

Reminiscences of Mrs Kathleen Frederick (nee Crowley), 12 Geraints Way, Cowbridge

Mrs Frederick, now in her 90s, has lived all her life in and around Cowbridge. Her paternal grandmother was Ellen Crowley (born Eleanor Donovan), who came over from Cork, Ireland to Cardiff to escape the potato famine. She became the landlady of the Bridge Inn, Eastgate around the early 1900s, and Mrs Frederick can well remember going there to the inn on Sundays when it was closed to customers. Her father, William Crowley, was the eldest of five surviving Crowley children (Mary, who emigrated to USA, Tom, who always played pranks, and Margaret, who wouldn't let her mother have a Catholic funeral and the last rites and who upset her siblings because of it). Tom worked on the railway initially, then became a policeman, but died very young when his little girl was just one.

Ellen Crowley would say, on Sunday mornings, that she was going to see the Fitzgeralds in the Blue Bell (now Filco – there were stone steps outside for mounting horses). The Fitzgeralds were Irish too, and the Crowley family eventually realised that she was going to attend Catholic mass in the chapel in the back garden of the pub (now demolished) which they didn't know existed, as it was surrounded by trees. When Ellen's first child was born, she walked to Bridgend and back to have him baptised in the Catholic faith. Grandfather Crowley delivered beer from the brewery opposite the Bridge Inn around the large houses of the town and villages, with his horse and cart, and was given a free drink wherever he went. It is said that once he fell asleep on his way back, but the horse made its way home safely, though unsupervised. Ellen had a lodger at the pub for many years after her husband died (Mrs Frederick cannot remember her grandfather).

William (Bill) worked on the Cowbridge railway, but progressed to a job on the Llantrisant to Rhondda line. He used to cycle to and from Llantrisant, or sometimes put his bike on the train on the outward journey. As a child, Mrs Frederick would take him a flask of tea to Cowbridge station, and she would be given a free train ride to Rhoose and back to see the sea. Mrs Frederick's mother, came to Cowbridge from the London area, and Mrs Frederick was always taken to London to visit relatives in her school holidays. The family lived at 6 The Limes, just up from the chapel, and it had a large overhanging porch. From the upstairs windows, Mrs Frederick could see rugby played on the large field opposite (later council houses), and also the annual circus with the elephants walking round, trunk holding tail. Bill Crowley played the piano well and often – the one in his mother's pub. During the war, his mother told him off for playing with no blackout curtains drawn, but he replied he was playing in the dark. When he took Mrs Frederick to the pub as a little girl, he would stand her on an upturned beer crate and she played with a ball on some string. Bill was proud of his Irish roots and always wore a shamrock on St Patrick's day. He was also a bellringer at Holy Cross church. He died in his 50s however, soon after Mrs Frederick was married.

Kathleen Crowley, an only child, went to Pontfaen School, staying there till she was 16 as she did well, and chose to study Greek mythology and Latin in her latter years, encouraged by Mr Sloman the headteacher. She then went to work for D. Brown the

printer and worked there until she married, all through the war years. She had thought of joining the WRNS at the beginning of the war, but was told she was exempt because she was so involved with printing. She did a man's work there, she feels, but then met and married her husband in 1948, and after living a little while with her parents, they bought a house from David the butcher's family on Eastgate, opposite the butcher's shop. It was very dark inside with thick brown anaglypta paper on the walls, but after three months of both her and her husband working on it, they were happy there. They had three children – two girls and a boy. Mr Frederick worked as a builder after serving in the RAF. Sadly he died of a heart attack several years ago.

Mrs Frederick recalls how times for her have changed – she would take a shopping list into the town and everything would be delivered to her home. The baker called at the house daily, the butcher twice a week. On Tuesdays, the Cardiff-based Victoria laundry would call for heavy washing such as blankets. She enjoyed dances in the Pavilion ballroom as a teenager, orchestras playing, and film shows at the cinema there. There were two different films each week – Mondays to Wednesdays, then Thursdays to Saturdays.

There was loads for youngsters to do in the evenings, she said. In the Sunday Schoolroom by the traffic lights (now a house) one very young curate had them learning modern dance. Then there were whist drives some nights. In the YMCA (the Young Men's Institute behind the town hall), again there were different things going on every night. The big room at the back was a ballroom (Miss Gunter, teacher in the Girls' High School, got her helping out there taking shillings for entry). Also, cooking was taught, and the room on the left at the entrance was a library – on Monday nights Mrs Frederick was put in charge there.

Betty Alden
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