

## Reminiscences of Bert Jenkins

31.10.01

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

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

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

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

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

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

navy-blue jacket and trousers; the buttons of the jacket had to be shining, and the trousers had to have sharp creases in them. We were inspected by the Post Master.

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

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

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

In 1936, I went to Barry, having received a Royal Appointment as a postman. My wages were now 28/- a week (£1.40), £1 going for lodgings. Tom Davies, the Union secretary, got me an extra 2/- for lodging. In 1937, I became a driver, with an extra 5/- a week. I joined the Royal Engineers (TA) in 1937, and we were mobilised in 1939 on the outbreak of war as a Coastal Defence Regiment. In January 1941 we were sent to the Suez Canal and then the Western Desert. In January 194 we came home, landing in Liverpool. On 7th June, the day after D-Day, we landed on Sword Beach in Normandy, where we were mainly employed on bridge-building. We crossed the Rhine in March, and at the end of the war in May 1945 I was in Bremen.

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

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

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

## Bertram Jenkins, Llanbleddian 1920-1936

I was the youngest of a family of thirteen children, though a brother and a sister had died before I was born. The surviving children consisted of six boys and five girls. By today's standards, eleven children is a large family, but there was another large family in the village in those days, the Jameses: there were ten of them. The nurse present at my birth was Nurse Rymer of Cowbridge, a very small lady, always prim and proper in her uniform, and always with a white bonnet. She went on her visits in a donkey cart. She kept the donkey original in what is now the children's playground, but later she owned a shed on what is now the school's cricket field. When she eventually retired she kept a tea-shop in Eastgate, called 'Maudie's cafe'. Maudie was her sister-in-law.

When I was about three years old I started going to Sunday school, and also became a choirboy in Llanbleddian church. We also used to go the Baptist school on Wednesday evenings. However, I recall that when I was about two and a half years old my mother used to send me on washdays to the Council School on Broadway, which is now Ysgol Iolo Morganwg. I used to accompany my brother Dick and his friend Harry Thomas who were then in standard IV. Their class teacher, Mr Owen Phillips, had told my mother that she could send me to school with Dick on any day when she was busy with her housework. Because of this I must have started school unofficially when I was less than three years old! When war came in 1939 Mr Phillips used to write to me quite often, especially when I was posted to the Middle East.

I well remember my first proper day in school, in the Infants classtaught by Miss Rees. We then progressed to the first class, taught by Miss Aubrey. We were expected to know the alphabet and be able to read fairly well before we entered Standard I which was taken by Miss Parker. Class II was taken by Miss Davies and later by Miss Gwyneth Thomas who was the daughter of Mr Thomas, the Returning Officer for the Parish Help.

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

Mr Frederick taught the boys gardening. The school owned a plot of land at the back, which was split up into small plots. For the last one and a half years of my schooling, when I was in standard VI, my teacher was Mr Sloman. He was the headmaster and lived in the schoolhouse, which adjoined the school. His wife suffered from poor health and I remember that when I was in the infant's class, a few of us used to go to her bedroom once a week to sing to her.

Once or twice a week during spring and summer, on fine afternoons, classes II and III would be taken for a long walk along the roads and lanes, where the teacher would show us all the different wild flowers and birds in the hedgerows. We always looked forward to this.

The council had made open air swimming baths on the river Thaw at the back of the Town Hall in Cowbridge. There were covered cubicles to change in but the baths themselves were in the open air. The river water was very cold indeed. They used to say that there were fifteen springs in the water, which made it so very cold. We were taught to swim there. Each school, including the Girls' High School and The Grammar School, was allocated one afternoon a week in the baths, but no mixed bathing was allowed. If we went with the school we were given a season ticket, for the baths free of charge. I have still got mine, and it is still in good condition after all these years!

On St David's Day we had a half days holiday from school. The morning session was given over to the performing of Welsh language plays and the singing of Welsh songs. Of course, all the boys wore

the famous leek, which we had to eat at the end of the morning! Needless to say we all wore the smallest leeks we could find.

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

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

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As I look back to my childhood and through my teenage years in to adulthood, I was always very aware as to how hard life was for my mother. I have vivid memories of washdays, which were usually on a Monday. I recall a huge bucket of dirty clothes soaking in rainwater, which had been collected in three huge wooden casks. These casks were sited by the back door where they could catch the water running from the roof. My mother would lift the bucket of clothes on to an open-hearth fire in the living room to boil. Then she would lift the hot bucket off the fire and pour the contents in to a large galvanised bath on the table in the back kitchen, so that she could hand wash the clothes. Each washday this process would be repeated about three times. After washing, the clothes would be wrung by hand and then put through a mangle. This had a wheel, which turned two wooden rollers. These would press together forcing the water out. The damp washing was then hung out to dry on the clothesline in the back garden. This process would be followed by arduous hours of ironing, using an old flat iron that was heated on the fire. We did not have any electricity in the house, no washing machines, no spin dryers and no electric irons. In those days washing day was physically very hard work.

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

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

Every Thursday, and quite often on another day as well, my brother Tom, sister Peg and I had to go to Cowbridge to Miles the Grocer to collect our groceries from his shop. This was next to where the Filco grocery shop is today. The grocery order would be given to the grocer the day before, and the three of us, loaded with shopping bags, called frails, would make our way home through Church Street and across the mill fields home to Llanbleddian.

At Christmas my mother made a lot of cakes and tarts. She made eleven or twelve yeast loaf cakes. She wet the cake mixture with a bottle of stout and we would each have a stir and a Christmas wish. We then had to fetch twelve tins from the bake house, the same tins that were used for baking the

bread. Some cake dough, which consisted of flour, raisins, orange peel, yeast, and all other Christmas things, was put into each tin. We then took them to the bake house for the baker to cook in his big oven alongside the bread. We would collect all the cakes the following day. The finished yeast cake was beautiful.

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

As we grew older some of the household jobs were passed down from the older children to the younger. We had a bucket toilet at the top of the garden. It was the job of Tom and myself to dig a deep hole in the back garden every Saturday morning to bury the contents of the bucket. We also had to scrub the toilet out with water, soap and disinfectant. We used a scrubbing brush and Jeyes fluid. We also had to clean out the chickens. We had about twelve, and when replacements were needed, we used to hatch our own eggs with the help of a broody hen.. During the summer term we had to weed the back garden path. Every Saturday morning it was the girls' job to help Mam to scrub the flagstone floor in the kitchen and the flagstones to the front gate. When they were dry sand was sprinkled on to the flagstones. After all the Saturday morning jobs were finished we were allowed out to play!

Every day, usually on the way home from school, we collected sticks for the fire from the fields. These would be put in to the oven to dry for use the next morning. During the autumn, we gathered hazel nuts from the woods and blackberries for tarts from the hedgerows. My mother used to make elderberry wine. She also made carrot wine and beetroot wine, and, during the spring, elderflower champagne. She also made nettle beer, which was known as herb beer. The elderberry wine was drunk warm for the treatment of colds in the winter.

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

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

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

Another popular outdoor activity was fishing. Mr Fred Evans, a retired tailor from Bridge House, Cowbridge, used to fly fish, catching fish with a rod and line. We spent many happy and interesting hours on the river with him. He fished the Thaw between Cowbridge, through Llanbleddian, and down the farm field to about opposite the Lake farm. He used to catch trout, which were plentiful in those days.

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

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When I got older and my voice broke I took on the job of Organ Blower in the church. The pay for this was £2 a year, and I can remember that my first year's pay was put on a Post Office savings book. Also, when I was about 16 years old I became one of the team of bell ringers in the church tower. There were six bells in the tower and I rang number 5. My brother Tom rang number 6, the harvest bell.

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

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

Llanbleddian also had its own cricket and football teams. I played cricket quite often, on the Llandough Castle pitch. Our village team had a good record. At one time we went through two whole seasons without a defeat. The football team, which played in the Barry and District League, also did well.

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

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

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

We children used to stand by the door of the mill where the huge water wheel drove the millstones for the grinding of the grain, but we were never allowed inside because it was too dangerous. We used to watch the flour come down from the first floor, to chutes and then in to bags. The local farmers went past our house, with their horses and carts, to take their grain to the mill for grinding. The Stone family ran the mill in those days. They had five children, three boys and two girls. Mrs Stone kept the shop in the Mill House selling sweets as well as the myriad of things usually sold by village shops then. We used to spend our half pence or penny on sweets. The thing that I remember best about the shop is that they sold 'Dolly Mixtures' and we could buy a halfpenny's worth of them at a time. Mrs Stone weighed the sweets out on an old fashioned balance with a brass bowl to hold the sweets. She kept the scales in the middle of the sweet jars, on a sort of platform, which raised them to almost eye level. This was so that she could make certain that, when she weighed the sweets, she never gave one too many. The Stone family was very industrious. Mrs Stone went to the market in Pontypridd once a week to sell her goods. The whole family used to gather mushrooms, blackberries, dewberries, and elderberries, all for sale in Pontypridd. She also sold her garden produce there. Many of the village women and farmers' wives did this as a way to make a little extra income. My family also grew vegetables. From when I was about seven years old I used to help in peoples' gardens bagging the potatoes and picking apples. I used to weed as well and usually I would be given a penny. The younger children would be lucky to receive a halfpenny.

The Bake house was about 50 yards from the mill, and only about 100 yards from my home, in Greenfield Terrace. Johnny Thomas and his wife Jane usually baked the bread twice a week. We children always knew when Johnny was taking the tins out of the oven, using a long handled wooden spade, because of the delicious smell of the freshly cooked bread. At those times we would all gather around the back of the bake house, where the oven stood, and stand just inside the door alongside the big wooden bin watching Jane tap the bread out of the hot tins with gloved hands. She would lay out the loaves on boards laid across the mixing bin, to cool ready for delivery the next day. When she turned out the bread lovely golden crumbs would fall off, and we children used to take turns to grab them and pop them in our mouths. They tasted wonderful!

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

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Winters were long, hard and very cold. Llanbleddian was always flooded because of the river overflowing. All the meadows from the back of the High Street in Cowbridge through the village to Llandough Mill used to flood. I remember Llanbleddian itself being flooded with about twelve inches and more of water, from the bottom of the short steep hill in Piccadilly, along the road past the water mill and the bake house, just up to our front gate in Greenfield Terrace. Also the road to the church schoolroom was covered in water!

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



6 Church St.

PROBABLY  
BATTLE OF  
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...received their decision. ...resents the Hon...

**COWBRIDGE HERO**

A very interesting ceremony took place yesterday in the Townhall, Cowbridge, when the Mayor (Mr. Thomas) presented on behalf of the borough an address and gift of money to the local hero, Staff-sergeant D. Jenkins, of Church-street, Cowbridge. The hall was packed with an enthusiastic crowd. The mayor who was supported by the town-clerk, Councillor Gwyn and other members of the corporation, congratulated the young man on his great bravery. He is the proud holder of a Medal Militaire, given him by the French Government "for conspicuous service in the great battle of Sept. 24," when, at considerable risk, he went to the aid of ten French ammunition wagons. He came home to be married, and to receive the good wishes of his townspeople. The gift of money amounted to £14 is. Jenkins's father is a veteran of the Crimea.

**CARDIFF CAR DAMAGED**

His Majesty's Inspector Hill Kelly heard...

WESTERN MAIL

1915

STAFF-SERGEANT

MAJOR RICHARD

JENKINS

(UNCLE OF 'BERT'  
JENKINS)

**HONOURED BY FRANCE.**

Staff-sergeant-major Richard Jenkins, a native of Cowbridge, has been awarded the Medaille Militaire by the French Government in recognition of his services.

Sergeant-major Jenkins is the third son of Mr. William Jenkins, Church-street, Cowbridge, the vicar of the parish church, and himself a Crimean veteran. Sergeant-major Jenkins served throughout the South African Campaign with the 1st Mounted Infantry. At the commencement of the present war he re-enlisted in the Army Service Corps, and soon won promotion to non-commissioned rank, proceeding to France in May of this year.

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

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

First class was taught by Miss Aubrey.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Children usually stayed in the school until 14 years of age. Bert took a Saturday job as a telegram boy when he was in the top class, then was offered a job with Cowbridge Post Office. The postmaster negotiated with Mr Sloman for Bert to finish school two weeks early (he pleaded he was sick) at age 14 so he could start this work.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Interviewed by Betty Alden and Luke Millar  
22<sup>nd</sup> June 2009

## Further reminiscences - Bert Jenkins, ex Llanblethian, @ January 2010

First cottage on right after Llb Baptist chapel, in Picadilly, (going up the hill towards Mount Ida) lived Darky Summers with his wife. She wore a Dai cap, wove and smoked a pipe. He went poaching, had double-barrelled shotgun; swept chimney by shooting gun up it. You could go into their cottage, and any others, to sit by the fire and have a warm.

Next door up was Fred Chissell – a year older than Bert. When Bert was serving in Tobruk in the war he was given leave to go to Cairo (only leave in 3 yrs). Heard Fred was going to be on leave too and they might meet up there, but leave was cancelled because of military action (1942) and Bert heard later Fred was taken prisoner that night.

Mrs Boobyer lived next door again – son in Scottish regiment and dressed in kilt.

Jameses in Hillside – Oswald James worked in Post Office with Bert. His sister, Mary Jane was made head of Llandow school, becoming a Nugent, marrying a farmer. Bert sat at same desk as Frank James. Bert did F's English and Frank Bert's maths- no one ever found out. Bert passed for the Grammar School but his mother was too proud to apply for charity, so he couldn't afford to go. The Jameses had charity funding to go and all did well (tho Bert doesn't resent his position). Ralph James married Dulcie Thomas (related to Rob Thos builder, and to Johnny the baker in Llb bakehouse). She died young with diphtheria. The Jameses kept goats on llb hill. Won all the steeplechases – reckoned it was due to drinking lots of goats milk.

Hard times living in Llb then, but a wonderful environment to be brought up in.

Aunt Em's house at foot of Castle Hill (now demolished) – she was Em Royall. Before her living there was Ted Morgan (known as 'Surrey') with his wife and crippled daughter who took in sewing. He was a short man, drank heavily, terrible. His wife took in washing, as did many others.

In next-door almshouses was Mr Groom the molecatcher – caught, skinned and sold skins. Ther MrsHague, Irish lady – a character, drank, had stable door kept half closed. Bert and friends played football outside. She'd keep their ball if it went over door and threatened to slash it with her knife.

In Bridge House (not a farm) was Mr Usher, church warden, then organist Milton Adams. Paid 2/6 weekly rent to church, as did Ted Morgan (probably much lower amount).

David Llewellyn MP lived in St Quentin's House. Wanted to buy the land opposite the new vicarage where a group of houses now stand, but 'no-one knew who owned it'. Wilderness land. Johnny the baker kept his horses there.

In Greenfield were the Williamses (posh). Gave the land opposite Bert's house at end of Greenfield Terrace to the Jenkinses if they cut Greenfield's grass. Jenkinses grew everything they needed there.

Walter Stone's father was the miller. You could hear the mill. Not allowed to set a foot over the door. Drays carrying grain would go to the mill past the Jenkins's cottage. Then the bread made from there was baked in the bakehouse. Mr Thomas of Beech Court gave the Jenkins family the tenancy of their cottage in Greenfield Terrace – bigger than next door, their former home, as they were such a big family.