

Arthur John (of Birchgrove, Cardiff – interview by Jeff Alden 2001)

Johnny (Grassy) John (later of Church St.), was brought up in the cottages next to the Edmondess Arms on the Aberthin Road by his Aunt Grace (hence Grassy). He married Miriam Ashby, born in Bedfordshire, who had come to live in a little cottage in Broughton. She worked in Cowbridge as a servant. Her brother Thomas, from Wick, worked on the Taff Vale railway.

John and Miriam had 7 daughters and 3 sons. The photo on the front of 'Cowbridge Buildings and People' shows some of the children :

David, Margaret, Blanche (mother of Arthur John), Elvira, Mary.

Blanche ended up in Peel House (Scotland Yard) in clerical work. She came home some weekends to see her children. Frederick, Mervyn and Arthur, her sons lived in Church St with their grandparents.

Frederick Henry was born 1907 (was a fireman in 1932), Mervyn enlisted in the Royal Navy 1929, Arthur was born 1915. They also had a sister Miriam.

See chapter on Arthur John in 'Cowbridge and District Remembered'

Arthur John's memories of the town date about 1920-25 :

Jim Lewis, the cooper, was a very clever man – spent ages watching him. There was a stink of glue in his living room from all his tools and stuff. He used to get the oak out into slats, soak them and put weights on to get the shape of the barrel. Get them outside. Plane them to perfection. Put them in metal bands. Used to put down between them a sliver. Another band on. Pick up shavings in barrel – set fire to them. Sandpaper all round. Band round to tighten them. Square nails, like studs. Before he tightened the top band, - lid with thin edge to fit in recess on top of barrel plants??

Escott butchers, 26 High St. Moved across to the other side of the road. Had a daughter called Vida. She was in Llandaff.

S Wales Motors – Thomas a conductor.

Nurse Rymer kept a donkey and cat in the Poplars.

One of the Meller girls rode down from Yorkshire (S Wales Echo)

Stables for the Duke – three boxes and a tack room. When other hounds came from the Wye Valley, the boxes were used for the hounds.

Beat up over to City and back.

Next day to Aberthin and back.

Wind ventilators, noisy clatter, on the Duke ballroom (opposite where Arthur was living). Tom Pratt kept 4 pigs in the yard.

Scrap at the back of Mills garage – used it to make boneshaker bikes for Constitution Hill.

Church Street –

No 6. Jenkins (Becky and Bert Jenkins's grandma). She cleaned the church to the end, working on her hands and knees. Woods from Senghenydd came there after the 1912 mine explosion. He suffered with pneumoconiosis. They had three children

Cocks lived in no. 5, decorator, large family.

No 4. Rees – Maud and sister, Lewis and Jack.

No. 3. David 'Billo', delivery man for Vale brewery. (He can remember the brewery catching fire. Palfrey had the brewery and the pub – amputated leg). Had family – Mabel, Beatrice and grandson Charles. Mabel married a rag and bone merchant from Cardiff (Williams). They had a daughter Doris, who lives in Aberthin.

No. 2. Carters – boozier. One daughter Winifred, Gwyneth, Jack, Lewis (Limes), Charlie a character, in Welsh Regiment, Tom (Rose Cottage), Evan a bellringer, father of Jack.

No. 1. Empty. Someone from Penylan, then another couple, deteriorating.

Shop – Thomas the saddler. Harness on the bar. Thomas became a bus conductor for South Wales Motors.

Arthur Gibbs (killed in car) and Henry.

'Harry' Gibbs bakehouse. Mr Stopps was the baker, Harry Gibbs the delivery man – horse and box-cart with big wheels.

Tilleys – Mrs Tilley nee Hiscock

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Uncle William's wife Ann was sister to Mrs Tilley.

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Of today's 6 and 7, No 6 seemed to be the residential part, with stone staircase up; perhaps grd floor of No 7 was used for a workshop?

Next door, stables and courtyard. Cobbles in front. Outside 7 Church St, cobbles right across road marked end of property. On No 7, iron brackets for lamps, before Gas Co. Arthur born 1915. Mother went to London to work, leaving Fred, Mervyn and Arthur with grandparents (John John). Visited regularly.

Church – Mrs Jenkins used to scrub the floor from altar to back of nave. Arthur used to help in polishing pews – zoom up along the wooden seat, back along the shelf.

Opposite side of Church Street: narrow path next to old cottage, led to back of Arthur Mills' garage. He dealt in bikes – used throw scrap bikes out into back lane. Boys used to cannibalise them for parts, to make boneshakers (no tyres, no brakes) Used to come down Constitution Hill – stop on the green at the edge of the road, or fall into the river.

Going down Church St – past Gate – Rose Cottage was thatched, occupied by a railway guard, James John. Town Mill Rd and entry to Poplars had massive elm trees along them – they'd been cut down and stumps were up to 4 feet across. Only Dynevor cottage, then Verlands, then Town Mill. Sanders lived in LH house, and they had a little shop for sweets, etc.

Sluice gate for mill – curved walls beyond sluice gate, which was only 4 ft wide. Boards dropped into slots to raise the level of the water for the mill. Millers did this in sequence – Cowbridge Town, Llb, Llandough, Howe Mill

Bowman's Well – watercress; zigzag path up slope of Mt Ida; Devils Foot and Knee halfway up.

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'Skinny dipping in river' – fire in quarry in Mill Park after.

Above Cowbridge very marshy – the Moors. Used to walk across moors up to knees in water. Reeds, lot of bird life, corncrakes

Broadway farm – George Cox, very friendly with John John. Son Dai Cox, never married. Used to go courting in Love Lane – a gateway where he was known to stop.

Cyril Morgan of Rhondda Villa, speech impediment, was called Twiddle

All went to Sunday School – Church (Cardiff Rd), Ramoth, Wesleyan, and to Bible Class. Big advantage in winter was that the stoves were kept going; boys used to take potatoes in to roast them. A picture in Ramoth which fascinated him was of naked native boys and a missionary. (Never saw black men in Cowbridge). One March Fair on the Bear Field, roundabouts, swings, sideshows. Someone drumming up trade outside on tent – a big Zulu dashed out; Arthur rushed home terrified.

After school (Mr Sloman HT, nasty vicious man, not a slow man with cane), Arthur worked for Williams the chemist, delivering medicines and extracting payment. Medicines were 1/6 or 2/- a prescription; people could only afford to pay off 1d or 2d. Farmers used to say “Tell Williams I’ll give him a sack of spuds” – storeroom was full of potatoes, swedes!

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Arthur John's
remembrance

(grandson of John John,
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