

John John (Grassy) of Church Street family notes

Gem article by J Alden

Many readers will recognise the photograph which appeared on the cover of *Cowbridge: Buildings and People*. It was taken about 1905 and shows six children standing on the corner of High Street and Church Street in Cowbridge, outside what is today *En Vogue* and *Quills*.

During the summer, I fell into conversation with a gentleman standing in Church Street. He turned out to be Mr Arthur John from Cardiff, the grandfather of Miranda and Jodie John, two charming girls it had been my pleasure to teach some years ago. On finding out that I had edited the *Buildings and People* book, he asked if I knew who the cover girls and boy were - and of course I did not.

Mr John was delighted to be able to tell me that they were all members of the John family, with his mother, Blanche*, being the fourth from the left. The complete list is Martha - Mary - Elvira - Blanche - Margaret - and finally David John. These were six of the ten children of Johnny and Miriam John, and lived in the left-hand cottage of the pair facing the church in Church Street (so they did not have far to walk to have their photograph taken!).

Johnny was born in 1840, and lived in the cottage, on the Aberthin Road, which is next to the Edmond's Arms. He had been brought up by his uncle John and aunt Grace (or Gras in Welsh). He was always known as Johnny 'Gras-y' or Grassy as a result.

Johnny Grassy had seven daughters and three sons, and died in 1932 at the age of 92. He was quite short, but a jaunty character and a great horseman. He rode frequently and attended all the hunt meets. When not on horseback he used a thumbstick, and always wore a bowler hat and breeches.

He was also well-known for taking part in the Mari Lwyd celebrations. Until the custom was revived in recent years, Johnny had been considered to have been the last person to have gone around from house to house 'under the horse's head' - it was he who wore the horse's skull set in a dark cloak. This was at a time when the challenges were sung in Welsh - and he used to sing the responses in the Glamorgan dialect of Welsh.

- *Blanche ended up working in Peel House (Scotland Yard) in clerical work. She came home to Cowbridge some weekends to see her three children, who were brought up by their grandparents (Frederick Henry, b 1907, Mervyn and Arthur, b 1915). Fred was a fireman in 1932, and Mervyn enlisted in the Royal Artillery in 1929.*

Arthur John's reminiscences from *Cowbridge & District Remembered*:

I was brought up by my grandparents, John and Miriam John, in 7 Church Street in Cowbridge. They both spoke Welsh, even though Miriam was from Bedford - she had learned the language after she had arrived in the Vale. Grandfather was noted for taking the role of the Mari Lwyd in its New Year procession through Cowbridge. He was known as 'Grassy' or 'Gras-y' as he had been brought up by his aunt Grace, in a cottage on the Aberthin road, next door to the Edmond's Arms in Cowbridge. He was noted for his interest in hunting, and was a terrier man for the Glamorgan Hunt. Having started with the Hunt when he was fourteen, he worked for the Hunt all his life, and was very popular with all the gentry. I remember The Mackintosh of Mackintosh, when on one of his visits to Cottrell, coming

into the house to talk to him; Owen Williams of Crossways, too, visited us. Grandfather died in 1932 at the age of ninety two.

John John, born Cowbridge about 1843

1851 census East Village, Cowbridge

William John, 42, coal carrier born Cowbridge
Mary, 41. coal carrier's wife, born Cowbridge
David, son, 14, servant
Ann, daughter, 15, scholar
William, son, 11, scholar
Edward, son, 9
John, son, 8
Thomas, son, 5
Lewis, son, 2
Mary, daughter, 2 months

1861 census Schedule 10 East Village, Cowbridge

William John, 51, coal carrier, born Cowbridge
Mary, wife, 51, born Monmouthshire
Ann John, 22, daughter, seamstress, born Cowbridge
William, son, 20, mason journeyman
Edward, 19, general labourer
Thomas, 15, scholar
Lewis, 12
Mary, 10
Blanche Jane, 5

John John (17) was a servant, a carter, to the farmer at Great House, Llanblethian.

1871 census East Village, Cowbridge

Mary John, widow, 61, born Newport, Monmouthshire
William John, son, 31, unmarried, mason, b Cowbridge
John John, son, unmarried, general labourer, “
Blanche John, daughter, unmarried, 15 “

Between July and September **1875**, **John John** married Miriam Ashby in the Bridgend district. He was about 31, and she about 20.

16/05/1880 William John, son of **John** and Miriam was baptised in Holy Cross church, Cowbridge.

1881 census The Limes, Cowbridge – possibly one of the cottages by the Limes chapel

John John, 34, horse breaker

Miriam, wife, 26, born Toddington, Bedfordshire

Mary, 5

Lydia, 4,

Elvira, 2

William, 1

1891 census Church St

John John, 46, horse breaker

Miriam, 36, dressmaker

Mary, 15

Lydia, 14

Edwin, 12

William, 11

James, 9

Annie, 7

Blanche, 5

Lucy, 4

David, 2 (they had 13 children in all)

1901 census Church St.

John John, 58, harrier man to Glamorganshire hounds

Miriam John, 46

Blanche, 15

Margaret, 8

Martha, 5

1911 census Church St.

John John, 68, labourer for Glamorgan Hunt

Miriam 59

David, son, unmarried, stableman for Glam. Hunt

Frederick Henry John, grandson, 3, born Cowbridge

According to the records of Laura Lee (listed on Ancestry.co.uk) :

Miriam John was born Miriam Ashby in Toddington, Bedfordshire, March 1854.

Her parents were William Ashby, born about 1828 in Toddington, Bedfordshire and Mary Ann Saunders, born about 1827 in Chilton, Bucks.

They lived in Broughton, Wick, in the 1861 census : William (32) a haulier, with wife Ann (31) and daughters Miriam (7) and Lydia (4). Lydia had been born in Wick.

William and Ann Ashby lived in Broughton right through till, and including, the 1901 census.

Miriam Ashby, in the 1871 Cowbridge census, was a servant aged 18 to William and Lydia Harding of Town Mill, Cowbridge (at the end of Town Mill Rd). She married John John (registered in the Bridgend district) sometime between July and September 1875.

The parents of Mary Ann Saunders were John Benjamin Saunders 1802-187? and Mary Ann Cordwell or Caudle (his second wife). They married in Aylesbury, Bucks and were living in 1851 at Long Crendon, Bucks. In 1861 they were in Bradford, Somerset and in 1871 at Woburn, Bucks. John Saunders died aged 69 in Cardiganshire, Wales in 1871.

Notes of descendant Tony John :

John John had been brought up in Cowbridge by his aunt Grace, and consequently was known as Johnny 'Grassy'. She lived in one of the cottages behind the Edmondes Arms on the Aberthin road.. Up until he was an old gent, he played the tin whistle. He would stand in front of the table and jump right up on to it, and do a jig. In the last years of his life he suffered severe leg pain (thrombosis), could not stand it and took his own life.