

Memories of Cowbridge – from Mrs V J Russell, Caxton House (83 Eastgate)

There cannot be many Cowbridge folk alive now who attended the Church Sunday School (now modernised into ‘School House’) on the Cardiff road. In the first decade of this century, I was living with my parents at 7 Eastgate. Miss Muriel Davies, who still lives at 3 Eastgate, was my playmate as we shared the same garden at the rear of our houses and went to the same primary school. Miss Beatie David, who now lives with Miss Davies, then lived in Church St, in a house now demolished to make the Duke car park.

There were no cars then and not much horse traffic, so it was quite safe for children to go to Sunday School. There were about six classes of girls and about the same number of boys. Miss Knapton was the Superintendent and her brother Fred played the harmonium for us to sing the hymns. At that time Miss Knapton kept a dressmaking establishment, and she lived with her family in a cottage now demolished to make the car park near the Town Hall. Mr Knapton was the organist at Llanblethian church, and his sister sang in the choir. I do not think there was a Sunday School in Llanblethian then.

Of the teachers in the Cowbridge School, I remember Miss Rees the Darren- her sister Beatrice came occasionally; Miss Maud Llewellyn (the chemist); Miss Molly Llewellyn (who lived with her aunts at Heath House and later became Mrs John of Verlands House); also Miss Smith who lived in St Crispin. The senior girls’ class was taken by Mrs Jenkins, second wife of Mr Jenkins the postman. He was a country postman and I have to thank him for starting my interest in botany. He used to bring me rare flowers which I pressed and mounted. But he was a conservationist. He never would tell me where the plants grew. I remember particularly herb Paris and bee and butterfly orchids. He used to show them first to the Rev. W F Evans, the headmaster of the Grammar School, a keen naturalist.

The boys’ classes were taken by the curate, a Mr Lewis who lodged at 13 Eastgate with Miss Davies, sister of a Mr Charles Davies the barber; Mr Knapton; Mr Tilley, to whom there is a memorial window in Holy Cross, and others including my father, Mr David Brown the printer.

What did we learn? To begin with we learned the Catechism – by heart before we could be confirmed. I remember the Rev Gilbert Thomas, who lived at the Poplars and Sorrento, prepared me for confirmation. We received prizes for attendance, including bibles and prayer books by the will of Lord Wharton who died in 1696.

A great event of the year was the Sunday School outing. We seemed generally to go to the Leys by train from Cowbridge on the Taff Vale railway to St Athan Road station. It seemed a very long walk before we reached the sea (and longer on the homeward journey). Our headquarters was the green in front of the Ocean House (now buried under the Aberthaw Power Station). A marquee was set up, and we had our meals outside

where we played games. The beach was very pebbly, as it is now, at Limpert Bay. Occasionally we went to Barry Island. Going through the tunnel was very exciting.

I can remember we had Band of Hope one evening a week, which the curate took, and Miss Loui Griffiths accompanied the singing on the piano. She lived in the grocer's shop on the corner of Verity's Court with her two sisters and father. She had charge too of the School Lending Library. She gave me pianoforte lessons. At the same time, another of her pupils was Miss Penelope Price, daughter of Dr Price of Llantrisant, the starter of cremation. At Band of Hope we used to recite or sing at our weekly meetings. I remember singing 'Jesus wants me for a sunbeam' – I found out afterwards that my father and mother had walked up and listened outside. They must have been amused!

The Sunday School had a Lenten week service in church – Rev. Gilbert Thomas was in charge of this.

I have a group photograph of a Sunday School outing to Llandough Castle in 1910, taken when Mr and Mrs Ebsworth were living there. We are having tea seated at trestle tables in the grounds. I can only recognise a few of the girls, including Mrs Dolly Blick, Mrs Leila Williams (nee Arnott) and Mrs Frank Williams, Mrs Cox (nee Topsy Marks, daughter of the organist and now living in Taunton), Evelyn Bevan, who lived in the sweet shop which is now Wadhams, and the late Mrs Lily Maddy. I cannot recognise any of the boys!

The Schoolroom was used regularly for entertainments and concerts, to which people contributed. Mr Charlie Gwyn's comic songs were great favourites. He was Mr W T Gwyn's (Town Clerk) brother. Then the Vicar – Rev Isiah Roberts- entertained us with his 'magic lantern', before moving pictures were invented. Later the room was used for Whist Drives and dances at least once a week.

*Written for the parish magazine in the 1970s & typed out
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Mrs Verley Jane Russell, nee Brown, was born in Bridgend on January 14th 1897, the eldest child of David and Margaret Brown (he set up the printing firm in ?68 Eastgate). She had a brother Eric, 5 years younger, and twin brothers Alan and Neil Brown, born about 1910, who continued the family business. (Alan married Enfys Jones, and Neil married May).