

Those were the days.....

Memories of a Narberth Schoolboy

1948-1961



by

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Return Journey

Dear friend, I would like you to come with me on a journey to the Narberth of my childhood. Not the vibrant up-market, up-tight, up-tempo town of today with its bustle and bunting but *my* Narberth, a sepia-tinted Narberth of people, personality and peaceful reconciliation. I speak of my Narberth, a town who's spirit was forged in the white-hot crucible of conflict that had torn apart families and the hand of friendship it offered to those men, women and children who decided not to return to their homes. The hard-working, hard-hewn townsfolk of Narberth welcomed evacuees and German and Italian prisoners of war alike. The bloody, brutal battles that claimed too many young innocent lives were soon to be replaced by contest, competition and camaraderie on the football, rugby and cricket pitches of my home town.

A town I am, and 'til my dying breath will be, proud to call home.

To Begin at the Beginning...

My first memories of Narberth are from 1948 when I moved from Llanmill, the humble place of my birth, to 3 Castle Terrace, a large terraced building with 4 stories, a cellar and stables to the rear. At one side, at no. 4, lived Richard Fanus (more of Richard later.) The Gwyther family lived at no. 5 and Mr & Mrs 'Affie' Cole (no relation) lived at no.6. Back then I thought Affie was an important man because he worked for the West Cambrian Electricity Company whose headquarters were at Town Moor. Miss Nellie & Hilda Davies also lived on Castle Terrace at No. 2. Miss Nellie Davies was known as quite an entertainer - she could whistle popular tunes but only when with her back to the audience (she couldn't perform facing the audience because of the facial contortions necessary to produce the appropriate sounds!) Miss Hilda Davies was a teacher in nearby Templeton. No. 1 Castle Terrace was occupied by the offices of Land Agents E.T. Blois Brooke who managed the Slebech Estate. Members of staff included Miss Mundy and Miss Picton. Miss Mundy once described herself as being a member of the 'Narberth elite'. Quite what she meant I've never understood.

School

Having moved from Llanmill, to Narberth I attended Narberth Voluntary Church School. The Headteacher was W. Haydn Richards, who among other things was the author of primary school text books that were used in schools across Wales at the time. I knew this because I, along with fellow pupil Huw Williams, would operate the duplicator which churned out page after page of matriculatory mind-benders prior to them being posted off to the publisher Harrops Ltd. I recall one morning when Mr Richards read out to the school a letter from Harrops praising him for the very high standard of his work. Sadly they had failed to mention the equally high standard of duplicating!

Whilst writing about Narberth Church School I must mention Miss Marjorie Halkon, Miss Alie Owens and Miss Olewydd Tudor. Miss Halkon was the Infant's teacher. Diminutive in stature but resolute in her efforts to make her pupils happy. We wrote on slates using white chalk and were taught 'times tables' by rote, a memorisation technique based on repetition. Though many years have passed I can still hear the class repeat '1 times 2 is 2, 2 times 2 is 4, 3 times 3 is 9" etc. Ah, happy days! In 1950 I moved up to Miss Alie Owens' class. I remember that though Miss Owens was kind and gentle she was very determined to secure the best possible future for her pupils. It was because of Miss Owens' steely determination that I was introduced to the '11 plus' and more importantly was made painfully aware of the herculean effort needed to pass the exam. In Miss Owens' class we were also taught to use a pen. Well, I say pen as it was no more than a long piece of wood shaped much like a pencil with a metal fitting at one end into which a nib was slotted. Ink was stored in ink wells close to the front right hand edge of your wooden desk. I'm still not sure why, but when a page of writing was completed you had to hold up your hand and ask 'Please Miss, can I turn over?' In all those years I didn't see any one sit at their desk and actually turn over!

In September 1953 I moved up into Miss Tudor's class. It was Miss Tudor who had the unenviable task of preparing the class for the now-dreaded '11 plus'. From now on the '11 plus' was to hang over the heads of every pupil something akin to the oft-quoted Sword of Damocles. Failure was not an option. My late father, Ben, was, by necessity required to help with my homework. I remember that one Wednesday morning an article appeared in the Western Telegraph under the title 'Seen & Heard'. The article reported that a pupil from a Narberth School had returned home from school one afternoon and shouted up the stairs to his dad 'Dad, you've got to go back to school 'cos you've got all my sums wrong!' It had been a long time since dad had been taught 'sums' at school at Maenchlochog back in 1907.

For the next 2 years we were threatened, both at home and at school, with words which even today fill me with dread: 'You've got to pass your 11 plus'. To fail would lead inextricably to a life of drudgery and eternal damnation, pushing a sweeping brush through the streets of Narberth with no prospect of ever 'pushing a pen'. Thankfully I was one of the lucky ones who passed. Those of my friends who failed were sentenced to remain in school until they reached 15 years of age at which time they could take up an apprenticeship or work at home on the farm.

Though the pursuit of sporting excellence was deemed an unsuitable career path by Mr Richards we did get the opportunity to take part in less formal, but no less competitive, sporting endeavours. Each playtime in summer we played cricket on the road outside the school. We even had proper stumps. Well, not quite proper, simply 3 wickets set into a wooden frame. If, by any slim chance the ball hit a stump the stump would lean back at an angle of 45 degrees and the batsman, always at the Church Gate end, would be declared 'out' - though not without a degree of controversy and much heated debate. It's fair to say that back in the 1950's the T.M.O. was somewhat unreliable and decisions made oft-doubted. During the winter months soccer was also played on the road. The gates of St Andrew's Church were the goal posts at one end of the pitch and two grey jerseys were placed strategically at the other end. The touchlines weren't strictly in accordance with Welsh F.A. rules and players had to use their imagination. On one side you had the newly built Church Hall whilst on the other you had the road leading up to a row of cottages and Plas Farm. Occupants of the cottages included Mr and Mrs Trevor Jones, Mrs Gibbon, Emil Prucha and his wife Doreen and Mr and Mrs Jonny Warlow. As boys we had huge respect for Jonny Warlow and Emil Prucha because they both played soccer for Narberth. Emil was a former German prisoner of war *and* he was a German Youth International goalkeeper. I must admit that we did not hold Mr and Mrs Trevor Jones in the same high regard - on more than one occasion they refused give us our ball back after it had ploughed through their beautifully manicured front border. More often than not I was the one nominated to enter into delicate negotiations with Mr and Mrs Jones for the return of said football. There were many such tense negotiations but peace would eventually be restored (subject to my earnest protestations that it would never happen again¹) and we'd get our ball back.

Relief from the daily grind of education, education, education could also be found at 'Aunty Minnie's Shop' which could be found on Church Street, conveniently located no more than 50 yards from the school gate. Reader, I say 'shop' but it was actually the front room of Aunty Minnie's cottage. Now, Aunty Minnie (she was everybody's aunty) was a squat, rotund lady of an uncertain age who owned an equally squat and rotund black Labrador who answered to the name of 'Rex'. Rex followed Aunty Minnie everywhere which perhaps explained the dubious cleanliness regime (or lack thereof!) which fell far short of modern food hygiene standards. What can only be described as a toxic canine stench permeated the shop as did rumours that Rex was allowed to wee all over the open boxes of sweets that were displayed under the counter. Thankfully, and well out of the way of Rex's attention, were jars of Mintos, Jelly Babies and Liquorice Allsorts which adorned the heaving shelves. Rowntree's Fruit Pastilles, tubes of Smarties, Trebor Fruits, Rolo's and Mars Bars were laid out invitingly to tempt those with a sweet tooth and hard-earned pocket money to spare. The counter was piled high with other firm favourites such as Bassett's

Sherbert Fountains, 5 Boy's Chocolate, Black Jacks and gobstoppers which, if chewed carefully, could last all day. I remember that toffee was sold in long strips and that Wrigley's chewing gum cost 1d a packet. Aunty Minnie, despite her advanced age, had a very sharp eye and keen business sense. Little, if anything, was handed over before full payment had been made. Having worked as a shop assistant in F.W. Woolworths in Haverfordwest I remain convinced to this day that Aunty Minnie provided the inspiration for Woolworth's 6d Pick 'n' Mix.

Aunty Minnie also sold paraffin.

Reader I would like to pause for a moment to ask you a question - did you as a child ever have to wear clogs? I did. I still have my very first pair. I remember they were 'hand-me-downs' given to me by my elder brother when I was two. Imagine the scene - there I'd be, a cot-bound babe wrapped tightly in swaddling clothes wearing a pair of oversize wooden clogs-times were tough in Llanmill in 1946. When I was four and living in Narberth I had two pairs of clogs - a black pair for wearing to school and a red (yes, red!) pair for wearing to chapel on Sundays. By the time I was seven my feet had outgrown clogs and to school I wore a pair of lace-up black 'tacky boots' which came up over your ankle. These boots played a vital role in getting me to school on time and before the bell tolled for the start of lessons. The soles were made of thick leather and my father would re-enforce the soles with metal 'segs'² and heel plates. My daily walk to school included the long descent down Castle Street. Now this is where 'tacky boots' became invaluable. I'd quickly cross Castle Terrace to Laver's Tailors and would begin to run down Castle Street, gathering momentum as I went. The segs and heel plates aided my propulsion, sliding easily over the rough concrete pavement. Stopping however proved to be a bit of a problem. By the time I got to Mrs Holmes' house, 'The Armoury', I'd be hurtling down the street at breakneck speed with the soles of my shoes glowing furnace red. To negotiate the sharp right turn up Church Street the only course of action was to grab hold of a grey painted down-pipe attached to 'the Armoury' and sling shot up Church Street towards Eynon's The Saddler. Sadly my tacky boots didn't help much on the return journey as I trudged slowly back up Castle Street towards home and safe sanctuary.

September 1956 saw me incarcerated into Narberth Grammar School, originally called the Narberth Intermediate Grammar School. The next 2 years were not happy times for me. The emphasis was very much on academic achievement. Sport was not encouraged. Rather it was tolerated. The Director of Education for Pembrokeshire at that time was a Mr D.T. Jones and he made it clear the W.J.E.C. qualifications were more important than creating well-balanced pupils ready to face the challenges of the turbulent late fifties and early sixties.

The School had adopted a socialist approach to education; boys were kept completely separate from the girls, other than when in class. At the front of the building were two large concrete plaques, making it clear that the left entrance was for the boys whilst girls entered on the right. Inside there were two main halls, one for the boys and one for the girls. There were also two further smaller classrooms, again one for the boys and one for the girls. These exclusion zones were zealously enforced prior to morning assembly and during break times. I remember that the football field was similarly divided in two, with the halfway line functioning as the not-to-be-crossed-under-any-circumstance 'iron curtain'. The girls were able to use the top half of the field whilst the boys were herded into the bottom half. Boys playing soccer in the bottom half of the field would accidentally (never) or deliberately (always) kick the ball into the top half. The unwritten rule was that a girl would carry it, but not kick it, back to the halfway line to be retrieved by the same boy. It is said that many short-lived romances blossomed and died as a result.

There were a number of teachers whose behaviour has lingered long in the memory. Our Latin teacher. (I've never understood why we were being taught Latin it wasn't the first language spoken in Narberth,) Mr Ivor 'Watty' Watkins, had an explosive and often violent temper, the precursor to which were often

the words 'By Jupiter, Jove, Mars and Venus and all the Gods that dwell on the grassy slopes of the planet Olympus I shall come down amongst you and descend upon you from the heavens like a ton of bricks.' Part way through this tirade his false teeth would rattle and we supposed (incorrectly as it would turn out) that he was laughing. He wasn't. Mr Watkins never laughed. Mr Watkins did however drive to school (well, he did live in Carmarthen.) His car was encouraged into life by means of a heavy iron starting handle. I remember vividly one cold wet afternoon when Watty tried repeatedly to start his car - without success. As you can imagine he quickly became infuriated and having finally given up threw the starting handle over the dining hall roof! What made it worse for Watty was that over half the school had assembled to witness the event.

Another member of staff worthy of mention was Mrs Mathias 'Stinker' Davies, our music teacher. She was an accomplished pianist but sadly her efforts to make us boys sing in tune failed miserably. On many occasions a *sotto voce* stage whisper would be heard encouraging the boys to "stop singing". This we did. Mrs Davies would then stand among us and demand angrily "Who said you had to stop singing?" None of the boys ever confessed to the crime and to this day the identity of the miscreant has never been revealed. There are some secrets I will take to my grave. The boys in my form were quite rightly considered unruly, feral even. During one lesson Mr Rowlands, the Chemistry Master, reached a level of such frustration at our behaviour he shouted to the class at the top of his voice 'Stop arsxg about!' As you can imagine the howls of laughter that followed this outburst did little to improve his mood. Or our chances of obtaining chemistry at W.J.E.C. 'O' level.

Another teacher frequently quick to anger was Mr Berian 'Willy Worm' Williams, the Biology Master. During a very serious lesson on the reproductive organs of humans he drew a vivid comparison between the sexual activity of humans and that of frogs. Having presented the facts he then proceeded to ask the class a series of questions. His final question demanded of the class 'There were two frogs sitting on a log. What do you think they were doing?' My best pal Richard Fanus quickly replied "Fighting, Sir?" Mr Williams was apoplectic with fury and all hell broke loose. Val Hunter left the classroom and reported the matter to Miss Nancy Rees, the English teacher, who in turn reported the facts to Sam Evans the Headmaster who subsequently visited the classroom. Peace was finally restored but not without the shedding of Richard's blood. To quote an oft-repeated phrase - I know 'cos I was there!

The Sports Field

Soccer played a big part of my childhood, both at school and during the time when I played for Narberth alongside boys such as Dai Skyrme from No.5 The Crescent, John Llewellyn from Caerau Farm in Llanddewi and Michael Evans who lived at Manor Farm, Sodston. Sadly, all three boys are now playing with the angels on another, more hallowed, heavenly turf. I remember me and Dai Skyrme playing in Narberth's first team. The team was selected on a Monday night and the team sheet was sellotaped crudely to the Chip Shop window. Dai and I would go up to the Chip Shop late at night to see if we'd been selected.

Narberth's soccer team enjoyed a huge amount of success having been top of the Pembrokeshire League on three consecutive seasons and winning the Knock-Out Cup at Haverfordwest's Bridge Meadow Ground. In 1958 Narberth won the West Wales Amateur Cup beating no less than Tower United from Swansea 6-3 in the final at Richmond Park in Carmarthen. Narberth supporters travelled to Carmarthen in 6 buses and others made the journey in cars or vans. One supporter, Eric L. Bates, rode to Carmarthen on his bike which he'd painted in blue and white, the Narberth colours. Eric also wore a blue and white cape and carried a loud haler! I don't think he rode all the way to Carmarthen - I suspect he might have had a lift to Towy Bridge.

Players who graced the pitch that day included Owen 'Lefty' Thomas who lived at Pemblewin Farm. As his name suggests Lefty was blessed with a howitzer of a left foot. The team captain and right winger

was Keith Owen who played alongside his brother Barry at inside right. Centre forward was Cliff 'Ginger' Jones and playing at inside left was Bill Morgan. Bill was married to Morfydd Thomas. Living nearby on Jesse Road together they ran the Chip Shop in High Street. Bill Morgan's deft control of the ball would mesmerise the opposition and render helpless the most obdurate of defensive back fours. John Bowen, born in Clunderwen and the wizard of the left wing, would cover every inch of the pitch. It was fair to say that wherever the ball went you'd see John Bowen! John terrorised his opponents, unleashing a barrage of mental and physical abuse in equal measure³. In all the time that I'd watched John playing I never once saw him sent off for foul play. I can remember distinctly during one match the referee, The Reverend Evans who'd travelled to the game from St Clears, granted John immediate absolution and forgiveness for a particularly enthusiastic (and, it has to be said rather late) tackle. Other members of the team included goalkeeper Emil Prucha, Glan 'the Tank' Cole at right back and John 'Cundy' Evans. John's aunt was Lizzie Evans. Aubrey Scourfield, whose dad owned Scourfield the Bakers on the High St, played at right half and Norman Morgan filled the centre half position. Norman was a telephone engineer. Much of the credit for Narberth's victory that day should go to Ivor Badham and Noel Seabourne. Ivor was the team's manager/coach and Noel was the physio, or to put it another way, he was the man with the 'magic sponge'. Both were giants amongst men and their dedication to soccer in Narberth should not go unrecorded. I remember with fondness the goalkeeper Tommy 'Jammer' James who played for Narberth for a number of seasons and who earned his nickname due to his habit of jamming man and ball up against the goalpost to prevent a certain goal, often paying more attention to the man than the ball. I can see him now, hurling his cap and gloves into the side of the net and rolling up the sleeves of his jersey before battle commenced.

Perhaps the most important match of any season was the home and away fixture against the 'old enemy', Clunderwen. On match day the word 'enemy' was most appropriate. The matches were played on the Tyhen Field in Clunderwen or on Jesse Road in Narberth. The game always attracted a large, enthusiastic and partisan crowd. The Clunderwen team included amongst others my elder brother Cecil (goalkeeper), centre-half Bill 'The Bush' Harries, Graham and Peter Phillips from the garage at Llandissilio and Peter Williams who, later in his football career, would have a trial with Manchester United. Also in the side were brothers Ron and Kay Narbett. The style of football, if it indeed could be described as 'style', was agricultural at best, with no quarter given or asked. It seems odd now but Bill Harris and John Bowen, who hailed from Clunderwen but played for Narberth, somehow managed to avoid each other for the full 90 minutes of the game even though they both wanted the other's blood to be spilt. I can only think it was divine intervention that prevented a mud-spattered massacre that day. Me and Russell Davies, a mate from Clunderwen who worked for Charles Salmon, the Ironmongers in Narberth, would have a bet on the outcome of both legs. In the event of each side winning their home game the wager was decided on aggregate scores.

When not managing the football team Ivor Badham played cricket for Narberth, alongside Peter 'the Vet' Davies, wicket keeper Harry Tucker, Gary Thomas and fast bowler N.E. Davies. Nicky Evans and Betty 'Mac' Evans kept score and it was my job to put the numbers on the scoreboard. I remember one match when Narberth were playing at home on the Lewis Lloyd ground. The opposing team arrived missing a player and a local school boy was quickly drafted in to make up the numbers. Wicket keeper Harry Tucker was in excellent form, carefully picking off his shots and playing some masterful strokes. Harry had scored 99 when he struck the ball with such venom that it climbed high into the air towards the distant boundary. A gust of wind caught the ball and it fell short into the hands of the young lad who, 2 hours previously, had been drafted into the visiting team. The lad, quickly realising the enormity of the situation (and the probable bollocking he would get from his father later that evening!) dropped the ball. I can still see

Harry's face now. He'd been batting from the Rugby Ground End and having been given out simply smiled, shrugged his broad shoulders and returned to the Pavilion. A true sportsman. And a gentleman.

Entertainment

Prior to the opening of the Queen's Hall in 1958 entertainment venues in Narberth were few and far between. In the late Victorian era there was the aptly named Victoria Hall which formed part of the De Rutzen Hotel. The late Henry Langen, in his letter dated Friday 18th October 2013, to the Narberth and Whitland Observer wrote that the Victoria Hall '....had a sprung dance floor which was one of the few dance halls in Wales to have such an unique facility'. The Tabernacle Chapel Schoolroom was often used for concerts and also served as the dining hall for pupils from Narberth Voluntary School. Each school day those pupils who had school dinners would, under the close supervision of Head Teacher Haydn Richards, be marched snake-like from the school in Church Street into Market Square and from there up St James' Street and finally into Tabernacle Lane. The long march from school to dinner plate would guarantee that pupils would be ravenous and would eat whatever food was put in front of them.

Built in 1953, St Andrew's Parish Church Hall played host to many public performances in my childhood, from whist drives to amateur dramatics to classical music. A father of two daughters both of whom went to whist drives was overheard saying, and I quote, ".....it's not the whist that worries me it's the b****y drives afterwards!" I can remember on one particular occasion being dragged (literally!) into a concert being given by the internationally-renown Welsh harpist Osian Ellis. The local press described it as 'an outstanding performance' but also reported that those in the audience numbered only 8. And I was one of them. Sam Evans, the Headmaster at Narberth Grammar School, was also sat in the audience. I've never understood why he was there as when at morning assembly it was perfectly obvious to those present that couldn't sing a note. For me the biggest stars to appear at the Church Hall were Gordon Hallwood from Church Street and Roy Roberts who lived with his wife Nurse Roberts and his son, John above the Hovis Bread Shop on Market Street. Gordon was a virtuoso on the spoons and Roy played the crosscut saw cello-like with the saw wedged firmly between his feet. Now that was true talent. Performances by a comedian called Roscoe Howells from Amroth included a monologue titled 'Over the Garden Wall' a sketch involving two gossiping women. Narberth had talent decades before Britain got talent!

The Hall bore witness to a number of dramatic plays performed by the St Andrew's Players. On one occasion, during a particularly tense murder scene, Bill Musto, the maths teacher at Narberth Grammar School, had to kiss Mair Evans, a teacher at the Infants School with lustful and passionate desire. Sadly for Mr Musto in the heat of embrace his cork-blackened moustache detached itself from his face and stuck itself just below Ms Evans' nose! As you can imagine the audience went into hysterics and the intimacy of the moment was lost. Earlier in the performance Bill Musto had fatally stabbed a man, played by John Cook from Coxhill, in the back. Following this brutal stabbing John had to 'play dead' until the end of the scene, with his body prostrate on the stage. Tragedy quickly turned into farce as the audience caught sight of Ms Evan's moustachioed face. Many have said that John's portrayal of a dead body accompanied by hoots of raucous laughter from the audience was worthy of an Oscar nomination!

I've mentioned earlier that the Church Hall was built in 1953 but it didn't satisfy the needs of Narberth's teenagers and others. In his letter to the Narberth and Whitland Observer Henry Langen mentions the setting up of a Hall Committee made up of six town councillors. This august body of civic leaders included Charles Salmon, the Ironmonger on St James Street and Hugh Morgan, the Gents Outfitters on Market Square. Hugh Morgan had served his apprenticeship at Harrods in London. John James was a solicitor and had his offices in St James Street. Hywel Davies was an accountant for Llewellyn Davies on St. James Street. The sixth councillor was Idris Williams, son of 'Willy' who owned the Flannel Merchants on Spring Gardens. All six councillors were successful businessmen in their own right and

were, as Henry writes “...very much ahead of the game.” Having secured a village hall grant the councillors began raising money.

And so it came to pass that the councillor’s efforts were rewarded with the opening of the Queen’s Hall in 1958. The opening marked a seismic shift in entertainment not just in Narberth but across South Wales. Instead of whist drives we were introduced to the gambling mecca (pardon the pun) that is ‘bingo’. Ivor Badham arranged the sessions and the ‘caller’ was George Mutch. George was the local postman and he spoke with a very strong Scots’ accent. Aged 14 it was against the law for me to play bingo but I did, on condition that I didn’t win. Which I never did because in my excitement I used to shout ‘house’ at the crucial (and wrong) moment. I blamed George Mutch’s Scots’ accent. After the bingo session had finished and though under-age I would sneak into the Angel ‘for a ½ pint of ‘Worthing E.’ Lucky for me I was helped in my pursuit of thirst-quenching beer by a certain E. L. ‘Decker’ Bates. I can remember the pub owner Cyril Coleman asking Decker, whilst pointing a finger at me, “Is he over 18?” ‘Dekker’ replied in a low sonorous tone “Of course he is, he’s joining the army tomorrow!” If I was going to join the army I would have been the youngest ‘boy soldier’ in British Army history. But, I *was* in the Air Cadets which met every week in the W.I. hut under the supervision of Flight Lieutenant (Ret’d) John Groom. John was married to the undertaker Harold Thomas’ daughter. One of the cadets, Alan Loveridge from Bentley Villas, went on to qualify as a glider pilot.

A ‘dance night’ was held at the Queen’s Hall every Saturday night. Featured bands included Joffre Swales and his band from Haverfordwest and Tom Parry’s band. Tom was from Robeston Wathen and his band included instrumentalists Guto Jones, headmaster at Templeton School, and his son Brenig. The highlight of the band’s performance was the clarinet solo played by Alec Hunter to close the dance night Alec would play Acker Bilk’s classic ‘Stranger on the Shore’. Alec’s performance would ignite a pre-pubescent paroxym in those boys (me included) who, fearing a sad, lonely walk home through Narberth’s narrow lamp-lit streets would choose a girl standing on the darkened side of the room and proceed to propel her by any means possible round the dance floor in a frenzied, and oft unsuccessful, attempt to fan the flames of passion in what time there was left. There were no suspended glitter balls in those days but there may have been a few fireworks on the Moor a bit later on!

The Queen’s Hall also hosted a programme of boxing events. Ewart Owen from Dingle Farm, Jesse Road was both promotor and trainer. Amongst his rosta of pumped-up pugilistic pupils were Jimmy Price, Martin Phillips from Llanddewi and Richard Lewis who lived on Church Street. Training took place in a chilly old chapel in Salmon’s Drang (Back Lane?) and equipment included a punch bag and skipping ropes. Opponents would be drawn from The Merlin’s Bridge Boxing Club, Cydweli (MontyLadd) and other boxing clubs from across the Gwendraeth valley. Returning to Narberth later in life I remember clearly a conversation I’d had with Ivor Badham about the time we spent at the Queen’s Hall. Ivor recalled the night he’d had a telephone call from Elton John (yes, that Elton John!) who’d been booked to appear at the Hall later that night. Ivor recounted that Elton had telephoned him to say in an apologetic voice ‘I’m very sorry Mr Badham, but I’m going to be late’ Would he be that apologetic today?

One of the most important entertainment centres in the 50’s and 60’s was the Picture Hut. Where was that you might ask? Well, it was in the W.I Hut in Spring Gardens and backed onto the Lewis Lloyd Cricket Field. The Picture Hut was the brainchild of Stanley Lewis who owned ‘Lewiphone’ on St James Street. Mr Lewis was an accomplished electronics engineer. Mr. Lewis was also a very senior officer in Narberth’s Home Guard. I know that because I’ve seen a ‘photo of him in his uniform. More importantly he was the projectionist in the Picture Hut. Every Monday he would display outside his shop the forthcoming feature film to be shown on the following Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. Tickets were available at 7d, 9d 1/3d and 2 shillings. Us urchins occupied the 7d’s, the 9d’s were occupied by 13+ year olds We sat on hard wooden school type chairs whilst ‘courting couples’ and others would sit in the 2 shilling seats in armchairs or sofas. It’s true - armchairs and bloody sofas! I think they’d been reclaimed from the rubbish

tip on the Moor. Members of staff in the Picture House included Mrs Nicholas, the receptionist, and Mr Johnny Vincent the usherette. We didn't have ushers in Narberth in the 50's! It is more probable that a man was chosen because he could impose silence on us kids in the 7d's. Memorable moments include Mr Vincent, following a row between those in the 7d's and 9d's seats, came amongst us. Brandishing his torch in one hand he threatened "I want more silence down here". There was even more jeering when the screen went blank following a snapped film reel. It was at the W.I. Hut that my mam, Irena Cole, was nominated to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace.

The Fair

On 1st October every year Narberth would host it's Fair on the Town Moor. The Moor in the 50's and 60's looked very different to how it looks today. Back then the Moor was a large gravelled area surrounded on one side by the town's rubbish tip (and I mean rubbish!) One day every week household rubbish was collected by horse and cart. The cart was quite large and had lids on the top to prevent coal ash and dust flying off. Recycling was still a long way off. The horse was driven by a man called 'Offie' (probably Alfie) Irving who lived on Spring Gardens. On the other side of the fairground was a paddling pool (yes, a paddling pool!) I can't remember the 'pool being used for the purpose for which it had been built as it was always full of old prams, bikes and tin cans. Entry to the fair was from the side of No.47 High Street and the entrance way was lined with 'Cheap Jacks' - probably from Swansea selling crockery, china, glassware, towels and bedding. Further into the fairground was 'Studs' Dodgem cars which proved very popular with up and coming F1 drivers. Any attempt to drive one of the cars in a straight line was impossible, as without fail, and without warning, a fellow driver would career into you. Reversing was equally futile as the steering wheel, which was often loose and bent out of shape, only worked when driving forwards. Next to Studs were the 'Waltzers', a sofa-like contraption that spun at high speed in a circle, following an undulating metal track. The experience was made even more exciting (and nauseous) with the addition of bright flashing lights and loud music. Local boys were also invited to take on Franky Booth's All Stars in his hastily erected boxing booth. For me, though the ultimate prize was the winning of a goldfish, which to win you had to throw 5 rings over a series of 5 wooden posts. More often than not the goldfish would be taken home only for it to be found dead the following morning, floating on top of the water with a desperate look on its face. I remember on one occasion the Brenchley brothers of Narberth Bridge winning 6 goldfish. I hope their goldfish fared better than mine after making their journey home all the way to Narberth Bridge!

The Streets and its People

As I sit here at my home, surrounded by the verdant rolling hills of the Elan Valley with the brooding hump-backed Black Mountains in the far distance I ask myself this very simple question - what is the most important street I've ever lived in? Reader bear in mind that I've led a nomadic existence and have worked in Northern and Southern Ireland, Scotland and England. In all honesty I would have to say Castle Street, Narberth. Why? Well, as the News of the World once boasted 'All Human Life Is There'. And it was! Castle Street began at the tailor's shop next to the Castle Hotel. It was owned by a Mr. Laver and his assistant, a Miss George, who travelled to the shop every day from Templeton. Mr Laver used to sit leg-crossed atop his work bench- you don't see that in M & S! Next door was the 'Shop' which, having ceased trading, was occupied by Paddy Keohane and his wife Molly and their two children Michael and John. Next to the 'Shop' lived Jimmy Vaughan and his wife and son Brian. Jimmy Vaughan drove a small and very old tip-up truck from which he used to sell logs. Jimmy would park his lorry in front of No.6 Castle Terrace, the home of 'Affie' Cole and his wife. Now Affie must have had some influence because one evening after dark he 'phoned Sergeant Davies at Narberth Police Station and instructed Sgt. Davies to have Jimmy's lorry removed. I can remember Sgt. Davies and P.C. Phoenix attending the scene of the crime. Sgt. Davies ordered Jimmy to move his lorry up to the Town Moor. Jimmy said that he couldn't because the lights on

his lorry were faulty and it was getting dark. Sgt. Davies replied "I'll walk in front of you and show you the way". And that is indeed what he did.

After Jimmy Vaughan's House, at No.6, came Wyndham Evans, his wife Peggy and their two children. Wyndham was the owner of Eastgate Garage. No.7 Castle Terrace was the home of Mr and Mrs Hubert Bates. Mr. Bates was a baker in Carmarthen and he worked nights. Mr and Mrs Bates had seven children - Peter, Arthur, Brian, Ray, Eleanor, Eric, Norma. I've no memories of Peter but Arthur worked for Nicholas 'The Dragon' Stores. Brian was a painter and decorator in Cheltenham and had amongst his clients Arthur Negus, more recently a well-known presenter of the BBC's 'Antiques Roadshow'. I remember Brian saying he wanted to be a 'Teddy Boy' but he didn't like the uniform! Ray married Gerald Badham who worked with his brother Ivor as a radio and T.V. engineer at their London House shop in St. James' Street. I can remember Mr and Mrs Bates' daughter, Eleanor very well. She was a true Christian, someone honest in word, thought and deed. I've already made reference to Eric Bates but I feel obliged to mention the time when Eric was a soccer referee in the Pembrokeshire League. He was 'refing' a game between Narberth Juniors and Fishguard at Jesse Road. I'm ashamed to say that us Narberth boys harboured a deep-rooted (and it has to be said completely irrational) hatred of the lads from the 'Guard'. Our centre forward, the late Dai Skyrme, took it upon himself to cut down any Fishguard player who he came into contact with. There were Fishguard bodies lying everywhere. Eric, after having given Dai several stern warnings, had, following a particularly brutal off the ball incident no alternative but to send Dai off. The crowd vented their anger towards Eric in no uncertain terms. As a result Dai Skyrme's father, Cyril, ran onto the pitch to declare Dai's innocence. His declaration included a fair bit of pushing and shoving and I can hear him, now, screaming ".....you've spoilt the game." Eric was resolute in his determination as referee to ensure that the rules of the game would be adhered to. Perhaps not quite what Cyril had in mind. Despite being reduced to 10 men we still beat Fishguard

At No. 8 Castle Street lived a tall ginger-haired Scotsman, George Brown, with his wife and two daughters, Muriel and Pat. Mr Brown had a B.S.A. motorbike which he used to ride to work. Mr and Mrs Ken Mason lived at No.9 with their son Gareth. Ken Mason was a bus driver and every so often in summer he would take the families in Church Street on a 'trip'. On one such excursion up to Aberaeron Ken took a wrong turning. Now Ken said he knew of a shortcut but the problem was we ended up on the lawn in front of Cilwendeg Mansion and in so doing we interrupted a rather posh garden party. I knew it was posh because they had china cups and fancy buns! Ken asked my late father, who could speak Welsh, if he would offer his sincere apologies to the squire. Sadly the squire was a frightfully posh English chappy, who didn't understand Welsh. My dad, who had by now abandoned any hope of restoring anglo-welsh detente, and on seeing that Ken had managed to safely reverse the bus, leapt back on. Ken threw the bus into first gear and we beat a hasty retreat. We didn't get to Aberaeron that day but we did stick our tongues out to the squire as we drove past, which made us feel good. As did the fact that an elderly gentleman sat near us on the bus also felt obliged put two fingers up to the squire.

We now move on to No. 10 Castle Street. It is this house, or rather the people who lived in it, who typify the real qualities of Narberth people. At No.10 lived a German prisoner of war, Walter Horndoff (the spelling of Walter's name might be incorrect -if it is I apologise unreservedly), and his wife and two children. The maiden name of his wife was Watkins. Her mother, 'Granny' Watkins, lived next door at no.11 with her daughter, who I think was called Joyce. Walter, I seem to remember, worked in the building trade. I can remember playing cricket with Walter on the road in Castle Street. The wickets were three small stones placed in the middle of the road just outside No.9. At the bowler's end was another stone also in the middle of the road. One major hazard were the cars and delivery vans going up and down. It was the responsibility of the batsman, on seeing a car coming up the hill, to cry out "car coming!" The bowler had similar responsibilities but for traffic coming down hill. One Narberth motorist in particular, Owen 'Lefty' Thomas from Pemblewin Farm, drove a blue Austin A30 car. Lefty would load his car up with passengers outside Joe Rapachioli's café on Market Square and hurtle downhill at breakneck speed.

He'd throw the Austin into the sharp right hand bend at the Castle pub, right onto our cricket pitch! I can remember many occasions when the bowler, in fear for his own life, forgot to shout "car coming", leaving the rest of us to leap out onto the pavement. Why am I telling you this? Well, it's because Walter Horndoff was an enthusiastic street cricketer. I can see him now. It didn't matter to us or the other people in Castle Street that he was a German. He was a lovely man.

At No.12 lived the Christopher and Unsworth families. The Christopher's included Albert and his son Howard. They were builders and had a green van. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you a little about Howard. As a boy I knew very little about Howard's service in World War 2 but having talked with his sister Doreen I was able to establish a few important facts. In the war Howard had served in the British 1st Airborne Division alongside the American 82nd Airborne Division. Howard, along with his fellow soldiers, parachuted into Arnhem. The rest is, as they say, history. After the hostilities ended Howard and Walter Horndoff lived almost next door to each other. Both men had a mutual respect for each other. The War was not of their making. Doreen Unsworth, with her husband John (Narberth's postman), used to arrange Sunday outings using Albert's green van. Us kids from the street used to pile into the back of the van and John would always take us to Barrafundle Bay. We didn't do much surfing in those days. Well, when we did we used a worm-ridden old plank of timber and rode the waves as though on Bondi Beach! The last house in Church Street didn't have a number. It would have been No.13 but instead it was called the 'Armoury'. A Mrs Holmes lived there with her son John and her daughter, who I think was called Nina. I suspect Mrs Holmes had been in theatre because for one Narberth Carnival she dressed me up as an Arab. I didn't win because it rained and my brown tan washed off!

The one street I haven't mentioned yet is Spring Gardens which joined High Street and St James Street together with the Commercial Inn at the St James St. end with the Farmers Arms ('The Farmers') at the High Street end. It is a well-known fact that Spring Gardens was originally called Cross Lanes which in its shortened form was called 'Crosslings'. You've got to be over 70 to know that and reader I am indeed over 70. Spring Gardens included The Post Office and Telephone Exchange. It is the importance of the postmen that I remember most vividly and they included Eric Dunn from Narberth Station, Alec Hughes who lived at Plaindealings, George Mutch from Halkon Crescent, Dan Hughes from Gwyndu Farm, Llanddewi, and Willie 'Tightfoot' Evans. Willie lived on Spring Gardens and was given his rather unfortunate nickname because he walked with a limp. Another postman was Tommy Adams. I can remember Tommy very well. He always wore a broad smile despite having been a prisoner of war for five years. Tommy Adams might have been small in stature but he walked tall in Narberth. His wife 'Dossie' was a telephonist at the Narberth Telephone Exchange. These men were the backbone of the mail delivery service in Narberth and across the surrounding small villages, hamlets and farms. Their duties would include meeting the early morning (6.05am) Royal Mail train at Narberth station. The mail would be sorted at the Spring Gardens Sorting Office and then delivered. At 7.25pm one of the postmen would have to be at Narberth Station to load mail onto the Royal Mail Train bound for Paddington Station in London.

It would be remiss of me not to make mention of Nurse Beresford who lived in the cottage next to the Post Office. The name of the cottage was carved in stone above the front door. Following her death the cottage was occupied by Mr and Mrs Bob Betsworth. The Betsworth's both weighed-in well above the national average After the Betsworth's came Willie Bradford House and I've mentioned his shop earlier. Next came T.E. & S. Morgan Builders Merchants. I remember a former German Prisoner of War by the name of Ernst Schroeder working there as a carpenter. Next to the Builders Merchants was Central Garage, owned and run by Willie Thomas. I can't remember the make of car he sold but do remember the garage having petrol pumps. The Mart Ground, which held its auction every Thursday, was next to Central Garage. The man in charge of the auction was 'Danny' Brynhill, Brynhill being a farm near Allensbank. Danny never seemed happy. He'd walk up Market Street into St. James' Street and then turn left up The Drang into the The Mart Ground. He was of a smart appearance, black parade ground polished boots,

brown gaiters and breeches. He carried his stick in a threatening manner. It is at this point that I must write respectfully of a deaf mute who lived in the Mart Ground. I'm not fully aware of his name but in conversation he would be referred to as 'Ilah Wallie'. Ilah lived and slept in the Mart Ground. Imagine the scene and you must ask yourself the question "Why?" In our modern so-called progressive and inclusive society Ilah would be institutionalised and forgotten. But in Narberth in the 50's he wasn't rejected; he was accepted as part of the Narberth family. I can see him now, shuffling down High Street, with his hands thrust deep into his overcoat pockets. Though he was unable to speak or hear I'm sure he knew he was surrounded by friends. Friends who clothed him, fed him and kept him safe. If he were to walk down High Street today I firmly believe that he'd be met with the same compassion.

From the Mart Ground you'd arrive at the Lewis Lloyd cricket field next to which was Charlie Thomas' Commercial Garage. Charlie was Willie's brother and employed a very important mechanic, a man by the name of Tom Blew. In slang terms 'blew' is Welsh for hair and Tom had a lot of it. Tom's claim to fame was that as mechanic in the RAF during the War Tom had worked on Spitfire engines which had fuel injected engines. On being demobbed Tom experimented putting fuel injected engines into motor-cars with disastrous results. Was it Tom who was responsible for fuel injected engines appearing in Triumph 2.0 litre cars in the 60's? We cross the road now and begin our return to the Farmers. Firstly you come to Jeremy's Garage who, I think, sold Ford Cars. The manager/owner(?) was Jacky Michael Thomas. Jacky played cricket for Narberth and had a daughter called Susan. Further along you came to James John, Ironmongers and Agricultural Suppliers. I can remember James John had a son, Noel. After James John came The Drang. I don't remember any shops after the Drang but I do know that a woman called Mrs. Hertzog once had a shop there. I'd like to know who Mrs. Hertzog was.

The Castle

The first written record of Narberth Castle appears in 1116 but the current stone structure is more recent, having been built in the 13th century – that's a fact because Eric Bates told me. Eric also told me that Oliver Cromwell had visited Narberth on his way to the seaside resort in Tenby. Since 1404, when the castle was attacked by my lifelong hero and tormentor of the Marcher Lords, Owain Glyndwr, there have been a number of myths, mysteries and downright lies told about the castle's history. One such story suggests that a headless woman would ride naked on the raised path that ran parallel with the castle wall. The path meandered for about 100 yards from the White House, a former toll gate occupied at the time by the Stephens family, up Bridge Hill to what are now the gates to the Castle Cemetery. The path was called 'The Lady's Walk' though quite why it was so named I've no idea. The path as I remember was bordered on both sides by strong smelling wild garlic. I understand that recent road improvement work included the destruction of the White House and The Lady's Walk. Had I been still living in Narberth at the time the work was carried out I would have petitioned Parliament in an attempt to preserve a classic example of one of Narberth's forgotten mysteries.

There is another story I should like to tell which concerns the escape route that made its way underground from inside the castle wall to the inside of St Andrew's Church. It should be remembered that the church was built in 1291 and the castle was built in the 13th century. In times of unrest if those people defending the castle feared defeat they would flee a certain and violent death by means of the tunnel through which they would gain sanctuary in the Church through a trapdoor in the floor. Mediaeval law prevented their attackers from entering the House of God. As a boy, and even today, I want to believe that there really was a tunnel. I like to think the film epic 'The Great Escape' starring Steve McQueen was influenced most certainly by the heroic 'Narberth Castle Tunnellers'. Looking at the possible route taken by the tunnel you have to consider that the Castle and Church cemeteries did not come into existence until the 18th and 19th centuries. The road down to the Bridge would have been no more than a dusty dirt-track. The landscape was much different back then.



The Ruins of Narberth Castle

It's a well-known fact that on 29th May 1953 Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay conquered Everest. What isn't quite so well-known is the fact on 2nd June 1953, the Coronation Day of Queen Elizabeth II, my late brother Cecil conquered the North Tower of Narberth Castle. Just on the left hand side as you go through the entrance gate the Tower was over 100ft high. My brother did it without oxygen, ropes or carabiners (knowing Cecil he was probably wearing a pair of daps.) On reaching the summit he proudly hoisted the Union Jack in joyful celebration. I'm just glad he didn't stand back to admire the view. I was proud of my brother on that memorable day. Do any of you remember wearing daps? They had canvas uppers and the soles were made from thick black rubber which had been cut from old car tyres. Willy "Daffo" used to sell them. I think "Nike" bought the patent for use later in the century.

Thinking of commemorations I'm reminded of Guy Fawkes night in Narberth, now more popularly known now as 'bonfire night'. For us boys who lived in the shadow of Narberth Castle bonfire night was an important occasion, not because of its historical significance but simply because we all enjoyed a good fire. Collecting combustible material for our fire proved to be a logistical nightmare. Cardboard had to be collected from local shops - Tommy Nicholas' 'Dragon Stores', Charlie Jenkins' Co -Op in Market Street and Gerald 'Star Supply Stores' in High Street. Collecting big rubber tyres was another major problem. We had three suppliers of tyres - Willie Thomas at the Central Garage, his brother Charlie from Commercial Garage and Wyndam Evans at the Eastgate Garage. Wyndam Evans was our main supplier simply because he lived in Castle Street. You might ask how we got our tyres down from Eastgate Garage to Narberth Castle, a distance of about half a mile. Well it wasn't easy I can tell you! We rolled our tyres down St. James Street into Market Street and then pushed them up the slope into the Castle field. As you can imagine rolling big tractor tyres through the town was a dangerous job that demanded nerves of steel and a scant disregard for the safety of others. However we had a well-rehearsed routine. Going down-hill we'd have a brakeman at the front to steer the tyre and we'd have a brakeman positioned at the rear whose job it was to hold the tyre in a straight line. Try and imagine the scene - eight young boys with four huge tractor tyres hurtling at breakneck speed down Market Street! The braking system was often faulty and we usually ended up crashing into the public water tap just outside Affie Cole's house. Collecting suitable combustible material began in early October and we'd store our material in what we called 'the dungeon' in Narberth castle. I think the term 'dungeon' owes much to poetic licence because I've since discovered that it was nothing more than a cellar and a pantry. In my defence I can testify that it did have a 'vaulted ceiling'. Security surrounding the safekeeping of our combustible cache was paramount. We were at risk of plundering from the infamous 'Croft Villas Gang' which was made up the 'Hedleys' and the 'Taylors'. There were nine children (including girls) in both families. We only had eight boys in our gang but with the Machiavellian master tactician in the form of E.L. 'Decker' Bates we had the upper hand. Decker knew full well that the Croft Villas Gang didn't like going out in the dark. There were no street

lights in Tabernacle Lane in the 50's so much of our nefarious activity took place in the long shadows and under a moonlit night.

But now to the fire proper. The fire was built using the previously stored cardboard and tyres and of wood harvested from the nearby 'Castle Back' Woods. Even allowing for exaggeration once built it reached skywards rising at least thirty feet in height. I can't remember who was responsible for lighting the fire but it must have been someone with access to that most flammable of accelerant - petrol. One member of our gang had a brother who had a motorbike. It was the first time I'd heard about petrol siphoning. Once lit the flames would shoot up through the branches and would eventually engulf poor old Guy Fawkes. Back then I'm not sure if we even knew who Guy Fawkes was but thanks to the teachings of Miss Tudor we did know that Joan of Arc met with a fiery end. But what about the fireworks? They were bought either singly or in boxes from Mrs Howell Thomas on St James' Street and were stamped with the trademark 'Standard Fireworks'. The fireworks themselves were either bangers, rockets, catherine wheels, pretty-coloured squibs or sparklers (for the girls). The mischief we got up to with those firework would today be considered acts of terrorism. The trick was to light your 'banger' and throw it down upon the unsuspecting occupants of 6, 7 or 8 Castle Street, who lived immediately below the castle. They hadn't been singled out for special attention but found themselves conveniently in 'no man's land'. In the 1950's fireworks didn't come supplied with a health warning. All that was written on the packet was "should the firework fail to ignite, retire". As you can imagine we thought retirement was for the over 65's so we would promptly shake the faulty firework whereupon it would explode between finger and thumb. Thankfully the stupid and self-inflicted injuries didn't require a visit to Dr. Peter.

The Shops

Thinking about shopping in Narberth in the 1950's I'm reminded about the shops in St James Street and High Street. You must remember that back then it was two-way traffic in both streets. Let us take a walk together around my Narberth, beginning with Hill House Corner at the top of High Street. It wasn't so much a corner, rather half a roundabout with roads approaching from Coxhill and Haverfordwest some 10 miles distant, Redstone and Maenclochog 5 miles away and at the third exit the road to Tenby, 10 miles to the south. Hence the expression that 'all roads lead to Narberth'. Further along Spring Gardens there was a road to Cardigan. Coming down High Street from 'The Moor' we pass on your right hand side "Ty Meddyg" (in English, the Doctor's House.) The building is still there today but is now No.47, a very fashionable boutique. The doctor was a Dr. Erbyn Williams quintessentially Dr. Finlay of 'Dr. Finlay's Casebook' fame. Dr. Erbyn was tall, broad shouldered and stood erect. He commanded respect. His son was Dr. 'Peter' Williams. More of him later.

A few doors down from "Ty Meddyg" is a milliners shop owned by A.G. Owen Milliners. Even now 70 years on I still don't know what a milliner sells. I know they were milliners because the word was printed on the front window. Next door is the 'Star Supply Stores' which was managed by a man from Llanddewi Velfrey called 'Gerald'. I can't remember his surname but he sold groceries. The next shop is a house belonging to a Mrs. Rees. Mrs Rees had a daughter called Margaret. Mrs Rees' shop took in dry cleaning. After Mrs Rees is Rowe's the chemist. Now Mr. Rowe once treated my late brother Glan for a throat infection. Mr Rowe's treatment involved giving my brother a proprietary liquid of unknown provenance and a long handled brush to apply the liquid onto my brother's throat. Thankfully, and before applying the said liquid, my father took Glan to see Dr Peter at Pencraig House. Dr Peter immediately threw the brush into a bin and the liquid down the drain. Thankfully my brother survived.

From Rowe the Chemist we came to the N.P. Bank. After the Bank is Pencraig House, the family home of Dr Peter and his wife Dr Olwen. They had three children Peter, Huw and Caroline ('Annie'.) I used to sit next to Huw at Narberth's Voluntary School. Occasionally I'd be invited to Pencraig and we'd play in an upstairs room on the top floor. In the room was a punch ball. Also in the room was a huge fort complete with a platoon of suitably attired soldiers and a cannon which fired matchsticks! I can remember Dr

Olwen because, during one very hot summer temperatures soared into the 80's, she encouraged parents to allow their children to take in the sun without protection. Which we did – with extremely painful results. The damaging sun's UV rays gave me the appearance of a beetroot. I still remember clearly the searing pain of my sun-blistered back. It should be remembered that Palmer Morgan, the chemist on Market Square, didn't stock sun tan cream. He sold calamine lotion instead. Now calamine lotion was a bit gritty and dried chalk-hard on your back. This explains why as a child I couldn't sleep on my back. Who would have thought it - Narberth in the 50's and people dying from sunstroke? Well, that's what it felt like and anyway, why let the truth spoil a good story!

Moving on to the opposite side of the road we now arrive at Vivian Rowe's the Butcher. Vivian was married to Betty John who was a nurse.. After Vivian Rowe's we came to Salmon and Son, Ironmongers and David Brown the tractor dealership. The red tractors were parked outside the toilets next to the Town Hall. After Salmon's comes the Wheatsheaf - the trademark of R.H. Davies Drapers. Even today the wheatsheaf trademark has pride of place over the entrance door. The High Street in the 50's had two jewellers, the first we come to being owned by Freddy Noot with his wife Sybil and daughter, Ann. In quick succession then comes Webb's grocery stores and the Denant Café owned by Mrs Ebsworth. The Denant was frequented by a rather select clientele which included Miss Lewis who lived at Greenway Mansion. I think Miss Lewis was my first encounter with aristocracy. Next to the Denant is 'Scourfield's the Bakers'. Mattie Scourfield had two children, Aubrey who played soccer for Narberth, and a daughter called Merl. I can remember Merl causing a bit of an upset because she returned home to Narberth with a French boyfriend in tow. A French boyfriend - Sacre Bleu! I remember one occasion when a customer went into the shop and asked Mattie "Where's Merl then?" Mattie's sarcasm-laden response was "She's in the boudoir with monsieur". I'll leave the rest of the conversation up to you.

No. 10 High Street was occupied by Mr Thomas' boot and shoe repair shop. Mr Thomas lived across the road not far from the Baptist Chapel with his wife and two sons, Gareth (Gary) and Royce. Though the sign above the front door read T W Thomas & Sons I knew it simply as 'Tommy Thomas'. The significance of Tommy Thomas' shop should not be overlooked because it was there where my dad bought my first 'proper' soccer boots, a pair of 'Eagle Continentals'. The brown leather uppers came up to just below the ankle and were a significant improvement on my previous pair of 'clodhoppers' made before the introduction of rubber studs and whose uppers came up way above the ankle. I can remember after each game, and with a religious vigour bordering on manic obsession, I used to clean the uppers using 'Dubbin', a type of wax polish. I also used to boil the laces. Gary Thomas married Ann 'Fach' Williams from Lampeter Velfrey. Gary was a very good cricketer and represented Narberth on many occasions. I first remember him when he was appointed Deacon at the Tabernacle Chapel. He was softly spoken, honest, compassionate and always very smartly dressed. I can remember my dad feeling very proud when Gary was appointed as a deacon. Gary took over the running of the shop in 1965 when his dad retired. Royce was three or four years older than me and went on to become a woodwork teacher.

Leaving Tommy Thomas to repair the townsfolk's footwear we now arrive at Narberth's first gent's hair dressing salon. I say salon, it was actually the front room of Bill 'The Barber' Davies' house. In the room stood one operating chair and a wooden pew against the side wall for clients to sit on. Now Bill specialised in only two styles of haircutting. You could either have a crewcut or a short, back and sides. The way Bill cut your hair was dependent on the conversation taking place in the room. If a chap by the name of Mr Harries, the font of all local knowledge, cracked a joke causing much hilarity you were likely to come out with Bill's version of a Mohican. Nowadays hairdressers provide piped music to keep customers entertained. Back then we had Mr Harries. Having a haircut could sometimes take half a day!

Walking a bit further up High Street we come to the front door of the fish 'n' chip shop which I think was run by Brindley Rowe, uncle to Vivian Rowe the butcher. I can remember going into the Chip Shop and asking for 'scraps', lumps of batter smothered in salt and vinegar. Scraps for us urchins were

considered 'haute cuisine'. Quite why I enjoyed scraps so much I'll never know - I was the best fed child in the town. My mam's cooking was to die for. She had many specialities but top of the menu was her apple dumplings with raisins and Tate and Lyle syrup. I remember the green and gold syrup tin carried the logo "Out of the Strong came forth Sweetness". The words were uttered by a lion which appeared in the logo. We're now nearing the top of High Street and we come to Miss Roblin, the Newsagent. Miss Roblin was a very petite lady who wore spectacles. In her shop you could buy everything a child could possibly want. Her main source of income came from the pupils of the Board School which was on the left hand side on the opposite side of the road to her shop. The Board School's headmaster was either Mr Aaron Edwards or Mr. Cyril Owens. Coming back down High Street and into Market Square we first arrive at the Midland Bank next door to which was Hugh Morgan, Gents Outfitter. Mr. Morgan was of slim build, medium height and wore black horn rimmed spectacles. He always dressed very smartly. His sartorial elegance was probably due to his having worked in Harrods of London. Market St. Narberth is a far cry from Harrods, Knightsbridge, London but let's pause a while and consider just what Mr Morgan's Harrods experience brought to Narberth. It gave him confidence, customer service of the highest possible standard (which he always displayed) and an appreciation of 'style'. I'm convinced he could gauge what size jacket a customer would require without the need for a tape measure!

Palmer Morgan the Chemist comes next, a pharmacy that had everything you'd expect - large blue coloured bottles and a wooden counter behind which were drawers full of lotions, potions and tablets. There were shelves of soap and perfume. The whole pharmacy had a distinctive perfume about it. Mr. Palmer Morgan was a well-built, quiet, unassuming man and when in the pharmacy he'd always wear a suit. I can see him now behind the counter wearing his gold-rimmed spectacles. He was a man who earned everyone's respect and you entered the pharmacy as you would a cathedral, observing deferential reverence to the curer of all ills. I think his assistant was his sister, Miss Dilys Morgan, who lived on Station Road with her sister, Miss Katie Morgan, a teacher at Narberth Grammar School.

We now find ourselves at the bottom of St. James' Street and the first shop we come to is the newsagent owned by Mr. A.J. Allen. Mr Allen sold a whole range of newspapers, magazines and books. His daughter, Mary was his assistant. He also had a daughter, Cynthia, who went on to become a police officer. Going up St. James' Street the next shop after Allen's newsagents is the jewellers owned by Mrs Howell Thomas. Mrs Thomas also owned the toy shop next door which for me was Narberth's answer to Hamley's of Regent Street, London. It is at this point reader that I would ask you to cast your mind back to Christmas 1950 in Narberth. It was five years after the War and Narberth, like so many towns and cities across the country, was still recovering from the ravages of conflict. Think what it must have been like. Money was in short supply but Mrs Howell Thomas decked her shop window with Christmas fayre and toys including an electric Hornby train set which ran live on an oval shaped track. Also in the window was a display of Dinky toys. I can remember lusting after a yellow Dinky toy crane which came complete with a jib and lifting hook. My lust for that damn crane resulted in not simply a letter to Father Christmas but also an earnest and head-bowed campaign of prayer to that most heavenly and white-bearded of festive deities. Now, I knew I didn't stand much of a chance when it came to praying but I thought what the hell and gave it a go. In the build-up to Christmas tension reached fever pitch, but when the morning came, there it was - my yellow Dinky Toy crane. My faith in Father Christmas, and the power of prayer, was restored! Just in case you were wondering Mrs. Howell Thomas also sold dolls and doll's prams.

At this juncture I need some help because I can vaguely remember that No.4 St James St. was a tobacconists and sweetshop. The shop was owned by a Mr Tucker and was somewhat up market because the sweets were displayed in glass bottles with screw top lids (unlike Aunty Minnies in Church St!) The shop also sold cigars, either in tins or loose. I know this because my late father would enjoy a cigar at Christmas. He bought his cigars at Tucker's. After Tucker's the next shop is Willy 'Daffo's'. Willy Daffo was a boot and shoe maker/repairer. I can see him now wearing glasses with his apron tied tightly

around his waist surrounded by his lasts, polishes and laces. Also around him were boots and shoes awaiting repair. He had no sense of organisation and repairs could take anything up to a month!

Russell Morgan's Milk Parlour next comes into view. Russell, with his wife and son, Michael, used to deliver bottled milk in Narberth. Glyn Williams from Coxhill represented Russell's competition as did Ewart Owen who owned Dingle Farm on Jesse Road. Russell was a big man. He played full back for Narberth Rugby Club and his claim to fame was his ability to kick penalties from an extraordinarily long distance from the posts. Unsurprisingly he became known as 'Russell the Boot'. After Russell Morgan's comes Louie Davies the butcher. Louie was the son of Danny Davies from Great Redford Farm near Princes Gate. Danny had another son called Fenwick. I remember Louie's butcher's shop had sawdust on the floor. The explanation given for the sawdust strewn floor was that it soaked up the blood dripping from the carcasses hanging from the wooden beams overhead.

The last shop as we approach the top of St James' St. is the 'cop shop', Narberth Police Station. The sergeant in charge was Sgt. Davies and under his command were police constables Phoenix and Hughes. It was my experience that PC Phoenix was a well-balanced police officer whereas PC Hughes was a bit 'heavy on the pen' when it came to reporting crime. I can remember being in High Street one evening and I shouted in a loud voice "shift" (or words to that effect!) P.C. Hughes was about to give me a Rule 2 caution i.e. 'you're not obliged to say anything' etc. when lucky for me P.C. Phoenix intervened and I was let off with nothing more than a stern word. No-one could ever forget the arrival in Narberth on certain 'high risk' days of George Mortimer who came from the Cross Hands Police Station. Having been an amateur boxer George was known to have, on a number of occasions, taken the law into his own hands. The last property on our left as we walk up St. James Street is the Commercial public house which was later renamed the 'Kirkland' after the name of a horse that had been stabled there the night before winning the 1905 Grand National at Aintree.

Crossing the road we are now walking back down St. James Street with shops on your left hand side. The first shop we come to is Rolo Reynolds. Rolo ran a grocery business. I can remember it well because my mam used to collect our wartime rations from his shop. As a four year old boy I couldn't understand why in 1949 we still had food rationing. The war had ended in 1945. Sugar was served in blue paper bags and before being served you had to produce your Ration Book which contained coupons. Further down St James's Street is another grocers, Len Thomas. Two doors down from there is 'Evans Brook House' that I can remember quite clearly. It was a bakery. One of the assistants was a man called Ronnie John and he had a distinctive English accent. I can see him now loading trays of freshly baked bread into a van parked outside. Two doors down from Brook House is the coal merchants owned by 'Willie Evans the Coal'. Willie had qualified as an accountant but I don't know why he ran a coal business. He was a tall thin man who walked with a stiff gait. I remember feeling sorry for him because he appeared to be in constant pain. Coal was delivered on the back of a lorry. Before delivery, the coal would be collected from Narberth Railway Station where it was weighed and bagged into 1cwt bags. The coal truck would have been shunted, under the supervision of George 'Shunter' Edwards, along 'the back road', a length of railway line furthest from the goods shed.

Len Davies, who worked for Pearl Insurance, and his wife and daughter Kathleen live next door to Willie. Len Davies had in my opinion the best job in Narberth - he got to drive the town's fire engine! I can't be 100% sure but I seem to remember T.E & S Morgan Builder's Merchants having a shop just before you turn left into Tabernacle Lane. Their builder's yard was on Spring Gardens. The next shop after Tabernacle Lane is London House owned by Badhams from where they sold radios, TV's and bicycles. They also recharged the lead acid accumulators that powered the valve heaters in your battery radio. Anyway, enough of the science. I can remember trying to tune into Radio Luxembourg on my transistor radio only to find that I could only get a signal for the BBC Light programme, which sadly did not broadcast the birth pains of Bill Haley's rock 'n' roll or Lonnie Donegan's frantic skiffle rhythms.

Badham's for me was the administrative centre for Narberth Soccer Club. Ivor Badham, whose brother Gerald also worked in the shop, was the Club's Secretary, Fund Raiser and Team Manager. It was from London House that Ivor arranged fixtures for Narberth's three Pembrokeshire League teams. In the late 50's the First team enjoyed huge success. I've made mention earlier of Ivor but I have to say again that he instilled a sense of pride in all the boys and men who he managed. Even today I can say that if you played for Narberth you would never entertain the thought of letting Ivor down. I can still hear him shouting to me "...don't worry about it Rog. It'll wash off!" Ivor was talking about the pitch on Jesse Road which, in the bleak midwinter, often turned into a Somme-like trench-foot inducing quagmire (particularly after Noel Seabourne had rolled in it a few times!)

Archie Howells the Butcher comes into view after Badham's in St James Street. Archie Howells was short in stature but big when it came to breeding Sealyham dogs. It was a breed that had its origins in Sealyham near Haverfordwest. Archie's dogs won prizes throughout Wales and were kennelled in Salmon's Drang (also called Back Lane.) Finally we come to Winchester House home of Wyndham Collins Auctioneers. When Wyndham retired his son Patrick took over the business. Wyndham Collins had an assistant called Marjorie Harkett. Her father was Jimmy Harkett, Narberth's Blacksmith and Undertaker whose workshop and smithy were to be found on Northfield Road.

Reader, our journey through the town is almost complete. Pray rest awhile before we make our way to Market Street and the de Rutzen Hotel.

The de Rutzen Hotel

I should now like to take you back to Market Street no more than 20 yards from where I used to live and the de Rutzen Hotel, a brooding, brutal building, part of which was to become the Victoria Hall. According to the Roman numerals that adorned the portico the de Rutzen was built in MDCCCXXXIII. As a five year old boy the numerals meant nothing but under the tutelage of the explosive Mr Ivor 'Watty' Watkins (remember him?) I later understood that the hotel was built in 1833. But why was such a monolithic hotel built in Narberth in 1833? What was going on in Narberth in 1833 that wasn't going on in 1953? Well, I think Baron De Rutzen, who had the hotel built, wanted to make a statement. He was, I think, of German descent but what is more important is that in 1832 he married Mary Dorothea Phillips of Lichfield. As a result of this union he became Lord of the Manor of Slebech, which included Narberth. So there you have it - there were Germans in Narberth in 1833 *and* in 1953.



The de Rutzen Hotel, Market Street, Narberth

But let's just pause for a moment. The railway station in Narberth wasn't opened until 1866 so the de Rutzen must have been a stopover for the horse-drawn mail coaches that served Narberth from 1833. I

remember that there was a large arched entrance way which led to buildings behind the hotel. Were these coach houses and stables? You've also got to ask where on earth were the coaches going? To the rear of the hotel was a pub called 'The Commercial Hotel', built perhaps for the many commercial travellers who criss-crossed the highways and bye-ways of South West Wales. In my day the proprietor of the Commercial was a gentleman called W.E. Nutt who lived there with his wife and son, Jimmy along with a very large St. Bernard dog. It is likely that the St. Bernard was a pony for Jimmy who was a pupil at Selwyn House, a public school in Begelly.

Let us pause again and consider for a moment a very important part of the de Rutzen - the Victoria Hall. The Hall had been converted to accommodate the market pens and stalls that had previously lined the streets of Narberth in somewhat less than hygienic conditions. After it ceased to exist as a market hall the Victoria Hall was converted to become a dance hall and, as I mentioned earlier, benefitted from a sprung dance floor. When the dance hall closed the building was converted into a bottling plant for James Williams Brewers who had their offices on Market Square. James Williams owned a number of pubs across Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire. I can remember that every fortnight a big red, beer-filled road tanker would arrive outside the double doors leading into the plant. Emblazoned on the side of the tanker in big gold letters was 'SIMONDS' and in smaller letters below was written 'Brewers, Reading'. Now Reading was a long way from Narberth in the 50's (even today it's a long way!) On arrival the tanker driver would hitch a large diameter pipe to the rear of the tanker and 5,000 gallons of beer would be pumped into the plant. The population of Narberth in the 50's was about 973. Given that back then a third would have been children that leaves 600 people to drink 5,000 gallons of beer. Even by Narberth standards that's an awful lot of beer! The man in charge of the bottling plant was a chap called Jack Sheppard. Jack would arrive from Tenby every morning in a green van. The deputy manager was a man called Ivor Norris who lived with his wife in Spring Gardens. Amongst the other members of staff was 'Ozzie' Evans. Ozzie rode over from Llawhaden on a B.S.A. motorbike. In those days the wearing of crash helmets was not compulsory but to avoid serious injury in the event of an accident Ozzie wore a flat cap turned back to front and jammed down over his head with a pair of yellow tinted goggles. I suspect they'd once been owned by a welder. Can you imagine seeing Ozzie hurtling throttle-wide-open towards you wearing a pair of welding goggles? I can remember Ozzie telling me that he'd been riding his motorbike for 38 years but hadn't been killed once. Ozzie also told me that he was the "best stacker in Wales". His job was to stack crates of beer prior to their despatch to pubs in the Narberth area. Amongst the office staff was a man called Bob de Winton and he lived with his wife and daughter Gwendoline in Church Street.

Narberth Station

I made a brief reference earlier to Narberth Railway Station and I should like to mention it again in a little more detail. The station itself is about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the town. I first worked at Narberth station when I was 13 years of age. I wasn't on British Rail's payroll but nevertheless worked the evening shift as a porter simply because the two signal men, who each worked a different shift, needed a hand after the mail train left for London at 7.25pm. The two signal men were Griff Evans who lived at Lyndale, Narberth Station and Iorrie Evans who lived on Jesse Road. I can remember with pride sitting in the signalbox during the late evening with Mr. Griff Evans. He'd been a prisoner of war during the 1914-18 conflict and on one occasion he'd been forced to march barefoot to a prison camp that would be his home for a number of years. There would have been a porter available - either Tommy Jones M.C. from Crinow or Olav C. Kjetska. Olav was of Polish descent but was born in Swansea. He lived with his family in Roboston Wathen. In my day the Station Master was Mr. Goodyear. The booking clerk was Geoff Evans from Kilgetty and the goods clerk was Leo Thomas who lived on Halkon Crescent. But more than equal to any of the aforementioned was the Porter and Signaller, Ralph Dunbar. As well as being a porter Ralph had to be the signaller for about two hours each day to fit in with the shift times of the permanent signallers. Geoff Evans would start at 5.00am and finish at 1.00pm. Iorrie Evans would start his shift at

2.00pm and finish after the last train which was scheduled to leave Narberth at 9.55pm. The last train was nearly always late. But back to Ralph Dunbar. The signalbox was very small and only had thirteen levers with which to operate the signals and points. On this particular day when Ralph was on duty as a signaller the signalbox was full of people. As a result Ralph was unable to get out through the door to exchange staffs with the engine's fireman. There was a window in the signalbox which was only partly open so Ralph, thinking there was enough of a gap for him to jump through, launched himself at the window. Unfortunately Ralph got his trousers caught on the window frame leaving himself half-in and half-out of the 'box. I think Ralph was disciplined soon afterwards, not for failing to exchange staffs (a serious breach of Health and Safety policy at the time) but for smashing the window frame! Even in a most serious situation all Ralph could do was laugh as he always did, no matter what the crisis. A great man.

I think I'd better explain the significance of the 'staff'. The railway line between Narberth and Whitland and Narberth and Templeton was a single track. Trains were only allowed to pass when in a station. Before leaving a station the engine driver had to be in possession of a metal staff about 30 inches long and 2 inches in diameter. At one end of the staff there'd be the station's name embossed in brass. In the summer there were occasions when a passenger excursion train would come down from the Rhondda Valleys to Tenby. The train was described as a 'Non-Stopper'. At that time there were no speed restrictions for a train travelling through a station and very often a train would be travelling at 60mph and the driver would not stop to exchange staffs. It was the responsibility of the signaller to change staffs one-handed with the engine's fireman. You had to give a staff and take a staff simultaneously. That required skill. I recall an incident when a passenger train left the station without a guard, which constituted an instant breach of Health and Safety regulations. It was a fine summer's day and the station was full of passengers getting on and getting off the 2.10 Pembrokeshire Coast Express passenger train bound for London Paddington. The guard was a very officious man called Jim Davies. Jim, who came from Pembroke Dock, always wore a flower in his buttonhole and his uniform was immaculate. The rules were that for a train to leave the station the guard had to (a) blow his whistle and (b) wave his green flag in the air. Now Olav got a bit confused and mistakenly thinking that he'd heard a whistle *and* had seen a green flag, raised his left arm high in the air as an indication to the engine driver that it was safe for the train to move off - which it did and didn't stop until the train arrived in Whitland. Jim Davies was fuming - his train had left the station without him! What was he to do? Well he was in fact taken to Whitland on the back of Ralph Dunbar's motorbike. Now Ralph had ambitions to become a leather-clad Isle of Man T.T. racer and with throttle wide open managed to get Jim Davies to Whitland before the Pembrokeshire Coast Express pulled into Whitland station. I'm not quite sure what happened to Olav after that but I don't think he liked Jim Davies very much. I do know that Olav was not sacked as a result. Incidentally Olav was the only cyclist I have ever known who cleaned the tyres on his bicycle with 'Zebra' black grate polish.

Whilst on the subject of Narberth Railway Station were you aware that there was once a hotel some 50 yards from the station, called appropriately "The Station Hotel"? Following the decline of passenger traffic the hotel was sold to Messrs. Ben Salmon who renamed it the 'Station Yard Milk Depot'. A steady procession of milk tankers would terminate only yards from the former hotel but sadly, with the construction of a large milk factory in Whitland (which employed over one hundred people) and the increase in the use of the road network to transport milk across Pembrokeshire, the Station Milk Yard closed and the building fell into disrepair. In about 1958 the building was bought by Mr Leslie John who renamed it 'Panteg House'. Leslie lived there with his wife and baby daughter. Leslie was the son of Caleb John of Pant yr Gorphwys, a low-slung stone cottage just up the road from Stoneyford farm. Leslie John owned a parcel of land to the rear of Panteg House and every year Leslie would fatten turkeys for sale at Christmas. We all know the fate of turkeys at Christmas - and I'm sure so did the turkeys. I suspected this because every year, on or about 22nd December, Leslie John's turkeys would mysteriously stop gobbling. After their execution they would be passed down to one of two women for feathering. One was Mrs Maggie Scourfield and the other was my mam. After being quickly denuded of their feathers the

turkeys would then be boxed and loaded onto a parcel train to Carmarthen where they would be sold. Some years later Leslie John sold Panteg Hosue to Geoff Morgan and his wife Olive (nee Killa of Orierton Farm.) Geoff and Olive continued the tradition of rearing Christmas turkeys.

Mains Sewage

Now let me ask you a question. What do you think was the most significant event in Narberth in 1958? Was it Narberth's football team winning the West Wales Amateur Cup? Or was it the proposal to close the public toilets immediately below the town clock? In fact it was neither of these. It was the installation of the town's much-anticipated (and much-needed) mains sewage system. Just think about the chaos the construction work would cause. Pavements and roads would have to be dug up. Farmers would lose their land under compulsory purchase orders. The sewage farm was built on a field on Kilnpark Farm which was owned by Mr. D.L (Lawrence) Davies and his wife, Ena. I know this was because I worked as a labourer for Lawrence, a lovely man who suffered from severe respiratory problems. During the winter months he couldn't feed hay to his cattle because the hay created a dusty haze that made breathing almost impossible. Lawrence was also church warden at Crinow Church.

A company called Gibson & King of Milford Haven were appointed to carry out the construction of the sewage plant. I remember clearly one morning when the excavator, a cloud belching leviathan much bigger than a modern-day JCB, arrived in a field owned by the Lewis Brothers of Greenway Farm. The Lewis brothers were Dai, Griff and Hedley. They also had a sister Lal. Now Dai was quite literally a loose cannon. Quick tempered and prone to violence he objected most vigorously to the prospect of the excavator digging a deep trench in his field. One day Dai decided to take the law into his own hands. Armed with a loaded 12-bore shotgun Dai leapt into the trench and, pointing the gun at the hapless driver, yelled "Stop, or I'll shoot". What happened next is a matter of some conjecture. Rumour has it that the driver of the excavator raised the heavily-loaded bucket and dropped the contents some two feet behind Dai. In the melee that followed Dai lost his shotgun in the mud. Dai didn't surrender, neither was he arrested. He simply dug himself out of the trench and went home. The fact Dai wasn't arrested and locked up was probably because Narberth Police Station didn't have a firearms squad. Even if all three police officers from Narberth Police Station had attended the crime scene attempting to put cuffs on Dai would only have served to exacerbate an already volatile situation. Public opinion in Narberth following the incident was one of amusement with many local people supportive of Dai's actions.

The introduction of a mains sewage system allowed the installation of bathrooms in many properties in Narberth. No longer did you have to walk (or even sometimes run!) torch in hand to the ty bach at the bottom of the garden. The ty bach with its privy (hole in the ground) and toilet paper in the form of square sheets torn from the previous Sunday's edition of 'News of the World' hung on a nail on the door.

Places of Worship in Narberth

When it comes to places of worship in Narberth in the 1950's I remember there were four - St. Andrews and the Baptist, Wesleyan and Tabernacle Chapels. The Rector of St. Andrews was the Rev'd Brinley Morris. Brinley lived with his family in the Rectory on Moorfield Road. The Rectory is now the Plas Hyfryd Hotel. I was bred from non-conformist stock and didn't have much contact with Rev'd Morris. I do know however that the church organist was Miss Hilda Davies. Miss Davies lived at 2 Castle Terrace and was responsible for the Girl's Friendly Society (the G.F.S.) I was never quite sure what they did as a society but Margaret Evans (ne Harry) was a member. With little respect for those long dead and buried us kids used the cemetery as a playground and could be oft found running round the weather-beaten headstones and hiding in the trees. On one occasion I can clearly remember Valerie John (ne Hunter) falling from the 'Sticky Glue Tree' and on hitting the ground injuring herself quite badly. The 'Sticky Glue'

was well over 50 foot high and as a child I was told that it was used by God to sweep clean the sky. On another occasion whilst playing amongst the gravestones I remember stumbling across a memorial to a soldier felled at the battle of Waterloo. Even today, and despite the passage of time and tide, I could take you to that memorial to a Narberth man killed on a foreign field far from home.

I remember one frosty, crisp autumnal morning (it must have been a Monday) striding up Church Street with Richard Fanus when, with pumped out chest, he announced proudly that he'd been made a choirboy at St. Andrews Church the day before. Now, living next door to Richard, I thought I knew him pretty well and I don't ever recall hearing a chorus of angels coming out of No.4. Nevertheless he'd been selected as a choirboy by none other than Miss Hilda Davies, the church organist who lived at No 2. In my humble opinion I think Richard was chosen not because he was in possession of any particular much-sought-after choral talent but because of his angelic looks. The fact that there weren't too many angels in Narberth at the time made the selection process a lot easier.



St Andrews Church, Narberth

The Baptist Chapel in High Street was built in 1837 with the present chapel opening in 1891⁴ and from that time up until the early 1960's there was healthy competition between the 'Baptists' and the Tabs (or to give it its proper title the Tabernacle Congregational Chapel.) The competition was always about membership numbers with the Baptists always having the edge, particularly after they opened a Boys Club under the leadership of the Rev'd. Wyn Evans. Rev'd. Evans was a lovely man who well-understood the challenges he faced in encouraging young boys to follow a less unruly lifestyle. I remember on one occasion he invited a Police Sergeant along to a Boys Club meeting. As part of his presentation the Sergeant presented to us boys his 'cosh' for closer examination. Its correct title was 'truncheon' or 'staff' but we all preferred 'cosh' because of its association with smog-bound gangland London. The police sergeant later admitted giving us a cosh to handle so early in his talk was a bit of mistake because it distracted us from his sermon on "how to take care of your bike". For those of you who might want more information about the Baptist chapel I commend to you a booklet entitled "Among The Myrtle Trees" written by the Rev'd Chris Rees and published in 2011. The Rev'd Rees has been the Baptist minister since 1995.

I now come to *my* chapel, the Tabernacle Congregational Church, or the 'Tabs' as it was known. The church was built in 1817 on Occupation Lane (now Tabernacle Lane) and finally closed its doors in 2009. The foundations of the building as you see it today were laid in July 1858 at a cost of 'no less than £1,000'. As was quoted at the time "the responsibility is great, and the majority of the church are working people,

they trust they may be forgiven the liberty of appealing for assistance to friends and well-wishers of the One Adorable Redeemer beyond their own immediate circle". And so it was that the Chapel was built. The Tabs was declared "free of debt" at the close of the day the chapel was opened. Let us pause and think about that for a moment. £1,000 in 1850 equates to about £127,000 in 2019. Would the 'working people' of Narberth today be willing and able to raise that amount of money?



The Tabernacle Congregational Church, Narberth

Much has happened since those foundation stones were first laid back in 1858. We have experienced wars to end all wars, man has flown faster than the speed of sound and has walked on the Moon. However when in need or pain we still seek solace from our Lord Jesus Christ. Bricks and mortar may come and go but humanity remains.

Moving on to happier times. My memories are of a Tabs that was vibrant and ambitious under the leadership of Cyril Skyrme, the Sunday School Superintendent and the Rev'd E.M. (Morris) Jones. Rev'd Jones took up his duties as minister in the 1930's and with his wife lived in the Manse (now Greenfields) on Station Road. I can recall them having two children - Eluned and Gwenda- who both went on to become teachers. Mrs Jones was my Sunday School teacher. Quietly spoken Mrs Jones was everything that was good about being a Christian. Collection at Sunday School was a 'ship halfpenny' which was our contribution towards The London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) We also had a collection for Dr. Barnardo's and had to put our money into a paper mache Barnardo's house which was painted dull yellow and green. If I have one singular regret it is at the Sunday School afternoon service when I misbehaved. As a punishment Mrs. Jones tapped me sharply on the knee with the words "Don't say that!" Now a tap on the knee from Mrs Jones was the equivalent to a sound thrashing from a less sympathetic teacher. I was distraught and vowed never again to disappoint Mrs Jones.

The Rev'd. Morris Jones preached his sermons without the use of notes. Instead he spoke from the heart with a deep knowledge and understanding of the Bible. More importantly for me, and because I was required to attend evening service every Sunday, Rev'd. Jones always started his service promptly at 6.30pm and ended no later than 7.30pm. I can remember one occasion when a minister from the Rhondda was invited to preach at an Anniversary service. He turned out to be the 'hell-fire and brimstone' type. In his fervour he mentioned "sins of the body and lustful minds" several times which I, in my ignorance, thought was about growing up in a pleasantly sinful society. I did get a bit worried though when he preached that "the wages of Sin is Death". Anyway, to cut a long story short, throughout the increasingly animated sermon I kept a close eye on the chapel clock. When it got to 7.30pm and there was no sign to the end of threats about Hell and Damnation I turned to my late father, who was a senior

deacon at the time, and said in a loud whisper, which it turned out the whole congregation could hear, "Dad, Dad. It's gone half past seven!" There was a stunned silence. The minister looked down on me from the pulpit apoplectic with rage. If looks could kill I would have been struck down dead on the spot. He couldn't speak because he'd completely lost his train of thought. Somewhat fittingly he ended the service with the hymn 'Rescue the Perishing'. I knew that when I got home I'd be in for it. Later that evening my Dad gave me a stern lecture on the importance of ecclesiastical behaviour and respect. My Mam told me later that Dad, who'd heard the sermon many times before, was secretly quite pleased I'd brought the service to an end.

There are two other members of the congregation I think are worthy of mention. The first is Mrs 'Squeaky' Hughes. Mrs Hughes lived with her husband Ivor in Nestor Square. Now 'Squeaky' had a problem - she couldn't sing a note (hence the name.) Nevertheless she insisted on leading the singing of hymns at the Tabs. She was in the habit of holding on to her interpretation of the last note of the last line of the last verse. It was said that her singing, if indeed that's what I was, could shatter the thickest of glass. The second congregational member of note is W.H. Lloyd, the bank manager at The National Provincial Bank in the High Street. I've already explained that the Rev'd Morris Jones started his evening service promptly at 6.30pm but W. H. Lloyd and his wife would not arrive until 6.40 more often than not during the singing of the first hymn. With no sense of shame he would walk solemnly down the left hand aisle to his seat on the front row after having allowed the heavy-hinged wooden porch door to close with a loud bang. W.H. Lloyd's attention span was limited to perhaps no more than 10% of the entire service. At the beginning of the service he would immediately take up a position in the corner of his pew and would fall asleep. His head would rest on his left shoulder and as he slumbered deeper into the arms of Morpheus he would slip further down in his pew and would not be seen again until the sermon ended. You might ask why Rev'd Jones didn't chastise W.H. Lloyd? Some said Rev'd Jones was a forgiving man both 'slow to chide and swift to bless'. Those less forgiving said it was because W.H. Lloyd's son Ambrose, a dentist in Carmarthen, was courting one of the Rev'd Jones' daughters. I'll leave that one for you to decide.

For me the highlight of the Sunday School calendar was the annual Sunday School outing to - wait for it - Tenby. Sunday School scholars (me included) would meet up on the platform at Narberth Railway Station to catch the 11.05 train. I remember the carriages were split up into three classes. First class was reserved for posh passengers. I remember one such person was, I think, Mrs Lort Phillips of Cresselly. It could also have been a Mrs. Harrison Allen also of Cresselly. Second class was reserved for the not-so-posh. Now third, and most important class of all, was for us - the down trodden, impoverished and unwashed (don't tell my mam I said that!) I remember the carriages had a corridor down one side. Some carriages didn't.

A memorable feature of the train journey to Tenby is passing through Narberth tunnel which was, and to this day still is, 273 yards long. The tunnel was notorious for being dark, dank and dripping wet. Above the tunnel was the road to Princes Gate and Shanklin's farm. Third class passengers had to sit in the dark until such time as the carriages passed Blackaldern Mansion in Crinow Gardens. A lot went on in the third class carriages as the train went through that tunnel. I remember that you weren't allowed to open the window in your carriage because if you did sparks, smoke and coal dust would fly in from the engine. On arriving in Tenby we'd be marched up to Deer Park Baptist Chapel. Why we had to meet at a Baptist chapel has always been a mystery to me. On arrival we'd be told about the arrangements for the day. Lunch would be taken in the Baptist Chapel Schoolroom at 1.00pm and afternoon tea at 4.00pm. The womenfolk from the Tabs would have prepared sandwiches, trifles and cakes for us to gorge on with eager enthusiasm. Ice-creams from Fecci's Ice Cream Parlour would come later in the afternoon (Knickerbocker Glories were a riot in those days!) It is with a note of sadness and regret that I have to recall the time when I lost my Dinky Toy steam roller on a Sunday School outing. It was painted green and had bright red wheels. I lost it in the sand on Tenby's North Beach near to Goscar Rock. I'll never

know but can only hope that my steamroller is now being played with by some urchin on a distant island shore. I recently bought a metal detector in the hope that one day I might return to Tenby's North Beach and find my treasured steam roller. Knowing my luck the only treasure I'd find would be ring pull from a carelessly discarded Coca Cola can.

I have one other memory I'd like to share with you about the Tabs - the Sunday night BBC broadcast of 'Sunday Half Hour', a religious programme featuring amongst other things choral music. The programme was broadcast live on the BBC's Home Service on Sunday September 20th 1959. Rehearsals for the broadcast were held well in advance and local church and chapel members were invited to take part under the leadership of the Tabernacle's resident musical director R. (Ronnie) A.J. Cole L.R.A.M. A.R.C.O. The organist was Miss Eluned Jones. Miss Jones was the daughter of the Minister, Rev. E. Morris Jones, who gave the closing prayer and blessing. Something that puzzled me at the time (and which still angers me even to this day) was the introduction to the service by the radio announcer who said, and I quote, "This evening's service comes from Narberth in Pembrokeshire, South Wales." Well I thought where else could Narberth be other than in Pembrokeshire? I know there's a Narberth in Massachusetts but that's in America. The announcer was a terribly English chappie called John Snagge. He had been a pupil at Eton College and was a member of the Bullington Club. I could tell from his highly-polished crystal cut-glass accent that he wasn't one of us. The morning after the service my mam met Mrs Ursula Garbutt who lived at Peterslake Cottage near to Stoneditch Farm with her husband and daughter Shirley. I think they had moved to Peterslake to avoid the Luftwaffe's blanket bombing of London. Mrs Garbutt pointed out to my mam that the choir had missed several notes during the service. Such was my mam's indignation at Mrs Garbutt's barbed criticism of the choir that she subjected Mrs Garbutt to a verbal lashing of stratospheric magnitude. For some reason Mrs Garbutt didn't speak to my mam for years after that. I thought Mrs Garbutt was a very sensible lady. She paid me 6d a day for hand pumping water into her cottage.

In bringing to an end my memories of the Tabs I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Ronnie Cole. Ronnie was a quiet, shy, unassuming man but to hear him play the organ was an absolute privilege. His feet would caress the pedals in the same way as a ballet dancer would float across the stage, his fingers would seek out the notes without effort and the sound he would create was heavenly. I have to say that though blessed with a God-given talent he was completely hopeless when it came to recognising talent in others. When during a rehearsal for a Sunday School Anniversary he described my singing as being very '*bass basso profundo*'. I can only assume he meant I was singing in the cracks between the black and white keys of the organ's keyboard. In my defence I was only eight.

You might be surprised to know that Narberth had a workhouse. It was built by the Narberth Board of Guardians in 1838 on Providence Hill ('Narberth Mountain') a mile south of Narberth on the road to Templeton and was under the management of the Narberth Poor Law Union. The original building was designed to accommodate 150 men, women and children from across Pembrokeshire and Carmarthen. In the 1930's the Workhouse was redesignated as a 'Public Assistance Institution' and became known as the Narberth Lodge Hospital. As a young boy I don't ever remember the workhouse having any other name than 'The Union'. It was renamed "Allensbank" in 1948 and the building is now part of a family-run caravan park. The unfortunate men and women who lived in 'The Union' were referred to as 'inmates' but my late father always referred to them as 'patients'. The phrase 'inmate' suggests they had been found guilty of a crime. Well reader if being homeless, malnourished and maltreated was a crime then yes they were certainly guilty but in the eyes of the Lord, and in the eyes of many of Narberth's townsfolk, they were without sin. Two men in particular stand out in my memory. One was Bertie 'The Union'. Bertie would walk the mile from the workhouse into Narberth. On arrival Bertie would walk up High Street smiling and singing "Way down upon the Swansea River", Bertie's adaptation of the popular tune penned in 1851 by American composer Stephen Foster "Way down upon the Swanee River". The second man I can recall quite vividly. His name was Dai 'The Union'. Dai was severely disabled. He didn't have legs

below the knee. He had to walk on his knees fitted with a type of rubber boot. Dai only had two fingers on each hand. Dai would walk on his knees into Narberth nearly every day, including Sunday when as a member of the congregation he would attend the service at the Baptist Chapel. Passing motorists would always give him a lift. Dai was a keen supporter of Narberth Soccer Club and at the start of every new season would proudly present the Club with a new match ball. I remember that Dai also had a speech impediment. Though from birth incapable of speech his beaming smile spoke a thousand words. As I write these words tears begin to slip down my cheeks. It is perhaps time to close now.

Why East Wind Chills

Dear reader it is now the frigid frost-bitten winter of 1961. Sadly, with head bowed low and stiff-collared to the wind, I must leave Narberth to find work. The page turns and a new chapter begins.....

Dreams are temporary.

Memories last a lifetime.