

## **A Hundred Years in Broughton**

*In September 2024, Mrs Marjorie Cunnah celebrated her one hundredth birthday. She has lived in Broughton throughout her life. She kindly agreed to share some of her memories with the History Group's Oral History team. The words below have been transcribed from a most interesting conversation we had with her.*

### **Childhood Memories**

I was born in Brynteg, an only child, no brothers or sisters to my regret. I was friendly with a local family and my best friend was the youngest and we remained great friends up to her death. I loved being with that family although they were extremely poor. There was a lot of unemployment when the collieries closed and her father and a lot of miners had Nystagmus, an eye condition which stopped him from working underground. He used to buy a huge piece of leather and had a 'shoe last' in the back kitchen. All the children had little black boots and he would cut and repair them and quite often the tacks would come through the shoe and they would be cutting cardboard and newspaper to make an insole. I loved being with that family.

Most families had someone working in the coal mines and I remember The Gresford Disaster very well, it was on a Saturday morning and I came downstairs and my mother said that there had been an explosion at Gresford and my father and uncle Emlyn had walked down with families around the pit-head. I knew a number of the children who had lost their fathers and the village was in a sombre mood. It was a terrible time.

I went to Brynteg Girls' School and I remember if you were found chewing the end of your pencil one teacher would take you in front of the class and take from her desk a big rubber dummy. It would later be given to the next child. Diphtheria was common and lots of children died. If I told my mother that I had been naughty she always said, "you must have deserved it". When a little friend told her dad my mother was furious and called on the teacher, we never saw the dummy again!

### **World of Work**

I stayed in school until I was nearly 15 and then went to Secretarial College in Chester. That was pre-war and, of course, we all had to carry gas masks and identity cards. We had an air raid test and had to run down to the basement.

Eventually my first job with the Council was as a Junior Shorthand Typist and I was in the Evacuation Department so I can remember the evacuees coming, poor little things! Unaccompanied children from the age of 5 and expectant mothers and babies. Some children went to Black Lane School and some to Brynteg Central School. As we had the "Phony War" early on some went back. Later the council had evacuees from London and Essex and house holders would have them. With the trauma of leaving their families some, who would only

be 5 or 6, were bed wetting and some had scabies so the billeting officer was told that they could not be kept.

I stayed with the Council until I got married and I became P A to the Chief Executive. I remember the creation of the NHS in 1948. Aneurin Bevan came over with his wife, Jenny Lee, who was also an MP and I remember serving them with tea and I made sandwiches for them. A pleasant little man and I wonder what he would think of it now!

### ***The Spanish Trip***

In May 1949 Harold Tudor from Coedpoeth who was a member of the British Council approached the choir and asked them if they would like to go to Madrid to enter a competition of music, but due to the war we couldn't travel in our own country never mind going abroad so everybody was so excited. It cost us £37 each, but I think we were subsidised a bit by the choir, so we went. It was no picnic!

We left Wrexham Station at 11 o'clock at night and got on a train and went to Chester and got on a train to London. It was a dreadful crossing from Newhaven to Dieppe and a lot of the choir were sick. Another train took us to the centre of Paris and we went to a restaurant and I remember them all saying it was horse meat.

On the third day we went on a Spanish train for Madrid. I remember that they had a civil war for many years and there were armed guards on the roads and we were put in an ex-army camp. We were segregated, females stayed in this camp and the men were taken miles away. We didn't see any showers but there were about 20 wash bowls. The sanitation was negligible really. The wash bowls were blocked and the toilets were blocked. It was dreadful and it was hot. We didn't know what we were eating when we did have food, they would bring big bowls and we didn't know if it was coffee or soup!

A bus would come to take you into Madrid but only one bus for hundreds of people. We managed to get on the bus once and eventually got into the Anglo-American Club where we had a cup of tea and some ham sandwiches, we hadn't seen ham for years in 1949 and we didn't know what a ham sandwich was. Going around the shops later we saw leather shoes and gloves which we hadn't seen at home.

We won one competition and I think the prize money was £3000 which was an awful lot of money in those days and that was the only consolation for the trip which was pretty horrendous. The only consolation was we had won first prize.

Back home the Broughton and District Choral Society had a lot of success including winning first prize at National Eisteddfods. We won at Mountain Ash where there were 16 choirs competing. It was a lengthy journey but Tom Price of New Broughton had a new bus which had wooden slatted seats. On the way home we stopped at Llandrindod Wells and sang in the square and people came out. There were always little Eisteddfods on most Saturdays,

often in Anglesey.

Because we had won, they put the Union Jack up on the head gear on Black Lane Colliery. After Madrid there was a party in Broughton School room. Emrys John the Vicar was there and the Catholic Bishop of Menevia John McCarthy always did the catering, always ham salad and bara brith, great days!

### ***Village Life***

I remember the bakeries in this parish - E. D. Roberts, Churton's, Woodfine's, John McCarthy, The Bryn, Crawford's (Behind the White Hart) and Parry Jones.

There were 5 farms - Rockwood Farm, Rhosrhedyn Farm, Brynmally, Broughton Hall and Pen y Bryn (now Riding Stables).

There were 8 shops on Victoria Road, Brynteg - Castle Betting Shop, Woodfine's, Fish and Chips (below The Castle), Bert Roberts, Pope's, a hardware shop, Mrs Lloyd, Les Price, the butchers, Broads, the tin shop. I counted 25, taking in Westminster Road, Victoria Road, Quarry Rd, Station Road and Clayton Road. Harrisons on Gwalia Road, Davies the tailor, a chemist and a fish and chip shop.

On the corner of Bryn y Gaer Road, Will O Webb had a billiard hall and he would put a note in the basket and his dog would take it to the Fish and Chip shop and the order would be put in the basket and the dog would take it back to him.

### ***Days of Music***

By Brymbo Pool there was a bandstand and on a Sunday night a band was playing so the people from Coedpoeth, Southsea, Pentre Broughton, Tanyfron and Brymbo would parade, sort of eyeing each other up, it used to be called The Monkey Parade. I did go every Friday night to a dance it used to be half a crown and I used to walk up in all weathers but of course there had been that murder in Coedpoeth so my parents were worried to death so you had to make sure you had company to walk home. There was a shortage of boys so we girls used to dance together unless you went to Wrexham which we did, to the YMCA which is now The Little Theatre. In the afternoon we would cut spam sandwiches for the soldiers coming in. And, of course, there were airmen from Borras Airfield and Royal Engineers from Wynnstay, Ruabon. Those not in the pubs would come to this little dance where we had a 3 piece band. The drummer only had one arm, his name was Harry but he did have 2 feet so he could manage the drumming with one arm. I was allowed to go to Acton School and The Church House, the only places I was allowed to go.

We had the Americans who were stationed at Plas Power. That was an eye opener, they started jiving and jitterbugging with the girls going over their shoulders. My parents thought it was disgusting but it was a sight to see, it was so entertaining.

We had bikes but didn't need lights as it was double summertime. The last bus was 10 o'clock and although people queued for food everyone just got on the bus when it arrived. They were only allowed 7 standing and when the driver and conductor came back from King's Cafe there were 15 or more standing. No one would get off and on 2 occasions they drove around to the Police Station and the police would turf people off.

### ***Sunday School***

When I was much younger, I went to St Peter's Sunday School and there would be as many as 120 attending. We would parade around the village with the church banner. We had trestles at Rockwood Farm and we would have tea and sandwiches. My aunty lived on the farm and they had an old horse called Bess and we would ride on her back which was bent. We had a trip to Rhyl and there were 7 buses queuing from the top of Church Hill down Victoria Road, of course buses were smaller than the ones we have today. We went to Rhyl and the ladies of the church took the food with us, they made sandwiches and cakes and put them in tins. We were taken to a room in Rhyl and had our tea on trestles in a school room.

### ***Life At Home***

After the war we still had gas lamps and my mother had a gas iron and gas ring and also a flat iron. Washing day was a big thing, no washing machines in those days. She filled the copper with water on a Sunday night and lit the boiler the next morning. We had a gas geyser in the kitchen and gas mantles which you had to light with care because if you touched them, they would break. A man came to check gas lights in the street and change the mantles. It was possibly 1947-48 when electricity came to Brynteg.

### ***Health Care***

The local doctor was Doctor Woods who was chauffeur driven. After he left, we had another doctor, Dr Ripley who was also a dentist and he used to pull teeth as they didn't bother with fillings, they just took them out. Dr Gandy came afterwards.

I had Diphtheria when I was about 6 and went to hospital, it was called The Fever Hospital and it was owned by the Wrexham District Council. It was a single storey brick building with high windows and was on the other side of the road from where the Maelor Hospital is today. You were not allowed visitors but there were steps outside and parents would come and look at you through the windows. The heads of the beds were against the windows so you couldn't speak to them. It was all miming through the windows. They would bring fresh eggs and put your name on them. They could only visit twice a week, Thursday and Sunday afternoons.

There was no Maelor Hospital but there was a Workhouse there. I can remember the start of the hospital which was called The Emergency Hospital and started just prior to the start of the war as temporary buildings but they did open pre-war. There were a lot of sick soldiers there and they were allowed into Wrexham if they were well enough but couldn't wear their

khaki uniforms. They wore horrible bright blue trousers and tops but they could wear forage caps and you couldn't miss them in the town.

### ***Leisure Time***

We used to have local carnivals and Mrs Curtis was a character and great for organising them. Another character was Lew Andrews the "Mayor of Broughton". They made two sets of swings and a rocking horse for The Rec. We also had the tennis court and bowling green and the old hut where they played snooker. We had a tennis team and a cricket team which my father played for. They played on a field where the Riding Centre is now on Long Lane, the captain was the previous vicar, Mostyn Davies who was an Oxford Blue.

The local policeman was a very handsome man and all the ladies liked him. He used to park his bike outside a certain lady's house and one day the bike was pinched. We also had a very Welsh policeman called Elis who once caught Don (Marjorie's husband) with a missing headlight or something. He had Sgt Jones from the Lodge with him and Don was summoned.

Glyn Evans from The Bryn had a pig but didn't have a licence to kill it so he tried to kill it at night but the squealing kept everyone in The Moss awake all night.

Methuselah Richards had a pony and cart and came around when he was a big age selling green groceries from his cart.

The Welsh language was alive in the chapels but a family I knew who went to Bethesda Chapel and spoke Welsh spoke English after chapel. My grandparents always spoke Welsh to each other and to my father when he was young but he never spoke it to us.

I think I have lived during the best days in the best of times.

*Mrs Marjorie Cunnah*