

St Mary's RC Church
Merthyr Tydfil
Parish Advisory Council



To Autumn

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness.
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run.*

Keats

ST MARY'S MAGAZINE

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EDITORIAL

Thank you to the contributors to this edition of St Mary's Magazine. Once again we have a wide range of articles and I am pleased to welcome those who are contributing for the first time. I do understand that some parishioners may be reluctant to write for the Magazine. However, my limited experience of putting together a magazine tells me that those who may not be in the habit of writing, or who have not written anything for a very long time, always under-estimate what they have to say and the way in which they write it; there is always a freshness in all the accounts of those who are not in the habit of writing regularly.

In addition to the usual appeal for contributions I would like to make a special request to those of you who are artistically gifted, to be more precise, those who can draw - in black! This may seem a strange thing to ask but the editorial group would like to include more visual materials in the magazine, including more original front covers. All we ask is that the drawings are made by a parishioner, the simpler the better, and are original and are capable of being copied clearly. We have considered using colours in the magazine but the copying costs are far too expensive. Cartoons or sketches would certainly enhance the magazine. Why not give it a try?

Hywel Mathews
Editor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Good Parish

Would you believe that I sat down and read the last Parish Magazine through - description of the tour of Ireland should be put in a Tourist Office as an advert. for Ireland.. I thought it was excellently written and Jack Walsh's prayers fitted into my prayer book!

Yes, yours is a good parish. Every blessing on you and on all contributors.

Sister Bernardine, St Clare 's Convent, Porthcawl

(Sister Bernardine is quite a remarkable woman and an inspired, inspiring and a well-loved and respected person, especially by those many pupils whom she has taught at the convent. She taught my wife, Mary, in the 1950s and my first meeting with her was at the convent when Mary and I were engaged. On reflection I now see that this was a sort of visit by which Mary could seek the approval of me, the fiancee of a former convent girl, by Sister Bernardine. The visit coincided with a power failure at the convent. As the only man in the house at that moment I was regarded as the saviour, despite the fact that I am not electrically minded or skilled. Nuns do things like this. By a fluke I re-set the fuses and restored the power. Since then, 40 years ago, I have been treated with just that little bit more regard than I deserve! *Editor*)

Dowlais Market

I was greatly surprised that Mary Gaiter, in her interesting recall of the old Dowlais Market in the last issue, made no mention of the faggots-and-peas stall. For many it was the Mecca, and the benches around the table were invariably full.

I think Mary was mistaken, too, in saying that few men visited the market. Certainly for me and my pals it was a regular Saturday meeting place. True enough, we may not have been ardent shoppers - except, of course, for the faggots and peas!

Dai Bont

MEMORIES

One of the benefits of growing old is the ability Nature gives us to recall people and events from times past with an increasing clarity. Perhaps it is her way of compensating us for the deterioration of our short-term memory as we struggle to remember people's names, where we put the keys or the reason why we came downstairs.

Like most Catholics, I have loved Easter with its joyous celebrations and confess to a tinge of sadness as the red and white vestments of Easter and Pentecost give way to the green of "Ordinary Time". But then, I console myself, there is Mary's month and the month of the Sacred Heart and the feast of Corpus Christi, and it is of this that I have the most happy memories.

I was one of a large family and the Corpus Christi Sunday procession was eagerly looked forward to by us all. As soon as dinner was over my grandmother would arrive to help us with the preparations. There were sandals to be whitened and to be left to dry on the outside window sill; dresses and veils to be hung up, ribbons to be fixed. My father would change into his best navy suit, my mother into her good clothes and then, all decked out, we would set off for church. After making our way into our various assembly points my father would don his red confraternity sash, my mother the badge of the Women's Guild. One of the teachers in the Parish, a Miss O'Halloran by name, was blessed with a powerful voice and she would lead us in the "Lauda Sion" in preparation for our walk around the neighbourhood. It was an orderly procession and we enjoyed looking at the altars people had erected and at the papal bunting strung across the narrow streets.

Returning to church we would assemble on the lawn in front of an outdoor altar. I can still remember the atmosphere - the wind blowing through the trees, the priest's voice wafting away, the stirring of the children. As the priest raised the monstrance in blessing the band would play a fanfare. Then followed the Divine Praises and the rousing, closing hymn of "Faith of Our Fathers" and "God bless the Po-o-pe". Our hearts were fit to burst.

There have been many changes since those days. In my adopted country, Canada, the Holy Eucharist is especially honoured on Holy Thursday and the feast of Corpus Christi is celebrated on a Sunday, with no special distinction. Still, many good things go on in my parish. There are numerous prayer groups, scripture study groups and the laity are actively involved in working for the sick and the poor. The importance of joining together in community is often stressed and sometimes when in a group, I tell them how blessed I was, as a child, to have been raised in a real community of prayerful, loving people, the memory of which has remained with me throughout my life.

Betty McGann (nee Bourne)

MILLENNIUM JUBILEE

All roads will certainly be leading to Rome in the year 2000 when the greatest Holy Year pilgrimage of our lifetime will take place.

It was Pope Boniface VIII who proclaimed the first Christian Jubilee in the year 1300. He was responding to what appears to have been a groundswell desire of people all over the world to seek penitence at the tomb of St Peter in Rome.

People did in fact travel to Rome in great numbers and in accordance with Papal Instructions paid visits to the two basilicas of St Peter and St Paul. The Pope envisaged a pilgrimage every century but in 1350 it was thought that it would be good to have such a celebration within an average lifetime and so Pope Clement VI instituted one that year.

In 1450 Pope Nicholas V increased the frequency to every 25 years and so it has been ever since. Pilgrims now visit the four great basilicas - St John Lateran and St Major have been added. There is also a ceremony of opening the Holy Door in each basilica. That in St Peter's is opened by the Pope on the Christmas Eve before the Holy Year and closed on the following Christmas Eve.

The idea of the jubilee comes from Jewish law. Every seventh year, like every seventh day, was regarded as holy, and the year which followed seven cycles of seven years (50) was kept as a sabbatical year of special holiness.

Anon

VISITING THE PALACE

Prince Charles will be 50 years old on November 14 and that day will in 1948 will always be a memorable one for me and my family.

A little earlier I had given birth to my own son, Richard, so I was always ready to tell anyone the date of Charles's birthday!

But what made the date even more memorable was that my brother and sister, Jack and Kit, happened to be inside Buckingham Palace at the time. Not, I hasten to add, on great affairs of state: a friend of Kit, Dowlais-born Margaret Crimmings, had started work there as a maid and had invited Kit for a visit.

They entered the Palace at the side gate in Buckingham Palace Road, went along a dimly-lit subterranean passage to a staff lift which took them up to the floor on which Margaret's room was situated. It was also the floor on which the Royal Family had its living quarters.

The room was large and airy, very pleasant. Looking up from the gates of the Mall, it was to the right of the famous balcony.

Before leaving, Jack and Kit did what was probably every visitor to the Palace does - went to the window and gave a languid 'Queen Mother' wave to the people below!

As to my son, Richard, he has also served the Queen, though in a different way. He went into the Army - the Household Cavalry, by the way - as a teenager, rose through the ranks to become a captain and has recently finished his time, although he still works for the Army as a civilian. He and his wife, Diane, live in the shadow of that other royal household, Windsor Castle.

Theresa Lewis (nee Walsh)

THE MERTHYR CONNECTION

When, in November 1938, the Vatican appointed Archbishop Godfrey to be the first Apostolic Delegate to the Court of St James, the story had an unusual Merthyr connection.

Mgr. Godfrey was the rector of the Venerable English College in Rome at the time of his appointment. A Liverpoolian, he was heard to say when he made his debut on the altar as an altar boy, "I'll never leave it."

He went to Ushaw College in England before going to the English College in Rome, always regarded as the Number One seminary for British priests-to-be. After a brief period in a Liverpool parish he went to teach in Ushaw and later succeeded his erstwhile teacher (later Cardinal) Hinsley as rector of the English College.

When he arrived in London to take up his diplomatic post there was no waiting Apostolic Delegate building to house him and his staff. It so happened that a former student at the English College under Mgr'

Godfrey - my cousin James Walsh - lived in a big house in Kensington, and he offered this to the new envoy. So for some time the house in Sheffield Terrace became the Apostolic Delegation.

Jim was the son of Thomas Walsh, a Dowlais jobbing printer, and his wife Mary, a stalwart in the St Illtyd's Women's Guild. He was at the time the owner and editor of *The Catholic Times*. He was one of the first entrants to the newly-opened Cyfarthfa Castle Grammar School (in 1922) but later he and his brother Will were sent to the Benedictine-run public school, Douai, in Berkshire. They were intended for the priesthood, but although both went to seminaries the vocation was not forthcoming. Will later became a solicitor, a prosecuting counsel for Manchester.

Sheffield Terrace in Kensington is off Church Street which connects Holland Park and Kensington High Street. Jim and his wife moved down Church Street to a flat behind the Carmelite Church and remained there for the rest of his long life. The Apostolic Delegation later moved to Wimbledon. Mgr. Godfrey, of course, later became Archbishop of Liverpool and then Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster.

Papal Nuncios are appointed to Catholic countries, where they automatically become Dean of the Diplomatic Corps. Apostolic Delegates go to non-Catholic countries.

Jack Walsh

WISE SAYINGS

People see your actions - God sees your motives.

When God measures a man he puts a tape around his heart.

Remember that the top banana is supported by the rest of the bunch.

If you have time to pray, God has time to listen.

If you wish to be happy let me tell you the way
Don't live for tomorrow 'til you have lived today.

Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. Was it worth it?

The darkest hour is just before you are overdrawn.

Opportunities are seldom labelled.

If you are too busy to be miserable you will be happy.

A new tie often attracts the soup of the day.

Poverty is catching - you can get it from the Inland Revenue.

A friend not in need is a friend indeed.

Most of us would be content with our lot if we had a lot.

Old age is when the numbers in your phone book belong to doctors.

Phyllis Meaker

KORCZAK AND CRAZY HORSE

We toured the American Wild West this year and were extremely lucky to be in South Dakota on 3 June for the 50th Anniversary of the first blast which started the Crazy Horse memorial on Thunderhead Mountain. We enjoyed the guest speakers' stories of achievements against all odds; watched the unveiling of the completed face of Crazy Horse; listened to The Lord's Prayer beautifully sung and expressively performed in Indian sign language; observed the massive blasting to start the work on the horse's head, and to applaud what will be accomplished in the next 50 years. We found the story of Korczak and Crazy Horse absolutely amazing. It is the story of a dream, not just the dream of one man, but the dream of a race of people.

Korczak Ziolkowski was born in Boston on 6 September, 1908. His Polish parents died tragically in a boating accident when he was only one year old and he grew up in foster homes. He became a gifted sculptor and produced many fine works of art.

On the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota lived an old Sioux chief named Henry Standing Bear. He heard of the young sculptor who had worked as an assistant to Burglum at Mt Rushmore on the memorial to the four presidents. Chief Standing Bear asked Korczak to carve a mountain to Crazy Horse. In 1940 Korczak visited the Pine Ridge Indian reservation in South Dakota to learn about the Indians and to find out why they had chosen Crazy Horse as the subject. He found the reservation the most desolate, lonely place he had ever seen and could not believe that this was where the government put the Indians. Chief Standing Bear spoke Lakota and English. He was a well educated man and had graduated from Carlisle University. When he spoke about Crazy Horse he spoke with reverence. Crazy Horse was a heroic figure who had fought to defend his people and their way of life, never surrendered, never signed a treaty and never went on a reservation. He was a symbol of everything that the Indian had stood for and lost.

For the next ten years Korczak worked on a statue of Noah Webster (author of Webster's Dictionary). During this time he studied

extensively about Crazy Horse and after three years in the army he accepted the Indians' invitation and turned down government commissions to create war memorials in Europe.

Carving a mountain and dedicating a memorial

Standing Bear and Korczak found a mountain to carve and, using his own money, Korczak bought privately owned land nearby. He carved a scale model of Crazy Horse atop his horse with left hand outstretched pointed over its head. This depicts Crazy Horse answering the derisive question asked by a white man, "*Where are your lands now?*", pointed east and replied proudly "*My lands are where my dead lie buried*".

In 1947, aged 38 years, he lived in a tent for seven months while building a log cabin. He also built a sawmill to provide the timber. The memorial was dedicated on June, 1948, with the first blast on the mountain. Special guests included five of the nine survivors of the battle of Little Big Horn, the youngest of whom was 88 years old. Korczak's project was non-profit making, financed by the public and not with government tax money. He did not take a salary and turned down federal money because of their record of broken pledges on treaties with the Indians. He worked on the mountain for 35 years and endured financial hardship, racial prejudice, injuries and advancing age. He died in October 1982 at the age of 74 years. His wife, Ruth, nee Ruth Ross, and all ten of their children were with him as he was laid to rest in the tomb that he and his sons built near the mountain. He left Ruth three books of plans for the mountain carving and she and her family carried on the work.

On the site today is a 1/34-scale plaster model, the log cabin studio and workshop filled with arts and antiques and the Indian Museum of North America as well as the new Native American Educational and Cultural Centre. When completed Crazy Horse will be 563 feet high and 6411 feet long, carved in the round, the largest sculptural undertaking in the world.

Crazy Horse was stabbed in the back in September 1877 by a white soldier while he was at Fort Robinson under a flag of truce. He later died,

on 6 September, which was the same date as Korczak's birthday. To the Indians that date is an omen and they also believe that the spirit of Crazy Horse is up on that mountain. Korczak felt that it was an honour to have been asked by the Indians to tell their story, and he often referred to himself as a "storyteller in stone". Sculptor Korczak

Ziolkowski (1908 - 1982) believed "if you believe strong enough and if you are willing to work hard enough, you can do anything you want to in this world. Never forget your dreams."

Amelia England

A CHRISTMAS CAKE

As it will soon be time to start baking for Christmas I was wondering whether you would be interested in printing a Christmas cake recipe in the September magazine. Here is a family favourite which I have used for many years, not only for Christmas but Christenings, Birthdays and Weddings too.

8 ozs butter

8 ozs soft light brown sugar

4 ozs SR flour

6 ozs plain flour

$\frac{1}{4}$ teasp salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ teasp mixed spice

pinch ground cinnamon

pinch grated nutmeg

1 tblsp golden syrup

4 large or 5 medium eggs

4 tblsp cold tea

$\frac{1}{2}$ teasp vanilla essence

finely grated rind of small lemon

12 ozs currants

12 ozs sultanas

6 ozs stoned raisins

3 ozs chopped mixed peel

3 ozs glace cherries (halved)

2 ozs ground almonds

Line a greased deep tin (8" round or 7" square) with a double thickness of greaseproof paper, letting it rise a little above the rim of the tin. Set oven at 300°F (100°C) or Gas Mark 2.

Cream the butter very well, add the sugar and beat until light and fluffy.

In a separate bowl beat together the syrup, eggs, tea, vanilla essence and lemon rind.

Sift together the flours, salt and spices and add them a little at a time, alternately with the egg mixture, to the creamed butter and sugar.

Add the remaining ingredients, mix well, turn the mixture into the prepared tin and level it off with the sides higher than the centre.

Tie a double thickness band of brown paper around the outside of the tin, place in the lower half of the preheated oven and leave it there for 3½ hours before testing it.

This cake should be made a month or two before you decorate it, to enable it to mature. It stores very well wrapped in a double thickness of greaseproof paper and then in foil.

Mabel Szyndra

THE REV MR PATRICK PORTAL

‘Rev Mr’ or plain ‘Mr’ is how Fr Portal is addressed in contemporary records - as, indeed, were all priests. However, in this article we shall adopt the term ‘Father’ when referring to priests.

In the early 19th century Merthyr Tydfil was a rapidly expanding, industrial town. In 1801 its population was 7,705 and this had risen to 27,281 by 1831. Amongst the thousands flooding into the town to seek work at the iron furnaces were families from Ireland. The first we have record of was the family of Laurence Hughes, who came to Merthyr after the failure of the 1798 Rebellion. They were the only Catholics in Merthyr in 1800. In 1815 three other families arrived - Timothy Long from Killarney, John Toohie from Cork and James McKeown from Northern Ireland. In subsequent years hundreds more joined them so that by the 1820s there were some 300 Catholic families in the town.

At that time Wales and SW England lay within the ecclesiastical area known as the Western District. It was administered by Bishop Collingridge who was based at Bridgewater in Somerset. He had three missions in this area, at Brecon, Abergavenny and Usk. The priest at Abergavenny visited Merthyr occasionally, to say Mass, but Fr Havard at Brecon was too old and infirm to assist in this way. In 1820 a Mr Lewis of Llanbleddian moved to Merthyr as his work required him to live in the town. Mr Lewis was a young man, a convert of Fr Richards during that priest’s time in charge of the Cowbridge mission, and a most devout Catholic. On the recommendation of Fr Richards, Bishop Collingridge appointed Mr Lewis as catechist in Merthyr. He contacted the Catholics of Merthyr, Penydarren and Dowlais inviting them to attend an improvised church in the vestry of a chapel. This was, most probably, the chapel built by Crawshay in Chapel Row, Georgetown, in 1788, but then in disuse. It was here that Mr Lewis gathered the two or three hundred Catholics of the district each Sunday. He preached to them, catechised the children in the hearing of the congregation and taught them hymns. A young man of about thirty, he was well-respected in the area, well known for his frequent contributions to the Welsh language

newspapers and, as a Welsh speaker, was sometimes invited to preach in local chapels.

Petition for a resident priest in Merthyr

In the mid 1820s, with Fr Richards’ support, Mr Lewis petitioned Bishop Collingridge to appoint a resident priest to the area. To strengthen his request he submitted a list of workmen from Merthyr and the heads of the Valleys area who were prepared to give financial support to his mission by having sums of money stopped from their wages from the various iron companies. The list is interesting because it gives us a picture of the distribution of Catholics in the area. For example, 42 at Cyfarthfa, 22 at Dowlais, 13 at Penydarren and 41 at Plymouth were prepared to contribute between them £7-5-0 a month, £87 per annum.

Bishop Collingridge was agreeable but found great difficulty in finding a priest prepared to take on Merthyr. In 1827 the position became acutely urgent for in that year Fr Richards was elected general of the Franciscan Order and left for Rome. Now, apart from an ailing Fr Havard at Brecon, there was no priest in the area.

The Merthyr mission was first offered to Fr Merton of Usk who refused it on the grounds that it was not financially viable. Fr Burke of Gloucester also declined. Bishop Collingridge then approached Bishop Kelly of Waterford in his attempt to find a priest for Merthyr. Bishop Kelly recommended a Fr Patrick Portal who was serving in the London District and was priest at Poole in Dorset. Fr Portal was approached and he accepted the mission.

“He does not squint disagreeably”

Fr Portal was born in Co Waterford in the parish of Kilrossantry. He was educated at what was then Bishop Dryle’s College in Carlow. When he left college he was strictly examined by Bishop Kelly who reported on his many excellent qualities, and ordained him in 1823 for the English missions.

We know something of his appearance for, on his transfer to the Western District, Bishop

Bramston of the London District wrote to Bishop Collingridge:

"He is upward of 30 years of age and seems a stout (strong and healthy) man. His appearance is respectable. And as he does not squint disagreeably, he may be called good-looking."

This is borne out by the testimony of John Driscoll, a potato merchant of Cardiff, who in 1828 was offered half a crown by a Welshman of he showed him the priest as he alighted from the Merthyr coach. According to Driscoll the man remarked, *"Why, he is nothing but a gentleman! And a fine gentleman too!"*

Within weeks of his arrival in the Western District, Bishop Collingridge sent him to Merthyr. He arrived here on 19 November, 1827, and for the next few months there is silence - could he have been suffering a culture shock on arrival in the town? Correspondence with the Bishop re-opened in April 1828. Apparently, Fr Portal had inadvertently taken the Poole baptismal register and other papers relating to that mission with him when he left in October 1827. These he found in his trunk and returned them immediately. Later, in June, Fr Portal wrote to the Bishop:

"The mission is most severe and disagreeable I have even ever heard of. There is no help from many parishioners, though many others, although very poor, are extremely good and kind. Many have not made their Easter duties for ten years. I am glad your Lordship is able to travel and will soon come to Merthyr. I need a suit of clothes badly."

He persevered despite the terrible conditions under which he laboured. On Sunday he said Mass at Merthyr, then packing his chalice, altar stone, crucifix, vestments etc. he walked the five miles to Rhymney where he said Mass at a rented room at the Bute works. Then he walked back to Merthyr. He heard confessions on Friday and Saturday at Merthyr and Rhymney alternately, never leaving the confessional until after midnight because people could not get away from work until a very late hour.

Even with all this work facing him the young priest was soon in touch with the small group of Catholics at Cardiff. Soon, he had arranged with them that he would say Mass once a

month at the *Red Lion Hotel*, on the corner of Queen's Street and North Street. He travelled there by mail coach from the *Crown Hotel* in Merthyr, the expenses being met by his Cardiff congregation. While in Cardiff he seems to have stayed with a Mr Boulton who owned a glassworks there.

Kind treatment from non-Catholics

Conditions in Merthyr did not improve; it was the constant help and support of Mr Lewis, the catechist, that enabled him to continue with the mission. One piece of good fortune to come his way was meeting with Fr Gerard, trustee of the Welsh funds for secular clergy. Fr Gerard was able to give him a second altar stone, crucifix etc. which made the weekly journey to Rhymney less burdensome. Sometimes he could afford to hire a horse for the journey to Rhymney and on one occasion as he and Mr Lewis rode into Rhymney they found the road leading to the Mass centre lined with men who shouted, *"God save the horse but the Devil take the rider!"* But for the respect these men had for Mr Lewis they would, probably, have pelted the priest with stones. This is the only instance of anti-Catholic feeling he records; he comments on the kind treatment he received from non-Catholics in Merthyr.

In 1829 Fr Portal started collecting money to buy a horse. He wrote to the Bishop explaining how much more could be done at the mission if he had transport, but nothing came of it. Indeed it was becoming increasingly impossible for the area to maintain a resident priest. The expenses involved were too heavy for the small congregation to bear. One thing, however, brought him great joy at his time; Mr Lewis's son, Peter, left for Lisbon at his time to test his vocation. Peter Lewis was ordained in 1843, the first native vocation of the parish. Monsignor Lewis, as he became, died in 1902.

Finally, in 1831, Fr Portal left Merthyr for Newport and the Merthyr mission closed. He did not forget his old parishioners and continued to say Mass from time to time at Cardiff and Merthyr. On 10 December 1835 he died, a truly dedicated priest who had worn himself out by his exertions for his people - he was in his late thirties.

Peter Williams

ONE DAY AT THE SEA

Fortunately I've got quite a good memory . I do forget things and I think this is quite normal, realising that I am now approaching seventy nine years of age. I was born in 1919, just after the first world war. I always say "born at the wrong time" but I'm now taking that statement back - it was to me a very happy time. We had very little money but plenty of love and affection from our parents. No one on those days realised our parents had a hard time trying to make ends meet. Why, we didn't know, because all our friends and relations were in exactly the same situation. I loved school and went to Dowlais Central and went on to Cyfarthfa, which I dearly loved.

In my young days most people could not afford a holiday in this country and certainly I never heard of anyone going abroad. The highlight of my year was the chapel trip to Barry Island; if we were very lucky it was Porthcawl for the day. I had very little sleep the night before in anticipation of the day to come. We went by coach and in the latter years by train. I recall going around my aunts and other relatives, hoping they would give me a little money, which they invariably did, so that I could indulge in an orgy of spending! With a newly hand made dress made by my aunt and a purseful of coppers, the Queen of England could not have felt better.

On the day, the first task for my mother was to buy my father's present; this was half an ounce of tobacco, bought at the local shop, which she carried to Barry and back. Present buying on such occasions was considered a ritual. Children who didn't go on these trips expected a present of Barry sticks of rock. Incidentally most men at that time considered themselves too macho to go with wives and children on these trips.

Oh! the smell of the sea; that smell is still with me over all these years. On arrival we couldn't get down to the beach fast enough, so my mother could pick a spot on the sand where she would stay most of the day surrounded by heaps of clothes. I recall the new bathing suits knitted by my mother. Feeling a sense of elation I raced down to the sea and walked straight in. After a few minutes contact with the water, to my horror the bathing costume became several sizes too large, reaching to well below the knees. This was followed by an embarrassing sprint up the beach to the safety of a towel and my new dress.

Soon the lure of the fairground became too much and, in what seemed to be minutes, my money disappeared on a variety of rides like dodgems etc.. The little tinker shops were visited and purchases made for the cats who would be waiting for their presents.

No money - I return to the beach. Then depression sets in because nearly all the other children had money left for donkey rides and ice cream. No comfort from my mother . She remarked, "you are only happy when you are spending". So things never change. 'Merry Friars' for tea, I recall; sandwiches, plain cake and currant cake. They were so much nicer, I thought, than we had at home. Children were rounded up, some had spent some sad hours in the 'lost-and-found' tent.

Tired out, we all got on the coach to go home. The smell of chips filled the air. I cannot recall having any, still it didn't spoil my day as I really enjoyed myself and could look forward to the following year for a repeat.

Incidentally, to get these trips we kids had to go regularly to Sunday School and Chapel. This to me was no problem, I went quite happily.

It never seemed to rain on that day.

Megan Sullivan

A PIECE OF CAKE

The day has arrived, the training done, I am now a Flight Engineer and have completed an air gunners course, learned to send and receive some Morse code, operate the bomb sight and plot a course, and spent some time with a Link Trainer and received dual flying lessons from my pilot. In point of fact, I am now a jack of all trades, complete with sergeants' stripes for whatever comes.

My crew, consisting of seven, were a very nice bunch, all aged between 19 and 22 years, except for the skipper who was an old man of 35 years, as steady as a rock and absolutely reliable.

We were posted to NO 9 Squadron, which was quite an old one and formed in 1918, at Bardney, Lincs.. We expected to familiarise and do some practice night flying before operations.

From the moment of arrival there was an air of expectancy; rumours and superstitions abounded, one of which was that it was unlucky to fly on an operation with a crew other than your own. This sometimes happened if a crew member went sick. We were also in a period of heavy bomber losses. It was said that an average of seven operations was about the life expectancy of a Bomber crew, rumours no doubt. Everybody believed that it wouldn't happen to them.

On the second day I was summoned to the flight office. Fearing that something was wrong at home I reported immediately. On entering the office I was aware of several pilots, including my own, sitting around. The Flight Commander extended a welcome and told me to take a seat. My pilot said 'Hello, Eddie, you have the honour of flying over the Third Reich tonight'. I said, 'Are we?', to which he replied, 'Not us. You will be flying with Sergeant Taylor here, whose Engineer has gone sick.' I struggled to retain my composure, nodded to Sergeant Taylor and said, 'I'll see you later'.

A little time later I met the rest of the crew and at the appropriate time joined them for a 'flying meal', which was always excellent and often laughingly referred to as the 'last supper'. Next came the briefing on the target for the night, which turned out to be the Ruhr, which had been known as happy valley. Then parachutes and an escape package were drawn, out to the aircraft and pre-flight checks. Time of take-off came and with it the sensation of taking off for the first time with a full load of bombs. The next few minutes were very busy assisting the pilot with take-off. My position was alongside the pilot.

After some time we approached the Dutch coast and I could see in the distance what seemed like hundreds of search lights probing the sky against a background of what seemed to be an expanse of fire. This being completely new to me I asked what it was. The pilot replied that it was flak (antiaircraft fire). I said, 'I suppose you'll fly around that.' 'No', he said, 'we'll fly through it. Diverting would take too much time and use up too much fuel.' Flying through this barrage produced a great deal of buffeting, with great puffs of whitish smoke drifting past the cockpit. Soon we passed through and pressed on to the target.

The raid was already in progress and we prepared our bombing run. There were red and green ground markers already laid. Our job was to bomb a red marker. Bombs released, the aircraft had to be held on a straight and level course for eighteen seconds to allow the camera to record, eighteen seconds which seemed like hours.

A course was given for home and after a number of fighter encounters we reached the comparative safety of the North sea.

My impression of the crew was that they were very competent and experienced. During conversation the pilot informed me that this was their seventh trip. My stomach turned over, in view of the superstition. I felt very lucky.

Meeting my own crew later the following morning, the rear gunner asked me what it was like. Without wishing to create too much apprehension I replied. 'Nothing to it old boy - piece of cake'. Sadly Sergeant Taylor and his crew failed to return from their next operation. I hope they survived the war, but if not I'm sure they will be reading this first written account of my first operation, from Heaven. I had the good fortune to complete 28 operations on major targets in Germany relatively unscathed, but not without some hair-raising experiences.

Edward Sullivan

RICHARD BURTON AND ME

I never called him Richard and he never called me Hywel but I must tell you that I once shared a stage with Richard Burton in Port Talbot in the late 1950s. I was on for 80 minutes and he was on for two, and the truth is that applause for my performance was louder and longer than for his. The common ground between us is the village of Pontrhydyfen. I lived there immediately after the war, in an isolated house outside the village, in an area called Cwm Evan Bach in a house called Ty Newydd. Our neighbours lived on Cwm Farm, a quarter of a mile away. One of my childhood memories of this time was playing football with an inflated pig's bladder with my friend Gwyn Rees, whose pig the bladder had once belonged to. I also remember how the pig was slaughtered, but the details are too gory and I am digressing from my story. Just let me add a final note to say that pig-bladder football does not last very long because the bladder soon deteriorates to a sort of parchment texture before it gradually collapses. This activity did make a change from kicking a small ball or playing rugby with a folded cap or knotted scarf.

But what about the Mathews/Burton (Jenkins) connection - my mother always later referred to him as Mrs Jenkins's boy. He lived a mile away in the village, in a house almost underneath the beautiful tall and narrow viaduct which crosses the river between Oakwood and the rest of Pontrhydyfen. A plaque now identifies the

house. His career developed his way and mine in mine. He went to Hollywood and married Elizabeth Taylor, I went to Swansea University and subsequently married Mary Lawler.

Our paths crossed - and I know that I am making a meal of this story but please forgive me because it is one of my few claims to fame - in 1957 or thereabouts. I was then playing at outside half for the University and had left Pontrhydyfen some years before. However I had not been forgotten, evidently, and when the village found itself short of a half-back for a cup match to be played on the Aberavon ground I received the SOS to play for them. I agreed and was collected by car, taken to the ground and, after the game, received ten shillings boot money. This was a very welcome donation to a student, albeit an illegal gift, but not at that time uncommon.

Richard Burton was taking a short holiday in Wales and he was invited to kick off the match, in his everyday clothes. He then left the field to watch it from the grand-stand and to support his village team. We had shared the stage for all of two minutes and all eyes were on the great man. We drew the match and lost the replay some weeks later, but who cares. Mathews and Burton, or should it be Burton and Mathews, had been together, however fleetingly, supporting Pontrhydyfen. What a partnership.

Hywel Mathews

Please send your contribution to the magazine, including letters to the Editor, Hywel Mathews, Rose Cottage, 1 Rock Lane, Cefn Coed, Merthyr Tydfil, CF18 2LN, Telephone 01685 722506 or leave it with Canon Kearney at St Mary's. The Editorial group comprises the Editor, Paul Price, Peter Williams, Jack Walsh.