

Humour in the hills

Community Link Cwlm Bro
April 1978

By Don Llewellyn

It is a recognised fact that a special brand of humour can be ascribed to a particular place and its people. Such is certainly the case with the yarn spinners of Pentyrch. For centuries the telling of every tale has been spiced with that peculiar sense of mischief which characterises those born and bred in the environs of the Garth mountain. Whether or not the phenomenon has survived the new residential development is presently being ribbed by those who understand such things! Counting myself amongst the interested at least, I have lately been listening more attentively to those who 'talk aloud' and I am delighted to report that all is well. The wit is as warm as ever; sarcasm survives, parody prevails and the verbal riposte can still cut you down to the quintessential quick.

No doubt, as the gardening season comes round, the friendly rivalries will once more generate reports of giant potatoes, radish as big as turnips, cucumbers hollowed out to make wheelbarrows! I remember this time last year discussing tomatoes with a gentleman who has lived in the village for about eight years. Dismissing from my mind the man's reputation as an astonishingly successful grower, I proceeded to lie profusely with regard to my current crop. "They are huge" I said. "The trusses are each big enough to fill a sack and there wouldn't be enough room on a dinner plate for a single tomato! What do you say about that?" I said smugly. Without hesitation he replied: "Perhaps you are not feeding them enough."

When the present incumbent of my local pub took office I received swift evidence of his line of humour. He knew that I was, at the time, president of the village rugby club and that I would surely be interested in hearing how our second fifteen had fared earlier that evening. He had watched our boys lose by some seventy points to his old club and knowing I was unaware of the result, he was very pleased to be able to 'put me right'. Casually, he asked me if there was a cricket scoreboard down at our sports ground. To my negative reply he said quietly: it would have come in bloody handy tonight."

Another 'non native' was overheard expressing with regard to modern teaching methods: An apparent neglect of the three R's and an over emphasis of the use of computers. "Take arithmetic for instance" he said sagely, "the kind of question a

mathe teacher will ask a class these days is: if there were seven calculators on a table and you took five away, how many would be left?!"

In the very same bar, a good friend of mine, a teacher, was being about a noticeable increase in the length of his beard. "You are getting to look more like a coconut every night," someone said. My friend snapped back immediately: "Rubbish, you can get a drink out of a coconut!"

It is comforting to know that the tradition of well honed humour is going to remain despite the rapid changes taking place in so many aspects of village life. It is also important not to lose for ever the anecdotes handed down to us; these must stay stitched into the fabric of our local cultural heritage. Each of us must record for posterity the stories which have tickled our particular fancies; I humbly offer this handful:

It was my privilege to arrange for old Edmund Llewellyn to take part in a television 'chat' programme some years ago. Edmund (Emwnt Shedi) was to talk of his time working in the Ty'nycoed drift mine at Pentyrch and another guest on the programme was a poacher from North Wales. The two old timers had some initial problems understanding each other's Welsh but soon achieved a certain rapport and proceeded to pull each other's legs about their respective modes of employment. As the programme was coming to its very end, each man was determined to have the last word. The old poacher thought he had triumphed when he jibed at Emwnt: "One thing you didn't have underground was rabbits, and that's for sure!" By now the end titles of the programme were rolling but Emwnt with perfect timing was heard to say: "Quite right bachan but we had rats as big as rabbits in Ty'nycoed!"

It was Edmund who told me about the local scallywag who was brought before the magistrates for being drunk and incapable. when asked by the chairman of the bench if he had anything to say in his defence, he quickly put the blame for his predicament on two men. This bewildered the magistrate because the constable who had brought the man in had claimed that there had been no other person about at

the time of the arrest. Our man stuck to his story and only after persistent questioning admitted that the two men who had been allegedly holding him down were 'Mitchell and Butler!'

I recall sitting with some elderly village men on the seat at the 'Twyn' admiring as ever the wonderful view of the Vale of Glamorgan. It was the time that Television was being brought to Wales for the first time - 1952. Alongside the main transmitter mast at Wenvoe, a much smaller auxiliary mast could now be clearly seen. "That's obviously for children's programmes" said one of the old wags.

There used to be a famous bench at Cefn Bychan known as 'The Bardic' where all the local poets and story tellers used to gather regularly to compare notes. Often the discourse would develop into friendly argument with one trying to outwit the other with epigrams or aphorisms as the only weapons until inevitably a brilliant comment stopped the conversation dead. Two elderly men were discussing on one occasion the matter of which of their respective families had been in the parish the longer. "Tell me," said old Twm, "how long have your crowd been here then?" Without hesitation Ianto replied: "O' erioed, erioed (for ever, we've always been here)." Twm was thrown for a moment but after a respectful pause shook Ianto's hand and said: "Oh well, you win. It was just after the Flood that our lot came here!"

MORE NEXT TIME.



EMWNT SHEDI

Humour in the hills

I have been asked many times about the origin of the intriguing sayings: "Bit rhyddoch chwi gwyr Pentyrch" and "Rhwng gwyr Pentyrch a'i gilydd". From my researches I find that these sayings which become well-known throughout Wales reflected the notorious insularity of Pentyrch menfolk, not to mention the women. It was a widespread claim that these people were best left to their own devices and neither needed nor welcomed interference from outside. These sayings were prevalent at fairs and markets when trouble was started by adventurous young bloods from the village. In more recent times the sayings became useful for explaining away dubious acts especially on the rugby field! When I recorded three old rugby club stalwarts in the early sixties their views on the derivations of the sayings were interesting. One said that a visitor passing through the village saw a husband and wife having a quarrel. He tried to intervene and was immediately set upon by the man and his spouse who seemed to find instant unity in front of the stranger. Retreating, the visitor was heard to say "bit rhyddoch chwi gwyr Pentyrch - let it be between *you* men of Pentyrch!"

Another explanation credited the Devil with the saying after he had tried to break up a fight between two men. David Williams the old schoolmaster included dragons in his version of the derivation. Mostly though, it was thought that there was something peculiar about the very air breathed in this hillside parish. It set the Pentyrch 'cuckoos' apart. New residents also quickly adopted that 'air of defiance' which characterised the locals and totally bewildered those who passed through. Nevertheless it was always admitted that despite fiercely defending their distinctive sense of identity, Pentyrch people were always ready to laugh and in particular to laugh at themselves. This sense of fun, I am pleased to say, has persisted to the present day and new anecdotes keep rolling in.

There was the tale of George E's little guard dog - a story which I gave to the Western Mail and subsequently appeared in thirty different newspapers! George had realised that he was not receiving any mail. He complained to the postman who explained he was no longer allowed to deliver letters to the house since George had acquired his 'ferocious' dog.

"Fair enough", said George, "but your people could at least have notified me."

The answer he received was: "There's a letter in the post!"

I am still chuckling over another quip from the undisputed tomato growing champion of Pentyrch, Bill B. A group stood at the bar engrossed in a discussion about tomatoes, cucumbers and such like and, when it became evident that a certain young upstart was trying to 'muscle' in on the conversation, everyone ignored him. He was saying repeatedly that *he* had a greenhouse too and wished to contribute to the chat. Clearly not a member of our select 'club' of gardening boasters and tall story tellers, he had little chance of breaking in. In time though, Bill relented and asked him what he wanted.

"Well", said the young man proudly, "I wish you to know that I have been growing tomatoes and they taste just like grapes."

"Keep trying boyo" said Bill, tapping him on the shoulder, "and you'll eventually get them to taste like tomatoes."

More next time.

DON LLEWELLYN

Community Link Cwllwm Bro

April 1989

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Before the turn of the century, produce shows were taken so seriously in Pentyrch and the surrounding villages that it was almost a case of open warfare between rival vegetable growers. Dirty deeds were not unknown in the period leading up to a show and of course the worst crime was to steal or damage another person's prize specimens. Old 'H.S.' was the victim of such a tragedy on one occasion and he took the matter as far as raising it at a prayer meeting. Standing in the pew with his head raised and with tears running down his cheeks he was heard to say: "O Lord, dear forgiving Lord, thou knowest who stole my cabbage. If I ever find out who it was, I'll kill him!"

Looking back at my own childhood in Pentyrch I now realise how rich the village was in 'eccentrics' even in that time. Each generation always claims that 'there are fewer characters about than previously, but I feel I was brought up in a particularly memorable period. It has to be said though that no person, however strange his or her behaviour, was ever actually considered to be unusual at the time. For instance there was the man who would speed down Temperance Road on his bicycle whilst doing a handstand on the handlebars. Another carried an alarm clock around with him instead of a watch. The widow who advertised in the local paper for a husband used to proudly show us her three previous wedding rings.



FOR THE LAST TIME, MOVE !

There was the man who used to fight lamposts and another who could not pass a mail box without standing to attention and saluting whilst loudly declaiming "God Save the King". A farmer had to be dissuaded from cutting the hay on a particular field if a cricket match or some other outdoor event was about to take place nearby in the village because if he did so it inevitably brought on rain. We always liked recalling the story of the man who, when asked the time, promptly made his way down to Creigiau two miles away to check it out on the station clock! One woman smoked a clay pipe and another could have become a world boxing champion. What about the marvellous man who was known to all as 'The Sherrif' on account of his wearing a tall black stetson hat!

I grew up in a street full of interesting characters. In the top cottage there lived a wonderful one-eyed man and in the bottom house an equally wonderful one-armed man. The middle dwellings housed variously a preacher, a poet, a poacher and a prize-fighter. Little wonder that I took an early interest in the nature of Pentyrch people.

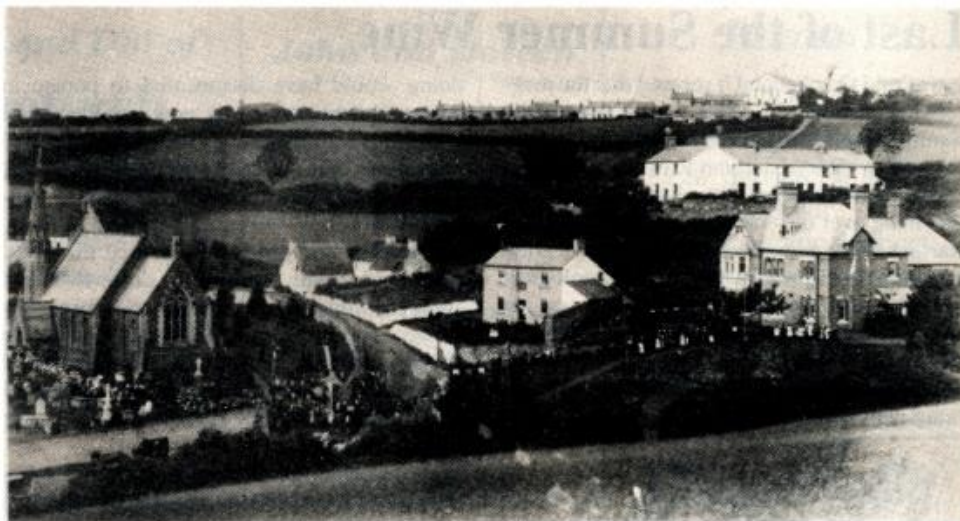
My favourite character was Shoni, a cheerful old countryman and a well-known member of the 'CAEWAL' family. One day Shoni was poaching down below Rhydlafar with his song Llew. As he was about to put the ferret into the rabbit burrow he heard the sound of horse's hoof-beats steadily approaching. He looked up to see a vicar astride the horse. Arriving alongside, the cleric asked Shoni impatiently: "Can you tell me the way to St. Fagans?"

"Well, well" said Shoni dryly, "what kind of a clergyman are you then? No doubt on Sundays you are trying to tell people how to get all the way to the Kingdom of God, - yet you don't even know the way to St. Fagans!"

More next time.

DON LLEWELLYN

Community Link Cwmwl Eiro
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Old Pentrych

Humour in the Hills

It used to be said that one needed a sense of humour to live in the Parish of Pentrych. Perhaps this jibe was born of the envy of some outsider looking inwardly at the natives.

I am afraid that there is ample evidence of the peculiarities of the people. Of all the elements of local humour the most enduring is the art of the 'riposte', the 'quick answer', the 'put down'; the response which cuts pompous persons down to size in a flash of verbal brilliance. Two people were arguing in the pub recently about how ugly each must have been as a baby. One was making out that the other had been so plain that people would cross to the other side of the street to avoid looking into his pram. His adversary responded sharply: "Yes, but when people looked into YOUR pram they used to say 'oh what a lovely pram!'"

My father, in his day, was well known for producing effective spontaneous aphorisms when required and some of his short pithy statements have entered the local folk memory. It is recalled that one day he was sitting on a bench seat in a certain hostelry when a woman who was unknown to him entered the bar wearing a fur coat and carrying a tiny Pekingese dog under her arm. She promptly sat next to him and my father, without hesitation, moved away a little. This induced the woman to move closer again and once more my father shifted himself. The moving continued until the woman with great indignation said (with obvious reference to the small creature under her arm): "He won't bite you, you know". My father's rejoinder was: "Madam, I'm sorry but the way it was raising its leg made me think it was going to kick me!"

The recent Re-union at Pentrych Rugby Club brought back many memories. One tale, probably apocryphal, recalled that an angry wife remonstrated with her husband when he rolled home very late one Saturday night. "I think you love that old Pentrych Rugby Club more than you love me" she wailed. "Don't be silly girl!" he said, "I love TAFF'S WELL more than I love you!"

There were stories about Sid, who, as Fixture Secretary was remembered with true affection. One referred to a Saturday afternoon when Sid was asked to step out of the clubhouse to explain the reason for a most disconcerting occurrence. It was observed that two buses carrying visitors from two quite different clubs were 'jockeying' for position as they tried to get through the narrow gateway. Sid, whose pint was now starting to spill a little, bowed his head and said quietly: "Boys, there's been a FIX UP IN THE MIXTURES!" Sid's solution to the problem of two different teams coming to play us was a stroke of genius. He said, "let the b.....s play each other!"

Every generation laments the passing of village 'characters' and it is always said that there are 'fewer about now than in our day!' It is certainly a long time since a personality like 'The Sheriff' entertained us; a man of beloved memory who had earned a reputation for 'energy conservation' inasmuch as he had perfected the art of idleness. He was an intelligent man who was more than capable of answering taunts about his alleged laziness. On one occasion a group of youngsters standing at High Corner thought that they could defeat him in an exchange of words. The 'Sheriffs' family were moving house that day and as was customary in those times most of the furniture was being carried. The good man's wife had been seen making several journeys variously carrying and dragging tables, sideboards and such-like throughout the whole day. Now her husband was to be seen for the first time, wheeling a tiny trolley upon which stood a small china jug and a cup and saucer. Impressed by this uncharacteristic demonstration of physical endeavour, the boys called over to him: "How is the moving coming along sir?" Without even turning his head he replied: "Well, this is the last of the big stuff!"

Many years ago (and I stress many) the local carnival was in full swing. A man in dark clothes and white reversed collar swayed past the assembled judges clutching a bottle of whisky in one hand and a large glass in the other. One of the judges, peering through her monocle, snapped: "How dare you impersonate the vicar like that!" One version of the story claims that the disgruntled cleric replied: "But madam, I AM the vicar!" One should beware of embellishments of good stories!

DON LLEWELLYN