



Memories of Llangwm

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Ninety-seven year-old Ellen Skyrme is probably one of the best-known and best-loved in a distinguished line of legendary Llangwm women. But who would guess that she has a romantic Cornish ancestry?

Her mother Mary Bryant of Guildford, Llangwm, went to work at the magnificent Tregenna Castle Hotel near St Ives at the turn of the 20th century. There, she met Cornishman George Trevithick, one of the descendants of Richard Trevithick, inventor of the steam engine and a pioneer of the Industrial Revolution, although somewhat overlooked by history. "The range and magnitude of his inventive genius is truly astounding, and yet few outside Cornwall are aware of the immense contribution he made to the development of the modern world," says a website dedicated to the Trevithick family.

The romance between George and Mary flourished and they married. Ellen was born in St Ives in 1909, and the family moved to Llangwm when she was three months old. The eldest of seven children (six daughters and one son) Ellen said she had a very happy childhood, spent mainly around the village and the river. The children would often go to Black Tar shore, where they would play 'eggshell' and 'dandies', as well as creating their own little buildings. "We would build little houses with two rooms and go out to look for some china to put on the dresser - no half measures!" she said.

She went to Llangwm school, where every day would start with half an hour of religious instruction. "I remember we would do lots of singing with the infant teacher Miss Morgan - all sorts of songs, about the Spring, pigeons, swallows, and the Summer' I still sing them quite often."

Although she enjoyed school, she said the headteacher was not afraid to use the cane if pupils misbehaved. "My first headteacher was Mr Carr. He was a tartar! After him was Mr Harries. We used to have the cane from him too. And if you had the cane you couldn't use your hand for the rest of the day. I did have the cane but not very often!"

Ellen left school at 14, as everyone did unless they went to Haverfordwest Grammar School, although only a few people could afford to do that because they had to board from Monday to Friday night.

It wasn't until the age of 17 that she made her first trip to Haverfordwest. But, as she explained, that was because her family had more of a link with Pembroke Dock, or 'Pater' as it everyone called it then. "My grandfather was a Llangwm fisherman and Granny used to go to Pater on the boat to sell fish, cockles and mussels," said Ellen.

"It was a lovely market in Pater, nicer than in Haverfordwest. We used to go down to the Jolly Sailor in a donkey and cart, and leave them tied up in a field - we used to give Mrs Prout, who ran it, a shilling, and we would go across on the ferry boat. Everyone had a donkey and cart and a boat."

She said her grandmother would always prepare the cockles the same way. "She used to boil the cockles and mussels and strain the stock off and leave it to stand. Then she would wash them and bring them to the boil again with lots and lots of pepper, and then leave them stand overnight in the pickle. Then in the

morning, Granny would take the cockles and she would put them in a big jug, with the pickle in bottles. She would take them to the market, with a jam jar, a spoon, and tea towel, and for three penn'orth, she would measure out the cockles in the jam jar and fill it up with the pickle."

Once a year, the Sunday School would also go to Tenby, one of the highlights of the year. "I remember getting the steamer from Llangwm Ferry to the jetty at Pembroke Dock, walk to the station, and catch the train to Tenby, and walk to the South Sands' We would bring our own food and go up to the caf6 and have a tray of tea. We used to go on a charabanc as well - they only had that in Tenby."

After finishing school, Ellen worked as a domestic help, first in Swansea and then in Bournemouth, which she liked very much. But she handed her notice in at the age of 20 when her youngest sister Vivianne was born, and then decided to stay in Llangwm.

She then met the late Gwynne Skyrme, the youngest of 11 children and the brother of Lizzie Skyrme, who had taught Ellen at Llangwm School. On 28th October, 1931, they married at Haverfordwest Registry Office and went on to have two sons, Bryant and John. Ellen has three grandchildren, Ian, Julie, and Ceri, and seven great-grandchildren, Garon, Rhys, Louise, Menna, Rebecca, Nia, and Ieuan, who is the youngest at eight months.

Ellen said Llangwm doesn't look very different now, especially Main Street and the Green, but the nature of the village has changed along with the times.

"When I was brought up, I knew everybody. In the summer, you would go through the village and you wouldn't see a single door closed. People would walk in and out of each other's houses. But although those times are gone, there's still a very good sense of community on Llangwm."