

Canal Memories - from Ron Gronow – 3rd March 2011

Last week I met Ron Gronow, now aged 88 years, who has some fascinating recollections of the Glamorganshire Canal.



Ron was born in 1923 at Phillip Street in the Graig, Pontypridd. His family moved to Ebenezer Street, Rhydyfelin in 1930 and he remained there until his marriage to Irene Foxley from Pwllgwaun in 1947.

From the age of 7 years until the demise of the Glamorganshire Canal in 1942 he lived within a stone's throw of the canal at the east end of Ebenezer Street which led to the stone bridge at Lock Lewis. Furthermore, the west end of Ebenezer Street met the road that was the filled-in Doctor's Canal that had closed before 1918. He recalls that this road was on an embankment high above Cardiff Road and was referred to as the "canal bank". In his early days there were two farms near to the canal owned by the Jones and Davies families. These farms were later to disappear with the building of housing and the Technical College. In the early 1930's there were few streets in that part of Rhydyfelin – just Ebenezer Street and Ynys Terrace. Just to the south, near to the canal were the Round Houses – a circular building comprising six dwellings, sadly demolished in 1938.

He recalls that for much of his childhood there were generally about two boats a day passing through Lock Lewis. The lock keeper was Mr John Powell, a P.U.D.C. employee. For much of the time Mrs Powell operated the locks. Ron says that he and his friends were discouraged from playing near the lock and were often chased away by Mr and Mrs Powell. The operation of the lock always held Ron's attention, particularly when the boat was released allowing the horse to go around.

The photograph is a recent shot of Ron taken just below the remains of the Lock Lewis bridge. The corner of Lock House, the former lock keepers cottage, can be seen to the left. The towpath steps are still in place – they're in the shaded area to the left.

He recalls fishing in the canal - there were gudgeons in those days as well as the smaller fish.

One vivid memory is of the 'bathing' parties when groups of boys would swim from Lock Lewis to the warm water outfall near the P.U.D.C. gas works at Glyntaff. They'd take soap and have a good wash down – but get really mucky again when swimming back!

There were on number of very cold winters at that time and Ron recalls 'skating' down the canal to beyond Dynea – avoiding the bridges where the ice would be thin – and skating back.

Other fond memories were of watching the dirt track racing at Hawthorn from the old Cardiff Railway embankment and playing in the Treforest tin plate works after its closure.

Ron volunteered for World War II military service and worked as an aircraft fitter in the UK and Canada. After the war he was employed in the electroplating business, an occupation in which he rose to become owner of the Cardiff Plating Company, based at City Road and then Whitchurch. He retired in 1991.

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