

Brynmawr born Brynmawr bred by Frank Westall

Old Ma Campbell's; Dinky toys and catapults,
Sheath knives and fireworks, cricket balls and bats,
Stink bombs and fishing nets, balsa planes and cap guns,
Indian bows and arrows, and Davy Crockett hats.
Pea shooters, lead bombs, sailing boats and tricycles,
Space-gun water pistols, five jackstones with a ball,
Plastic solitaire games, pull-string helicopters,
Old Ma Campbell smiling, wrapped up in her shawl.

Ah, did I mention Dick the Rock and Mickey Jacobs,
Woods the dentist, Hughes the coal and Saxon's pop,
Nuths the fish and London House and Briggs's shoe shop,
Cable's papers and the Briggs's at the top?

Davies's the sweet shop; wooden trays of heaven,
Bonbons and Merry Maids, pink and white pear drops,
Four a penny chews and Barratt sherbet fountains,
Bubble gums and Cook's mix and whistle lollipops.
Pineapple cube chunks and velvet coconut mushrooms,
Riley's rum and butter and chocolate toffee rolls,
Bassett's liquorice allsorts and rock hard peanut brittle,
Two ounces or a quarter weighed in shiny bowls.

Ah, did I mention Deaves's bread and Hughes's Dairy,
Caleb's fruit and veg, and flowers in their pots,
Norman Stores, hot Vimto in the Corner Café,
Gameson's photos and the Art and Craft shop yachts?

Old man Deakin with a bulging bag of pennies;
Thousand keys around his neck to open any lock,
Win yourself a goldfish, ping-pong balls go flying,
Wooden balls for leaded cans, fresh coconuts in stock.
Chained leather punch ball smashed with knuckles flying,

Dodgems, rockets, Noah's ark, The Whip and candy floss,
Three darts thrown at playing cards, rolling boards for pennies;
Miss a square and touch a line and that's your penny lost.

Ah, did I mention Brace's shop and the Emporium,
Chopra, Farrington, if you were feeling ill,
Brown's car trips to Nantyglo to have an X-Ray,
William's Chemist or the Co-op for a pill?

Marie's Café; Trevor, Pam and tea cups,
Ten or twenty motorbikes parked out on the street,
Check out all the speedos, 'Can they do a hundred?'
Juke box playing rock and roll for inch thick crepe-soled feet.

Hones's Fish Shop, 'A tail of hake and chips please
And have you got some scratchings to sprinkle on the top?'
Leave by the side door; scuttle down the alleyway,
Vinegar malt dripping onto winkle-pickered socks.

Ah did I mention Bythel's sausages or Rigby's,
John the butcher's chops and Week's or Eastman's brawn,
Moore's the bakers, Jones and Porters and The Meadow,
Bruten's rods and floats, fresh maggots, bags of corn?

'Rag bone! Rag bone!' Can you hear him calling?
Earn yourself a tanner for a mangle or a chair.
Horse and cart clip clopping; leather reins a-dangling
'Rag bone! Rag bone! Rag bone!' Fills the morning air.

Dickey Hill and Charlie cutting hair like fury;
For the youngsters put a wooden plank across the chair.
Razors slapping leather, curls and waves go flying;
Short back and sides the styling for everybody's hair.

Loshin Mush the mighty; legend of the valleys,
White shirt crisp and spotless, biceps large and bare

Stripped and crossed the reed bed into the Machiney,
Swam into the sunshine as we were fishing there.
Perch and roach stopped biting; tench and carp absconded,
Loshin ruled the waters much to their dismay;
Jet black hair and muscles gliding through the greyness,
As he left asked, 'Hey boys, you caught anything today?'

Ah did I mention Bushes hardware store and Shellards,
Rogers shoe shop with school uniforms and ties,
Bowen's comics, Sims's cloths and Perslaw's café,
Bag of chips from Glens with massive oval pies?

Mrs Gurney's tuck shop; worth a day off mutching,
Slabs of golden honeycomb and red aniseed balls,
'Can I have a Jubbly frozen hard as concrete?'
Sugar treats for schoolboy coins hanging on the walls.

Ah did I mention Bernstein jeans of every colour,
4 inch turn-ups, bright fluorescent coloured socks,
Co-op Divvy, Annie Newman's, Betty's fashions,
Clinic queues to get protection from small pox?

Saturday Market bustling with a frenzy;
Cabbages and cauliflowers, fruit of every kind,
Mrs Embrey's faggots set in rows of beauty,
Roasted pork with stuffing and crunchy crackling rind.

Arthur Phillips, Pickerings, Llewellyn Hughes and Dowdins,
Alec Morgan's, Greatwoods making windows with a sash;
Sawing wood and cutting glass, selling nails and putty;
Mortise, tenon, dovetail joints and coffins made of ash.

Ah did I mention Sims the butcher's shop and Downey's,
Powell's furniture or Brests' for any chair,
Bollom's Cleaners, Edna Woods's, Cleaves's shoe shop,
Mrs Eaton's rows of busbies drying hair?

Hugo Cafarelli, king of Rena's Café,
Standing in the doorway with his hands upon his hips;
Coffee maker screaming, hissing hot with vapour;
Children licking golden ice-cream wonder from their lips.
Curvy wooden chairs of continental comfort;
Sip Espresso coffee and watch the world go by;
Take your mother's shopping bag up the café's alley,
Knock on kitchen door to pick up crusty home-made pie.

Ah did I mention Siddles; pocket watches ticking,
Gilbert Jones's, Williams' grocers on the square,
Wilfred Roderick barrow boy till he was eighty
Preaching cabbages and apples to the air?

Johnny Morris, Jeweller; cuckoo clocks and watches,
Eye glass set securely in the grimace of his face;
Golden chains and bracelets, wedding rings and promises,
Multi-mirrored music box with ballerina grace.

The gentleman, Ken Lewis; mystery and magic,
Razor blades and cotton thread pouring from his lips.
Sherbourne's toy shop bursting with racing cars in boxes,
Dolls and prams and coloured kites and wooden sailing ships.

Ah did I mention Mrs Beynon's, the Mothecare of King Street;
Rompers, socks and mittens, bibs in pink and blue,
Filly hats and dresses, Terry Towelling nappies,
Safety pins and dummies and teething rings to chew?

Bishop's the tobacconist, set inside a tardis;
Cigarettes, cigars and snuff and polished pipes in racks,
Petrol tubes and lighters, cleaning wires and pen knives,
W D and H O Wills in Woodbine patterned packs.
Smell of flaked St Bruno rising to the Milfraen,

Swan or England's Glory to help you strike a light;
Roll your own with Rizla's, lick the paper gently,
Breathe in deadly comfort to help you through the night.

Ah did I mention Fred's or Cammerman's or Hughes's,
Lyndon Sims's drums, guitars and record store;
His red sports car just come back from Monte Carlo;
RAC win, Aston Martin DB4?

'The Winches are coming!' Gather all the brave hearts;
Warwick Road defences, draw the battle line;
Skirmishes and fist fights; best friends in the morning,
As the day was dawning, working down the mine.

Joe Lyon's garage; piston rings and cam shafts,
Nick Carters, Lake Road selling Esso Blue;
Ken Hodges, master brain, memorising manuals,
Name a car of any type he'd find the part for you.

Ah did I mention Edgar's fishing shop and Liptons,
Barrell's butchers, Football Echoes on the square,
Pete the famous hot dog seller in his mobile;
Burgers, sausages and onions, Slash back hair?

Mrs Jessie Williams, Brynmawr's own Welsh lady;
Marie, Pam in costume dancing for the town;
Tall black hats like chimneys, shawls and twirling dresses,
Boys with clogs and broom sticks jumping up and down.

Cyril Williams, Chivers, Ford and Reams and Langford's,
Davies and Meredith; diesel fumes to spare;
Red and White and Black and White;
Buy yourself two Woodbines;
Mrs Davies splits a pack for everyone to share.

Boundary stone and slaughter house; sights to get you retching,
Smells to take your breath away, squeals and bleats and moos;
Slatted lorry prisons jammed between the death gates;
Knives and hooks and aprons; bloody splattered shoes.

Ah did I mention Brothers Giles with pointy ladders,
Rags and buckets dangling from a wooden rung;
Bikes with baskets crammed with orders for delivery;
Fruit and veg and chops and cheese and ham and tongue?

GPO in Worcester Street; queues for stamps and pensions,
Parcels tied with hairy string ready for the van;
Telegrams for Bantam bikes, saving stamps for children,
Half a crown or sixpence buys you Charles or Princess Anne.

Go and phone your girlfriend, Button A connects you,
Line up all your pennies ready for the slot.
If the line is busy, Button B refunds you
Clicking out your change into a tiny metal pot.

Camel's humps and Nut Wood down the Clydach valley;
Iron ore deposits for spots and warts and all.
Climb up on the brickwork past the spike defences,
Shuffle down the pipe-line past the waterfall.

Mr Denning's scout hut; neckerchiefs and woggles;
Be prepared for everything, earn a bob a job;
Learn to tie a reef knot, sing around a camp fire
Ging Gang Goolie Goolie; Dyb Dyb Dyb, Dob Dob.

Fire Station, Factory Road; siren loud and blaring,
Some poor kid from Curzon Street has set it off again.
Practice at the Pump house down beside the Wauny;
Hose pipes, jets of water and polished buttoned men.

Semtex, Tuffs and Dannimacs, Everwear and hair fluff,
Davies's the printers and Morgan's crates of Milk,
Roberts's the cobblers and Baker's shop for Rolos
Davies's for wallpapers and paints in matt or silk.

Market hall on Saturday, come and see Kirk Douglas;
Old Spice, Brute aromas, wavy Brylcreamed hair.
Thirty seven boys stood up with Tony Curtis
Claiming they were Spartacus, Torchie going spare.

Ah did I mention Milfraen climbs to pick some wimberries,
Tarzan's pool with deep green water for a swim,
Ben Ward's fields with paths and styles and hawthorn hedges,
Hafod Farm and Slam gate runs you tried to win?

Ninety seven pubs and inns, churches, halls and chapels;
Ninety seven businesses, cafes, trades and shops;
Ninety seven different ways to spend a shiny penny;
Ninety seven flavours of ice creams, sweets and pops.

Swimming pool on sunny days; corrugated sun beds,
Numbered wire baskets, picnics on the grass,
Water fountain, paddling pool, diving boards and chlorine,
Heavy knitted cosies and steamed up goggle glass.

'See you up the Welfare!' Spaces fit for growing,
Seesaw, slides and iron horse, roundabouts and plank,
Swings to sit or stand on, tennis courts and putting,
Bowling green and flower beds and sliding down the bank.

Table tennis, snooker, table bowls and billiards,
Racks of cues and score boards, meters ticking time.
Bans for hitting pink from third to second table,
See the Stute's committee to answer for the crime.

Ah did I mention Strattons, Gratrix the optician,
Katy's toffee apples, Rees the Abercarn,
Mrs Gunter's, Prior's, James the line or Kibbys
Mrs Nash or Mrs Jones for wool and yarn?

My good friend, John Ransom; spirit of a trader,
Working every hour sent within the day,
Serving a community, spuds and tins and laughter,
Always had a cheerful smile to send you on your way.

Brynmawr's many businesses (Please forgive omissions!)
Streets and shops and characters, those that I recall;
Bustling streets and voices calling down the decades,
Strange to think a single store has now replaced them all.

F H Westall 26/8/2015

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