**Our last milkman**

When Eifion Jones placed that final bottle to his last house in August 2016, it signalled the end of 35 years of doorstep delivery and the demise of yet another country service. Things had been quite different a hundred years earlier, when the few country house dwellers collected their milk from nearby farms and smallholdings in jugs or containers. Prosperity after the Second World War saw many more houses and later estates appear to fuel a rural demand for milk. So milkmen, long established in towns appeared in the countryside.

Eifion Jones, from his home in Cwmduad took over the Round from Henry Conwil, in 1971. That daily run would take in Conwil and Hermon, before descending to Cwmdwyfran and then Bronwydd, up as far as Rhiw Graig. There his Round met Defi John Llanpumsaint’s domain, later taken over by Gwyneth Thomas Bronallt. She supplied Nebo, the whole of Llanpumsaint village and beyond as far as Ffynnonhenri, before returning to attend to her much admired flower garden above Rhiw Coopers. In some rural areas competition could spill over into aggression, but here, as all sides confirm, there was always a spirit of mutual respect for boundaries

The milk from Unigate and later dairy Crest, arrived from Swasea and Pontardulais and then Haverfordwest. At 6 am Eifion set out. “*When i started a pint was 11pence in old money, or four pence halfpenny in the new”.*He’d be at it doorstepping until around 9.30. As more houses were built, swelled by the emergence of Bronyglyn and Gelli Aur estates in Bronwydd, the Round prospered. . Over those decades a succession of Pick-ups could be seen pulling in to the clink of glass on concrete. He went through 2 Morris Thousands, 2 Datsuns, a Mazda. and the well recognised red Vollkswagon. No matter which those children in Cwmdwyfran enjoyed climbing up on the back.

Many a resident opening the door to an avalanche of white on that snowbound morning in 1983, which closed all roads, got a huge surprise to find the daily Pinta already there on the doorstep. Eifion recalls the drama. With his supplier unable to move, he borrowed a Fergie and transport Box to plough his way down to Ben Lleine Conwil, whose milk could not be collected by tanker. Then in a borrowed land rover away he went to deliver and shock his customers. Ingenuity! When he lost his wife Evelyn in 1994 both sons Endaf and Edryd came to the fore to help out at a difficult time.

There could be mishaps, a bold Robin or a hard frost could remove tops, and once something very unusual. The Barrett business always took a crate of milk by the quarry, but one morning found all the bottles empty. A note stuffed inside offered an apology from some thirsty early morning Australian tourists, who’d been unable to find a shop open. No payment though!

Operating in a traditionally open and trusting society saw Eifion stride unannounced into a house, place the bottles in the Fridge and be on his way again. As he collected the money on a Friday afternoon he’d be looking forward to his last call with Daisy in Hermon, where that cup of tea and slice of tart awaited. There is evidence of unrecorded kindnesses, a family in difficulties could find that Eifion chose not to collect his dues. The sympathetic policeman attending a sudden death, became totally confused when he advised the widow to make funeral arrangements. “*All right! I’ll tell the milkman*!” she replied. He wasn’t to know of Eifion’s other role in life, the dignified and highly respected local Undertaker.

Nothing is as permanent as change. When Tesco and later other supermarkets began selling milk in plastic bottles it heralded a gradual downturn for the local milkman. “*We tended to keep the old customers but newcomers often did all their shopping at the supermarket!”* Habits changed as country shops also began to offer milk in plastic, to further diminish the doorstep demand. Nevertheless in 2016 both prevoius and remaining customers saluted his years of service and contribution to country life . In conclusion one must note the recent reaction against plastic and its long term threat to life. A renewed demand for glass milk bottles and the return of milkmen to London streets could signal further change. As Eifion explained “*You could wash a glass bottle up to twenty times but you can only use a plastic one once”.* Nevertheless there is no truth in the rumour that he’s started delivering again around Narberth; he’s on different business down there.

*Arwyn 2018*