



Paul Phillips, our Dialect Recorder, won “Best in Literary Section” at Leedstown Show with a short Dialect Story “Back Then”

Back Then

Why, ‘allo Sam, ab’m seen ee fer ages round this way. Weer ‘ave ee bin to? Not that ‘tis any bisness o’ mine weer you’ve bin keepin yerslf, but ‘tis nice te know all the same. Anyway, I’m sum glad te see ‘ee, comest on in by the fire ‘tis bit keen out ‘ere, I’m just ‘bout te put the kittle on fer to ‘ave a dish o’tay. I know there’s two things you de dearly like; one’s a good strong dish o’ tay an’ the other is te hark te tales ‘bout the good old days, back long. So ‘ere’s the first part - nice drop o’ hot sug’ry tay.

Now guss on up te the parlour an' put 'nuther log on the fire if these mind to, an' I'll tell 'ee 'bout one of me 'olidays I 'ad when I was a buoy, t'was w'en I went down te Portleven te my old pal Owen's plaace. Mind you a 'oliday was quite sumthin fer me an' my brother in they days, cawse Mather and' Faather used to keep a lil' plaace, you know what I mane by a lil plaace dawn't ee? A lil small holdin' they de call it. So we boys was free labo'r an' was expected te do a lot around the plaace all the time. T'was a proper caution te get a Saturday afternoon off to play a game o' cricket lev 'lone 'ave a weeks 'oliday.

Faather wud cut cabbage 'fore we wus out o' bed, an' we boys would come on dreckly an' pack them inta big cabbage nets; they was like gate string bags and mawther wood cum on behind we with a long niddle and string and saw up the open ends. Later on that day, they'd be c'lected and drove off te market. If we wud'n doin that we'd be put te do other jobs like picken up tattes and baggin them up. There'd be a long tripod in the corner with a stilliards to weigh them into ha'f hundred weight sacks. I remember wan tattee season we 'ad one o' they lil evacuees girls stayen with us; she jumped up 'pon the stilliards and then went runnin' up te faather shoutin' "Daddy, I've measured and I'm 10 years old!" Poor soul, didn' understand w'at she was tellen of see. Nuther job we'd be put te do was te take the pony and arra and harve one of the off meadows fer the next crop er to be put te scud dung; I cud never git'n xactly even.

Now, I've lost track of w'at I wus goyne tell ee; where wus I to? Awe, I know, I wus goyne tell 'e' bout ma 'oliday.

Any old how, this particular time I was allowed to ride me bike down te Portleven an' spend a few days with my old pal Owen. He used te live in our village and his faather an' mine used te sing in the 'Oss Downs male quartet.

Owen's family lived out te Wellmoor on the Treza Road. To me Owen's ma was Auntie Ethel, see, any adult friend of yer parents was recoded te be auntie an' uncle. Auntie Ethel's brothers waz all fishermen and lived there too, but they slept 'cross the yard in the net loft were they mended theer nets and made pots. I can mind it now, see'n of them wi' their needle and string menden the awls in the nets and benden they there withies into shape fer to maake proper fitty crab pots wi' stawnes in the bottom te wey them down w'en they was shut averboard.

The lavatry down te Portleven was outside and was of the 'bucket an' chuck it' stile. Then, that didn' woerry me cawse we 'ad the same luxury 'ome, awnly ours was nicely lime washed inside an out. Ours used te attract the odd rat

and sometimes wen yu was sitting down pon the wooden seat you'd feel the fur of 'is back touch yer bum as he sneaked out of the bucket and slipped away without maaken a sound! Caan't credit it these days can ee, with cloam this and cloam that an' everything highgenic an' squeaky clean? I tell 'ee w'at yo', there must 'ave bin sum goodness in the food we et in they days, cawse where faather used te bury the contents o' the bucket it would thraw up gate stingin' nettles four te five foot high! They'd 'ave bin ideal now a days to 'rap 'round that there Yarg cheese! I tell'ee 'nawther thing, in they days newspapers was cut up an' pierced to stick on a nail fer ee te clean yerself with, no soft luxury tissu' in they days. I never did find out whether the print comed off er no.

W'at I did ferget te tell ee was that there was always a stub of a candle an' a box o' matches on a bit of a ledge fer to see w'at you was doin'if 'ee 'ad te make a night visit; but wow betide ee if you dropped the matches!

Now, I'm wanderen off my story a bit 'ere. Fishin' boats, 'arbours and sand was all strange te me, I didn't knaw nuthin 'bout that way of life; I couldn' even tell w'at the fishermen was tellin of. Not awnly did they have a different lilt te their voices, but they was usen different words to what I knawed. That didn' matter too much cause Owen was on hand to e'splane w'at they was sayin'.

The food we 'ad was different too; lots o' fish like scowled mackerel and ling dun in milk wi' Bay leaves in un. I didn' fancy either very much but I ate them up just te be polite. On the first day we went down te the 'arbour, Owen was keen te show me the sites! The tide was out and men was workin on their boats. I cudden work out what two o' them was doin 'itten the sides of their boats with a heavy 'ammer. W'en Owen explained I cud see sure nuff. They was driven in long pieces of tarred or pitched rope, in between the planks, not that I was any the wiser 'bout that either, 'til owen splained that it helped keep the water out when the boat was out te seay. Well tha's fair nuff idn a? You dawn't want a lot of that wet stuff in yer bawt w'en yer three er four mile off shore tha's fer cert'n!

Breakfast down Port was quite an experience too. We'd start off wi' slops, A Auntie said 'twas porridge; - well we're all entitled to our apinions I ar'nt uz? Next wud come a nice bit o' fresh 'omemade bread that 'ad bin toasted on a long-handled fork agin the bars of the fire in the Slab; that was lovely 'specially with a gate dollup o' 'omemade jam er marmalade on en. The older men 'ad butter an' golden syrup which was w'at they called treacle; this they washed down with a gert mug o' cocoa. I don't think any of em 'ad any teeth 'cauze they cudn chow much. I was particularly taken with the way Auntie Ethel used te cut the bread; she'd 'old the loaf close te 'er bosom in the crook of her arm

and work the knife t'wards her, maaken sure not to cut thru 'er nice clean pinny. Baaken was dun once a week, so as the week went on an' the bread got staler an' staler, so the slices got thinner and thinner 'til they was like waafers.

There was a few chicken out in back the yard and sumtimes they'd git the last crust, but awnly if it wadn fit te ate.

It took me ages te fatham out what they was tellin of when they was talkin 'bout goyne somewhere. I eventually realised that Portleven was divided up into three imaginary areas as you might say. 'Downlong' er 'Downtown' mean't you was goyne te the 'arbour. The Gue, a steep narra lane an' Unity was 'Uplong' an' this included the Coastguard station up te the Terrace, whilst the oldest livin' part with it's lil' cottages clignin fast of the cliff top fer dear life was called 'Gravesend' on account o' seafarers' graves out on the cliffs near Loe Bar. An' if you went fer a stroll along the pier an' back they'd call it 'goyne fer a turn'.

W'en Sunday cummed we all traipsed off te Chapel just as if I was 'ome. Portleveners were well knawn fer their strong Methodist ways. I didn' 'ave anything special te weer, but auntie did shine me shoes far me te look a bit dacent like. I remember singen they lovely 'evangelistic Sankey hymns, an' I cud give they a bit o' belltink too, 'cause 'ome we was Apostolic where they use te sing choruses before the Preacher gived the Word. After nearly ev'ry hymn sure nuff somebody wud strike up the chorus or last verse again, so the argonist 'ad to be pretty sharpe and ready te gib'm billy-ho on the keyboard too. You see t'was all in celebration of they lovely words.

Tawken 'bout Sundays, my pal Owen told me a beauty yarn that so 'appened te be true as well. 'Week days the old retired fishermen wud sit at the bottom o' Salt Cellar 'ill with their blue Jerseys on, caps akimbo and pipes in mouths tellin each other yarns too I s'pose. On Sunday's see, they'd all be gone Chapel with their wives an childern so their places would be took aver by the local youngsters who'd lie in wait to chide the 'Chapel Goers' when they comed out from Sunday service. Well, on this particular Sunday evenin' when Mr. Noye comed by with his Bible an' Hymn Book in the crook of 'is arm, an' no doubt feelin' very inspired by the preacher's sermon, one of the buoys called out te en an' said, "E- e- e-e-r Mr Noye, do ee really bleeve that Jonah was swallowed by a whale?" "My dear buoy," Mr Noye replied, " If this Book said 'ee was swallowed by a Pilcherd I'd beleeve it!" I think that was more'n likely te 'ave bin the end of the conversation!

There's a lot more I cud tell ee but 'tis time fer me te fit the maate fer dinner so I'll tell ee 'bit more anawther time. My 'oliday was ovver an' twas time fer me te jump on me bike and boot it back 'ome; something I didn't look forward to sa very much 'cause 'tis all up 'ill down Portleven!