

April 2017

This month we heard from eight members who were recalling aspects of their parents and grandparents working lives.

Some many changes have taken place during the 1800 and 1900s, not only with the jobs that were on offer then but on the attitudes towards their working lives. Didn't families have a lot of children in those days despite quite a lot of poverty and overcrowded living conditions!

One member remembered her parents and other family members plying their trade on the canal boats, carrying wares between Birmingham, Manchester and London. This was their family business. Her mother working while bringing up 9 children, cooking and washing in the confines of a canal boat. The children just attending school while they had a few days moored in one place. The men and older children having to tend to the many locks and leading the shire horse along the tow paths, which was their most valuable asset.

One of our Welsh members told us his grandfather worked as a miner, but to supplement the family income he was a bare knuckle fighter. Fights took place on the hillsides around the local villages. The money was given to his wife, who "put it by" who was then able to buy houses for 3 of her 5 children. His grandmother had six children and her husband was a miner and poacher, in order to bring more food to the table, but drowned in a reservoir leaving his wife without any income. She took the brave decision to place the two youngest boys in an orphanage, which would have better than the workhouse. Later when the wife remarried and the stepfather didn't want the responsibility of the children, the sister took the boys out of the orphanage and altered the birth certificate of the member's father so that he could start work in the pit, at the age of 11 not 13. He later left the pit to join the army.

We heard about a member's great grandfather who really tried to make a difference in his working life. Joseph Massey became an Honorary District Evangelist aged 23 whilst working as a ironworks labourer. He was concerned for the well being of the people and helped with the social education of the young. Whilst in Cardiff he started a social club and the first black youth cricket team. Moving to Worcester he held the position of Superintendent Pastor at the Welcome Mission, founded by Richard Cadbury. Here he worked with the homeless, poor children and elderly through the depression years of the 1930s. His obituary which can be seen in The Hive was read out praising his faithful and willing service, his radiant joy and him being, "Brotherly, generous hearted and cheerful" What lovely things to say about a man!

Some of our grandparents were not quite whiter than white! We listened to humorous stories of what a great grandfather got up as a lad. When the local bobby is after you in wintertime, how do you not get caught. You walk in your big clogs backwards in the snow, think about it. But as the saying goes, he was poacher turned gamekeeper and became a shepherd. What a lovely picture of this man in a white smock carrying a shepherd's crook tending his flocks!

A father's life at sea as a merchant seaman, possibly one of the hardest jobs especially during WW2. Not only away from your wife and children for months on end, but them not knowing where you were. His log books, apart from the one lost overboard, showed all the different ports around the world that he had visited, but no details of the dangers that he faced. We saw his well earned set of medals, which like so many other servicemen, he did not claim, that was left to his daughter to claim them after his death.

A bit more up to date, we heard what it was like to be a policeman between 1960 and into the late 1980s. From walking the city's streets to riding a "Noddy" bike all policemen tended to work the same patch. So they knew the good and the not so good residents, but more importantly the public knew the local police. We saw two posters of the policeman on duty at a football match during the late 1960s. The supporters all standing up on the terraces, not much in the way of football scarves or tops and mostly white people. We saw his long service medal made by the Royal Mint in Wales and the force badge from his helmet.

Q. What did policemen carry under their helmets.      Answers on a postcard please!!

Another member related how her grandfather had started work at the age of twelve and was hired out to a farm to work milking cows and delivering milk. His parents had received £5 for allowing their son to work on the farm for twelve months. He lived in at the farm and was well fed, the best during his young life. By the time he was thirteen he had gone to work in the pit where he earned 1/6d per day. After a year his pay increased to 2/- a day. He still remembered going down in the pit cage for the first time into the total blackness. It seemed very easy to move from pit to pit in order to earn more money, eventually at the age of sixteen and working a twelve hour night shift his wage was 4/- a day, rising to 4/6d a day when he was seventeen.

Our last member described his upbringing in a very strict environment. Many fathers in the early 1900s were often heavy drinkers and smokers. Wages in these families did not always arrive onto the kitchen table. Families however coped with this way of life, knowing that all their neighbours were experiencing the same conditions. It became especially difficult when a parent died young, which was quite common in the 1880 and 1900s.

His grandfather and then father owned a sawmill and knew all about wood, which was fine until the advent of plastic, which eventually brought about the demise of the sawmill.

A member summed up the life and times of our grandparents and parents by saying that; despite the poverty, lack of education and hard working lives, they would be surprised that in the next generation and then into our generation, family members have aspired to better themselves, in the ever progressing professional world.



