

## Melin Memories

As the festive season draws near I find my mind draw back to younger days spent at the Farmers Arms in Melincryddan. Although the workers in those days had only Christmas and Boxing Days off from work, festivities at the Farmers started weeks before the actual event and continued well after. A few "happenings" spring vividly to mind. "Ivor the Bolsh" who usually reserved his gravelly voice for the singing of humorous ballads stood up and attempted to entertain his audience by absolutely murdering a Christmas Carol. Next to him sat Dai, a Farmers regular who had on the table before him a half pound of laverbread he had purchased earlier, intended for next days breakfast. This character, who was well under the influence, suddenly unwrapped his laverbread and contemplated the glistening seafood, spread like a black cowpat on the greasproof paper. He then started dipping his finger into it and suspending the finger over Ivor's glass, watched blobs of it fall into his beer, while Ivor carried on obliviously making his audience wince. Then Dai placed the glutinous black mass on his palm and studied it intently. After a short meditation he seemed to have come to an important decision. He stood up alongside Ivor, looked sadly at him, then deposited his next days breakfast in his face, screwing it well in. Dai had the decency to slide the wrapping paper away, which left Ivor looking like an eyeless mouthless collier. As the bar erupted into laughter. Ivor's tongue appeared through the goo, and after some rolling around exposed lips which looked very pink against the blackness, two index fingers did the same for the eyes, and carrying on the fight against all odds "of all great artists, he dropped to one knee and spreading his arms wide gave a wonderful performance of "mammy" an Al Jolson favourite.

On another occasion Christmas drew near a vociferous tenor who had for years sung the same song when called on to sing, told everyone that he had been practicing a new piece and would be singing it the next week at the Farmers, it was called "Little White Dove". On the

night the bar was packed, I could tell from the very innocent expression on the faces of a certain few of those present that something evil was afoot, but what? The throaty tenor was called upon to open the evenings entertainment, because as the M.C, explained everyone was agog to hear "Little White Dove" his new offering. As he commenced his off key rendition he beamed with pleasure, completely taken in by the rapt attention of the aforementioned felonious few. I wasn't, what the hell were they up to? Half way through his song I had my answer. Heads suddenly bent, hand reached under tables, the creak of wicker could be heard as baskets were opened, and feet sent dozens of pigeons flying up into the low smokey atmosphere where they collided with everyone in sight. Glasses were upset, tables overturned, as flailing arms sought to fend them off, unintended blows and slaps were exchanged as everyone fought to keep them at bay, it was amazing, the sudden panic over creatures as gentle as pigeons. I must admit though, there were rather a lot of them. Unbelievable as it may seem, above the roar could be heard the strains of "Little White Dove", as the tenor battled on regardless.

"Tex", now comes to mind. When Tex sang at the Farmers there were shouts from his audience to keep the doors tightly shut in case the tumbleweed blew in from the street. One evening as Tex sang with great emotion about some bridle or other hanging on the wall, there was a great commotion and clatter got louder and louder until at last a terrified horse was pushed and pulled into the Bar-room. Astride his back was someone dressed in jockey gear. The connection between jockeys and the wild west is puzzling I know, but it was part of the 'Farmers' weird and wonderful thinking. To bring someone in astride a horse, (while Tex was singing) dressed as a cowboy would have been far too mundane. Anyway, the poor trembling creature was led to the singing Tex. The sight and smell of a horse proved too much for the Welsh cowtoke. He finished his song, arms around the horse's neck, tears of emotion streaming down his face. To me these are wonderful memories of a place where

really hard men gathered, men who spent their working hours in appauling condition in the local iron and steel works in the days when the physical effort demanded of them saw most of them (to use a local term) "failed" at around forty. Yet fights were unknown. Men who perhaps had knocked hell out of each other while drinking elsewhere, sat happily together at the Farmers. Trouble? How could there be, amid such happy madness

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