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Smelly old Amlwch

Last updated: 26 October 2006

Have you got a nose for history? **Jane Rallison from Mynydd Eilian** describes the vivid smells she remembers from growing up in Amlwch in the 1940s.



When I was little and there was no telly, we walked a lot. On Sunday mornings, after chapel, mam would go home to make the dinner and dad would take us four kids for a walk. The best walk was from the chapel in Wesley Street, over the Afon Goch with its strange metallic odour, to the port where dad would talk about the old days of sail. It was lovely when the tide was in, fresh and clean, but there was a fishy old smell when the tide was out.

Then we'd go back home across the clinkers (where Craig y Don is now). I loved to kick them up, releasing a powerful pong of sulphur, but I had to do it behind dad's back because I was wearing my Sunday best shoes and the clinkers were very rough.

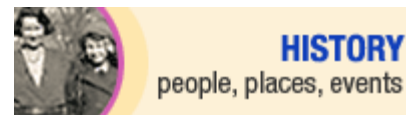
When we went shopping we often went past the memorial hall and down Lon Gias (Gas Lane). We had to pass hell itself. I was fascinated by the view through the tiny opening in the wall. You could just see a shadowy black figure shovelling great heaps of coal onto a furnace which somehow made town gas and was stored in the gasometer. The flames, the heat and the stink of gas were so exciting and frightening at the same time. It was such a relief to go past Charlie's yard and sniff the cool mothballs.

Every shop had its own smell, from the blood and sawdust of the butcher's, the stale biscuits and tired bacon in Bryn Afon Stores, the sweet smell of new cotton cloth in Manchester House, the rubbery smell of tyres in Griff Bikes and the rather sickly, milky air in Buarth y Foel.

There's a posh sweet-smelling little garden near the library now. Once there was a tobacco factory there. Being of a musical nature, I loved the noise of the machinery 'clunk, key, boinc, mmm, clunk, key, boinc, mmm' over and over. But the stench of the tobacco choked and revolted me. How could anyone chew the stuff the stuff without throwing up?

Practically every day in the summer (except Sunday of course) we went to the creek to swim. I loved the smell of the sea, cool and fresh, but if we moved the seaweed and jumped out of the way of the little flies the smell was strong and stale.

We liked to play in Rhos, mainly because it was so overgrown



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Weather for Amlwch



Sunday
max 16°C
min 7°C



Monday
max 13°C
min 6°C

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that grown-ups never came there. It stank of wormwood. I know it's a horrid smell, but I love it because it brings back the sense of freedom we enjoyed. We would return home redolent of the weed, scratched to bits with brambles and stung with nettles - all part of our childhood.

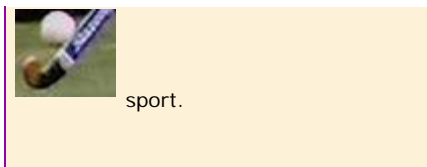
Before electricity came to Amlwch, we cooked and heated and lit our homes with fire, gas and candles. No carbon monoxide detectors then - you didn't need them. You knew very well that the house was full of smoke and fumes.

School had its own perfumes - ink, dusty books, sweat and, oh dear, wet macs. No nylon cagoules. Rain-soaked wool gabardine had a very distinctive penetrating pong and at 4pm we had to wrap ourselves in them again.

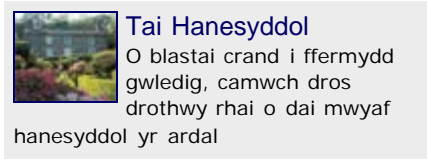
There were mysterious buildings in Amlwch, with brown screens over the windows so you couldn't see what was happening inside. We'd see men creeping in secretly and might see them coming out on wobbly legs. But we all knew the buildings were pubs - because they stank of beer.

I could tell you about the Ty Bach half way down the garden, but it was a necessary evil, and I'm not going to make any bog-standard jokes about it.

In later years, Octel arrived. You didn't need to stick a wet finger in the air to test the direction of the wind. Just sniff. You could tell by the intensity of the choking, brown, aerial goo whether or not the wind was blowing to you from the port. Now of course, we wouldn't put up with these old smells. Instead, we spend small fortunes on deodorising gadgets. Can't stand the smell of them myself.



LLEOL I MI Gogledd Orllewin



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