

Participant 6: Chris Barnikel

Location 1: Barracks Hill, Defensible Barracks [04:50]

What I thought I'd be trying to do is maybe relate some historical information, and then maybe a few little stories that relay into that. Well I'm here today at on the Barracks Hill, which overlooks Pembroke Dock, and is so-called after the building of the Defensible Barracks, which are to the east of the hill. There were, I believe, three barracks in Pembroke Dock, built to protect the Royal Naval Dockyard. There was one in Pennar, one in Llanion, and this one here. This one here has a bit of a notorious reputation because it has a rather deep moat all the way around it to protect it, but not an enclosed moat. So we lost a few soldiers down the years, and even a doctor who was taking a shortcut back from Pennar after treating a patient, in stormy weather I think, and he fell in there, so that was him a goner. So that was the Defensible Barracks. It's now a golf course, but still a public right of way. I spent quite a bit of time up here as a young boy with my grandfather. He was a Llanreath resident, and quite a well-known character, a skilled craftsman – but he also liked to do his fair share of beachcombing and foraging and so on, and visiting various rubbish tips to see if there was anything he could lay his hands on to reuse! So it was him that used to bring me up here, as I say, as a young lad. And he'd walk ahead a little bit, and just quietly drop coins out of his pocket in a bit of a line, and he'd be saying to me, 'now then boy, keep your eyes to the ground now! You never know what's might see!' And along the way then I'd find a few coins, and I'd be absolutely thrilled to bits. And he'd be saying, 'well, you know, make sure you keep doing that now, and you never know what you might find.' So, yeah, that was Sidney, John. Quite a character.

Location 2: Oil storage tanks attack [10:25]

On the south side of the golf course here, just over the valley, that's now part of the golf course as well – but that was where the oil storage tanks were located, and they were part of the story of perhaps the most famous incident in Pembroke Dock's history, the bombing of the oil storage tanks. So the story goes that the Luftwaffe sent a reconnaissance mission over – this is August 1940 – to check out the air defences for what was and still is an important estuary – one of the deepest natural harbours in the world. And they realised that they were met by no fighter planes, no radar... And they just realised the whole area was unprotected. So I think the story goes then that within a day or so Luftwaffe command said, 'right, we'll send a squadron of bombers there and see what we can do.' And in mid-August of 1940 then they hit the tanks, and there was just a giant inferno which raged for many many days. They had to get fireman in from as far as Birmingham, hundreds of firefighters. Five lost their lives. And that's one of the big stories in the history of Pembroke Dock, and certainly for the wartime here, when they just hit these tanks and they destroyed I think something like 11 out of 17, that's roughly about right I think. And then the oil just kept oozing out of these tanks. They couldn't put the fire out, and it oozed down the valley here, down onto the beach – you can still see the oil there. It's now solidified but it's still there basically, all these years later. There's a stream in the valley here, so there was an incident where fresh oil was still seeping through, and they put signs up there saying it was dangerous, and don't take dogs down. So that was only a few years ago.

Location 3: Hotel Bombings/Pier Square [14:00]

May of 1941...The night of May 11th/12th...they landed bombs on a couple of hotels on Pier Square, at the junction of Pier Road and Tremeyrick St. The Pier Hotel and the Criterion, they were both destroyed, and 30 lives were lost that night, or 30 civilians and 2 firefighters. That was a heck of a loss for a town the size of Pembroke Dock. 2000 houses damaged. Some properties were destroyed. The major hit on Pembroke Dock was May 1941, and the Pier Hotel on Tremeyrick Street took a direct hit. I was told by a friend, an elderly friend, that people were sheltering in the Criterion at the time, using that as an air raid shelter, and they all – they all perished, because it took a direct hit. And 30 lives were lost, 30 civilians, and I think two firefighters, so that was a heck of a loss of life for a town the size of Pembroke Dock. They say it was the equivalent of London losing 40,000 dead in one air raid!

Location 4: Llanreath Chapel [00:12]

Both my sets of grandparents lived in Llanreath during the 1930s. My dad was born in Llanreath in 1937, and my mum the following year. They didn't get to know each other before the war, and then when the oil tanks got blown up everyone was evacuated from the village, as it's just right next to the tank storage place. So my dad got evacuated to Pembroke, the nearby town, but came back within a few weeks – but my mum got evacuated to Hazelbeach, which is directly across the water. But it didn't spoil their getting together – she used to row back and forth across the river, initially to see her grandmother who remained in Llanreath, and so she became part of the Llanreath gang of kids growing up, of which my dad was one, and that was the start of their childhood romance. And they kept that going until they got married in 1959 in Llanreath Chapel. So that was that – and they stayed together until my dad passed away a few years ago. So that's a nice little Llanreath story.

Location 5: Rowing [02:40]

My mum used to row across the river there – unknown to my grandfather, he wouldn't have been impressed because there was quite a strong current there. And the other story that my mum likes to tell is that this was – we're now talking about the 1940s and early '50s – it was still a flying Sunderland flying boat base, and they used to use that water to land on. So my mum used to row across in the dinghy, and they'd be coming in on the flying boats, and the pilots would be waving her out of the way, telling her to get out of the way of the landing space! So yeah, I don't think it was that common! But she's quite a daredevil and a tomboy, and I think preferred to play in Llanreath rather than Hazelbeach, where she'd been evacuated to. They were evacuated with their families – my dad came back with his brothers and his mum and dad. But because my grandfather, this was Sidney John, had quite an important role in the mines depot, when they were evacuated just after the tank explosion they decided to stay in Hazelbeach, that it was not only a bit safer there but also handier for the work for this mines depot, which was at Milford Haven.

Location 6: Chapel Road Chapel to Shipwrights' Cottages [04:09]

So, as we walk away from the Barracks Hill into Llanreath Village, we walk along Chapel Road. And the first building on the right is the actual chapel – and that's where Joe and Brenda got married in 1959. Unfortunately it got closed down, just in the early 1960s or soon after that, and it's now a private residence. So that's the first property there: then on the left, as you go through, is one of my favourites places in Llanreath, because that used to be the sweet shop when I was a boy growing up.

They did have a little convenience store or shop, but that's now a residential place as well. And then, as we go a little bit further along towards Orielton Terrace, we've got some old terraced properties there, and I'm led to believe that they were some of the first built. They were known as the shipwrights' cottages, and so they were some of the first to be built in Llanreath. As we know, Pembroke Dock was built or became established because of the Royal Naval Dockyard, and it's a modern town and it only really got established in 1814, and the story of Llanreath I think mirrors that really, which is not that surprising. So the shipwrights' cottages, one of which was a public house, back in probably the peak time for both Llanreath and Pembroke Dock, probably the 1890s when a lot of men – between two and three thousand men – were employed at the Royal Naval Dockyard. And I'm told there were three pubs active in this little village of Llanreath, one of them in one of the little cottages along Chapel road.

Location 7: Sunderlands, and the landing zone on Llanreath Beach [07:40]

You know the Royal Naval Dockyard, such a big part of the history, and the reason why Pembroke Dock is here, you know, that was closed down in 1926. And when I was a boy and used to go into Pembroke Dock shopping with my grandfather and grandmother, I couldn't quite understand his comment, which I think he made every week really, which was, 'oh... this place has been going downhill boy, ever since 1926!' And I'd look around, and I thought, 'what a busy vibrant little town this is!' Especially compared to nowadays. But that's the way he saw it – and obviously a lot of men lost their jobs then. But they say there was a little bit of a reprieve when they made in the 1930s, they established the flying boat base there, and that continued through the war. So that was a vital flying boat base during the Second World War and into the, I think into the late '50s, before they closed it down. I mean we've lost a few things over the years from Pembroke Dock, I think maybe because of lack of funding. So when I was a young lad, just behind the the dockyard wall there, we did have a flying boat, a Sunderland was there, as a museum piece that you could visit, and you could go inside and so on. And if that was there now it'd be a tremendous visitor attraction. But that didn't stay here. It actually got moved in 1971 to the RAF museum in Hendon and I believe is still there for people to see.

Location 8: Sidney John/Orielton Terrace to Beach Road [12:50]

As I said, Sidney John had a great reputation as a craftsman, as a mechanic and an engineer. In the 'thirties he worked as a motor mechanic in a garage in Pembroke, and I think was sufficiently highly rated that the owner, when he decided to sell up, I think in the late '30s, offered the place to Sid. But he declined the offer, I think he thought he was too young and didn't have the necessary experience. But one of his great achievements was the rebuilding of an old Austin A7, one of the classic 1930s Austins. This was where you picked up a shell of an A7 and rebuilt the whole car, fitted a new engine, put it all back together, sorted all the upholstery out... And that was the car he drove around until the early 1960s. That was something he spent a long time creating or making – but he also built his own rowboat as well. He was a skilled oarsman, so him and his Llanreath partner used to win a lot of the Regattas. Boats then were a sort of essential means of transport. So the beach at the bottom of Llanreath, as you go down from Chapel Road, you go into Orielton Terrace, and then that goes into Beach Road, which leads down a steep hill right to the beach. And all the boats really were just moored up, kept on the beach there. I don't think that's allowed now, so there's no boats at all there now, but that was the way it was

for most of the 20th century. And he built at least a couple of those himself, did Sid, so yeah – a very talented chap. Everyone knew whose boat was whose. It's still pretty safe. I think this county – you know, Dyfed Powys is the overall county – still has the lowest crime rate in the UK, and so it's still a place where, up to a point, you know, you can leave your door open and you should be okay. So yeah, we still get away with it compared to some of the cities on the mainland.

Location 9: Glan-y-mor/Beach Road [16:00]

As we walk into Llanreath and we go down Beach Road, on the right hand side as we go down towards the waterfront are a series of houses, and they were built by my great great grandfather – we're going back to the late 1800s – and he was someone that arrived here from the village of Llangym, which is further upstream. I think there are a few families who turned up at Llanreath from Llangym and other places, basically to work at the dockyards. So there was so much work here that this was the place to be, and so houses were built here. So that was George John. That's my great great grandfather. As we go down Beach Road, one of the first properties, from the top of the hill there, is a property called Glan-y-mor (meaning seaside). And that was one that he built. And at the time of the war, that was where my mum Brenda and her parents Sid and Addie lived. And there were a couple of stories attached to their living there: so when the oil storage tanks got blown up, Addie tells the story that she heard this tremendous noise, and the house shook, and part of the ceiling collapsed. And initially she was more concerned about her boiled apple dumplings being spoilt than anything else, but soon realised that maybe there were more important matters, and woke Sid up, and they realised that something serious had happened. And there was one other story there, that my grandmother Addie used to relate, was that she had Brenda in the pram out in the garden there at the back of Glan-y-mor, and behind that was a field – and the air raid siren went off. And the first thing Addie did was to grab Brenda out of the pram and bring her inside. And I think they used to hide under a big kitchen table then, that was the safest place. Anyway, there was a bomb dropped, in the field at the top of Wireless Hill, and it caused some damage to one of the nearby properties. And when they went out later on to bring the pram in, she found a large piece of shrapnel right in the middle of the pram. So that was a close shave for my mum then, yeah – I think if they'd neglected to bring her in, that could have been the end of her in 1940. I think it was quite a frightening experience – I mean my grandmother was a very calm person, and very level-headed. I think my grandfather Sidney was more nervous, and it frightened the living daylights out of him. So he found that very difficult to handle. And I think maybe that was a factor in them not coming back to Llanreath after the evacuation, and staying across the water in Hazelbeach, they just felt a little bit safer. A difficult time. The other houses built by George John and his sons can still be seen on Beach Road below Glan-y-mor, namely Clifford, Redcliff, Clifton and Beach House.

Location 10: no. 8 Beach Road/The Barnikels [20:32]

So they lived on the other side of the street, number 8 Beach Road, and my dad was one of four brothers. But the background story is quite an interesting one, because my grandfather was in the British army, I think he was a dog handler. Anyway he was stationed in Germany during the '20s as part of the Rhineland occupation force. And whilst he was out there, he obviously met my grandmother Freda, and, I think unknown to him, got her pregnant. Anyway, she decided after giving birth to young

Bert that the boy needed a father, and she'd find a way to the UK and find the father. So as a young woman, she wrapped up her boy, who was I think maybe less than one year old still, and made her way from Germany – we're talking around about 1930 I think – made her way across to the UK, found her way to Aldershot Barracks, and promptly propped this young baby on the sergeant's desk and said, 'this boy is Albert Barnikel's boy, and he must look after him!' At which point the sergeant demanded, 'Barnikel, come here! You have something to sort out!' So yeah, that was the beginning of their more serious relationship and getting married. She was a tough character, yeah, definitely! And so she got all the way over here. I don't know quite how long it took them to relocate to Llanreath, but they did do that, that must been the early '30s. And everything was fine there – she was well accepted, and the older boys were in school, and so on. But it all changed, you know, when the war broke out. And so straight away from friendly neighbours and invitations in for a couple of tea and so on, she was then deemed to be a potential spy, a German spy, and people claimed she was leaving a light on to guide the bombers in ... the boys, including my dad then, would have eggs thrown at them whilst they were being pushed around in their prams ... and yeah, it got a little bit unpleasant, which was unfortunate. But she survived all that – she was, as I said, a tough lady. Freda Leidner, her name was, from Nuremburg.

Location 11 [27:37]

It's not a place that I sort of know much about now, I suppose. There are a lot more houses here, so areas where there was just, you know, green space that you could play in, have now being built on. I had a brief spell a few years ago where my in-laws moved here – of all places to move to, they came down here and bought a place in Llanreath! So we used to come back and forth in the early two thousands, but I don't come back here too often now. Maybe just to walk the dog on the Barracks Hill.

Location 12 [29:00]

My mum and dad moved across the water. The town opposite the dockyard is Neyland, so that's where I was brought up. But unusually perhaps, for the 1960s, both my mum and dad worked when I was a young lad, so hence I spent quite a bit of time with my mum's parents in particular in Llanreath. So although that wasn't my hometown, I did spend quite a bit of my childhood in Llanreath. I suppose my adventures, mostly because I would have been under the wing of my grandparents, were with them really. So one of my highlights, as a young lad was – which probably I wouldn't have been allowed to do with my parents – was to go out with my grandfather with a double-barrelled shotgun shooting wood pigeons! So I was only maybe, I don't know, eight or nine, but he'd let me have a go, and he was skilled at that as well. So we used to go out in his 14 foot boat, and we'd just cruise along quite close to the shoreline, to the woods – and he'd have his faithful corgi, which he'd trained up to retrieve the pigeon. So he'd shoot the wood pigeon, send the dog in to the water, and either pick it up out of the water, or from the shoreline, or the woods, and bring it back. And then I'd be designated to pluck the pigeon, and prepare it for the pot. I'm vegetarian now, but for many years wood pigeon was one of those things, because of those childhood memories, that was, 'oh, yeah, wood pigeon!'

Location 13: Heritage Centre [35:11]

I think for Pembroke Dock more generally, there's been various plans for regeneration over the years and they've never quite come to fruition. I've moved back here after living away for some time, I came back in the early '90s, and there were lots of waterfront regeneration plans and so on. And they've never quite taken off. I mean, at the moment, there's another project in what was the dockyard, you know, it's now the Irish ferryport, but they do have some other marine operations there, so it's Pembroke Dock Marine, I think is the latest project, where they're talking of a £60 million investment for renewable energy equipment, and so on. That I think sounds to me like a great way forward. It has got a little bit stymied, I think, with people concerned about them infilling some of the dry dock facilities that were used in the naval dockyard days, so there's a little bit of an issue there. But to me that seems the way forward. We've got to have progress – and especially if it means renewable energies, I think that's essential for the planet. So if we're going to lose a slipway or two. I'd say maybe that's the price we have to pay. I mean we've discussed earlier about how it's important to retain our heritage, and we've missed out a little bit with things like the flying boat, that could be a big part of tourism now if we'd kept that. But at the same time, you know, we've got to have some progress in the right direction – it's not as if we've got some, I don't know, some nuclear plant or something that's extremely divisive, we're talking about renewables here, aren't we?