

A Ride into Town with two Coffins

Mrs Aplin was born in 1905 and interviewed in 1994

There were nine children in our family. I was the oldest girl. We lived in Seaton, about two miles from Workington. Of course it was a mining place and our dad was a miner. He had to go down the mine when he was eleven even though he had eye stagnus ("Dancing Eyes".) He was rather bow-legged because they had to work in very small places. There was dad and his two brothers. Dad used to collect the wages and give pocket money to the boys. Every week the money was collected from my dad's family and it went into the bank Monday morning.

Mother used to go out to work helping wash laundry for some farmers. She'd go early in the morning to get home an hour earlier, but the farmer's wife brought all the fustian trousers belonging to the workers, and she'd all those to wash to keep her for that hour.

They were put in a basket and they all had to be taken outside and banged in the entry to take off the dust and that sort of thing. Sometimes they had to be put in the oven to dry overnight. There was no washing machine in those days just dolly legs. When the miners came home they had to go in what we called the back kitchen for a bath.

Every night when we came home from school we'd go down to the area sea shore with what we called a bogie, with wheels to collect a bag of coal which was washed up by the sea. It was in lovely little round pieces and it burned so very hot so we always had good fires.

I remember one day we went to the fair at Workington nearly two miles the weather wasn't very nice and the carpenter in the village offered us a lift. He was driving one of those old high sided carts. When we got in there were two coffins in the bottom and he said "Don't make a sound because I don't think they are quite dead yet." He gave us a penny and we had twopence for the fair which was wonderful

My aunty and uncle had twelve children and every year we would go to her house to help make a rug mat for Christmas. She used to dye old blankets and things to make red clippings. We used to draw "Home Sweet Home" and fill it up with straw. The new rug would go in pride of place in the kitchen and the old one would be placed in the back kitchen. Then Uncle Harry, he had one of those concertinas, and he used to play it and we would sing hymns and songs and such like. When we finished auntie used to say "Would you like some treacle toffee." It was quite a thing getting everything ready for Christmas.

Christmas dinner was always rabbit. It was usually two rabbits stuffed and roasted and we'd all have our own veg and everything. We never went without food, never. 'Cos mother was a good housekeeper.

We used to have turns about at having a party. It was for grown-ups. There was a door at the bottom of our cottage and there were snecks in the door and my brother and I used to get out of bed and close one eye and keep looking to see what was going on. My brother said it's not a very big hole. When mother's out and there's nobody about I'll put the poker into the fire and we'll have a bigger hole next time. So that's what he did.

We wanted to go to the pantomime, it was Dick Whittington. We'd never been to one and, with two grown-ups, we walked the two miles to Workington. We had saved our pennies until we had enough to pay for this treat. When we got to the theatre we went upstairs and said "Look there's nobody in that lovely seat at the front." It was the dress circle! Off we clambered down with our clogs on and sat on this seat. Then this usherette came and she said "Now what are you doing here?" She turned us out and we had to go downstairs into the pits where the poor were and they were wooden forms you'd to sit on.

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