

## Coppers, Cash and Convenience

The nook in The Pick and Shovel public house was unusually smoky that cold December night in 1944. Sitting in the corner of the room was Caradoc Evans. He was intensely puffing his way through his sixth pipe of the hour. Between Caradoc's face, the dim lights and the blackout curtains the whole place had the feel of an ante-chamber of Hell. His brow was furrowed. His hands clenched. He stared unflinchingly at the cigarette scorched table before him. Across the table was his brother Talfryn.

Talfryn was a huge nervous man in awe of his elder brother. He was busily studying all areas of the room that would avoid bringing his and Caradoc's eyes into contact. The brothers were sporadically involved in shady turf accountancy, and other businesses of dubious legality; Caradoc was the bookie and brains of the venture whilst Talfryn was his runner and muscle. Talfryn's only function was to collect money from punters who had made bets and lost money. There was never any problem with this arrangement as Talfryn was as swift with his fists as he was slow with his mind. On this night, however, something had gone very wrong with the well run operations of their trade. Somehow, Talfryn had managed to lose a week's takings.

Caradoc started gently.

"Let me get this straight now Tal". Caradoc was at his most focused when it came to money and although he loved his brother he knew the only way to fish some clue out of the vast areas of ocean between Talfryn's ears was to apply a forensic examination with just a hint of a threat. "You are telling me that in the time it took you to get from The Comrades Club to this pub – a matter of ten minutes bus ride at a push – you lost over four hundred pounds of our money? Notes, silver and copper?"

Talfryn, who was sitting side on to his brother with his eyes fixed to a point somewhere between his boots, quickly shifted his eyes to his brother's hands and back again. In an instant, visions had flashed across his mind of the times he had incurred Caradoc's wrath. There was the time he had taken the Wellington boots from under the stairs to do a spot of impromptu fishing. How was he to know that Caradoc had stuffed the boots with pound notes to elude the attention of any police officer who called looking for evidence of illegal betting? More to the point how was he to know that the pond was eight foot deep? Luckily it only took a day or two to dry the notes out and iron them back into use. And how was he to know that another stash of cash had been hidden up the chimney behind the drawer guard. "All right! So, it had been in the middle of summer"! But he was feeling cold and Caradoc hadn't told him not to start a fire.

He was suddenly jolted back from his reminiscences.

"WELL"? Caradoc shifted into Torquemada territory.

"Not exactly Car". mumbled Talfryn. "Look! I 'ad a bit o trouble on the way 'ome see. There was coppers on every bus stop between the club and back' ere. So, I stayed on the bus." Caradoc was quick to interrupt.

"And exactly where did you get off Talfryn"?

The younger Evans went sullen and white in that order.

"I dunno Car ". The pipe in Caradoc's mouth moved around at some speed.

"Don't know"?

"No Car. I just stayed on and got lost. It was dark an' I didn't recognise anywhere I was when the bus stopped. There was a lot of buses there and I

asked the driver how to get 'ome. He said that I'd have to walk cos the buses 'ad stopped till the mornin'. Then I 'eard the sirens and the blackout started".

Caradoc sat back, frowned and let the implications of this information seep through his mind. "He's traveled ten miles to Porth depot and walked back in a blackout. TEN MILES!" The odds of finding their money were getting longer than the chances of Talfryn becoming a Spitfire pilot. Caradoc was calm.

"Isn't there anything you remember about the walk back home that can give me a clue Talfryn? Anything"?

Talfryn shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Well Car bach! I might 'av decked a copper".

After recovering from nearly swallowing his pipe, Caradoc gave out an exasperated whisper.

"Decked a copper???"

"I think so Car. Yes I'm sure I did. I was walking an' a voice said, 'This is the police. Identify yourself.' I thought they were after me Car so I lashed out and hit something. Next thing I slipped and fell into a 'ole. It took me a bit of time to get out. 'ad to pull a lot of earth in because it was steep. Come to think of it I missed the money not long after I got out o there. Anyway I must've caught 'im a corker cos It went quiet for a bit until I 'eard 'im moanin. "

For the first time that night Caradoc began to see some light.

"That's it then" he said. "It's in that bloody hole. Wherever that is. We'll retrace your footsteps if it takes us all night. There's a good chance the cash will still be in the hole and covered with the earth you pulled into it. Drink up".

Earlier that night in Cwmparc police station Sergeant Billy Price was looking at PC Alwyn Davies with some amusement. Davies had a prize shiner on his left eye which had closed tightly shut.

"Did you fall boy"? the sergeant said half mockingly.

"No I did not sergeant". Came the indignant reply. "I was making my way back to the station after watching for illegal betting up The Comrades Club when I was punched by some bastard in the dark - there was a blackout and I never saw him - and right outside the station too. When I came around the blackout had finished, and the bastard had 'ooked it".

"Hmmm!. Well forget that for the time being. I've had inspector Pryssor Jones on the blower all the way from Cardiff. Ties in with your Comrade Club activities it does. He's coming up 'ere and he wants us to pick up Caradoc and Talfryn Evans and bring them in for questioning. It looks like the two buffoons have finally slipped up. Someone has informed on them apparently and they're carrying a particularly large amount of dosh skimmed from the dullards who bet with them. Better still, our informant says they're sitting in The Pick and Shovel and haven't been home yet. The inspector thinks they may still have the cash on them".

Price and Davies looked a knowing look at each other which simply said, "Fat chance!"

When Sergeant Price and PC Davies walked into the nook of The Pick and Shovel, luck was with them. Caradoc and Talfryn were in the process of putting their hats and coats on. As they did two things happened simultaneously. Caradoc Evans saw the beautiful black eye PC Davies was sporting and Sergeant Price saw a large bruise on Talfryn Evans' knuckles. Nothing was said but the casual observer may have noticed a sudden and almost imperceptible rise in

tension within the room. Caradoc was the first to speak with just a hint of sarcasm.

"Feeling thirsty officers?"

Sergeant Price who had known Caradoc Evans for almost forty years replied in kind.

"Yes Caradoc. We've come to invite you to a tea party at the station. If you and your brother would be good enough to put your hats and coats on we'd like you to attend the shindig now. We'll be your escorts for the evening."

"What do you want with us Pricey?"

Caradoc had already decided that there was no way Talfryn was being picked up for assaulting PC Davies because if he was half the valley police force would now have been in standing in front of him.

"It's Sergeant Price to you Evans. Just come along now and we'll discuss the particularities at the station".

Caradoc smiled and looked at Talfryn. He made a mental note to kick his brother up the arse when they got home.

Inspector Pryssor Jones had left Cardiff for Cwmparc in a rancorous mood. He knew full well that the chances of nailing Caradoc Evans were practically nil. He also knew that he would have to pull the old bugger over the coals for the best part of the night if only to remind him that breaking the law was not something that should be regarded as an acceptable occupational hazard. However, he comforted himself with the thought that just turning up at the Cwmparc station would remind criminals and local coppers alike that he meant business.

The confines of Cwmparc police station held no terrors for the Evans brothers. They had been 'invited' there on so many occasions that Talfryn had actually sent them Christmas cards for the last five years. Caradoc hadn't discouraged this practice as he appreciated the element of ridicule it presented that was blissfully lost on Talfryn. When they entered the station the two police officers and their charges never spoke a word. They simply made their way to their allotted places and resigned themselves to the usual seven or eight hours of interrogation, banter, boredom and tiredness. Ignoring Talfryn entirely - Price had long ago given up talking to Talfryn as he had found the effort of trying to follow his mind far too frustrating; on one occasion Talfryn had been brought in for questioning and Price had decided to employ a friendly casual approach designed to throw a suspect off his guard. He had asked Talfryn in passing whether it was raining outside. Talfryn looked at him and said in all sincerity that he didn't know as he'd been brought to the station down the back lanes.

Price looked directly at Caradoc and said, "Well! Here we are again".

"Yes". Said Caradoc. "What is it this time"? Suspected chicken rustling? Eating pies with intent to buy chips? Fishing in a manner likely to cause a breach of the peace".

The Sergeant looked like a man made of flint being shot at with rubber tipped arrows.

"No no. Nothing like that Car. Tell me. If I were interested in placing a bet on a horse - on the quiet like - who would I go to?"

Caradoc raised both his eyebrows and adopted a look of dramatic horror.

"Sergeant! I'm shocked! Surely you know that running a book without a license is illegal".

Price closed his eyes and raised an open hand.

"Alright Car! I'm not wasting my time. Inspector Pryssor Jones is on his way here from Cardiff. You can talk to him. By the way. How did Talfryn get that bruise on his hand?"

"Beats me Sergeant" Caradoc smiled.

"Why don't you ask him".

Price's smile looked like the silver handles of a coffin.

"One nil to Evans," he thought.

"Three points to me," thought Evans.

Shortly after the opening salvo between Sergeant Price and Caradoc Evans, Inspector Pryssor Jones arrived, and the mood quickly changed from one of resigned indifference to one of cordial contempt. Jones and Evans were masters of their own arts; one a consummate inquisitor with a mind like a steel clamp the other a wizard of evasion with a supernatural grasp of the intricacies of his fabrications. Throughout the night they weaved and dodged and ducked and feigned until close to dawn the match was declared a draw. It was then, in the quiet of the battle's wake, that fate would take a hand.

Caradoc and Talfryn had been officially released from police custody and were making their way to the front door of the Police station when there was an almighty roar.

"What the hell is that noise" demanded Pryssor Jones. It's eight o' clock in the morning".

Price, Jones and Davies pushed passed the Evans brothers and looked out into the street. The five men were greeted with the site of a concrete carrier depositing its load into a large hole opposite the police station.

"Oh Christ! I'd forgotten about that," said Price. "Sorry inspector. The council are erecting a public urinal across the way. It's going up today."

As they watched the concrete fall they could see some men busying themselves with spades smoothing the stuff over. One of the men had found an item on the ground and was showing it to the others. PC Davies was looking keenly at them when he realised it was his truncheon.

"That's my truncheon he's got there Sarge. I must have lost it when I got thumped last night".

Behind him Caradoc's face had become gorgonised with an intensity that would have astonished Henri Gaudier Brzeska.

When they finally got home Caradoc was in an advanced state of agitation. He was moving around the room looking at the ceiling, shaking his head, pointing at Talfryn, turning purple and red by turns until finally collapsing into a chair, closing his eyes and gibbering sporadically. Talfryn was watching him and was getting scared; he'd never see his brother show any emotion other than short lived annoyance and mild surprise before.

"What's the matter Car? Are you tired?"

Caradoc slowly opened one eye and fixed it on Talfryn.

"Tired? TIRED???? How can a man with only one head be so stupid? I tell you there's more brains in a bucket of ashes than you've got. . . "

"I never told them anything Car, 'onest"!

"Told them? Told them? What could you. . ?"

Caradoc slumped even further into the chair than seemed possible and then stopped speaking for a while until he quietly said, "Our money's gone Talfryn. It's buried under five feet of concrete and a public bog that's standing outside a police station". There was a horrible gibbering sound and a manic look in his eyes. "It would take a stick of dynamite to get at it."

At that point Caradoc was becoming overwhelmed trying to work out how to let a stick of dynamite off twenty feet from a police station without the police being mildly interested when he fell into a deep faint totally exhausted from the problem and the previous night's mental exertions. Talfryn looked at him and breathed a sigh of relief that he'd finally fallen asleep; the way and number of times that Caradoc had mentioned the words boot and arse on the way home had worried him.

Left alone a man can think of many things that he would not normally entertain. Left alone Talfryn could think of everything that no one would ever entertain. As he paced the kitchen flagstones occasionally throwing small coal on the fire he kept hearing the words 'police', 'bog' and 'dynamite'. These words and his earnest need to make Caradoc feel better resulted in a synaptic collision of the first order. In a moment of clarity, he decided he would raid the local pit's powder house and get some dynamite. He would then place a stick or two down the urinal's drain, light it and recover the cash.

Later that night, having placed the elapsing Caradoc into bed, Talfryn went about his plan. He easily purloined some dynamite from the Dare colliery's powder stock and made his way to the Parc Road urinal. He selected two particularly long fuses to give himself some time to escape. If there was one thing Talfryn had learned in his life underground, it was that long fuses were essential for assuring a chance of longevity. He lit them both and dropped them attached to two sticks of dynamite into one of the urinals' three drains. There were two distinct splashes that gave him the sign to move away. Unfortunately, at that moment Sergeant Billy Price and Inspector Pryssor Jones entered the urinal from different ends and proceeded to use the utility for its designated function. For whatever reason, Talfryn who was sandwiched between them in the dark, decided to stand still until they had finished. However, before they had a chance to enjoy the song of their relief there was an almighty explosion in the sewer some hundred yards away where the dynamite had, by now, floated. It had not only gone off but had ignited sewer gas that would blow manhole covers off and send jets of flame into the air in a five mile radius. This included the jets of flame that shot out of the three vents at the urinals' base.

Speculation in the press was rife. Some thought that there had been a pit explosion. Others, who had taken time to notice that only manhole covers had been damaged, pointed convincingly to the sewerage system; there was one wild theory that some kind of subterranean bank robbery had taken place where the bank robbers had used too much gelignite and blown themselves and their loot into eternity. There were some grounds for this particular theory as hundreds of coins and scorched and shredded pound notes had been found scattered over a wide area. It was also delicately reported that several gentlemen at the Parc Road urinal suffered minor burns to their 'nether regions'.

As the years rolled by, the story of that night was told and retold until it was exaggerated and passed into local myth. Rumour had it that two police officers had been given early retirement because of some unusual event that had taken place in a public toilet. Many people were all too ready to believe this piece of speculation. The fact that Billy Price and Pryssor Jones moved out of the police force and the Rhondda in the same week shortly after the events of that evening confirmed for many people that something was very much amiss in the local constabulary.

However, there are only two items of fact that can be confirmed for certain; the urinal still stands, and the police and locals were convinced that the Evans boys had had something to do with it all. There was nothing conclusive you understand but it was noted that from time to time over the next thirty years until his death, Caradoc Evans would, for no apparent reason, turn a peculiar shade of grey and kick his brother up the arse.

Ian Price