

HOOK and ARGENTINA

written by Alun Jones for the
Hook History Society Lockdown Series

(June 2020)

*Reproduced in Llangwm website "Bygone Days" collection
by kind permission of Hook History Society*

www.hookhistorysociety.org.uk

www.llangwm-pembrokeshire.org.uk

Article twelve in the Hook History Society Lockdown series

Respected Pembrokeshire journalist, the late Llewellyn Thomas made his home in Hook for over 50 years.....his uncle, Edgar Thomas was also a journalist but he had a wanderlust that took him across the world into an exciting life that would grace the of pages of a bestselling novel.

Here the story is told by Alun Jones, the son in law of Llewellyn Thomas, having married his daughter, Sue. Alun and Sue maintain a strong link with the family who made their fortune in the Argentine and enjoyed a life that the villagers of Hook and neighbouring Llangwm could only dream about.

Alun met his wife when they were both training as teachers and from that time the bond between the families has strengthened with reciprocal visits to Edgar's descendants home in Italy and a trip down memory lane in their father's native village of Llangwm during a holiday in Hook.

On his retirement 1997 Alun had been for sixteen years the headteacher of Grove Junior School, Pembroke and below he tells the incredible story.

Famous Poets, A Gift of a Bride, Wartime Hardships & Fortune seeking in South America

Well known Pembrokeshire journalist, the late Llewellyn Thomas, was born in Llangwm but spent the larger part of his life in Hook, residing in what is now The Old Post Office, where his wife was postmistress for more than 50 years. Llewellyn was a senior member of the once popular West Wales Guardian.

His uncle, too, was a newspaper man and it is around Edgar William Thomas that a fascinating story can be told.

Stranger than fiction in parts; incredulous in others but I can assure you every word is absolutely true.

Edgar Thomas was born in 1890, the second son of David and Elizabeth Thomas, in Pill Parks Way, Llangwm.

His mother was a real character known as Bessie Num. Although less than five foot in stature even the children gave her a wide berth.

Volunteered and wounded

Edgar went to the village school and surprisingly for a Llangwm boy he went to Haverfordwest Grammar School and was then awarded a place in the London School of Economics ..Having graduated he began his career in local journalism but on the outbreak of WW1 he volunteered and was quickly commissioned, towards the end of the war, however, he was wounded and honourably discharged.

Pictured is Edgar Thomas in his officers' uniform

If that wasn't excitement enough, he soon had itchy feet he emigrated to Buenos Aires in Argentina.

Shortly after he arrived, he met with two elderly brothers who ran a grain exporting business. He worked for them and when they retired, he inherited the business which he expanded and became extremely successful. He subsequently met his future wife....Terzitza Paton.

Story of Edgar's wife

Terzzitza (Tassie in the family) had a very interesting pedigree. Her great grandfather was Edward Trelawney, a great friend of Shelley and Byron. He was something of a rogue having been sent to sea by his father at a very early age. He was with Byron in Greece during a troubled period when in one of the hill villages, just before they left for Italy ,the Elder of the village concerned for the safety of his 13 year old daughter asked if they would take her to Italy. Trelawney did not speak Greek, so this was relayed to him by a friend. After the Elder's speech of gratitude off they went. They had been on the boat to Italy for more than a day when Byron asked why Trelawney was not paying much attention to his new wife!

Unknown to Trelawney the Elder had given him his daughter in marriage. The name of the girl was, of course Terzitza after whom our aunt (Edgar's wife) was named. Trelawney's first wife had died in rather mysterious circumstances and they had a daughter, Zella, who married, Jose Olguin, the first Argentinian to study medicine in the UK. After qualifying he returned to the Buenos Aires but volunteered his services at the outset of the Crimean war. During the whole time he spent in the Crimea he kept a daily diary which is still in the family today. It is a remarkable insight into the conditions under which he had to practice his life saving skills. It is beautifully written but as one can imagine now very fragile. I insist on wearing gloves when I read it.

Tassie and her sister were grandchildren of Olguin and Zella. The sister married a Brazilian shipping magnate and they were invited to the Onassis/Kennedy wedding. He decided he did not want to go....much to his wife's disgust.



Llangwm born Edgar and Tassie settled in Buenos Aires in an affluent area called Belgrano.....named after a former President and the Argentinian warship involved in the Falklands crisis immediately comes to mind.

Front seat for Mother

They had three children, David, Elizabeth and Jean. When they were quite young Edgar brought the whole family to Llangwm on an extended holiday and he had his cara large Dodge convertible transported with them.

His mother....the legendary Bessie Num... being very short of stature insisted on sitting in the front seat on a number of cushions, not so that she could see but so that she could be seen in this magnificent car!

His parents always hoped he would return permanently, and, in anticipation, they built a bungalow for them. It is there today with the name Belgrano in stained glass above the door.

Pictured are Edgar's parents, David and Elizabeth Thomas.....alias the diminutive Bessie Num!

In the Argentine Edgar and his wife lived in an affluent style. Edgar even owned an island in the river Plate. It had a commercial orchard and a resident farmer as well as their weekend retreat home.



Of the three children sadly, David died whilst working for a radio station in Guatemala, on his way to work he was knocked off his motor bike. Jean worked for the Canadian Embassy and was posted to Santiago in Chile where she married Pancho, a Chilean aristocrat and playboy. They married and had one daughter, Sofia, after whom our eldest granddaughter is named. Sadly, Jean died a few years ago.

Sofia lives in Santiago with her husband and two children. Edgar's other daughter, Elizabeth married an Italian, Al Borgatti, a trainee barrister who was commissioned in the Italian army and saw active service. When Mussolini conceded defeat in 1943 like many Italian soldiers Al found himself in German occupied territory. The option was fight for the Germans or be sent to a POW camp. Al refused to fight and as a consequence suffered appallingly in a prison camp in Poland.

After the war he like Edgar before him emigrated to South America where he met and married Elizabeth and together they had three daughters. Now a highly successful entrepreneur Al was never going to experience the dreadful cold of that fearful POW camp.....so he built a large bungalow in Montesilvano ,Abruzzo, where he had been brought up where the family enjoyed the northern hemisphere summer and then back to Montevideo for the southern summer.

Italian Honeymoon

The Hook connection is still very much alive. My wife, Sue and I first met them when we left college and spent part of our summer with them; two years later we honeymooned in Abruzzo and have visited most years since. Last year was our Golden Wedding and we hired a large house near Elizabeth, who at almost 89 has downsized to a flat and to make the occasion complete we were accompanied by our son Nick and his wife and two girls Rhian, Sofia and Olivia.

Picture: The bungalow in Llangwm with Belgrano still proudly emblazoned above the front door

Edgars family have also stayed with us in Hook and on one occasion Edgar's daughter Jean asked if she could walk alone through Main Street on her own just as her father and grandparents had all those years before.



Footnote:

In the article Alun tells us that Mrs Thomas aka Bessie Num was a fearsome lady who everyone was little nervous of. This assumption is borne out in Grenville Thomas' book....**SOME REMARKABLE PEOPLE OF HOOK AND LLANGWM.....**when he refers to the infamous Llangwm riots of November 1900.

Police were drafted into the village from many parts of the County and as a result 12 villagers were charged with unlawfully, riotously assembling to disturb the peace and make a riot and disturbance to the terror and alarm of Her Majesty's Subjects..

True to form one of the four women charged was Elizabeth Thomas of Cemetery Road, the mother of the main character in story.

ends