

Brynhyfryd, Llanblethian

An advertisement in the Cambrian newspaper in August 1839 stated:
“American Cottage – to be let or sold, with immediate possession, freehold beautiful romantic villa residence known as American Cottage. Five bedrooms, two parlours, hall, two kitchens, brewhouse, two-stall stable with hayloft, coachhouse, cowhouse with loft, and every convenience adapted to a house of this description; together with flower and kitchen gardens, shrubberies, etc. Apply JW Donne, Orange Street, Swansea.”

This was Brynhyfryd, built, according to local lore, by an American; the owner, John Donne, was one of a Vale farming family whose relations lived at that time in Great House, Llanblethian. It would seem that the stable and outbuildings today form the core of the house called Dulce Domum.

Donne was initially unsuccessful in his advertisement, because the Tithe Apportionment of 1840 records him as the owner of an unoccupied property.

In fact, we have to wait until the census of 1851 for the first recorded occupier. Charles T Rhys, an attorney, and son of the noted schoolmaster of the Eagle Academy, Cowbridge, Thomas Rhys, married Jennet Meazey of Cowbridge in 1850, and they are shown as living in the house in 1851, with their servant. Charles Rhys was cut out of several wills at this time – leading one to wonder whether there had been severe family displeasure at his marriage.

The Rhyses moved to Tresilian on the coast near Llantwit Major, and were succeeded by the next census by James Giro and his daughter, Lita, and two servants. Giro was a widower, born in Gibraltar, and had a private income; he soon fitted into Cowbridge and Llanblethian society. The young Revd FW Edmondson in his diary for 30th November 1867 records, for example, “Dined at Mr Giro’s – Lita’s birthday, 19. Gave her prayer and hymn book”, and in the following year...”to dinner at Brynhyfryd”. James Giro died aged 72 in 1870, leaving the property to his older daughter Sarah, who continued to let the property, probably on an annual tenancy.

Giro was followed in the house by the Revd M Vaughan, who did not stay there very long, for in 1880, David Jones of Wallington recorded in his diary that Giro’s house was empty. By 1881, Eliza Roach, a widow from Brecon, lived there with her three sons, two nieces and a servant; in 1891, Harold Bird, a highway surveyor from Neath, was there with his wife and son – but they soon moved on to live in St Quintin’s in the village. Harold Bird took over the ironmonger’s shop which had been run by his brother Nathaniel in Cowbridge, and started the expansion of the business (and as borough surveyor, got the refuse from the town to be dumped on Waun y Gaer – the field now occupied by the garden centre – to build up its level).

Llanblethian Buildings & People

1839, 3rd August American Cottage – to be let or sold, with immediate possession, freehold beautiful, romantic villa residence known as American Cottage. Five bedrooms, two parlours, hall, two kitchens, brewhouse, two-stall stable with hayloft, coachhouse, cowhouse with loft, and every convenience adapted to a

- house of this description, together with flower and kitchen gardens, shrubberies,
etc. *Cambrian newspaper*
- 1840 Owned by John Dunn – vacant *Tithe 244*
- 1850 C T Rees married Miss Maisey at Llanblethian *Cambrian*
Charles Thomas Rhys, attorney at law, of Cowbridge, son of Thomas Rhys gent.
married Jennett Meazey of Cowbridge, daughter of Jonathan Meazey.
Parish records
- 1851 C T Rhys, attorney *Census 33*
- 1852 Occupied by C T Rhys; owned by Mr W Lewis, house Heol Lan Ned, also known
as Crofta Mawr
Mr Morgans owned, house, American Cottage
Llanblethian rates GRO R13 2/5
- 1859 James Giro of Broadway near Cowbridge – on Llanmihangel road
Electoral register
Giro was recorded as of 15 Regent St. London in 1844, executor of the will of
Richard Bassett of Beaupre *Gwyn and Gwyn E/19*
- 1861 James Giro, fundholder, born Gibraltar, widower, with his daughter, a visitor
(Pauline Green, widow, born Copenhagen) and two servants -see notes below
Census 47
- 1865 -91 James Giro of Broadway, Cowbridge owned a tenement on
Llanmihangel road. *Electoral register*
- 1867, 25th April 'With Arthur Gilbertson to Brynhyfryd with Lita's umbrella'
30th November 'Dined at Mr Giro's. Lita's birthday, 19. Gave Lita prayer and
hymn book'. *FW Edmond's diary*
- 1868 'C (onstance) and Row lunched at Mr Giro's....to dinner at Brynhyfred'
FW Edmond's diary
- 1870, 11th March Death of James Giro aged 72 *Cambrian*
- 1871 (Anne Nurse, servant) *Census 49*
- 1874 Revd M Vaughan occupied; late Giro owned *Glam County Rate 53*
1874, 20th March Death of Sarah Angela Shackleton, wife of Revd T Shackleton and
daughter of James Giro *Cambrian*
- 1878 Revd. William Vaughan *Electoral register*

- 1880, 7th May 'Giro's house empty' *Diary of David Jones*
- 1881, 25th February Death at Brynhyfryd of Mr Thomas Roach aged 50 years
Glamorgan Gazette
- 1881 Eliza Roach, widow, with three sons, two nieces and a servant *Census 56*
- 1884 Mrs Roach, private resident *Kelly's directory*
- 1890 William Lougher of Llanblethian, land and tenement *Electoral register*
- 1891 Harold Bird, highway surveyor born Neath, with wife and son *Census 25*
- 1895 'Very severe-looking house, built some say by an American. Called at one time American Cottage. The house was occupied by Miss Jenkins, who remained for a short period and went to Tremain. Had been unoccupied for a long period'.
Llanblethian in 1895 by Robert Thomas
- 1906 Miss Morgan, Stratford *Kelly's*
- 1914 J B Wayman purchased Brynhyfryd from Miss Shackleton, Herne Bay
Gwyn and Gwyn records
(‘Death of Sarah Angela Shackleton, wife of Revd. T Shackleton and daughter of James Giro’
Cambrian 1874)
- 1943 Daughter born to Conrad and Mary Wales, Brynhyfryd
Llandough parish records

Notes on James Thomas Michael Giro, born Gibraltar 13th January 1798, son of John Giro.

In 1841 census he was 'a merchant' living in Lordship Lane, Brixton, with other merchants. He married Sarah Dowell in the parish of Highgate St Michael in 1847. She died in 1849 when giving birth to their daughter Sarah Alexandra Giro, and in the 1851 census, James and Sarah were in the Hornsey parish of London with three servants.

In 1861 in Brynhyfryd, James was a 'fund holder' aged 63, and Sarah, born Highgate, was 11. James died in March 1870, presumably in Llanblethian, and Sarah in the 1871 census was a 'visitor' in the parsonage at Llandough. She married Thomas Shackleton in Clifton, Bristol in 1873.

Sources/references :

GRO = Glamorgan Record Office, where most of the documents used for reference can be found

PRO = Public Record Office, Kew