

## Factory House, Llanblethian

Llanblethian's woollen factory was long celebrated for the production of cloth - 'flannel' used for shirts, dark blue serge, and suitings, black with thin white lines, and *brethyn llyyd*, a hard-wearing grey cloth. Much of this would be made up into clothes by the tailors of Cowbridge in the nineteenth century, but one inhabitant of the village still remembers ladies wearing tall black 'Welsh' hats - the cockle women of Penclawdd - coming to the factory to buy the black material with red stripes that they habitually wore. The factory, which contained two looms, was water-powered, and occupied the low building just across the stream from the house; it had ceased operation by 1913. The looms and millwheel are now at the museum of Rural Life at St Fagan's.

Use of the factory for weaving is only documented from the 1830s, and up to the middle of the century weaving was essentially a domestic industry, with a number of houses in the village containing weaving looms. 'Johnny the Weaver', the landlord of the King's Arms, now Belgrave House, and Robert Thomas of what is now known as The Old Bakehouse - he was a handloom weaver employing seven men - were the best-known of the domestic weavers in 1851.

Factory House, and the adjoining building, have however had a much longer association with the production of woollen cloth. There is mention of a tucking mill or fulling mill - tucking was a process of shrinking and hammering material to consolidate it, and needed water power to drive the hammers - in Llanblethian from the sixteenth century onwards. Though the earlier deeds - such as the 1570 Manorial survey which stated that 'Jankin William holds a fulling mill of Hugh Carne' - do not precisely locate the mill, from later references it would appear that the fulling mill occupied the site of today's Factory House.

By 1782, the 'felt mill' was part of the Llanmihangel Estate, leased to Edward Ballard of Cowbridge, but in 1804, the occupant was John Jenkin the younger of Llanblethian, tucker, who also had leased the croft mill, pound house and garden from Thomas Wyndham of Dunraven, as by then the Llanmihangel and Dunraven estates had combined.

The first named weaver here was William Price, also described as a woollen manufacturer. He was the son of another William Price, also a weaver, of Llantwit Major. The Llanblethian William probably had six children, including two pairs of twins; his daughter Margaret in 1838 married David Davies of Gelligaer, described on the marriage certificate as a musician, and known in South Wales as a celebrated harpist.

Price was followed in the factory by Thomas Evans, born in Llandaff. He was a weaver, employing one man, probably his lodger, Daniel Jones, a handloom weaver from Llysworney. Bradford James who was the occupant from 1869 on, employed four people; he was followed for a short time by Evan John, who manufactured 'all kinds of woollen goods, stocking yarns, etc', and then by David Jones, born in Llanfabon but who had moved to Llanblethian from Pentyrch.

The last of the woollen manufacturers were the Howells family. Charles Howells was born in Caerphilly, but had lived in Merthyr and Abercarn before settling in Llanblethian by 1885 with his Llantrithyd-born wife. Llanblethian Churchwardens' accounts show that charity monies were used to aid the apprenticeship of Tudor Howells, his son, in 1886, and Tudor was working with his father in the factory at the time of the 1891 census. After his father's death, we assume that Tudor continued as a weaver, as his mother lived on in the

house. It was she who entertained Princess Mary of Teck, who 'took tea in the garden' when on a tour of the Dunraven properties in South Wales.

Dunraven ownership ended in 1913 when the 'dwelling house (containing parlour, back kitchen, pantry with store room over, four bedrooms on first floor), woollen factory, stable for one horse, coach house, etc' was auctioned at the Bear Hotel in Cowbridge; the purchaser was William Jenkins of Llanblethian. From that date it has been a private house, though in the early years the Jenkinses had a sweetshop there.

*Llanblethian Buildings and People' – CRS publication 2001*

Miss Maude Gunter wrote in 1961 in 'The Garden of Wales':

*Possibly the oldest inhabited house (in Llanblethian) is the former woollen factory at the extreme western end of the village, on which Mr and Mrs Rhys Roberts have spent ten years in loving restoration, opening up a very solid medieval stone stairway, exposing the oaken rafters and establishing that the original building was a single storey, for the shoulder of the first roof is visible in the first floor. The detached building on the other side of the brook is (apart from its windows) almost as old as the main building where the wool was washed, carded and spun. It housed at least two looms. The mill pond was west of it, fed by a leat, now overgrown, parallel with the brook. The mill wheel and looms are now at St Fagan's. Even sixty years ago many of the older villagers wore the products of this factory both for underwear and outer garments, especially the 'brethyn llwyd' (grey cloth) so serviceable for country wear. The women spinners and the weavers lived in the village except in the final phase of its existence when it depended on itinerant weavers. Cloth and flannel were taken into Cowbridge and Bridgend on market days within living memory and among the customers were the cockle women of the Swansea area for whom a special black flannel with narrow scarlet stripes was woven. The factory ceased to function before the first World War.*

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THE WOOLLEN INDUSTRY OF LLANBLETHIAN (part II) by John LS Miles (Dec. 2005)

The Factory was part of the Earl of Dunraven's estates. Princess Mary of Teck while on a visit to Dunraven Castle visited the Factory and had a cup of tea with Mrs Howell while on a tour of the estate. It was sold by the Dunraven Estate to a Mr Jenkins in 1912.

When I wrote this article in 1975, there were three ladies who remembered the factory in production: Miss Mabel Morgan of Llanblethian, Miss Hopkins of Llanblethian and Miss Gunter of Cowbridge. Mr Carder who then lived in Cowbridge stated that his father-in-law

bought the Factory in 1912: we presume that he was Mr Carder's father-in-law.

Two looms were housed in the building across the brook. Both Miss Morgan and Miss Gunter remembered winding bobbins for the weavers. According to Miss Gunter there were two weavers and they came from north Wales. What has been classified as the 'cottage' section in the main building was one large room which housed two copper boilers. Here the yarn was dyed before it was woven. Miss Gunter remembered the yarn hanging outside to dry. According to Mr Carder there was a loft ladder leading upstairs where the fleeces were stored.

A variety of material was woven at the Factory. Apparently the weave was left to right which gave a diagonal effect. They made a very tough ginger-brown coloured tweed called Brethyn Lwyd which was used to make jackets and overcoats. There were several kinds of flannel, one being white with three thin black stripes and then a space. This was very fine. Another was a black flannel with fine red stripes. There was also a special sheeting flannel which was blue-grey in colour (Miss Hopkins still had some of this material which had been made into a hot-water bottle cover). The factory also produced blankets on a single loom, wide enough for a single bed. To fit a double bed, two were sewn together. When the double blankets were to be washed, they were unstitched to be easier to wash then re-stitched, sides to middle. The Factory also produced shawls, petticoats and aprons.

People in the village would buy material at the Factory and either make it up themselves or take it to one of the tailors in Cowbridge. The most popular tailor was said to be ST Evans of Cowbridge who employed seven men. Mr Carder remembered an overcoat that his father-in-law had had made. He wore it all his life and it never wore out. It was completely waterproof. On his death it was given to a cousin in Pencoed, to be used yet again.

Mrs Howells, the Factory owner, had a pony and trap and used to make a circular trip to Monknash, St Donats and Wick, getting orders for shirts. She would take the shirting flannel to the dressmakers in Llanblethian and they would make it up. They had proper cuffs and a collar and there were three buttons in the front to open it. The wealthier people had pearl buttons while the farmworkers had cloth-covered buttons.

Mrs Howells also used to take bolts of material to Bridgend market and the cockle women of Penclawdd used to buy the flannel to make short flannel petticoats, shawls and flannel aprons. In the early twentieth century the stress was on durability rather than attractiveness.

No-one is quite sure when the factory actually ceased production. Mr Carder said that it was about 1908 but due to the fact that Mrs Howells had stock-piled material, she went on selling it until she died in 1912.

All these people verified the fact that the Factory Brook was diverted to operate a water-wheel and this water was then diverted back into the brook. The looms lay idle in what was called the 'longhouse' for some time and eventually bits and pieces were used for firewood and other pieces were disposed of.

The Factory probably had to run down because it could not compete with the prices and

variety of cloth produced by the factories of Yorkshire. It had obviously played an important role in the history of the parish, as the local farmers would bring their fleeces to the mill where they were spun into yarn and woven into cloth for the rural community. This cloth could then be made into garments by the wives, dressmakers or tailors of Llanblethian parish and Cowbridge. *John LS Miles*

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1570 Jenkin William holds one fulling mill, from Hugh Carne  
*Manorial survey, Bute SI-2*

1637 Grant of a cottage in Llanblethian, with lands of William Philip, tucker, on west, the river leading from the tucking mill to little mill on the south  
*D/D 805 Coleman deeds (National Library of Wales)*

1782 Part of a tenement described as 'house, garden, felt mill and croft', rented from Charles Edwin by Edward Ballard and son.  
*Map of Llanmihangel estate*

1791 Sale of a close, with high road from tucking mill to church on the south, east and north  
*D/D Xg 31*

1804 Thomas Wyndham to John Jenkin the elder of Llancarfan, farmer, and John Jenkins the younger of Llanblethian, tucker – lease of the tucking mill at Llanblethian for 18 years, at a rent of £8 p a. Lately held by Edward Ballard, and now in the occupation of John Jenkins (younger), and the croft, mill, pound house and garden thereto.  
*Dunraven deeds 27*

1823 Lease as above – Windham Henry Wyndham Quin, Viscount Adare, to John Jenkins  
*Dunraven 27*

1828 Deaths at 4 months of Rebecca and Rachel Price of Llanblethian, daughters of William and Mary Price  
*Church records*

1835 William Price, woollen cloth manufacturer, the Factory  
*Pigot's Directory*

1837, 17<sup>th</sup> September Death of William Price aged 24  
*Church records*

1838 Margaret Price of Llanblethian, daughter of William Price, wool manufacturer, married David Davies, musician of Gelligaer, son of David Davies, musician  
*Llanblethian parish records*

1840 Earl of Dunraven owned; Thomas Evans occupied - Llanblethian rates  
*R 13 2/5*

- 1851 Thomas Evans aged 26, weaver employing one man, b Llandaff, with his mother (widowed) Jane, 66, housekeeper b Llandovery, Daniel Jones (24) handloom weaver and Selina Jones (7) general servant *Census*
- 1854 Jane Evans of the Factory dies aged 69 *Parish records*
- 1855/6 Llewellyn and Thomas William Evans, sons of woollen manufacturer, baptised *Parish records*
- 1858 Jane Evans baptised *Parish records*
- 1861 Thomas William Evans, 36, master weaver, born Llandaff  
Mary Evans, wife, 38, born Llanblethian  
Llewellyn Evans, 6,  
William Evans, 4,  
Jane Evans, 2 all born Llanblethian  
and Catherine Thomas, servant, 12, born Boverton *Census*
- 1869 Bradford James, the factory - rateable value £12 *Register of Electors*
- 1871 Bradford James, 45, woollen manufacturer employing 2 men, 1 boy and 1 female, with wife Cecilian James, 42, born Coity, and Ann Rees, mother in law, 85, born Ynysawdre *Census*
- 1874 Bradford James occupied, Earl of Dunraven owned *Glamorgan County rate 36*
- 1874 Marriage in Llanblethian of Evan John, 22, flannel manufacturer, son of Evan John, labourer, to Elizabeth Morgan of Llanblethian, daughter of Thomas Morgan, labourer *Llanblethian parish records*
- 1875 Evan John, flannel manufacturer and all kinds of woollen goods, stocking yarns etc. *Worrall's directory*
- 1881 David Jones, 31, woollen manufacturer, born Llanvabon, with wife Ann, born Pentyrch, and daughters Sarah (5), born Pentyrch, and Mary (1), and son William (3), these last two born in Llanblethian;  
also, a visitor Jane Evans (5), and apprentice woollen weavers John Neilby, 17, and David Williams, 19, both born Cardiff. *Census*
- 1885 Charles Howells, the Factory – rateable value of £12+ *Register of Electors*
- 1886 Charity – to apprenticing of Tudor Howell, son of Charles Howell of the Factory *Churchwardens' accounts*

- 1891 Charles Howells, woollen manufacturer, born Caerphilly,  
wife Jane, 49, born Llantrithyd  
son Tudor Howells, 21, weaver, born Caerphilly  
son Charles Howells, 15, born Merthyr  
son Taliesin Howells, 10, born Abercarn  
daughter Annie Howells, 0, born Llanblethian *Census*
- 1895 Jane Howells, widow *'Boyhood Walk Through Llanblethian 1895'*
- 1906 Jane Howells, widow *Kelly's Directory*
- Visit of Princess Mary of Teck (later Queen Mary) – took tea in the garden
- 1913 Dunraven estate sale at Bear Hotel of a 'dwelling house and woollen factory and buildings and premises'.  
The dwelling house contained a parlour, back kitchen, pantry with store room over, and 4 bedrooms on the first floor.  
The buildings included a stable for one horse, a coach house, the woollen factory.  
Sold to William Jenkins of Llanblethian for £250 *D/D SA 8/22*
- (William Jenkins had married Margaret Elward of Llantrithyd *Graham Phillips*)
- Pigs kept at back of Factory in 1920s; possibly a sweet shop 1940s *Local comments*
- 1945 Owner, Mr Rhys Roberts, barrister, who had a red Rolls Royce. He built on the wing to the east end. *Local knowledge*
- 1975 (ca) Sold to Mr and Mrs Ceri Davies
- Mrs June Phillips, Broadway, has samples of material from the factory  
– two kinds of shirtings ('flannel', bluey grey with lines), one serge (dark blue/black), one suiting (black with thin white lines)
- Current owner – John Newark (from 1980) - extended west wing.

***Sources/references :***

*Most of the documents & deeds sourced can be found in Glamorgan Record Office or the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth*