

Factory Road, 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 llwyd*, 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 Jenkinsons had a sweetshop there.

The first house on the right along Factory road has been known as *Curland* or the *Old Post Office*. In 1840 this was one of a number of properties owned by Thomas Bassett, and was occupied by David Richards, who in the 1851 census was described as a 63-year-old farmer of 26 acres, employing one man. Two daughters, two sons, (all unmarried) and two grandchildren lived with him in the cottage. By 1861 he had increased the size of his farm to 80 acres, and his family to seven, mainly different ones from the previous census!

Bennett Edwards was recorded in the house in 1874 and in 1880; he too was a farmer, born in Cowbridge, who moved in 1881 to *Porth y Green*, at the top of Constitution Hill. It is not certain who lived in *Curland* between 1881 and 1895; but from that date to at least 1910 the occupant was Henry Williams.

Westbury, opposite, had been a barn for many years but was converted towards the end of the nineteenth century into a cottage. Thomas Williams, who owned *Curland*, also owned *Westbury*; the occupant at the end of the century being David Williams.

Greystones is one of the properties which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was used for weaving.

When David William, weaver of Llanblethian, died in 1701, the inventory of his goods suggested that he was not a wealthy man. The total value of his possessions was only £13. 2s. 6d - but this did include three weaver's looms, so he probably employed some other weavers in his cottage, which was placed conveniently close to the fulling mill where the woven cloth could be treated. David William also owned two houses, one of which was built on the site of *Greystones*. He bequeathed to his 'son, Edward David and his heirs for ever' the cottage and the croft (or plot of land) opposite - and this pairing of a cottage and 1 ¾ acres of pasture crops up continuously in subsequent records.

By 1767, the property was described as being 'late of Ann David' - probably Edward's widow - but it was by then owned by William Thomas, a land agent who seemed to be accumulating property in the village. It passed by inheritance, via Mary Jones, to Evan David of Fairwater, Cardiff, and it then stayed in the possession of the David family throughout the nineteenth century.

John Jenkins was the occupier in 1840 of the 'dwelling house, barn and garden', with the narrow strip of field opposite - no mention of weaving now - and in 1851 he was described as a farmer of 17 acres, born in Llanblethian, with his Cowbridge-born wife Ann and four daughters.

One of these daughters, Gwenllian, married William Edmunds, a farmer from Llantrisant, and it is they who are shown in the house in 1861, having moved in soon after the death of her father in 1857.

Gwenllian died in 1868, and by 1871 Thomas Jenkins, a maltster, lived in *Greystones*. He had moved in from the house-next-door, now known as *Maltster's Cottage*, where his parents continued to live. It is likely that Jenkins worked in the malthouse which had recently been built; he also farmed ten acres, including the field across the road.

Thomas and his wife Catherine, from Bettws, near Bridgend, brought up their family of five children in *Greystones*. Their barn was sold and converted into the house now called *Westbury* towards the end of the nineteenth century. This was occupied by David and Polly Williams who were still neighbours of the Jenkinsons in 1910.

The tall, three-storey malthouse dominates photographs of Factory Road at the end of the nineteenth century. It had been built around 1870 for William Thomas, who had been the miller at Town Mill and who moved to Hill House, Llanblethian. The malthouse dwarfed *Maltster's Cottage*, where the inhabitants from at least 1840 to 1871 were John and Ann Jenkins - confusingly, the same names as the inhabitants of *Greystones*. Ann however, had been

born in Llanblethian. She is recorded as living on in the house, after her husband's death, until at least 1891; her brother, Richard Morgan, lived with her as he had done since 1851.

Windsor House is an early twentieth century building, erected by Edward Llewellyn

At various times in the past, up to three cottages existed on the site of ***Leys Cottage***, but in the mid-eighteenth century, it was one cottage, leased to Jenkin Butler by the Carnes of Nash Manor. After Jenkin's death, his widow Catherine continued living here, but from 1798 to 1807, the Butler lease having expired, a fresh lease was granted to William Bowen.

Bowen was replaced as tenant by William Hardee, who appears (with some variations in the spelling of his name) to have lived on in the house until the mid-nineteenth century. Certainly, the Tithe Apportionment of 1840 records William Hardee in the house, and in the Churchwardens' accounts of 1851, William Hardee is one of the 'industrious poor' of the parish. However, the census of that year records his name as William Hardin, a 88-year-old coal-carrier, born in Newton Nottage, with his wife Catherine, aged 55, and son Thomas aged 14.

The Cambrian newspaper records the death of William Harding aged 93 in 1854 (presumably the same man, despite the slight discrepancy in age) and by 1861 William's widow Catherine, described as a nurse, who had been born in Llantwit Major, lived in what then was one of three cottages on the site. Gwennlian Roberts, a widow born in Llantrisant, and James Braddick, a coachman from Stockland in Devon, and who subsequently moved to *The Firs* near the Mill, were the other occupants.

By this time the annual Llanblethian pleasure fair had ceased to exist on the land near the Church and Cross, but a modified version continued as Kitty Harding's fair, held in her cottage. EW Miles of Cowbridge wrote "I remember being taken to her Fair by a nurse from the village on one occasion. Her cottage had a capacious hearth, with stone seats on each side under the chimney which were appropriated by the older boys, while cracking jokes and nuts, and consuming the small but primitive luxuries sold at the table at the side of the room."

After Catherine's death it is difficult to work out occupancy of the cottages, though it is likely that one was occupied by William Jenkins, a farm bailiff from Colwinston, and his family. Ownership changed from the Carnes to the Revd JCF Morson, headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School, and then to Edward Llewellyn who also bought the adjoining property, where he built *Windsor House*.

In 1891, the three cottages were occupied by the Barbers, Thomases and Boobyers. Mr Barber, who worked at Marlborough Grange, was away at the time of the census; his wife was described as a charwoman. The children had been born in Cirencester and Llanfair Discoed, Mon, so the family had certainly moved about the country. The son, though completely crippled, could play the piano with his feet! The middle cottage was lived in by Isaac Thomas, a carpenter who had been born in the Bakehouse in Llanblethian (and one of whose sons was Robert who started the Cowbridge building firm which still exists). The Boobyers lived in the end cottage on the right. Aaron came from Stoke St Gregory in Somerset, Harriet from Pendoylan; she kept a sweet shop.

By 1910, all had again changed; the three occupiers were then John Harding, Fred Bryant and Thomas Jenkins. In the twentieth century, Viv Whythe's parents bought two cottages and converted them into one, despite the different floor levels; the Georges moved into the third, and then bought the others to make one cottage.

Belgrave House was earlier known as the *King's Head* public house. The earliest record we have of the occupancy of the *King's Head* is the 1840 Tithe Map when John Thomas is recorded as owner and occupier. In the 1851 Census John Thomas, Publican & Weaver, who came from the Swansea area, was recorded as Head of the household, aged 72. His wife,

Margaret, was also 72 years of age. Their grandson, Thomas Jones, scholar, aged 11, was the only other occupant.

John Thomas was the famous Sion-y-Gwaith - John the Weaver, who helped to make the *King's Head* the village ale house. To quote David Jones of Wallington, "Sion-y-Gwaith" is quite a household word at Llanblethian and popular enough to have conferred his name upon the little "public" instead of the name the sign bears. If you wanted this house you may ask twenty people in the village for its whereabouts and not one of them at first thought could tell you anything of the *King's Head*, but ask for John the Weaver's and the youngest child could tell you".

The *King's Head* and the *Picton* (the public house near the Church) held a contest every year to ascertain who had the best tap, particularly at the Mabsant (Dancing Festival) held after the St Mary Hill Fair on August 26th when an extra bushel of malt would be added to the ale. According to David Jones "the Welshman is a dancing animal" and a riotous evening ensued.

John Thomas had three daughters, Ann, Sarah and Catherine. Ann had married James Kitt, a carpenter from Pinhoe in Devon, and though John Thomas still lived in the house, it is James who was regarded as the head of the household in 1861. John Thomas died intestate in 1866 and James and Ann Kitt took over the property without reference to the two other sisters. Legal wrangling ensued until 1881 when the property was sold to Thomas Jones of Llanblethian, rural postman, who lived in *Ar y Mynydd* near Piccadilly.

David Jones's diary for 7th May, 1880 stated "John the Weaver's old house all in ruins, and grass growing over the stones"; perhaps something of an over-statement, because the 1881 Census records the Kitts as still living there. A new house, in typically solid late-Victorian style was erected on the site in the 1880s. In 1889, Thomas Jones sold the property to "David Williams of Aberthun, Gent".

In the Census of 1891, the house, now *Belgrave House*, is quoted as having as head Elizabeth Williams, aged 72, a lady of means, born in Llantrithyd. (She was David Williams's widow). In 1891, the eastern triangular part of the garden was purchased from G W Nicholl of Llanblethian House. Sadly Eliza Williams died in July 1893, from injuries sustained when she was thrown out of her carriage; an inquest was held in Great House, Llanblethian.

The next tenant was William Thomas, a carrier of goods from the railway at Cowbridge, followed by John Williams John. The property was bought in 1898 by Edward Llewellyn, a carpenter of Wenvoe, probably the same Llewellyn whose mother had been evicted from Rose Cottage near the church in 1880, and who went on to build Windsor House. The Llewellyns lived in *Belgrave* for some years in the early twentieth century.

Llanblethian Buildings & People, CRS 2001

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There were weaving activities in Llanblethian from the fourteenth century. In 1655, there was evidence of a fulling mill. In 1851, there were in Llanblethian nine dressmakers, one sempstress, one dressmaker's apprentice, three tailors' journeymen and four weavers (also many tailors in Cowbridge making clothes from Llanblethian cloth).

The factory was powered by a waterwheel. In the nineteenth century, it was part of the Dunraven estate. Queen Mary (then a princess) visited the estate and was entertained to tea at the Factory House.

Mrs Howells was the last to weave there. She died in 1912 and had stopped weaving a few years before. There were two looms, in a small single storey building.

The factory made : material for jackets (ginger weave)

shirtings

blankets

flannel

men's drawers, tied below the knee – white with thin black stripes

like skirt material.

(Mr Adams said that in 1920 for £6 he had three suits, two shirts with collars, two pairs of shoes, a bowler hat and ties.)

In the house is a medieval stone stairway.

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Alderman Robert Thomas built the houses either side of Factory Road (towards the ford) in the 1930s-40s

Information from Billy James

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FACTORY ROAD LLANBLETHIAN 1841

From the tithe map south of the Factory Brook

At the west end

220 House / garden owned by Dunraven Estate and occupied by William Price

222 A croft/ pasture owned by Rev Evan Jones and occupied by Gervas Turberville

Along the N. side from W to E

218 A croft/ pasture /building owned by Thos Bassett and occupied by Richard Rees

217 House/garden Owned by Edward David & occ by John Jenkins

216 Cott/garden owned by Thos Bassett, occ by John Jenkins and Thos Jenkins

192 Garden owned by Eleanor Markham (Carne family), occ. by Thos Jenkins

215 Cott/garden owned by Eleanor Markham, occ by Wm Hardee

214 Inn/garden owned by John Thomas, occ by John Thomas

Along the S. side from W to E

223 Croft/pasture owned by Thos Bassett, occ by Richard Rees

224 Croft/garden owned by Thos Bassett, occ by David Richards

234 Acre meadow owned by Edward David, occ by John Jenkins

225 Garden owned by Thos Bassett, occ by Thos James

232 Cott/garden owned by James Taylor, occ by John Williams

226 Croft owned by Edward David, occ by John Jenkins

228 House/garden owned by Edward Nicholls and occ by David Williams.

244 House/garden Owned by John Dunn and unoccupied