

CROSSWAYS, Llanblethian

The family featured in the photographs published in the Gem of June 11th 2009 is that of Sir William James Thomas JP, colliery proprietor of Ynyshir, Rhondda. He bought Crossways in 1907 and sold it in 1917, and the photos are dated about 1910

.Crossways is a large house on the back road from Llanblethian village to Llysworney, with the appearance of being built around 1900. Parts date back to Tudor times, however, with the first found document naming it 'Crossways' dated 1700. It was owned at that time by the Deeres, a family of Vale landowners, then passed in 1787 to the Revd Henry Jones of Penmark.

It was farmed by a number of tenants, including, from 1822 to 1853 by members of the Entwisle family who had settled in and around Llanblethian from Rochdale, Lancashire. There was a very productive fruit garden then ... "a dozen and a half fine peaches...upwards of a thousand taken off green from the trees" (to quote a Llanblethian resident at the time). By 1859, the Revd WH Beever farmed there. He was headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School, but also an expert on Shorthorns. He lived at the school, so had one of his workers living in the house.

By 1881, Crossways was owned and occupied by Ralph Thurston Bassett and his family, a wealthy farmer and land agent who employed a governess for his two daughters, and also seven servants. He was a JP, Master of Foxhounds and responsible for the house's reconstruction. There were two owners after his death (including William Thomas featured in the photographs) before the house was bought in 1917 by Owen Williams, a shipowner from the Lleyn peninsula. Owen and his brother had founded the Silurian Steamship Company in Cardiff and then the Golden Cross Line to run Mediterranean liner services and tramp services to Argentina. In 1917, Owen Williams, aged 55, married 17 year old Margaret Thomas, the daughter of a Pontypridd mining engineer, and spared no expense on the house or his young bride. Crossways was lavishly decorated, furnished and also extended, but by 1924, Owen Williams's fortune evaporated; his wife left him for an Indian nobleman (cricketer Ranjitsinji) and the Crossways estate was sold off.

In 1930, the house became a convalescent annexe for the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital, with many long-stay children there having schooling. Some of the former nursing staff, and patients, still live in the Cowbridge area today. Crossways was re-established as a private residence in 1964, and has since been converted into apartments, with part of the house run as a country guest house.

Betty Alden

Cowbridge Local History Room - 23/6/09

Telephone discussion with Mr Chris Doble of the Barry Philatelic Society :

He had bought this set of postcards a few weeks ago in Neath from a Mrs Maud Thomas of Ynyshir, who said they were from a great aunt of hers. He is keeping the set until he can either sell them or swap them with someone offering Barry-related pictures.

He identified the car as dated 1910, and we have concluded that the photographs are of Mr (Sir) William James Thomas and family (colliery proprietor of Ynyshir) who bought Crossways in 1907 and sold it to Owen Williams in 1917.

Betty Alden, June 2009