

## Birch Cottage



*Birch Cottage in 2023.*



*John Evans' map of North Wales, drawn in 1795. Birch Cottage (then known as Fron) is highlighted in red.*

Birch Cottage appeared again on an Ordnance Survey map of the area from 1835, although again it wasn't named.

*The 1835 Ordnance Survey map.  
© The British Library Board.*

It is difficult to discover much about the very early history of Birch Cottage as it does not appear to have belonged to any of the large estates, and so, unlike many other properties in the area, there are no rental records. The earliest appearance of the building was on John Evans' map of North Wales, where Birch Cottage, along with Tan y Fron Farm, Tŷ Isa and Hendre, was marked – although not named.



At the start of the 19th century Birch Cottage went by the name Fron. Local knowledge records that in 1820 the Sunday School was held here, before moving to Eglwyseg Mill and later Nant Tŷ Du. The first definitive record that we have about who lived there comes from the 1841 Census, which noted that thirty year old labourer Robert Evans was living at Vron with his wife Catherine, also 30, and sons William, Edward and John.

The 1844 tithe survey showed Robert Evans as still living at Vron, with the property being owned by a John Williams. However, by 1851, Robert and his family had moved out, to be replaced by another Robert – 45 year old labourer Robert Davies. He lived at Vron with his wife, Susannah (44) and 10 year old daughter Margaret. Robert and Susannah did not stay long. At some time in the next ten years they moved to Post Office Terrace in Pentredŵr, and Robert was working as a stone cutter.



*The tithe map of 1844. Birch Cottage is number 275, along with the field number 274. Courtesy The National Library of Wales.*

By 1861 the property had been given the slightly more grandiose name of Fron House.

Unfortunately the page of the Census with that entry on has not survived, and so we do not know who was living there then, although by 1871 Vron House was occupied by quarryman Edward Evans (41), his wife Elizabeth Evans (41), sons Edwin (16), William (13), Robert (4) and Thomas (1) and daughter Anne (8), as well as gardener John Williams, a lodger! Edwin and William were also both quarrymen. The family stayed at the house for over ten years, and Edward and Elizabeth had another daughter, Elizabeth, during their time there.

Vron was not listed in the 1887 rates book for Eglwyseg, neither was there an entry for the house in the 1891 Census, and so it would seem very likely that it was empty for a number of years around that time.

However, around the turn of the century, Rowland and Margaret Morris moved into Fron. Until 1888, Rowland had lived with his parents Peter and Jane, and his six siblings, at Castell in Llandynan. However, in that year he married Margaret Ann Williams from Pentredŵr, and the newly weds set up home in Post Office Terrace. It seems that Rowland Morris may have run the Britannia Inn for a while, as in 1896, he was noted as 'keeping' the Britannia when two men were charged for drinking there on a Sunday. Shortly after, he and Margaret moved across the valley to what had become Vron Cottage.

1858. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Llantysilio in the County of Denbigh								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
212	May 19 <sup>th</sup>	Rowland Morris	24	Bachelor	Quarryman	Cestell	Peter Morris	Quarryman
		Margaret Ann Williams	20	Spinster	—	Pen-y-bwrdd	David Williams	Quarryman
Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church of the County of Denbigh, by me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us		Rowland Morris		Margaret Ann Williams		Ewan Jones		J. L. Jones, Vicar
						in the Presence of us,		The Parson of Llantysilio

*Rowland and Margaret Ann's marriage at Llantysilio Church in 1888.*

Rowland was a quarryman and enjoyed using his work skills away from the quarry, winning the slate splitting competition at the Llangollen Agricultural Show in 1905 and 1908. In 1905 Rowland and Ann had a daughter Jane, known as Jennie. Very sadly Jennie died at the tender

carried off first prizes were splendid specimens. In the slate-splitting competition, always one of the most interesting departments in a district like Llangollen, Rowland Morris (Eglwyseg) was first and Robert Pritchard (Glyadyfrdwy) second. The

age of 14 months. Although it doesn't appear that Rowland and Ann had any more children, they did stay living at the house that they now renamed Birch Cottage.

*Rowland Morris won the slate splitting competition at the Llangollen Agricultural Show in 1905.*

*Llangollen Advertiser, 15th September 1905.*

The new name for the cottage was almost certainly taken from the local term for the lower slopes of the hill, Fron Fawr, on which Birch Cottage stands. It was then, and still is today, known as The Birches, after the predominant tree type that grows there. Almost exactly ten years after the death of his daughter, Rowland also died, aged just 52 years. On the gravestone in Llantysilio churchyard it says that he was from Llantysilio, but on the burial record it notes that his 'abode' was Rhosddu, so possibly they had moved away shortly before. Margaret lived to the ripe old age of 84, passing away in 1949 at Croes Newydd Hospital in Wrexham. She was buried with Rowland and Jennie at Llantysilio.



*The Morris family grave in Llantysilio churchyard.*

After the Morrises moved out of Birch Cottage it became the home of Margaret Dickinson and her two teenage children Lizzie and Fred. Margaret was noted as being head of the household, although recorded as still married not widowed. Originally Margaret and her husband John had lived in Ffynngroyw in Flintshire, where John was a butcher. Whether John had died or was living at Birch Cottage with his family, but was away on the night of the 1921 Census, it has not been possible to discover.



*Birch Cottage (top right) in the snow in the 1930s. In the field below can be seen Tŷ Isaf (bottom left) which has now totally vanished.*

By 1939 Birch Cottage had become the home of Frederick Wormington, a tea agent and tobacconist. Frederick Edmund Wormington had been born in Liverpool in 1876, son of Edmund and Caroline Wormington. He had been a postman in Liverpool, living with his parents and siblings in the Fairfield area, before moving to Birch Cottage in his fifties, possibly following the death of his father in 1929.

do	do	21/3	do	55	4	30/10/39	Wormington, Fredrick E	M	26/9	19	S	Upward Domestic Duties
do	do	do	do	55	5	30/10/39	Wormington, Fredrick E	M	26/9	19	S	Upward Domestic Duties
Birch Cottage, Eglwysedog												Tea Agent & Tobacconist
V. Holly Cottage, Eglwysedog												
V. Hill Ct. Farm, Eglwysedog												
V. Heade, Eglwysedog												
Abbey Cottage, Eglwysedog				60			Wormington, Harry	M	21/11	19	M	Blacksmith in Buckley (H.W.)
do	do						Wormington, Daisy	F	20/2/39	19	M	Upward Domestic Duties
do	do	21/11/41					KIRTON	F	21/11/41	21	S	Shop Assistant

*The 1939 electoral roll shows tea agent and tobacconist Frederick Wormington living at Birch Cottage.*

During the Second World War, Birch Cottage operated as a café, although whether that was operated by Frederick, who died at Croesnewydd Hospital (later to become part of the Wrexham Maelor Hospital) in 1942, or by his successor at Birch Cottage, is not known.

Older neighbours remember a Mr and Mrs Grant living at Birch Cottage after the Second World War, along with their son Michael and a Mrs Hollier. Mr Grant had a hardware shop on the corner of Wharf Hill and Mill Street, where the taxidermist is today (2023). Following the Grants was a lady, a dressmaker, who had previously lived in the old wooden hunting lodge in Eglwysedog.



In the early 1960s, Birch Cottage became the home of Bill and Nora Fairclough. Both from Liverpool, Bill and Nora had been married in 1941, and had moved to the peacefulness of Eglwyseg to enjoy their retirement. Nora became a stalwart of the Women's Institute, initially being vice President of the Pentredŵr WI, then President in the 1970s and then the WI County Chairman in the 1990s. She was also the Chair of the League of Friends of the Agnes Hunt and Robert Jones Memorial Hospital in Gobowen. Bill died in 1987 and Nora moved down into Llangollen, into a house on Green Lanes. Sadly she too died in 1991, although she remained active at the heart of the WI right up until the end.



*Nora Fairclough*

**WI screens a down to earth display**



*Nora Fairclough (right), along with Freda Crawford, Llangollen WI Eisteddfod tent chairman, inspecting the WI environmental display at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod in July 1990.*

Bill and Nora made a number of changes to Birch Cottage during their time living there. In the 1960s they added a larger, slightly bowed window to one ground floor room, as well as adding a small porch to the door facing out across the valley. Then, in the 1970s, a lean to conservatory was added to the south side, and later a lean to kitchen on the north side of the house.



*Birch Cottage in (L-R) 1961, the 1970s and 1988, showing some of the improvements to the house.*

After the Faircloughs left, Bill and Pauline Walton moved into Birch Cottage with their two young children. Unfortunately, it being the time of Margaret Thatcher's financial disasters, the mortgage rates went sky high and the family quietly moved out; did a flit as they used to say. The house was left empty, and ownership transferred to the bank. The Walton's cats wandered to the farm next door and were looked after until they died.

Having moved from Flintshire, one of the present (2023) owners, Ruth, bought Birch Cottage from the bank on 17th June 1993. There had been leaks in the house and so she did not actually move in with her partner until October 1993, whereupon the outside pipes that brought water from the well into the house froze! An interesting welcome from Birch Cottage.

Ruth and her partner lived in just three rooms while Ruth renovated the rest of the house, removing some of the earlier 'improvements' and revealing the 18th and 19th century features of the house. For example a huge fireplace was found behind the oak beam that had been bricked up at some point. A bread oven was uncovered at the same time. Quarry tiles were discovered under layers of carpet and lovely old pine floorboards appeared under dark varnish in the three bedrooms.

In the late 1990s an Australian walker came to the gate. He had lived at the cottage as an evacuee in World War Two. He remembered that the garage was then the pigsty - the walls are still there under the rendering, encased with breeze blocks. He also remembered there being an open fire in what is now the dining room.

At the very end of 1999 Ruth's partner moved out and, to Ruth's great joy, her sister Chris, moved in with her. They continue to tend some of Nora Fairclough's plants in the garden and marvel at how Bill Fairclough cut the terraces out of the hillside that form the area around the house.

The well at the side of the house, which was the water supply, always dried up around June and so a concrete water tank had been built, perhaps by the Faircloughs. This supplied the occupants through the warm months until the days cooled and the rains became more regular. Due to global warming the well began to dry up from February, so the sisters applied for a grant from the council (those were the days) and a borehole was dug on the drive. The hole went down to more than 200 feet before hitting water. The 'whoosh' could be heard across the valley, as could the cheers of Chris and Ruth who now had a secure water supply.

Ruth and Chris now (2023) own Birch Cottage outright. Ruth celebrated 30 years of working on, and living in, Birch Cottage on 17th June 2023.

*By Ruth and Chris Moore Williams and David Crane.*