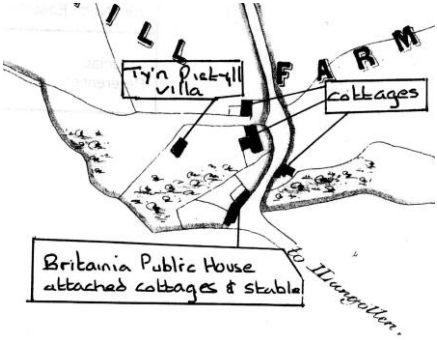
The Britannia Inn

The Britannia Inn in 2023.

The Britannia Inn reputedly dates back to the time before the dissolution of Valle Crucis Abbey and is thought to have been where the monks brewed ale and baked bread, which they sold to weary travellers. This continued even after the dissolution of Valle Crucis in 1536. A beam in the bar has been dated to the 14th century, although no other part of the existing building dates back this far. The Britannia Inn itself was once a much smaller inn adjacent to two cottages, which together were part of the Tŷ'n y Pistyll Estate.

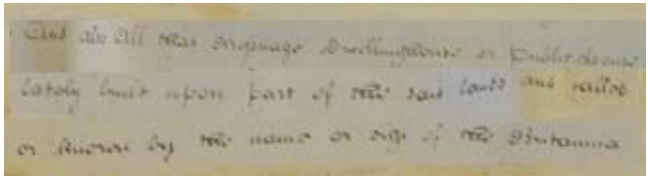
It first appears in printed records on a map of 1835, produced by the Ordnance Survey, which shows the first Tŷ'n y Pistyll and the Britannia Inn, along with the adjacent cottages. The present owners of the Britannia do, however, have a lithographic print of the Inn with a date written onto it, attributing the picture to 1820.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1835 with the Britannia Inn highlighted in blue.
© The British Library Board.



A plan from around 1869.

In 1837 there was a conveyance of Tŷ'n y Pistyll. In that sale the estate is sold to John Crow in trust for Robert Crow. Robert's wife Ann Maria was the daughter of John Roberts who had died a year earlier and had left the Tŷ'n y Pistyll Estate, including the Britannia Inn, to be divided equally amongst his five children (see Tŷ'n y Pistyll). The 1837 sale, therefore, shows Robert and Ann Maria Crow buying out her siblings, using money from his father John Crow. Robert and Ann Maria rented out the main house and the cottages, but decided to live in and run the Britannia Inn themselves, taking over from Ann Maria's sister and brother in law Roger and Susannah Jones, who had previously been the innkeepers.



The sections of the 1837 conveyance describing the Britannia. Courtesy North East Wales Archives, D/BC/5546.

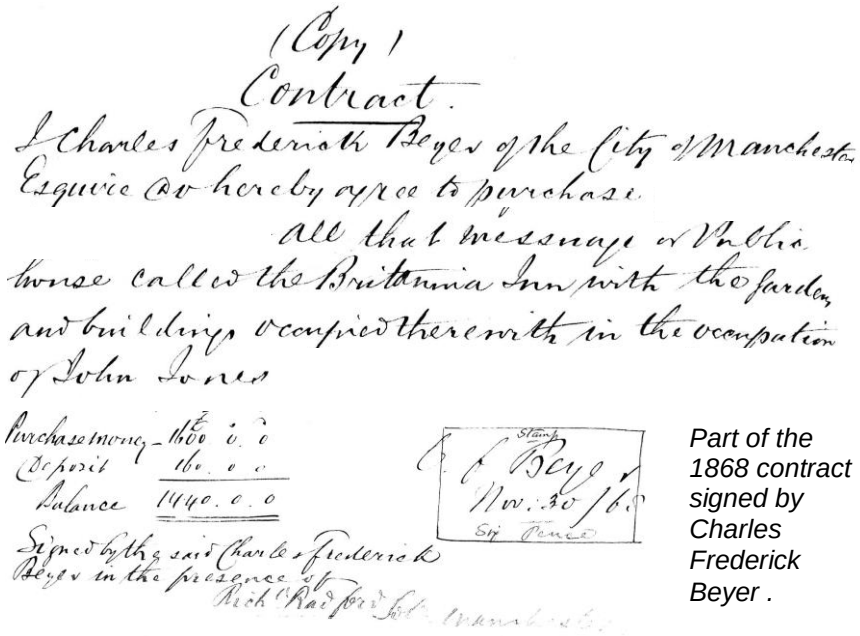
In the 1837 conveyance the description of the Inn was 'all that messuage, dwelling house or public house lately built upon part of the lands, and called or known by the name or sign of the Britannia'. The document also describes 'the stable (lately a cottage) and other outbuildings belonging thereto and two adjoining cottages'. In the 1841 Census, 45 year old Robert was noted as the publican, living at the Britannia with Maria (40), their twins Susannah and Robert (15) and much younget daughter Maria (2).

They would not remain at the Britannia long, however, as in 1847, with the agreement of Anna's siblings, they sold the Britannia, as part of the Tŷ'n y Pistyll Estate, to local entrepreneur Alexander Reid, together with Mr Charles Kennings and Mr James Beattie, for the sum of £2000. The three men were members of a benefit building society called the West End and Western Mutual Association or Building Society, which, with agreement from the other members of the society, raised the £2000 purchase price. The properties were rented out and the Britannia Inn became the home of John Jones (44) and his wife Eliza, who was ten years his junior, along with their five year old nephew John Thomas, Servant Elizabeth Evans and lodger Richard Thomas, who was a rockman.

The Britannia Inn, Tŷn-Y-Pistill, near Llangollen by Randall Druce.
From Picturesque Views in North Wales published by Charles Moody c1850.

John Jones was listed in the 1951 and 1861 Censuses as a carpenter, with no mention of the Britannia being run as an inn. However, it seems almost certain that the Britannia continued to operate as an inn as a watercolour painted by Randall Druce and published around 1850, entitled The Britannia Inn, clearly shows the building with a sign above the door. During this time the Joneses had a change of landlord, as in 1859 Alexander Reid sold the Estate to John Whitehurst of Shrewsbury for the sum of £1300. Number 14 in the list of the Estate contents was 'The public house called the Britannia with its stable, out offices and apartments being of 30 perches in size' and number 15 listed 'Also those two cottages and gardens adjoining the public house being of 16 perches in size'.

In 1867 ownership of the Britannia Inn changed again. At an auction, held at the Hand Hotel on the 19th of July 1867, Charles Frederick Beyer, who had succeeded Alexander Reid as the owner of Llantysilio Hall, purchased for £1600 'the messuage or dwelling house called or known by the name of Tŷ'n y Pistyll', including 'all that messuages or public house called the Britannia Inn with the gardens and buildings occupied therewith in the occupation of John Jones', although the sale was not completed until late in 1868. And so the Britannia moved back into the ownership of the Llantysilio Estate.



(Copy)

Contract.

I Charles Frederick Beyer of the City of Manchester Esquire do hereby agree to purchase all that messuage or Public house called the Britannia Inn with the garden and buildings occupied therewith in the occupation of John Jones

Purchase money £1600 0 0
Deposit 160 0 0
Balance 1440 0 0

Stamp
C. F. Beyer
Nov. 30 1868

Signed by the said Charles Frederick Beyer in the presence of
Rich'd Radford Solr Manchester

Part of the 1868 contract signed by Charles Frederick Beyer .

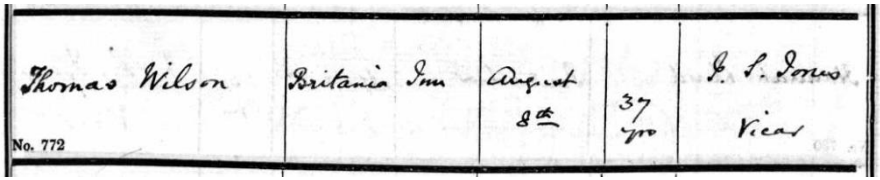
Courtesy of North East Wales Archives, D/BC/5499.

By 1871 the sixty five year old John Jones was listed in the Census as a carpenter and a publican and ten years later as a publican and a farmer of 16 acres. Eliza was also still at the Inn but nephew John Thomas had left.

In April 1882 John died at 77 years old, having run the Britannia for over thirty years. Eliza moved to Bootle where she too passed away a year later. Both were buried in Llantysilio Churchyard.

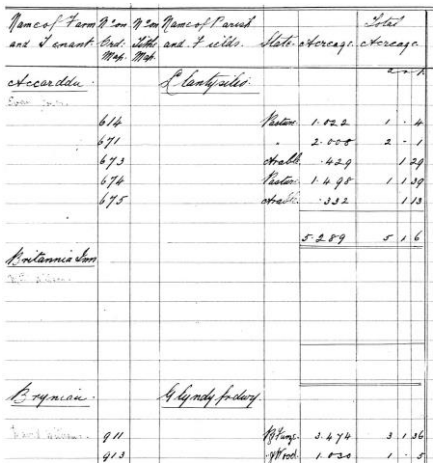
Seventy five year old widow Margaret Jones then became the innkeeper at the Britannia for a time. This was possibly the Margaret Jones who had farmed at Bwlch Mawr with her husband John until he had died in 1881, but this is by no means a certainty. Margaret was followed at the start of the 20th century by Thomas Wilson and his wife Mary Elizabeth.

John and Eliza Jones' gravestone in Llantysilio Churchyard.



Thomas Wilson	Britania Inn	August 8th	37 yrs	J. S. Jones Vicar

No. 772



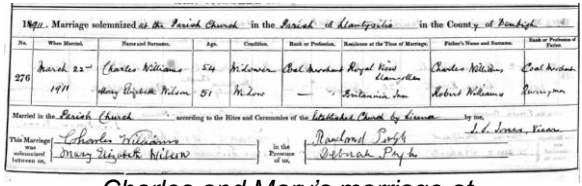
Name of Farm and Tenant	No on Ord. Map	No on Tithe Map	Name of Parish and Field No.	State	Acreage	Total Acreage
Accardda			Llantysilio			
	614			Pasture	1.022	1 . 0 . 4
	671			"	2.008	2 . 0 . 1
	673			Arable	.429	1 . 2 . 9
	674			Pasture	1.498	1 . 1 . 39
	675			Arable	.332	1 . 1 . 13
					5.289	5 . 1 . 6
Britannia Inn						
Bryncair			Llangedwyn Parish			
	911			Pasture	3.474	3 . 1 . 36
	913			Wood	1.020	1 . 0 . 5

Thomas Wilson's burial record from Llantysilio Church in 1904 (above) and (left) the rental record for the Llantysilio Estate at the start of the 20th century showing (although not very clear) Mrs Wilson holding the tenancy of the Britannia Inn. Courtesy of North East Wales Archives, DD/LH/42.

However, their tenure together would be short, as Thomas passed away in 1904. Mary continued on as the publican of the Britannia on her own for seven years before re-marrying.

A group outside the Britannia Inn around 1907.

In 1910 Mary married widow Charles Williams. Like his father before him Charles was a coal merchant, operating from the wharf in Llangollen. He and his first wife, Mary Ann, had had nine children, and were living in Royal View, Llangollen, when she passed away in 1909. In the 1870s Charles' father had also been a licensed victualler. Possibly Charles wanted to emulate his father's other career by moving up to the Britannia to live with Mary. In 1911, however, he was still noted as a coal merchant, whilst Mary continued as publican.



1910. 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.
276	March 22nd 1910	Charles Williams	54	Widower	Bachelor	Royal View Llangollen	Charles Williams	Coal Merchant
		Mary Elizabeth Wilson	51	Widow	—	Britannia Inn	Robert Williams	Farmer

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by Licence by me, T. L. Jones, Vicar.

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Charles Williams and Mary Elizabeth Wilson. In the Presence of us, Rowland Pugh, Deborah Pugh.

Charles and Mary's marriage at Llantysilio Church in 1910.

Charles and Mary did not stay on at the Britannia, however, as in 1913 Frank Richards took over as the innkeeper. Frank had previously been a house painter and decorator, living with his wife Mary Eleanor and their four daughters, Alice Mary, Harriet Lucy, Jessie Fanny and Gertrude May, in Condover, just outside Shrewsbury. The family came to run the Britannia and would stay there for over thirty years. In the 1920s it was Frank and Mary that ran the Inn. They were helped by their daughter Gertrude, who was also living at the Britannia with her husband John Williams, who worked at the brick factory in Trefor, and their young daughter Olwen. Gertrude's sister Jessie lived just up the road at Fron Haul, Oernant, with her husband Edward (Ted) Thomas. They also had a young daughter, Eleanor. After a period running the Traveller's Rest Inn, just on the other side of the Horseshoe Pass, in the later 1920s or early 1930s Jessie and Ted moved down to one of the cottages by the Britannia, then known as Wayside Cottage.

By the start of World War Two, Gertrude and John had taken over the running of the Inn, although still helped by Jessie and Ted. As well as being the licensee, John was also recorded as an insurance clerk. Frank and Mary were still living there, but by then were retired. In 1941 Mary died, followed just a year later by Frank. It seems possible that they had gone back to Condover right at the end because, on their gravestone in the churchyard at Llantysilio, it says that Mary was of the Britannia Inn (late of Condovor, Salop).

Mary and Frank Richards' gravestone in Llantysilio Churchyard.

Jessie and Ted's daughter Eleanor remembered growing up there and spending many hours in the Britannia. Her childhood was quite lonely, as her grandfather (Frank Richards), an ex Sergeant Major, discouraged other children from being in the public house due to the fear of them gossiping about who was or was not there.

Eleanor remembered standing outside the Britannia one night watching a Wellington Bomber flying round and round. She went into the Inn to fetch an officer from the bar, who then used the RAC phone box to telephone the nearby Bryntysilio searchlight battery. They directed their main search light beam, and all the local search light batteries, towards the airfield at Borras. The plane, thus directed, landed there safely after following the line of the beams. The pilot wrote to say that their radar had been shot off, and that when they landed there was hardly the fuel to fill a cigarette lighter.

The Duke of Westminster used to come for shoots in the nearby Eglwyseg valley. He sometimes stopped at the Britannia and took the time to show the children his car. On one occasion in 1938, Eleanor remembered that he was accompanied by Winston Chuchill.

In 1944 Jessie and Ted moved to run the Sun Inn in Rhewl. After the War John and Gertrude Williams purchased the Britannia Inn from the Llantysilio Estate, becoming the first in a string of owner-landlords that would run the Britannia over the next seventy five years.

At some time in the later 1940s (most probably after the Williamses had bought it) the frontage of the Britannia was changed. In order to gain

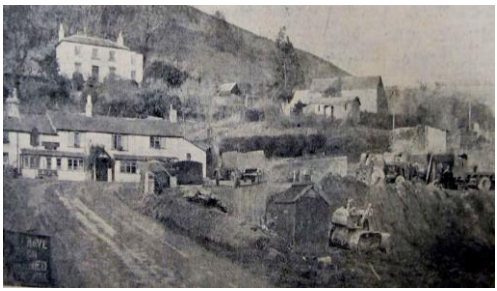
The changes to the front of the Britannia in the 1940s can be seen from these two photographs.

slightly more light and space inside, as well as more of a view, the standard windows either side of the main door were replaced by long shallow single storey extensions out from the front of the building with windows fitted along the whole length. The new windows also replaced the door and the window of the adjoining cottage and it seems likely that the Inn was extended into the cottage at this time. The amount that the new windows could protrude from the front of the building was, no doubt, restricted by the presence of the main road, which then ran directly in front of the Inn.

The line of the road would soon, however, be changed. In July 1947, returning home to Weston Rhyn from a trip to Rhyl, a Sunday school bus failed to negotiate the bend by the Britannia and crashed into the building opposite. Two older ladies and a young boy were killed and nine people injured. As a result, the line of the Horseshoe Pass road was straightened past the Britannia, with the bend in the old road being made into the car park for the Inn. Following the Richards and Williams families, the Britannia has been managed by a number of different landlords – including Gwyn Jones, Dot and Jack Lyden (1963-71), Cyril and Maureen Ashton and Mike and Vicky Callahan. Today (2023) the hosts are Tony and Ann Dicker, who have, for over twenty years, continued to provide a welcome place for travellers to stop and get much needed refreshment.


THREE DIE
IN SUNDAY SCHOOL
BUS CRASH

The headline of the report of the bus crash in the Western Mail, 7th July 1947.



Work on straightening the road.

By Tony and Ann Dicker and David Crane.