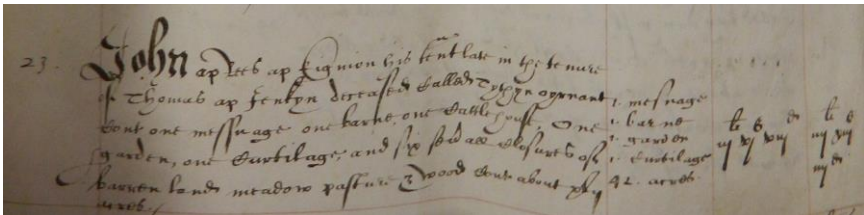


## Oernant Isaf / Oernant Farm



*Oernant Isaf in 2023.*

Oernant Isaf today (2023) is a substantial modern built property, constructed on the same site as, and incorporating parts of, the original farmhouse that stood there. We know that there has been a farm on this site since at least the early 16th century, and almost certainly before, because it is included in a 1606 rental document giving details of properties and tenants that previously belonged to Valle Crucis Abbey before it was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1536.



*A section of the 1606 survey of former Valle Crucis lands in Llantysilio. Courtesy North East Wales Archives - DD/WY/5406.*

The entry says 'John ap Rees ap Eignion his te<sup>m</sup>nt (tenement) late in possession of Thomas ap Jenkyn deceased called Tythyn Oyrnant cont(aining) one messuage, one barne, one cattle house, one garden, one curtilage and six severall closures of barren land, meadow, pasture and wood cont(aining) about 17 acres'. For the 42 acres John was paying £3 7s 8d.

It is another hundred years before we get any indication of who was at Oernant. A newspaper report of a court case at the Shropshire Assizes in 1820 over land rights at Oernant (then in the possession of Mrs Eyton) summarised the rent rolls from 1713. The case demonstrated that following a grant of the Valle Crucis lands from the Crown, in the 9th year of James I (1611), to Edward Lord Wootton, the land at Oernant had become the property of the Wynnstay Estate.

In 1713 Eleanor Edwards, widow of John Edwards, paid a total of £17 3s for the 'fee farm rent of four tenements'. Sadly it doesn't detail the properties that were being leased but the largest rent of £5 14s 8d would almost certainly have been for Oernant Farm. There were payments recorded to Eleanor Edwards from Thomas ap Robert, Thomas ap Lloyd, Gabriel Williams and John Rogers for 'Oernant Slates'.

The rent roll went on to say that in 1718 the tenancy changed from the Edwardses to the Eytons, who continued to lease Oernant until 1820, although it would appear from the land tax records from the end of the 18th century that Thomas Eyton sub-let the four properties to different tenants.

**TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,**  
At the Hand Inn, in Llangollen, on Friday, the 19th day of August, 1831, at four o'clock in the afternoon, (unless sooner disposed of by Private Contract, of which immediate Notice will be given,) in the following or such other lots, and subject to such conditions as will then be declared,  
**LOT IV.**  
A Tenement, called *Oernant*, containing 47a. 1r. 27p. with the Slate Quarries thereon, situate in the parish of Llantysilio aforesaid, with an extensive exclusive right of Common adjoining, on which there is excellent Grouse shooting, now in the occupation of John Hughes, under a lease for a term of years which will expire at Lady-day next.  
Mr. John Jones, draper, Llangollen, will direct a person to shew the different lots, and further particulars may be known from him, or Mr. Thomas Eyton, 45, Devon-street, Liverpool; Mr. Hugh Eyton, 57, Dean's Gate-street, Manchester; Mr. John Seed, Waverley, near Liverpool; or Messrs. EDWARDS and SON, Solicitors, Oswestry, (who are authorised to treat for the same by Private Contract,) at whose office maps, descriptive of the different lots, may be seen.

*The auction notice for Oernant  
from the Chester Chronicle,  
Friday, 12th August 1831.*

Thomas Eyton was a member of the Eyton family of Leeswood Hall in Flintshire, but the family also had connections to Craig Ddu in Llantysilio.

In 1831 he auctioned off Oernant, which had by then grown slightly to 47 acres. It was Lot IV in an auction of a number of properties, although it is unclear whether all of the properties in the auction belonged to the Eytons. Oernant was purchased by the Tottenham Estate, and they continued to rent it out throughout the 19th century. Farmer John Hughes was the tenant at the time of the sale. He

owned two other houses in Oernant (possibly the two cottages of Tŷ Issa) but was renting and living in Oernant Isaf with his wife Sarah. John died in 1835 at the very young age of 34 and left the two properties that he owned to Sarah. It would appear that she sold the other two houses and moved away, and by 1841 Edward Parry and his family had taken over farming at Oernant. Edward Parry had previously farmed at Bwlch y Garnedd in Rhewl. There he and his wife Margaret had had five children William, Elizabeth, Mary, Sarah and John and had possibly taken the opportunity to move to the larger Oernant Isaf as the size of their family increased.

At Oernant, Edward and Margaret had another two sons – Edward and Thomas. We have not been able to discover what happened to Edward Parry and his family, but by 1861 rockman David Jones was living at Oernant Isaf. We have not succeeded in discovering the name of David's wife, but they had three daughters – Ann, Ellen and Elizabeth. The Joneses did not stay at Oernant for long as, by 1871, another quarryman, Richard Williams, had taken occupation of the house, along with his wife Elizabeth and their six children – Michael (15), Thomas (13), Elizabeth (10), Elenor (8), Levi (5) and Margaret (2). Richard and Elizabeth had married twenty years previously, Elizabeth being the daughter of Thomas Roberts, innkeeper of the White Hart Inn. In 1877 Richard and Elizabeth's eldest son Michael married Mary Davies from Bethel, and the young couple moved into Plas Du just down the track towards Pentredŵr. The following year they had their first child, Mary Elizabeth (see the history of Plas Du).

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1877. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Llantysilio in the County of Denbigh							
No.	When Married	Name and Residence	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the Time of Marriage	Parish's Previous Residence
185	June 9	Michael Williams Mary Davies	22 22	Bachelor Spinster	Slate Maker —	Oernant Bethel	Bethel Bethel

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church in the Parish of Llantysilio in the County of Denbigh.

This Marriage was solemnized between us  
*Richard Williams* of the Parish of Llantysilio in the County of Denbigh  
*Mary Davies* of the Parish of Bethel in the County of Denbigh

*Michael and Mary's marriage at Llantysilio Church.*

However, double tragedy was to strike the young slate maker. Mary Elizabeth died at just seven months old and, less than three years later in 1880, Mary also passed away. By 1881 the widowed Michael was once again living with his parents at Oernant Isaf. By that time Richard had given up quarrying and was farming, but only with 22 acres. During the 1880s the all the children apart from Mary had left home and the family moved to the neighbouring Bwlch Mawr Farm. By 1901 Mary had also gone her own way and Richard and Elizabeth had moved to live at number 9 Tai Newyddion on the other side of the Horseshoe Pass.

At Oernant Isaf Richard and Elizabeth's second son Thomas had taken over the farming, along with his wife Mary and their daughter Margaret. The Williams family would remain at the farm for another thirty years. For a period during the 1890s another family were also living at the farm. It seems most likely that they were not renting from the estate but simply lodging with Thomas and his family. John and Hannah Jones, and their daughter Margaret, had previously lived in one of the cottages at Pentreuchaf, along with Margaret's siblings Mary, Hugh, Samuel, Price, Edward and John, and then had moved for a period to Tan y Bwlch before lodging at Oernant Isaf.



*Oernant Isaf around 1900.*

The time at Oernant Isaf was, however, not a happy one for the family. Margaret would die in 1895, to be followed by Hannah two years later. They were buried together in Llantysilio churchyard. John then moved into Pentredŵr to live with his son Edward and his family at Gorffwysfa – the Cambrian Stores. John died there in 1913 and was buried with Margaret and Hannah, to be joined by son Samuel in 1926.

Thomas Williams and his family stayed at Oernant Isaf, although Thomas had become a quarryman by the turn of the 20th century. It would appear, however, that the farm was still operating as in 1901 they had two servants, Evan Jones and Alfred Bennion who were both carters on the farm as well as in the quarry. Daughter Margaret had become an assistant in a drapery shop by 1911, but ten years later was out of work.



*The grave of Margaret, Hannah, John and Samuel Jones.*



*The report in the Llangollen Advertiser about the public footpath in Pentredŵr.*

Thomas was involved in local life and was a member of the Llantysilio Parish Council. At a meeting in April 1903 he called 'attention to the disgraceful state of the public footpath leading from Oernant to Pentredŵr village, from 16 to 20 children, in coming to and from the chapel Sunday services, were compelled to trudge through mud ankle deep, and more especially during dark nights there was a danger of falling over the bank into the brook'.

Thomas and Mary Williams continued to farm at Oernant into the 1920s. Mary passed away in 1926 and Thomas two years later in 1928. They were buried together in Llantysilio churchyard.



*The double grave of Thomas and Mary Williams.*

The next residents that we know of at Oernant Farm were living there just before the Second World War, when two families shared the house. William John Fleetwood Seddon Wilson was the son of John Elphinstone Fleming Jordan Wilson of Olton Hall in Warwickshire and Elizabeth Seddon, but had been born in Lancashire. He married Helena Louisa Davis of Bristol in 1924 and they had four children whilst living there, two of whom died very shortly after birth. We do not know how long they remained in Pentredŵr but they moved down to Exeter afterwards.

Also living at Oernant Isaf in 1939 were Henry and Margaret Drakeley. Henry had met Margaret when he had worked near Clocaenog between 1900 and 1912. Wanting to broaden his horizons, Henry decided to go to Canada. He tried to persuade Margaret to go but she refused, not wanting to leave her family. Throughout his time in Canada and then, when he enlisted in the 7th Dragoon Guards in 1914 and served in the War, he wrote to Margaret. Back in England in 1916, while he was stationed at Assage Barracks in Tidworth, Wiltshire, Henry and Margaret were married in Clocaenog and set up home in the village. However, not long after they moved to Plas Norway on the other side of the Horseshoe Pass, where Henry started work as a Gamekeeper for the Best family. Plas Norway was in a very remote spot on the top of the Horseshoe Pass miles from anywhere and their children Harry and Margaret had to walk to school to the village of Bryneglwys which was about 2½ miles away. So, a few years later, they moved to Oernant Isaf. This house was a little more sheltered from the winds and snow and now it was not such a distance to go to school as it was just down the road in the village of Pentredŵr.

In 1949 daughter Margaret Drakeley married Sydney Burrows, son of the well known local artist Ernest Burrows. The marriage entry shows that the Drakeleys were still living at Oernant Isaf at that time.

18. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Plasnydd in the County of Dorset

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.
374	<u>Sydney Burrows</u> <u>Wilson</u> <u>June 25</u> <u>1949</u> <u>Plasnydd</u> <u>Drakeley</u>	<u>Sydney Burrows</u> <u>William Burrows</u>  <u>Margaret Ann Drakeley</u>	<u>31</u> <u>years</u>  <u>26</u> <u>years</u>	<u>Bachelor.</u>  <u>Spinster.</u>	<u>Private.</u>  <u>—</u>	<u>Ty Nelyn, Bryneglwys</u> <u>Plasnydd</u>  <u>Oernant Isaf</u> <u>Plasnydd</u>	<u>Ernest Burrows</u> <u>(deceased)</u>  <u>Henry Drakeley</u>	<u>Artist</u>  <u>Gamekeeper</u>
Married in the <u>Parish Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <u>Church in Wales</u> after Service by <u>Mr. Page Doolittle, Vicar</u>								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<u>Sydney Clarence William Burrows</u> <u>Margaret Ann Drakeley</u>		in the Presence of us,		<u>Llewellyn Owen Humphreys</u> <u>A. Jones.</u>		

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The marriage of Margaret Drakeley and Sydney Burrows in June 1949.

Shortly after, Henry and Margaret Drakeley left Oernant Isaf and, for their retirement, moved to a house just a little way up the hill called Oernant Uchaf, which would be the last move for the family. What Margaret never discovered was that Henry had started another family whilst he was in Canada, descendantsof whom live in Saskatchewan province to this day.

In the 1950s, Les Potts, who worked at the seed factory in Llangollen, lived at Oernant Isaf for three years. At that time the house belonged to the Gollan family who lived at Bwlch Mawr, and he rented the house from them. He recalled that the house had no gas, no electricity and no piped water. But what Oernant Isaf did have was quietness, which he enjoyed after a day in a noisy work environment. After three years the holiday house above Oernant Isaf (Tŷ Issa) came up for sale and Les bought it and moved up there.

Elsie May Gollan decided to pass ownership of Oernant Isaf to her son Donald and his cousin John Pickett, who lived at Pentredŵr Farm (Maesyrychen). However, following his marriage in 1964, Donald moved down to Shropshire and so John and his wife Margaret bought his half of Oernant Isaf and rented it out.

The Mills family from Manchester took on the rent for the house – suitably large enough for them and their twelve children. Unfortunately under their tenure the house began to get run down and when they left around 1974, to move first to Glyndyfrdwy and then back to Dergoed, Oernant Isaf proved difficult to rent out and became more dilapidated. In the early 1990s the Picketts sold the house to John Bromfield from Corwen. He made numerous attempts at getting planning permission, with several rejected, but eventually obtained permission for some alterations and extensions.



*The dilapidated original building of Oernant Isaf in 2007.*

In 1997 Oernant Isaf was bought by Anne Robinson and Norman Maloney, although it took until 2008 to complete the sale (with ground work, and access work onto the road, that were conditions of the sale).

Unfortunately the house was in too bad a state of repair to save. They started work on site in 1998 but it was not until 2009 that they were able to hammer out the rock. The original building was taken down in 2011, but the new house that has been constructed incorporates a small part of the south west wall of the original building, including the fireplace and a bread oven.



*Hammering the rock (above right) and the original building section that was incorporated into the new house (right). The entrance hall and bread oven (below) and the restored original fireplace (below right).*



*By Norman Maloney and David Crane.*



*The original building  
of Oernant Isaf as  
painted by Alwyn  
Dempster Jones in  
around 2000.*