

Tŷ Issa, Oernant



Tŷ Issa, Oernant around 1900.



*The 1819 Ordnance Survey plan.
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Tŷ Issa, Oernant was very likely built as a house for labourers or slate merchants at the quarry, possibly in the 18th century. Although not very clear it does appear to be faintly marked on an 1819 plan of Oernant, and there is also a track leading directly to the location of the house.

Not until the 1830s, however, are we able to be more certain about the people that owned and lived in Tŷ Issa. In 1832 and 1834 rockman William Roberts and his wife Anne had

Thomas
Roberts'
baptism
in 1834.

No. 365.	Nov	Thomas William	&	Roberts	Tŷ Issa	Oernant	Rockman	S. Hugh
	9	son		of				Minister
		of		Anne				

two of their children, Hannah and Thomas, baptised at Llantysilio Church. In the record for Thomas' baptism it details that the family were living at Tŷ Issa, Oernant. William and Anne had three more children whilst at Tŷ Issa, Jesse, Anne and Ellis. Jesse's baptism was not at the church, however, but at the Wesleyan Pentremorgan Chapel in Llangollen, and so William and Anne had evidently embraced Methodism.

It would seem probable that Ellis Roberts was the sixty year old slate merchant that lived at that time at the nearby Oernant Uchaf. It also seems quite possible (but by no means proven) that, given the age difference and the 'long agreement to sell to William Roberts', Ellis Roberts and his wife Margaret were William's parents. Whether William kept ownership of Tŷ Issa and rented the two houses out we do not know, but by 1851 he and his family had left Pentredŵr.

Over the next fifty years the cottages were lived in by a variety of quarry workers and their families. It is sometimes difficult to be certain who was there as the census records often label all of the properties just as Oernant, although the two houses at Tŷ Issa seem to have gone by the names Tŷ Isa Craig 1 and 2, with number 2 being known as Bryn Ffynnon for a



This photograph from around 1900 clearly shows Tŷ Issa as two cottages.

period of time. Robert Edwards, his wife Elinor and their four children lived in number 2 for thirty years between 1851 and 1881 whilst number 1 changed hands more frequently. In 1911 Tai Issa (the Tai – houses – could indicate both houses) were still being used by a quarry worker - 33 year old quarry labourer John Watson and his wife Elizabeth lived there, although John would have been working at one of the other quarries at the top of the Horsehoe Pass as the Oernant Quarries had closed by then.



Tŷ Issa around the start of the 20th century.

Tŷ Issa doesn't appear in any records in the 1920s, 30s or 40s, although local people do recall an evacuee, Anne Farrell, living at the house during the Second World War. The next reference that we have for the house is in the 1950s when Les Potts, who worked at the seed factory in Llangollen, purchased the house, having lived at Oernant Isaf for three years. Les referred to Tŷ Issa as having been a holiday cottage before he bought it and so possibly that is why it tended not to appear in any records.

Les and his wife Joan modernised the cottage, levelling the 14 inch difference between the two floors. The slate waste was removed until he saw he was well below the walls. He and Joan mixed and laid seven tons of concrete by hand. He removed all of the old horse and lime plaster and set about getting the walls, doorways and windows straight, but often he just had to follow the curves as they were, in some places, six inches out.

The house was cold, even with stoves in both cottages on for 24 hours a day. Water was collected from the stream, and if left overnight a few feet away, it would freeze. Lighting was by oil lamps to start with, but a diesel engine with a dynamo soon allowed plenty of lights around the house and even charged batteries to give enough power for a television. The Lister engine was fitted with two two foot flywheels, which meant that to start it by hand could be hard, needed lots of cranking and even more care.

On moonlit nights they would sometimes hear steps crossing the slate slabs outside and would watch as the original front door of the right hand cottage opened. Later they built a porch over both doorways, but still it was only the original door that opened. They had a very large black dog that was scared of no man, but this Alsatian would back away and hide in the stairwell at the back of the cottage, a quivering wreck. Les and his family endured many things over the five years that they were at Tŷ Issa, but it was the frequent car crashes on the corner above that made them finally decide to leave.

In the late 60s and early 70s a Mr and Mrs Deeks lived there and then, after a stint running the Conquering Hero Inn in Llantysilio (around 1978) it was lived in by Wilf (not sure of his surname) and his wife.

At the end of the 20th century Tŷ Issa was the home of Anthony and Linda O'Malley - one of the sadder stories connected with the house. In 2002 Anthony and Linda had just moved out of Tŷ Issa into a house in Market Street, Llangollen. Their dream was a holiday and retirement villa in Benidorm, and they flew there to search for a suitable place. They went to view a small villa hidden among pine trees, but the building would become their prison and ultimately their burial place. Two men held the O'Malleys captive in the villa's cellar for five days to extort money from them, but having forced Anthony, at gunpoint, to withdraw nearly £20,000 from his account they killed the couple and buried their bodies in the cellar of the villa. The two Spanish men were jailed for more than 50 years each. It was in that year Tŷ Issa was sold to the present owner.

By Joanna Lawton and David Crane.