

Yr Efail or The Smithy or Rose Cottages



A view of Yr Efail and Rose Cottages, Pentredŵr, in the early 20th century.

In 1854 George Borrow visited a number of the villages around Llangollen. On one of his excursions he walked around the track from Plas yn Eglwyseg across to Pentredŵr. He recorded in his book *Wild Wales*:-

‘About a mile farther on the path wended down a descent, at the bottom of which I saw a brook and a number of cottages beyond it. I passed over the brook by means of a long slab laid across and reached the cottages. I was now as I supposed in Pentre y Dwr.’

The cottages that George Borrow saw across the brook would have been the Smithy (Yr Efail) and the adjoining cottages.

At the time of George Borrow’s visit the blacksmith was thirty five year old John Hughes. John had been born in Mwstwr township, himself the son of a blacksmith. The family had lived and worked at the smithy in Glyndyfrdwy when John was young and, after he was married he moved to Pentredŵr with his wife Margaret to continue in his father’s footsteps.

Up until the mid 19th century the village smithy was an essential part of every town, and the blacksmith a key figure within the community. Their work was valuable to many different trades - heating pieces of wrought iron until the metal was hot enough to shape into everything from horseshoes and agricultural equipment to armour and weapons.

Lot 1.—A TENEMENT called
TY TAN Y BWLCH,

And COTTAGE thereto belonging,

Containing by admeasurement 56A. 0R. 32P. with an exclusive right of Common on the adjoining Hill of 98A. 0R. 19P. situate in the Parish of Llantisilio, in the County of Denbigh, now in the occupation of JOHN EDWARDS, as Tenant at Will.

N. B. There is excellent Grouse Shooting on this Hill, and it is very probable a Quarry of Slate may be found on the Inclosed Land which may be worked at a light expence, and lies within two Miles of the Ellesmere Canal.

Lot 2.—A TENEMENT called BWLCH MAWR, and a COTTAGE called PLAS DU, containing 91A. 3R. 25P. with an extensive exclusive right of Common on the adjoining Hill, on which there is excellent Grouse Shooting, situate in the Parish of Llantisilio aforesaid, and now in the occupation of the representatives of the late RICHARD JONES, as Tenant at Will.

Lot 3.—A TENEMENT called BWLCH ISSA, with a COTTAGE and SMITHY thereon, containing 40A. 1R. 6P. with an exclusive right of Common belonging thereto, situate in the Parish of Llantisilio aforesaid, and now in the occupation of JOHN JONES, as Tenant at Will.

Lot 4.—A TENEMENT called OERNANT, containing 47A. 1R. 27P. with the Slate Quarries thereon, situate in the Parish of Llantisilio 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.

Lot 5.—All that well-accustomed PUBLIC HOUSE called the WHITE HART, with several Pieces of Land adjoining, containing, 18A. 2R. 30P. at the Yearly Rent of £20, situate in the Parish of Llantisilio aforesaid, and adjoining the Turnpike Road leading from Llangollen to Ruthin, now in occupation of ROBERT JONES.

The auction poster from August 1831 for properties in Pentredŵr, including Bwlch Issa and the Smithy.

The Smithy was originally part of Bwlch Issa farm. An auction poster and newspaper cuttings record the sale of the Smithy, along with Bwlch Issa, in 1831, and a plan from 1832 included in the deeds shows that Yr Efail (and indeed the nearby White Hart Inn) were included together in the 1832 conveyance that followed the auction. John Jones was the farmer at Bwlch Issa and so would have leased the Smithy as well, most likely renting it out to the local blacksmith.



The plan of land included in the 1832 sale and, inset, a detailed section showing that Yr Efail was included.

At that sale Bwlch Issa, along with the Smithy and several other properties were bought by the Tottenham Estate. Sadly, the poster and newspaper article fail to mention who was selling the properties, or indeed who was occupying the smithy. Although the auction could have been for independently owned houses, the close geographical grouping of lots 1 to 5 in Pentredŵr would seem to indicate that they were all being sold by a single person or estate.

And here the trail back in time goes cold for the moment. The only slight possible clue is given by the land tax records for Maesyrychen from 33 years before in 1798. At that time there were only two landowners that held and rented out multiple properties in Maesyrychen. Thomas Jones of Llantysilio Hall had four houses that were tenanted at the time and his nephew Thomas Eyton rented out three properties. So it seems very possible that Bwlch Issa and Yr Efail were owned by a branch of the Llantysilio Hall Estate, before being sold to the Tottenham Estate.

We do know, however, that in 1841 the blacksmith in Pentredŵr was 30 year old Thomas Wright. Thomas had been born in Pentrebychan near Wrexham. Marrying Mary Jones in 1833, Thomas was a blacksmith by the time they had their first child John in 1835, working in the Glyn Ceiriog Valley. The family then moved to Pentredŵr, where Thomas worked alongside another blacksmith Watkin Jones. They did not remain at Yr Efail long, however, moving back to Pentrebychan Smithy, where Thomas died in 1877.

Blacksmith John Hughes, mentioned at the start of this history, took over from Thomas Wright, but he too did not stay long, as by 1861, he and his family had moved to St Martin's in Shropshire, where he continued his trade. The blacksmith's shop in Pentredŵr was taken over by Thomas Gabriel. Thomas originated from Cefn Mawr, born there in 1832. Having married Elizabeth in the 1850s, they lived in Llangollen for several years before moving out to Pentredŵr.

But times were becoming hard for individual rural blacksmiths. Mass steel manufacturing and the availability of ready made tools and other items resulted in a rapidly shrinking market. Many small blacksmiths went out of business and the Smithy in Pentredŵr was no exception.

By 1871 there was no longer any smithying in the village. The Gabriel family had moved to Acrefair, where Thomas was a labourer and his sons were working in the brickworks and the iron foundry. It is difficult from the census records to be sure who was living in Yr Efail then as the houses are not named. By 1881 there were three families living in 'Yr Efail' – slate quarrymen John Hughes and Evan Evans, and their families, and pauper Jane Davies and her daughter Mary. Both the Hughes and Evans families had been living in Pentredŵr in 1871, but it is not possible to say whether they were in Yr Efail then.

So by 1881, Yr Efail had been divided into three separate family homes. Quarryman John Hughes and his wife Jane continued to live there until at least 1891, although the Evans family left, to be replaced by John and Jane Hughes' eldest daughter Catherine, with her new husband William Henry Bond and their first child Jane. William grew up in Liverpool, his father, Dyer Bond, a master mariner originally from Bristol. He and Catherine had married at Llantysilio Church in 1889, and Yr Efail would be their first family home. The third cottage in the group that made up the Old Smithy was empty at that time.

1889. 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.
214	Feb. 9 1889	William Henry Bond	28	Bachelor	Bookbinder	Scutcher	William Bond	Master
		Catherine Jane Hughes	26	Spinster	-	Scutcher	John Hughes	Bookbinder

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church after Banns by Mr. J. J. Jones, Vicar

This Marriage was solemnized between us, William Henry Bond and Catherine Jane Hughes in the Presence of us, John Griffith and Ann Edwards

William and Catherine's marriage in February 1889.

John Hughes died in 1897 and Jane moved in with her daughter and son in law. Her cottage became, in turn, the home for quarryman George Roberts and his family. George and Ann

Dist.	Household	Name	Sex	Age	Profession
	Mr. Efail, Scutcher	William Henry Bond	Head	37	Quarryman
		Catherine S. Bond	Wife	31	
		Jane Eglw. Bond	Daughter	9	
		John Henry Bond	Son	7	
		Thomas Charles Bond	Son	3	
		Jane Hughes	Widow	68	
112 W	Mr. Efail, Bookbinder	George Roberts	Head	49	Quarryman
		Ann Roberts	Wife	46	
		Evan John Roberts	Son	24	Quarryman
		Sarah Elizabeth Roberts	Daughter	17	

The 1901 census for Yr Efail.

Roberts had previously lived in one of the houses at Pentreucha, where they had had four children – Evan, Emma, Laura and Sarah, but only Evan and Sarah had moved in with their parents at Yr Efail. Twenty four year old Evan John Roberts was a quarryman like his father.

Ten years later Sarah had moved away, but George, Ann and Evan were still living at No. 3 Smithy Cottage, whilst No. 2 Smithy Cottage remained unoccupied. William Bond and his family had relocated across the lane to Brookside and another George Roberts had moved into No. 1 Smithy Cottage, with his wife Martha and their son John. Fifteen years younger than his namesake next door but one, this George and his son John were also both quarrymen.

George, Martha and John did not stay long in Pentredwr. By the time of the 1921 Census they had moved away and George and Ann's son Evan John Roberts had moved into No. 1 with his new wife Sarah, daughter of Amos and Frances (Fanny) Roberts who then lived in the cottage next to the Bethesda Chapel.



Amos and Frances (Fanny) Roberts outside Yr Efail around 1920.

A few months after the 1921 Census George Roberts died, and was buried in Llantysilio churchyard. On the gravestone it says 'beloved husband of Ann Roberts, 3 Rose Cottages, Pentredŵr'. So here we see the name of the three cottages changing from Yr Efail or the Old Smithy, to Rose Cottages. Over the following years all three names would be used. Five years later and there would be further changes in the occupants. A 1926 Tottenham Estate document from the deeds records that all three cottages were again occupied. Mrs George Roberts (i.e. Ann) was living in 3 Old Smithy House, Ivor Jones was in number 2 and No. 1 was occupied by Evan Edwards. Sadly, in 1927, Ann Roberts died. She was buried along with George in Llantysilio Churchyard.



George and Ann Roberts' grave (above) and the 1926 Tottenham document (below).

<u>No. in Rent Roll</u>	<u>Name of Holding</u>	<u>Tenants Names</u>	<u>Area of enclosed land.</u>
87 /	No. 1 Old Smithy House	Evan Edwards	.060 /
88 /	No. 2 ditto	Ivor Jones	.024 /
89 /	No. 3 ditto	Mrs. George Roberts	.060 /

Rose Cottages, now with two known as Minffordd (Edge of the Road), next appear in the records just before the Second World War, in the 1939 Electoral Roll. Evan Edwards (if indeed it was the same Evan Edwards) was still in No. 1, with his wife Alice and their two youngest children Robert and Priscilla. The Edwardses had previously lived at Tan y Bwlch, but their two eldest children, Sarah Ann and Frank, had fled the nest before they moved from there to Yr Efail.

K. Not Wales Cottage	93	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rose Cottage.	94	1	Roberts. Annie.	-	♂	26 Jan	04	60	W. Wales Domestic Duties	
ditto	94	2	Roberts. Dennis	-	M.	16 Nov.	28	5	at school	
"Minffordd"	95	1	Edwards. Evan	-	M.	24 Mar	71	M.	General Labourer - Healyton	
ditto	95	2	Edwards. Alice	-	♀	7 Jan	81	M.	W. Wales Domestic Duties	
ditto	95	3	Edwards. Robert. T.	-	M.	15 Sep.	08	15	General Labourer - Healyton	
ditto	95	4	Edwards. Priscilla. M.	-	♀	12 Feb	18	5	W. Wales Domestic Duties	
ditto	95	5	Edwards. Robert. L.	-	M.	15 Mar.	86	5	Shelter (Slate Quarry)	
Pentredwr Farm	96	1	Rees. Annie.	-	♀	20 Jan	62	W.	General Farmer	

The 1939 Electoral Roll for Yr Efail / Rose Cottages.

No. 3, called Rose Cottage, was now lived in by 35 year old Annie Roberts and her 11 year old son Dennis. Whether there was any familial connection between Annie and either of the Roberts families that had previously lived in Yr Efail it has not been possible to establish at this time. However, Annie would play an important part in the future of Yr Efail, as it was she who, in 1949, purchased the three cottages from the

Tottenham Estate for the princely sum of £250. At this time No. 1 was vacant, No. 2 was occupied by Morris Lloyd Thomas and No. 3 was lived in by Annie.

12th September 1949
Stamp £1.50d.
P.D.S.

BY CONVEYANCE of this date made between Charles John Tottenham of Plas Berwyn Llangollen in the County of Denbigh Esquire (hereinafter called "the Vendor") of the first part Nathaniel Taylor of 23 Stephens Green in the City of Dublin Solicitor Richard Watkin Richards of Bank Buildings Llangollen afd Solicitor and John Leyland Mandesley of 27 Eccleston Street Eaton Square in the County of London Solicitor (thereinafter called "the Trustees") of the second part and Annie Roberts of 3 Old Smithy House Pentredwr in the Parish of Llantysilio in the County of Denbigh Widow (thereinafter called "the Purchaser") of the third part.

IT WAS WITNESSED as follows :-

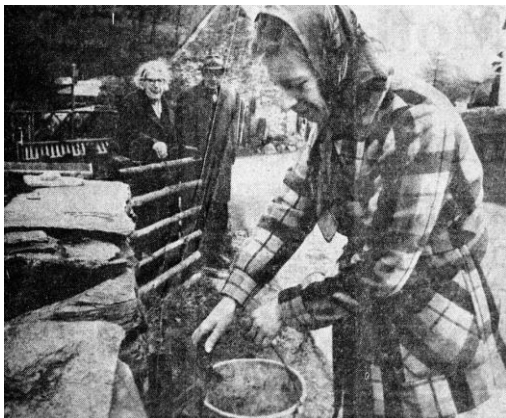
1. In conson of the sum of £250 paid etc. receipt etc. the Vendor as Trustee in exercise of the power conferred on him by the Settled Land Act 1925 and of every other power him enabling thereby conveyed unto the Purchaser

The 1949 conveyance in which the three cottages of Yr Efail were sold away from the Tottenham Estate and purchased by Annie Roberts.

ALL THOSE three messuages or dwellinghouses known as Nos. 1, 2 and 3 Old Smithy House situated at Pentredwr afd with the gardens and appurtenances thereto belonging Number 1 being then vacant Number 2 being in the occupation of Morris Lloyd Thomas and No. 3 being in the occupation of the Purchaser which premises were for purposes of identification only delineated and coloured Pink on the plan drawn thereon

Annie Roberts stayed owning all three of Rose Cottages for seven years, but then, over the next six years, sold them off individually. In 1956 she sold No. 2 to Lily Anne Esther Riva, and then, in 1957, sold No. 3, where she lived, to John Frederick William Baines and William Charles Baines. Finally, in 1962, Annie Roberts sold No. 1 Rose Cottages, also known as the Bungalow, to Mary Latchford, from Netherton in Lancashire, for £350.

In 1964 Lily Anne Riva gifted No. 2 Rose Cottages to Agnes Clarke. A year later John Baines sold No. 3 for £450 to Edward David and Julia Mary Jones, who were living then at Brookside Cottages, just across the lane. Julia (Julie) was Mary Latchford's daughter and so two of the cottages were then owned by members of the same family. Ten years later, in 1975, David and Julie bought No. 2 from Agnes Clarke for £1,250. Very sadly, just a year later, Mary Latchford died. She left No. 1 Rose Cottages to her daughter, and so once again all three of the cottages that made up Yr Efail were back under single ownership.



Today (2022), the Old Smithy Cottages remain in the ownership of Julie Jones. She continues to live in No. 3, and the other two cottages are rented out.

Julie Jones fills a bucket from one of the standpipes in the village in the 1970s, watched by her mother, Mary Latchford, and neighbour James Roberts.

*By Julie Jones
and
David Crane.*

Yr Efail in 2023.

