

### Brooklyn, Piccadilly, Llanblethian

Photographs taken 100 years ago show a Piccadilly different from today in a number of respects: with more buildings, with thatched roofs, but smaller houses and hence many more people living there. The essential pattern of stone-built cottages and winding lanes was as true then as it is today, in this area set between the common land of Llanblethian Hill and the meadows around the river Thaw.

The oldest deeds which we have been able to find relate to **Brooklyn**, that 'messuage or cottage having to the north the road from Llanblethian Mill through the village of Llanblethian, and to the east the brook'.

Rees Nichol, a carpenter, was living in this house in 1713, when it was bequeathed by Alexander William in his will to his youngest son, also Alexander. In 1766, Alexander Williams, then of Holborn, London, and Mary Williams of Cowbridge, sold the house to John Lloyd of Cowbridge; the sitting tenant was a widow, Cissil Gibbon. Lloyd in his turn conveyed the property, in 1799, when it was occupied by John David, to Edward Rowland, a wheelwright of Llanblethian. Rowland sold off a piece of his garden to Thomas Jenkin, a cooper from the village, who then built a cottage there - now incorporated into the outbuildings of the modern Coopersale House next door. (This cottage was the home of David Roberts, the murderer of Thomas Thomas of Stallcourt in 1887).

Rowland sold Brooklyn in 1839 to Arthur Malkin, one of the five sons of Benjamin Heath Malkin, the historian and topographer who lived at Old Hall in Cowbridge. BH Malkin, in addition to writing *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales*, also wrote *A Father's Memoirs of His Child*, telling of the brief life of Arthur's brother Thomas, who before he had died at the age of six, had written detailed stories about a fantasy land called Allestone.

Rowland continued to live in the house, despite the sale, as he is shown as the occupier in the 1840 Tithe Awards. Subsequent occupiers are not known until 1861, when the census records John Williams, a tailor, born in Cowbridge, with his wife Harriet from Llanstephan, three sons and three daughters, living there. They had moved from Causeway Cottages. Ownership passed from the Malkins to Richard Rees Todd of Cardiff, who bought the house for £55 in 1863, but it remained the home of the Williamses until at least 1874, though by 1871, Harriet was a widow, living there with only her eleven-year-old daughter Mary Ann for company.

Thomas Jenkins, a stonemason, and his family of wife, three daughters and three sons, were living in *Brooklyn* in 1891, but when the house was sold to George Williams, a wheelwright, in 1902, it was described as unoccupied. Williams also bought the garden opposite *The Firs* (at the bottom of St Quintin's hill) and expanded his landholdings, so that by 1935 he was described as a farmer.

Opposite *Brooklyn*, **Rose Cottage** and **Half Moon Cottage** (both relatively recent names) were at one time home for five families.

Richard Rees of Llanblethian, nominally a mason but in reality a bit of a property developer, bought this land when it was put up for auction in 1803, by the trustees of the estate of William Bruce of Great House. Initially he built two cottages; the **Rose Cottage** part was let first to Walter Hibbert and then to Catherine Richards. Rees sold this house in 1815 to Mary Williams, a widow, for £60.

Ownership can be traced using the deeds, so that we know that in 1856 the then owner Thomas Williams sold the house to Benjamin Price. He died in 1865; his heirs auctioned the property in 1868, and the successful bidder was John Howe. On his death in 1881, the house was left in trust to his wife and daughters, and the trustees of his will conveyed *Rose Cottage* to Miss Mary Jones of *Llanblethian Farm* (niece of John Jones the tenant of the farm). By 1923 Mary had

married Thomas Jones of Llantwit Major, and conveyed the property to Mrs Elizabeth Llewellyn of the *General Picton Inn*.

It is much more difficult to sort out the occupiers of the property, especially as tenancies were frequently for one year or less. In 1840, the Tithe Map shows William Roberts and Thomas Price living there. The 1869 conveyance calls it a 'messuage converted into two messuages now or late in the occupation of Sarah Thomas'. We may make a fair guess that Jacob Jenkins and John Blethyn lived there in 1871; we are sure that Alice John and John Robert were in the house, as tenants of Howe, in 1874. 1897 saw the 'two cottages' lately occupied by Mr Randall, but the 1891 census showed that there were two Randalls in Piccadilly. One, John Randall, a maltster's labourer from Somerset, lived with his family in a small, four-roomed cottage, which could well be part of today's Rose Cottage. If that is correct, the other half, only three rooms, was occupied by George Grittin, a stonemason from Hereford, and his wife.

**Half Moon Cottage** remained in the ownership of Richard Rees until the 1840s. In 1819 it was occupied by Jennet Lewis, widow; in 1834 by Mary Morgan and Jane Richards, and in 1840 by Mary Morgan, Thomas John and Ann John; by then it was evidently divided into three. Richard Rees' s widow sold the house to Elizabeth Simkins in 1846, and in 1851 at least one of the subdivisions was lived in by Edward Evans, a cooper born in Llanwonno near Pontypridd, his wife Gwenllian and son Samuel.

On the death of Elizabeth Simkins in 1855, the house was left to her sister, Mary Shaftesbury Llewellyn, and subsequently to her nephew CT Rhys, the attorney, of *Brynhyfryd*. Mrs Jennet Rhys, his widow, was recorded as owner in 1867, and again in 1874 when one of the then two parts of the house was empty; the other was occupied by William Robert. Within two years, John Loader was paying £5 annual rent, and William Denbury £4 rent for the two parts, and the new owner was Philip Morgan, who sold the house in 1891 to WD Alexander, the retired miller of Cowbridge Town Mill. The occupants then were Jacob Jenkins, maltster labourer, and his children, and Isaac Williams, a blacksmith, and his family. It is possible that two rooms were occupied by Mary Wyatt, a charwoman, and her children.

Alexander is still recorded as the owner in 1910 when the occupants were Harriet Boobyer, and Elizabeth Jones, both paying a rent of £5 a year. The property was then described as two very old freehold cottages and gardens in Piccadilly.

**Hilldrop**, the last house on the right in Piccadilly when you go along the road away from the mill, is one of the properties where old photographs indicate that great changes have taken place: here stood, close together, two separate houses, with different owners.

Where the garage stands today was a thatched cottage, which in 1713 was the dwelling house of Alexander William, who also owned *Brooklyn*. He left this house to his wife Joan for her life, and then to his son William.

By 1840, the owner was the Revd John Williams, the grandson of Thomas Williams, the headmaster of Cowbridge Grammar School in the eighteenth century. John Williams was later described as 'of Wigginton Rectory, near Banbury in Oxfordshire, the eldest son and heir of Revd John Williams, late of Plaxtol in Kent'. Watercolours of Wigginton and Plaxtol, painted by Col WH Taynton, a relation of the Williamses, still exist. The occupier from 1840 to at least 1851 was Thomas Jenkin, a labourer on the roads, who received some poor relief as 'one of the industrious poor of the parish'. Thomas had been born in 1774 in Ewenny; his wife Ann was from Laleston.

Isaac, his son, an agricultural labourer, had taken over the tenancy by 1861; he lived there with his wife, four daughters and two sons. The children had been born in Llanblethian, Marcross, Wick and Llandow, pointing out the temporary nature both of farm employment and of house rental.

The house was sold in 1863 to William Thomas, the carpenter who lived in the house next door, but was rapidly sold on to Richard Todd, a Cardiff shipbroker. When he died in 1872, his heir was Richard Rees Todd, who also owned *Brooklyn*. Throughout these changes of ownership, Isaac Jenkins, now described as a working maltster, continued living there. Three more children had been born by 1871, but four had left home, or died, and he had re-married.

Isaac and his wife were there alone in 1891. Robert Thomas described their home as being “a small cottage with surrounding wall, well below the road. A stile leads down some steps to a yard in front of the house”.

When RR Todd conveyed the property, along with *Brooklyn*, to George Williams, it was described as “until recently occupied by Mary David, but now unoccupied”, and by 1910 it was considered to be a garden - the cottage must have tumbled down. Walter Stone remembers it as ‘a little cubby hole, where some old boy lived’.

The history of *Hilldrop* itself has so far only been traced back to 1840, when the owner was Mary Thomas and the occupier Elizabeth Roberts. Elizabeth was still in the house in 1851 - a widow, she was described as a washerwoman, born in Coity, with her niece Elizabeth Rowland from Penlline. Deeds show us that in 1863 William Thomas, a carpenter, lived in the house: apparently the William Henry Thomas, a carpenter and cabinet maker, from Mathry in Pembrokeshire, who is shown in the 1861 census as living in Piccadilly with his Llanblethian-born wife and son.

However, there is certainly a different William Thomas there in 1871, 1874 and 1881, and this William had also lived somewhere in Piccadilly in 1861. He was first described as a gardener, but by 1881 was a farm labourer. His wife was Catherine, his children Mary, Catherine and Evan. In 1878 the fifteen-year-old Evan was apprenticed to David Hopkin the stonemason, and in the 1881 census is regarded as a stonecutter. The Thomases were followed by George Mustoe, a general labourer, originally from Gloucester, and his family. Three of the five children had been born in Llanharry (one son, the twenty-seven-year-old Edward was described as a collier, and so probably continued working in a pit to the north of the Vale).

At the turn of the century Benjamin Williams was both owner and occupier of *Hilldrop*; he worked at Llandough Castle, and he and his wife were apparently devout Baptists. Early in the twentieth century, the cottage had a corrugated-iron roof over the thatch.

The two cottages on the lane running off Piccadilly at the foot of the hill are *Hillside* (that further from the road) and *Ar y Mynydd*.

### ***Hillside***

This was another of the cottages owned by Richard Rees in the early years of the nineteenth century. According to Maud Gunter, the occupants had the rights to cut fern and graze animals on the common of Llanblethian Hill, which rises steeply up from the lane at the back of the cottage. Those rights were still being exercised in the early part of the twentieth century.

Ann Evan was living there in 1819 when Rees mortgaged the cottage, and his other properties in Piccadilly; she was also living in 1834 when he took out a further mortgage from Elizabeth Simkins. Henrietta Perkins lived in the house in 1840. When Richard Rees died in 1846, his widow Jane evidently found it necessary to convey the properties to Elizabeth Simkins.

In 1851, the two adjoining properties on the Hill were both occupied by a John Rice and family, both gardeners, and both from around Swansea, probably father and son. Within a year, there was only one John Rice and also a John Webb living in Miss Simkins's houses: we are not sure who was where.

In the late 1850's George and Ann Sandland moved from Broadway into *Hillside*. George was described variously as a gamekeeper and market gardener and was born in Kingsbury in

Warwickshire. He married Ann Deakin in Lichfield in 1821. They had two daughters who died in infancy, and one son. They lived at Dyffryn Lodge before moving to Cowbridge and presumably George was employed at Dyffryn House. Ann died in 1867 at the age of 71 while George lived on till 1874 when he died at the age of 86.

A letter exists from Ann written in 1856 to her son Charles who had emigrated to Australia having earlier kept a bookshop in Cowbridge. The letter is full of delightful village gossip, to do with St. Nicholas rather than Llanblethian or Cowbridge, mentioning a surveyor's wife who had been committed to Cardiff prison for theft, a certain 'Harbottle', a farmer at Tinkinswood, who was dying from the effects of drink, and 'Young Jane Edwards' who had been confined in something of an emergency in the parson's house shortly after a shotgun wedding. Ann also refers in graphic detail to the tragic explosion at Cymer colliery.

Charles was baptised at St. Nicholas, lived in Dyffryn Lodge in 1841, and was educated at the Eagle Academy in Cowbridge. He died in 1909 in Victoria, Australia at the age of 78. He had become a farmer and had eight children. Some of his school books are still in the possession of his family.

After the death of George Sandland, Thomas Williams, another gardener, born in Taunton, moved into *Hillside*, and he bought the house in 1876. Thomas Williams mortgaged the property later in the same year and a further mortgage in 1886 involved the interests of the Oriel family of Dowlais. It is likely that Thomas Williams had married into this family as his sons were Thomas Oriel Williams and Ben Oriel Williams aged 11 and 9 respectively in 1881; there were also five daughters.

In 1895, Robert Thomas described the house as the village shop. "Mr Thomas Williams lived there and he also kept a small farm and had the run of the hill for sheep. He also delivered coal. His wife was an invalid for many years. The shop catered well for the needs of the village. Could usually get what you needed, oil, soap, candles, sugar, flour and sweets. Easter Monday was a big day, usually ran a fair, at least that is what we called it, quite a lot of fun those days. Also, like my grandparents, they kept a donkey which was named Fanny. The donkey's name stuck and the family were identified by such".

In 1910, the owner and occupier was still Thomas Williams, but in 1927 the two sons - Thomas, living in Dowlais, and Ben, a tailor and outfitter in Port Talbot - passed on the the property now known as 1 Hillside Cottage to their youngest sister, Rose Ellen, who had married Tom James. Having grazing rights on Llanblethian Hill, the James family kept sheep and goats. "The Jameses in Hillside - Herbert, Tom, Ossie, Ralph, Dai, Frank, Idris and Ted. Most of them played cricket for Llanblethian, on the ground behind the Hunt Stables, where a proper wicket had been laid for Sir Sidney Byass, and the outfield was grazed short. Ted was a marvellous cricketer, a lovely bat."

***Ar y Mynydd*** was Richard Rees's own house – he was living there in 1819 when he mortgaged his properties; he was still there in 1840. It was then a much smaller cottage than *Ar y Mynydd* today – the property was considerably enlarged in the 1970s.

Home to one of the John Rice families in 1851, the cottage was occupied in 1861 by a pauper widow called Ann Harding, and also by a tailor journeyman, the Devon-born James Tout and his wife Mary, who moved to various cottages in Llanblethian during their lives.

Unoccupied in 1871, the 'cottage and pigstye with garden' was occupied by Morgan Morgan, shoemaker, for an annual rent of £5, when Philip Morgan became the owner in 1876. In 1881, Aaron Boobyer, miller, from Stoke St Mary in Somerset, whose brother had also moved into Piccadilly, lived in the house with his wife Harriet. They soon moved to live in part of *Llys Cottage*, and in 1891, Thomas Jones, a postman, lived in *Ar y Mynydd* with his family. Robert Thomas remembered his wife as having a laundry; the 1891 census records his daughter Elizabeth as being a laundress. Thomas Jones died in 1908. His obituary stated "For many years

he was familiar to the older inhabitants as a letter carrier in the district. As a faithful churchman, communicant, chorister and Sunday school scholar the late Thomas Jones had few equals”.

By 1910 Richard David lived in the house; Thomas Williams of the adjacent *Hillside* was recorded as the owner. Soon after, the Harrises occupied *Ar y Mynydd*; they kept goats, and cut fern from the hill for bedding. Jack Harris and Fred Chisell used to keep the paths on Llanblethian Hill cut back.

*From 'Llanblethian Buildings and People' 2001*

.....

**Piccadilly** somewhere – 1712/3 Will of Alexander William of Llanblethian to wife Joan : all my house where I live, together with the 2 gardens in the parish of Llanblethian, lying on the north side of a lane leading twds Llanblethian mill from lane to Llanblethian church. Later to son William.

To youngest son Alexander : all that little hse and garden in Llanblethian over and against the house where I now live (above bequeathed to my son William) to have and to hold the same little house.  
*D/D Dav 226*

1766 Between Mary Williams of Cowbridge, widow, and Alexander Williams of Holborn, London (1), John Lloyd of Cowbridge (2) and Thomas Lewis of Cowbridge – a messuage in the village of Llanblethian, having the road from Llanblethian mill to the village on the north, the lands of John Edmondson Esq. called Kill-Hayes on the south.....held now by Cissil Gibbon, widow (assigned property to John Lloyd)  
*D/D Xjb 1*

1797 Conveyance – William Meyrick of Cowbridge cordwainer and wife Mary, and Anne David of Llanblethian widow (which said Mary and Anne are daughters of late John Lloyd), John David of Llanblethian tailor, son of Anne David, for £12  
*D/D Xjb 2*

1799 Between John Lloyd of the parish of St John, Cardiff (1), Edward Rowland of Llanblethian, wheelwright (2) and John Miles the younger of Aberthin, gent. – that messuage, cottage and one garden containing one burgage in Llanblethian village, having the road from Llanblethian mill to the village on the north, and lands of Thomas Edmondson Esq. called Killhays on the south.....as John David now holds  
*D/D Xjb 3*

1821 – 5 Edward Rowland owned, house and garden, 3d *Land tax accounts*

1829? Written note at bottom of 1766 deed – Edward Rowland the present proprietor has sold a portion of the said premises to Thomas Jenkin of Llanblethian, cooper  
*D/D Xjb 1*

1839 Conveyance – Edward Rowland to Arthur Thomas Malkin of Wimpole Street, Middlesex, messuage with certain premises previously sold by Edward Rowland to Thomas Jenkins, cooper, on west  
*D/D Xjb 5*

1840 A Malkin owned; Edward Rowland occupied *Tithe 256*

1852	John Williams occupied; Mrs Malkin owned	<i>R 13 2/5</i>
1863	Conveyance, AT Malkin to Mr Richard Rees Todd for £55, now occ by Harriet Williams widow	<i>D/D Xjb 7</i>
1871	Harriet Williams	<i>Census 26</i>
1872	Richard Jones Todd deceased, late of Harpenden Villa, Cardiff, shipbroker, died at Clifton, widower and intestate. His son was Richard Rees Todd.	<i>D/D Xjb</i>
1874	Harriett Williams occupied; Todd owned	<i>Glam. County Rate 19</i>
1891	Thomas Jenkins, 41, stonemason and family	<i>Census 77</i>
1902	Conveyance, RR Todd of Cardiff to George Williams of Llanblethian wheelwright – premises for many years occupied by Harriet Williams, widow, and afterwards of Thomas Jenkins, mason, but now unoccupied	<i>Deeds</i>
1910	Sale of garden opposite Firs to George Williams of Llanblethian, wheelwright	<i>Deeds of St Quentins</i>
1935	'George Williams of Brooklyn, Llanblethian farmer' – sold garden	" " "
1954	George Williams died; Mary Ann Williams owner	<i>Deeds</i>
1950s	Fred Lewis ran the Sunday School in Piccadilly	<i>Memories of Roy Harris, Ar y Mynydd</i>

**Sources/references :**

*GRO = Glamorgan Record Office*

*D/D = deeds in GRO*

*Glamorgan County Rate, land tax assessments, tithe accounts = in GRO*

*R = Llanblethian rates in GRO*