

Bryntyrch under Church ownership, 1750-1922

For nearly two centuries, Bryntyrch was a glebe farm whose rent provided an additional income for the curates of Capel Curig and Dolwyddelan. In 1750, it was acquired by the Commissioners of Queen Anne's Bounty, a fund set up by Queen Anne to augment the income of poor Church of England clergymen. Because Capel Curig was a chapelry within the parish of Llandegai, the curate's only income before 1750 was £2 a year from the parish of Llandegai and £1 from Llanllechid. Offerings at weddings and funerals might bring in another £5 a year. This was not enough to live on, so the curate also served Dolwyddelan, though his income for this was not much better – about £8 a year paid by the owners of the Gwydir estate who pocketed the parish tithes. After its purchase by the Commissioners, Bryntyrch farm was rented out at £16 10s a year – a considerable augmentation to the curate's income - though out of this he had to pay 18s 8d p.a. King's rent, as well as the costs of maintaining the farm buildings.

The first tenant we know of was William Griffith. At his death in 1763, he was a reasonably prosperous farmer, owning 41 cattle, 4 oxen for ploughing, 98 sheep and 24 goats. His stock and household goods were valued at £93, slightly above average for the area at this period. Griffiths left most of his goods to his widow Margaret verch Hugh and after her death to three grandchildren, Hugh Thomas, Alice Thomas and Margaret Williams. (Note here the use of patronyms, where both women and men took their second name from their father's first name.)

Margaret verch Hugh died two years later. She had managed to grow the farm's value to £141, with more milk cows and goats, though some of the old sheep were declared fit only for their wool. At this point, the tenancy of Bryntyrch farm and pastures was apparently split between two of William and Margaret's three grandchildren, Hugh Thomas and Margaret Williams. Subdividing farms in this way was a common practice at this period because rising population meant there weren't enough farms for all the farmers' children looking out for a tenancy. Furthermore, when farmstock was split between several heirs, none of them ended up with sufficient capital to stock a large farm.



Snowdon and Capel Curing by Philip Mitchell, showing Bryntyrch Uchaf c.1850

In 1765, Margaret Williams married Robert Price, a Dolwyddelan yeoman, who moved to Capel Curig to join in farming her share of Bryntyrch. This was the lower part, Bryntyrch Isa. Robert died in 1784, bequeathing his goods to his widow and their two children, Alice and Robert, who were still minors. His stock (which included Margaret's inheritance, since women's possessions passed to their husbands on marriage) was less than her grandparents', reflecting the fact that Robert and Margaret only farmed part of Bryntyrch. Margaret continued to farm her share at least until 1797, when she was named as co-tenant of Bryntyrch for land tax with her cousin Hugh Thomas.

Hugh had taken over the upper part of the farm, Bryntyrch ucha, and in 1770 married Catherine Davies from Llanrwst. Hugh Thomas died in 1797, bequeathing most of his goods and chattels to his wife and son. His possessions were valued as 'less than £300', suggesting a fair degree of prosperity for the times. His son Thomas Hughes was farming Bryntyrch Uchaf farm in 1813, when he was in his 20s, though in 1827, the tenancy had passed to John Hughes – no known relative. By 1841 however, Bryntyrch Uchaf farm had been reunited with Bryntyrch Isa: thereafter, the cottages at Bryntyrch Uchaf were rented to a succession of agricultural labourers and quarrymen.

The Bryntyrch Inn

Capel Curig started to expand after Lord Penrhyn built the first road to the area in the 1790s, followed by a high-class hotel, the Capel Curig Inn (later known as the Royal Hotel, now Plas y Brenin). This was a springboard for a new turnpike road from Bangor to Shrewsbury via Capel which attracted traffic from London to Dublin away from its previous route along the north coast of Wales. The inn was on a grand scale, with 35 bedrooms in 1808, not to mention 11 parlours, a bar and tap room, stabling for 36 post horses and 22 gentlemen's horses, a coach house for 12 post carriages plus lock-up coach houses for six private carriages.



Bryntyrch Hotel before 1910

Evidently the new tenants of Bryntyrch Isa in 1814, Edward Williams and his wife Jane, felt there was room for a less grand hotel nearby and turned their farmhouse into an inn. This was a good business proposition, for in 1815, Parliament approved the first of a long series of grants to Thomas Telford to improve the London to Holyhead Road which ran through Capel Curig. Even so, the farm seems to have remained the more important part of the family business, with Edward junior and a hired man working as agricultural labourers. In 1841, the family was also renting the neighbouring farm of Tyn y Lon from the Penrhyn Estate.

By 1851 however, Edward Williams senior, with wife Jane, three daughters and younger son David had moved on to bigger things, running the Capel Curig Inn. Edward Williams junior took over as Bryntyrch farmer/innkeeper with his wife Mary. On Census Sunday in 1851 they employed three men as farm labourers, a female house-servant, and had three guests in the hotel. The hotel was then known as the Ancaster Arms - somewhat surprisingly, as it had no direct connection at this period with the Ancaster/Gwydir estate which owned the eastern half of Capel Curig.

Edward junior died in 1856, aged just 40, and his wife Mary took over the management of the Bryntyrch Hotel and its 100-acre farm plus extensive rough pastures. She must have had her hands full, employing a carter, farm servant, shepherd, cab driver, housemaid and dairymaid. Among the guests staying in 1861 was a local waiter, John Jackson, the son of Jonathan Jackson, memorably commemorated in St Julitta's churchyard as 'for 40 years a most confidential waiter at Capel Curig Inn'. John appears to have taken over the Bryntyrch Hotel shortly afterwards, but in 1864 was declared bankrupt and returned to being a waiter. In 1871, the hotel and farm were being run by Edward Davies, son of Catherine Davies who farmed a smallholding at Bryn Brethynau near Pont Cyfng, with his sister Ellinor as housekeeper.

In 1877, the Capel Curig vicar, the Rev. David Thomas, leased out Bryntyrch Hotel for 60 years and the farm for 30 years. The lease was sold on in 1880, and again in 1897, this time to brewery owners Samuel Allsopp and Son of Burton-on-Trent for £500. This was probably when the hotel was separated from the farm - with disastrous consequences for later vicars. Allsopp's Brewery had invented India Pale Ale in 1822, and in 1859 was the largest brewery in Britain. But by the end of the century, it was struggling financially and tried to merge with another Burton-on-Trent firm, Thomas Salt & Co. (In 1910, a partner in the Salt Brewery, Leonard Spencer Salt, died in a climbing accident on Lliwedd near Snowdon, and was buried in Capel Curig churchyard.) In 1911, Allsopp's went into receivership and the Allsopp family were invited to step down from the day-to-day running of the company. In 1934 the firm merged with Ind Coope. The Allsopp's must have sold the Bryntyrch Hotel lease during their financial difficulties, for in 1922 the lessee was Mr. Frank Crossley.

The new hotel lessees in 1877 evidently let the hotel to a new licensee, William Chambers, who started to promote Bryntyrch more vigorously as a family and commercial hotel:

'Close to the renowned Snowdon, Carnedd Llewelyn and Carnedd Dafydd mountains. Good accommodation for Tourists and Visitors. Private Apartments. First-class trout fishing in Ogwen, Capel Curig and other lakes. Guides to Snowdon. Good stabling. Posting in all its branches.'

Under the new management of Thomas Roberts, the hotel was refurbished in 1895 and provided carriages for hire. It hosted various community events, such as the annual Whit Monday festival of the Glan Llugwy Friendly Society, and sales of sheep and cattle from Bodesi, Glan Llugwy and Tal-y-Braich farms in Nant y Benglog.

However, leasing the hotel separately from the land made the farm much less attractive, especially once agricultural depression set in after 1880 due to international competition. In 1880, the farm had been let for £101 a year, but by 1905, the next vicar of Capel Curig, the Rev. Sinnett-Jones, was unable to let Bryntyrch farm and was obliged to hire a bailiff and farm it himself. He initially tried to persuade the Church Commissioners (who had taken over from Queen Anne's Bounty) to sell the land, but this was opposed on the grounds that a projected electric railway through Capel Curig was expected to increase land values. Two villas with fine views of Snowdon - Bryn Derwen and Plas Curig - had already been built on Bryntyrch land. Sinnett-Jones therefore obtained a loan to equip the farm with barns, but his request for

a further loan for a new farmhouse to increase the farm's value was refused and the new farmer was obliged to live at Bryntyrch Uchaf. By 1922, the farm was still only fetching £75 a year; the electric railway had not materialized, and the only new development was the artist Alfred Oliver's studio near Cobden's Hotel. With land no longer considered a good investment, the Church Commissioners decided in 1922 to sell the entire Bryntyrch estate.

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