

## MEMORIES OF OVERTON

### Penyllan Street

**Penyllan House** which faces down the High Street was the home in the 1830s of William Edge, the first Mayor of Overton. In 1861 and 1871 Owen Shone lived here and ran a drapers and the post office.

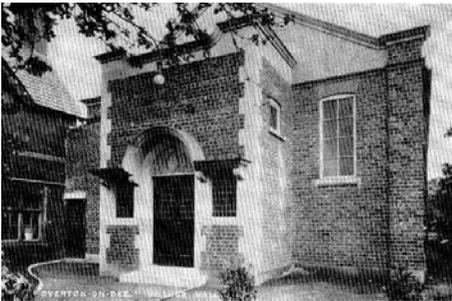


By 1891 it was run by Charles Edward Studley as a Malt Kiln and Grocers and Corn merchants as seen in the photograph. During World War II it was a chip shop run by Mrs Dalby with her daughter and son in law Mr & Mrs Alf Jones.

The field behind was known as Studley Kraft and occasionally was the venue for the circus. In the 1970s it was a caravan site.

Penyllan Cottage at the top of the path to the river was originally two houses, one of which was a small inn

### The Village Hall



A Village Hall fund was started in the early 1920s and Major Peel conveyed land alongside the Cocoa Rooms to the Trustees, i.e. the owner of the Brynypys estate, the rector and the churchwardens. The rector Rev Gilbert Heaton, obtained steel frames at a cost of £309 from the dismantling lifeboat hall at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. The total cost of building the hall was £3,473 and it was opened in October 1926.



The Village Hall in the 1950s. The posters for Mr Jenkins cinema are on the noticeboard outside.



Since then the Village Hall has been the venue for all kinds of entertainments, cinema presentations, dances, dinners etc. The Land Girls from Queensbridge Hall remembered the dances held twice a week with Dick Cross and his band. The band knew when the land girls had to leave and they would play '*Give Us Five Minutes More*' by Jimmy Young.

The picture shows the Savana Dance Band, with Dick Cross on drums, Jan Zamojski on trumpet, Percy Rogers on saxophone, Kath Hamlington on piano accordion and Gwen Dalby née Davies on piano.

The Village Hall was also the venue for the "Welcome Home" party for returning troops after WWII paid for by money raised by people in the village.



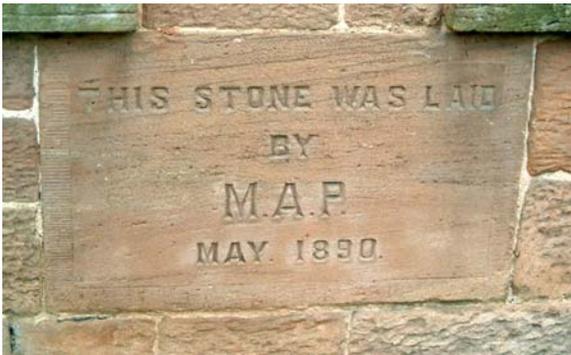
It was also the venue for the local cinema. There was a problem with the electric power. When the Mill started up the power went down and the cowboys in the Western films galloped slower and slower. The projectionist was Mr Jenkins and Edna Davies was the usherette. Tickets cost 1/9d in the balcony and 1/- or 9d in the stalls.

**Memory from Dave Austin** "I remember, extremely well the local cinema in the village hall being run by Mr Jenkins and powered by Mr Gamble. Very often the power would drop and following a big cheer from a crowd of us young kiddies was the chorus "Pedal up Archie". Great days and always somewhere to go on Saturday evenings and even in the week."

**Memory from Geoff Price** “Reading about the cinema reminded me of one night Mr Jenkins, the boss, asked me to hold the fort while he went downstairs to check the sound. One of the machines decided to "spew" the film out. When he returned all he could see was film everywhere. Rewinding it was no joke.”

### **The Cocoa Rooms and Reading Rooms**

In the 1800s where the Cocoa Rooms now stands, was a cottage and adjoining it was the one that is there now. Both were owned by J. Bennion together with 2 acres of land. The present cottage which was known as "Overton Academy", a girl's school run by Mrs Eliza Wigger and her daughter. When the cottage next to it became empty this became the "Coffee House and Reading Rooms" with William & Jane Jones as caretakers. In 1881 they were called "Coffee House Keepers" and it was open from 10 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night.



In 1890 Mr Edmund Peel who had become the landlord, had this cottage demolished and the Cocoa & Reading Room built. Coffee or Cocoa and Reading Rooms were opened in many areas in response to the Temperance Movement and to encourage the drinking of less alcohol. The foundation stones were laid by his daughters, the Misses M.A. and E.M. Peel on May 9<sup>th</sup> and the rooms opened on October 27<sup>th</sup> 1890. The room on the left of the front door was the Cocoa Room with

access to the cottage where James & Mary Barnett lived; he was a decorator and she was manageress of the rooms. By 1901 Mr Northover, an Assurance Agent lived in this cottage with his wife who was the manageress (plus 4 children). Over the years this room with its roaring fire became a popular meeting place for all ages. It is still fondly remembered by army personnel, and the members of the Women's Land Army who were stationed in the area during the Second World War

The room above this was the Reading, Library and Parish Room and also used for small whist drives. Miss Chevasse had this and the staircase panelled in wood in memory of her aunt, Miss Maude. The room opposite was the games room. In 1908 a three quarter size billiard table was purchased from Ellesmere Men's Club for £15. In the late 1960s both of these rooms were incorporated into the Sports and Social Club (see notes below). The Cocoa Room was closed, separated from the cottage and became the Library.

The bigger room opposite was a large kitchen with a black leaded range, sink and draining board. After the Village Hall was built in 1926 it was used a great deal as a refreshment room, when various functions were held in the Hall. In WWII it was used for school dinners. On Wednesdays twelve school girls age 11 to 14 from Overton and Penley attended cookery classes, starting with basics like bread and rice pudding, every Xmas making a cake, Xmas pudding and mincemeat, and also doing laundry, ironing and household cleaning. Happy days!

In the 1970s it became the Parish Room and provided a home for the new Overton Playgroup and Lloyds Bank. In the 1990s the two rooms swapped over, the Library moving to the larger room.

**Memories from Mary Caspar** in the 1930s. “There was a second school, very small and held in the Cocoa and Reading Rooms. It was a private venture, run at first by Mrs. Lindsay, wife of the plumber and painter. She was succeeded by a Miss Rowbotham who came daily from Wrexham, and of whom I only remember that she had a hairy chin and an unfortunate habit of chewing her tongue.”

### **Overton Sports and Social Club 1968 to 1979**

There used to be a Billiard/Snooker room, in what is now the main clubroom of the Club, with a table which has a history of its own. It was made from a sailing ship's timbers as recorded on the plaque at the end of the table. It was given to the village by Major Peel of Bryn-y-Pys Hall. By 1968 use of the room had declined until the last villagers, Hughie Gregory of Bryn-y-Pys Home Farm, Sgt Smith, Bill Bloor and Geoff Hughes, stopped playing. The Village Hall Management Committee locked the room to prevent it from being vandalised.

To avoid losing the facility forever, Tom Haynes arranged an informal meeting with Bill Bussey, Ron Cox, Den Owen, Raymond Haynes and Ivor to revive some interest in billiards and snooker. A committee was formed who re-decorated the room with paint from Noreen Haynes' shop at the Hermitage, Willow Street, which along with building materials was purchased on a 'pay when you can' basis.

Later a liquor licence was applied for and the Village Hall Committee agreed to re-locate the Library to what is now the Parish Room, and create what is now the bar and television room. This involved a lot of demolition work and removal of rubble using a tractor and trailer provided by Mick Huntbach of Trench farm and Tom Williams of Cae Dyah, who were both on the committee.

In 1969 the new bar and lounge was opened and villagers were invited to become members. The bench seating was purchased at a sale on Penley Camp for 50p each. Fund raising was always going on, which included a two day fete held on the football field with a couple of committee members sleeping in the beer tent to protect the contents and culminating with a dance in a large marquee. One of the attractions in the afternoon was a piano smashing contest!

The club had very little money, but as membership numbers increased, demand for games of snooker also increased, so the decision was made to install a second table. After further discussions with the Village Hall committee, their new kitchen was built, and the club could go ahead and build the present "snooker room", toilets and committee room, with all the steel girders purchased from Ifton Colliery.

The second snooker table was bought from "The Swallow Club" in Whitchurch for £25, dismantled and brought to Overton in T.L. Haynes half ton van, carried upstairs and reassembled in its present position. One of the girders was used to replace the entrance door and wall to make room for the present bar area for the club room. At a later date the Cellar was extended and the Pool room built above it. The bar was manned by committee members for the first 10 years, with the cellar and Beer Pipes cleaned every Sunday morning, along with restocking the bar, cleaning the club rooms and ironing both snooker tables. In 1979 the club had its liquor licence taken away for a period of 6 months after more than 20 police personnel including constables sergeants, plain clothes and Inspectors raided the premises with a search warrant, resulting in about half a dozen members being prosecuted for drinking 20 minutes after the prescribed closing time, but still within the half hour drinking up time, so we all drank Coke and orange juice until the licence was restored and the club was renamed "Overton Recreational Club".



### Machine House

Machine House (on the left of the picture) was built as part of the provision for the Ellesmere to Wrexham turnpike. Turnpike acts for the repair of the road from Shrewsbury through Ellesmere and Overton to Wrexham (the present A528/A539) were passed in the 1750s.

Chester Chronicle 11 January 1785 states

#### *“TOLLS TO BE LET*

*Notice is hereby given That the Toll Gates leading from Overton to Ellesmere and Hanmer will be let by auction at the Bowling Green in Overton, on Wednesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> next, between the hours of two and six o'clock in the afternoon, in the manner directeth by the Act passed by the Act in the thirteenth year of his present Majesty; which GATES were rented last year at £345. Whoever happens to be the best bidder must at the same time give security with sufficient sureties to the satisfaction of the Trustees, for a payment of the rent agreed at such times as they direct.”*

The tolls continued to be collected at 'Overton Gate' on the corner of Salop Road and Penyllan Street (and 'Maesgwaelod Bar' near Overton Bridge) till the 1870s. The tolls were used to pay for repairs and improvements to the road but it was soon discovered that heavy carts and carriages caused more damage to the roads. The Trustees of Toll Roads then began installing weighbridges to weigh carts and charge tolls according to weight. The local trustees installed a weighbridge in a pit in front of Machine House where the pavement is now. It was a bridge platform onto which a vehicle would drive with a system of weights and pivots below. Lever bars took the weight and extended under the track into the Machine House where the weights were read (the same principal as kitchen balance scales).

In 1841 Roger Kynaston was the Toll Keeper. In 1851 Joseph Barrett was Toll Gate keeper as well as being Parish Clerk, in 1861 Mary Ann Catherall was collector of tolls, and in 1871 William Crewe with Martha Roberts as the 'machine keeper'. The Tolls were abolished in 1874 when local councils became responsible for roads. However the weighbridge was still used till the late 1930s.



In the 1950s Wilf McDowell lived in Machine House. He had a bicycle shop on the opposite side of the road where the veterinary surgery is now. (See photo, Wilf and Machine House on the right and Dick Cross on the left)

## The Methodist Church

Overton Methodist Church was born out of the ashes of the 2 previous Methodists Chapels in Overton. In the late 1930s it was decided by the 'powers that be' that the Primitive Methodist Church, Wesleyan Methodists and the Free Church should amalgamate. The 'Prims' as it was called affectionately was opposite the Almshouses in Salop Road (now 3 cottages) and the Free Church at the Bangor Rd end of School Lane (now called Chapel House 1 & 2).

Mr Tommy Thompson, builder, smallholder cum-entrepreneur of the Free Church, negotiated to buy both Chapels and also acquired the corner plot of land on the crossroads of Salop Road, which had previously been the village 'pound', was where the new church was to be built. Mr Thompson got the contract to build the present church which was erected in 1938 with the help of donations from various other churches and chapels in the locality, local dignitaries and business people, and of course the money from the sale of the two previous chapels. Some of those names can be seen in the foundation stones around the chapel.



At the Overton Methodist Church Christmas fair.

In the newspaper cutting (left) Mr Thompson can be seen with Mrs Haynes and Mary Thompson.

Methodism has been practised in the village since the late 18thC & the date 1816 on the Chapel in Salop Road can still be seen. The chapel opened on the first Sunday in December 1938. The schoolroom

used to have a stage and in the 1940s there was a small Youth Group that put on plays. There was a good choir and Edward Haynes taught the Tonic Sofa Music. He was organist and choir master up to his 80th year.

## The Mill

The houses facing Station Road known as The Mill take their name from the sawmill that once stood there. At Chirk Castle the polished wooden floors of the Dining Room, Saloon and Drawing Room were laid down in 1772 and castle's Stewards Book records that the timber came from Overton sawmill. Emyr Phillips ran the sawmill during WWII.

## The Police Station



On the opposite side of the road stood the Overton House of Correction. In 1851 Edward Griffiths was the Keeper of the House of Correction with one prisoner, Edward Trevor. By 1861 Thomas McLaren was Police Constable followed in 1871 by Police Constable James Edge. After the new Police Station was built in 1884 this became a house for the Police Sergeant and later, the Inspector.



This picture show Inspector Owen Jones and his family outside the house in about 1910, his wife Susanah and children Richard and Elisabeth Ellen ( Nellie). Inspector Jones retired in 1926.

The last Police Inspector in the village from 1925 was Insp. Rogers, very smart, and with a small stick which he carried on his shoulder.

The building then became the Flintshire Council & Register Office. In WWII it was the Food Office It was demolished in

1956 when the new Council Offices were built on the site of what is now the medical practice in the High Street.

The new Police station to the right was built in 1884. It incorporated the Magistrates Court, a robing room and 2 cells. The first case was heard in 1886 when John Davies of Overton was charged with being drunk and disorderly and fined 5 shillings with costs of 8 shillings and 14 days to pay. This building was replaced in the 1960s by the present Police Station on the opposite side of the road.



### **The Pump**

To the right of the Police Station is the pump. This was erected by Edmund Peel in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

The well to provide water for the pump is to the left of the pump's present position and therefore under the building.

### **Gwydyr House**

To the left of the entrance to Church Road is Gwydyr House, a substantial, H-plan, two-storey late 17th or early 18th century property. The doorway is flanked by ionic brick pilasters at either end and fluted ionic stone columns, which are all on high bases, stylistically in-keeping with the date of the building but moved to its present position in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The house was possibly built in 1707 which is the date on the cottage attached to the left. Its name may indicate its connection with the Wynne family whose ancestral home was Gwydyr Castle. Sir Watkin William Wynne 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet (1692-1749) was a prominent Jacobite and Overton had a tradition of being a venue for the Cycle Club, a Jacobite organisation.

In the late eighteenth century it became the Gwernhaylod Arms and then the Bowling Green Inn and served as Overton's main posting inn. Censuses list many innkeepers, servants and lodgers. To the left were stables and service buildings and behind a garden which extended

to the churchyard wall. There was also grazing for horses on the 13 acre Bowling Green field, which was across the road where the Chapel now is and extended along Salop Road to where the present garage.

In 1885 it was renamed Gwydyr House and become the private residence of George Tringham, retired from the Admiralty, who lived here until he inherited Nerquis Hall. It was at this time that the upper windows were changed.



From the 1920s the building became the Maelor Co-operative Society later taken over by the the Cefn & District Co-operative Store run by Jack Roberts till c1960. Two large shop windows were added (after the picture below was taken in the 1920s)



The room upstairs above the right hand shop window was used as the Masonic Hall for the Gredington Lodge. More recently the building became a carpet shop, garden machinery shop and a soft furnishing store.

To the left was the stable yard with service buildings. Alterations some years ago revealed the bake house ovens in what became the abattoir.

Two shops were created, the one to the right has been Mr Wilf McDowell's bicycle shop, the village doctor's surgery in the 1960s and 70s, a dress shop and the Vets practice.

The shop to the left was E.A. Woolley's butchers with abattoir behind. Ernie Woolley retired in 1971 but still kept an interest in the business for his successor Derrick Blair until the business closed.



The buildings are now converted into houses called The Stable Yard.

*With contributions from articles for the Overton Oracle by Betty Williams, Ivor Parkinson and Josie Ralphs*