Barmouth Sailors' Institute

(Founded in 1890 by the late Canon EDWARD HUGHES B.A.)

Sailors' Institute, The Quay, Barmouth, Gwynedd, LL42 1ET

Registered Charity No. 1057490

NEWSLETTER ISSUE TWENTY NINE

(Edited & Published by Trevor Roberts)

June 2023



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Reverend Benedict (Ben) Griffith

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Trevor Roberts.

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Chairman's Notes

Well here we are at Issue 29 and another half of the year has passed. In putting this newsletter together again, although I'm the Editor, my special thanks go to Alan Vincent again who spends many hours compiling the Newsletters and having to put up with my last minute late requests. He really does a great job in the presentation and making the articles easy and pleasant read.

I'm sure you will enjoy several of the articles, and again I ask members to give thought to any articles they themselves would like to see in future editions.

At our AGM we had several changes in our officers including a new Membership Secretary in Helen Palmer and a new Treasurer in Alan Vincent with John Puddle moving to become our new Vice-Chairman, something that kept John within the Institute officers family.

Obviously I take this opportunity to welcome our new Institute President the Revd Ben Griffith. Having met Ben several times at local events these past couple of months, I think you will all agree that he really does come over as a (down to Earth) person who is really interested in all the residents of our area.

I have included within this newsletter a profile of Ben Griffith that gives readers a better understanding of someone new to Ardudwy.

Finally, my thanks to all your officers who continue to give support to the institute on behalf of our members with of course especially to our Secretary Janet. Who besides keeping the Institute business on a sure footing really does have a little success in keeping myself awake.

Hope you all enjoy the rest of the summer months and hope see you in our next Newsletter in December**.**

Best Wishes

Trevor

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SECRETARY MURMURINGS

Once again Trevor needs some words from me. It's nice to be back after the unfortunate circumstances that led to the cancellation of our December issue. I'm sure Trevor will be making up for it in this issue.

The past year has been a steady one for me, nothing too hectic. I've had some pleasant social coffee reunions with people I first got to know during lockdown when they were at the beginning of their search for long lost maritime relatives. I find it very nice they've kept me up to date with their progress and what progress some have made! It's amazing how widespread some families are. Earlier this year, I met with a couple of long-standing members who have now come to live in North Wales from Norfolk. They reminded me the only other time we had met was way back when they were on holiday in the area and they visited one of our coffee mornings in the Dragon Theatre. They became members over a cup of coffee!. Now that they live much nearer, I hope we shall socialise again soon over another cup of coffee.

The Institute hasn't featured in any more national programmes. Fishlock's Choice, mentioned in issue 28, was eventually televised in December. Back in February, Alan was interviewed in Tŷ Gwyn for an article in 'Coast' magazine. We are still waiting to hear which issue it will appear in. A few years ago, the Sailors' Institute was also in the same magazine.

As Trevor will no doubt have told you, we have welcomed a new President, Revd Benedict Lloyd Thomas Griffith to the Committee. Any vicar of the Bro Ardudwy area is automatically the Institute's President. I'm very pleased to say Ben is very enthusiastic about his position and we look forward to seeing him at our Committee meetings. There was a very nice service in St. John's Church to welcome him. Trevor was there as Mayor and I went to represent the Institute. We were both there again a couple of weeks later for a Coronation Thanksgiving service.

During the quiet winter months, we managed to improve the access for disabled people by readjusting the steps into the building.

Alas, as time goes by, it is inevitable we lose some very loyal members. Thankfully only three over the last twelve months, our thoughts go out to their families. On the happy side, as with last year, we have again welcomed new members into the fold. We now have Helen in post as Membership Secretary. As our membership has grown over the years, it's a position long overdue. She is a great help to me, relieving me of some paperwork!

As I write these few words, we are enjoying some glorious sunshine welcoming folk to Barmouth. When I was in town a couple of days ago it was bustling with happy faces. It's amazing what sunshine can do!! Barmouth appears to be very popular with dogs of all shapes and sizes. They come in twos and threes!! I think there must be a magazine for dogs out there saying what a welcoming place Barmouth is with a shop offering biscuits on the way in! Water also available outside many shops.

On that sunny note, I sign off wishing you all a very happy Summer and Autumn. See you again in December.

Janet Griffith Hon. Secretary





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Some of my experiences with the

1st Barmouth Sea Scouts

in the early 1960's.

Richard Baker

Preamble

Last year while visiting Barmouth, my wife and I met up with Janet Griffith, Secretary of the Barmouth Sailor's Institute. I had become a member of the Institute the previous year but had not as yet met any of the officials. Janet and I had exchanged several e-mails and were now keen to put faces to names, so managed to arrange a meeting during our holidays. We spent a very pleasant couple of hours being shown round the Institute by Janet. Just as we were about to take our leave, I happened to spot a small photograph high up on the billiard room wall. It was a copy of what is, as far as I know, the only photo of the original eight members of the 1st Barmouth Sea Scouts taken in about 1962. I pointed this out to Janet and thought no more about it. Shortly after returning home to Holland, I sent a list of names of the persons in the photo and what little information that I could remember to the BSI and received an enthusiastic mail from Trevor, the BSI magazine editor, asking me to write a piece on the 1st Barmouth Sea Scouts for the magazine to which I readily agreed.

Bear in mind that I am writing from memory about events which occurred over 60 years ago!

My involvement with the troop extended from its inception in approximately 1962 until spring 1965 when, at age 17, I joined the Merchant Navy as a Navigating Apprentice.

Introduction

Sometime in 1961 or 1962 I heard through the grapevine that there were plans afoot to form a Sea Scout troop in Barmouth. Further enquiry revealed that the initial intention was to recruit four boys around thirteen years of age who would receive an initial training to prepare them to act as Patrol Leaders. At a later stage, further recruitment would take place to recruit 'ordinary' scouts. Eventually, it was hoped to form patrols of approximately six



scouts, each consisting of a Patrol Leader (P.L.), a Second (Assistant P.L.). and three or four 'ordinary' scouts. The recruiting would be phased so that the Scoutmasters trained the P.L.'s who, helped by the Scoutmasters trained the Seconds who, in turn supported the training as, and when, necessary.

At this stage, recruiting would have started in earnest and the newcomers would have been divided between the patrols. As I

recall, we ended up with four patrols Seagull, Bittern, Gannet and Curlew each consisting of five or six boys.

The four original P.L's	The four original Seconds
Richard James Griffith	Nigel Smith
Roger Evans	John Yeomans
John Rees	Peter Rees
Richard David Baker	David Wyn Williams

Uniform

Royal Navy ratings cap with the words 'Sea Scouts' in gold wire on the tally band

Navy blue seaman's jersey with words 'Sea Scouts' in white on the front

Navy blue woollen shorts

Navy blue knee socks

Black leather lace-up shoes

Green scarf with yellow edge

Scout belt

White lanyard

Leather woggle in the form of a Turk's Head knot

Sheath knife (optional)

Looking back, it never ceases to amaze me that it was perfectly normal to see a twelve year old carrying a knife with a 4" or 5" blade on his belt. How different things are these days!

Training/Activities

Training indoors took the form among others of demonstrations of rope work, i.e. knots and splices, compass, and chart work. Training outdoors consisted of small boat work, that is, handling small rowing and sailing craft, summer camp, camp cooking, hill walking, etc. Seeing a group of Sea Scouts walking in the hills behind Barmouth in Scout uniform inevitably prompted passers-by to ask-'Where's your ship?' Funny the first few times but there are limits!

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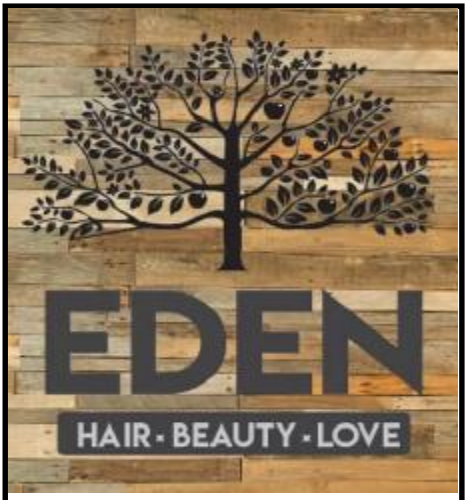
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The following event has kept those of us who were present at the time smiling for years. A group of us, in uniform, were preparing a boat for some activity or other watched with much amusement by crowds of tourists. One scout whose name I will not mention, was standing with one foot on the slipway and the other on the boat's gunwale when he paused, possibly to drink in the beauty of his surroundings, or to admire some pretty holidaymaker passing by, causing the boat to drift ever further away from the quay. Having set things in motion, all he could do was to wait for the inevitable to happen, which it duly did, depositing him in full Sea Scout array in a noxious mix of seawater, leaking fuel from some of the many motorboats plying the harbour and, worst of all, the discharge from the public toilets on the quay. One local wit later described the event as 'not so much as swimming as going through the motions'. Needless to say, this has been rectified!

In due course, it became necessary to create a Senior Scout patrol to accommodate those who had reached the age of sixteen, the maximum allowable age for a scout. This was the James Cook patrol with yours truly as Senior Patrol Leader. My recollection of

my time in the Seniors is limited as I went to sea shortly afterwards.

Although I was intrigued by the idea of becoming a sea scout, I would have preferred to have joined the Army Cadet Force at that stage in my development. However there was one big snag; my mother, adamantly refused to allow me to play with real guns, so that was the end of that! I consequently applied to be considered for one of the first four trainee P.L'.s vacancies and was lucky enough to be accepted. Looking back, I have absolutely no regrets about my 'enforced' membership of the Barmouth troop especially because I was involved from the very start.

Training of the four probationary P.L.'s commenced shortly afterwards under the benign leadership of Glyn Morris (Skip), an ex. Royal Navy Gunnery Petty Officer who had swallowed the anchor and was now manager of the Manweb shop in Barmouth. The initial plan was to train the P.L's to Tenderfoot badge level before recruiting the four Seconds. The Tenderfoot badge indicates that the wearer has reached the basic level of training as required for membership of the Scout Movement. Skip was augmented shortly after by John Rhodes (Chiefy), an engineer at Llanbedr Aerodrome. The troop meetings were held on Friday evenings in the basement canteen of the old Barmouth Primary school. Together with a small group of fellow scouts, we soon discovered that the fanlight in one of the basement windows could be opened from the outside with the greatest of ease. It was then only necessary for one scout to climb inside and release the cylinder lock on the basement door and let the rest of us in. In this way, the old canteen gained more functions, those of hang-out place and smoke room for young adolescents!

Ockenden Venture

I have absolutely no recollection of taking part in Bob-a-Job week other than doing some light gardening at Bryn Melyn at the bottom of Panorama Road. However, what we original four can feel very proud of is our painting of all the window frames at Hendre Hall prior to the arrival of a group of so-called D.P's or Displaced Persons, in our case, German speaking Czech children. We spent several weekends spreading paint about at random. I can't speak for anyone else but I enjoyed myself enormously! Hendre Hall, part

of the Ockenden Venture, was a private charity owned by the Ockenden family dedicated to assist refugees from the Second World War. The man in charge at the Hall was always referred to as Mr. Ray by the children and I think that he might have been one of the Ockenden family itself. Relations between the 1st Barmouth Sea Scouts and the Ockenden children were cordial from the very start and, indeed, several became members of our scout troop.

The Troop is now official!

Unless I'm mistaken, the troop had no official status up to this point. This hiatus was rectified by means of a modest enrolment ceremony in the presence of the District Commissioner, Dr.May, a local G.P. as well as the scout 's relations. It would be the first occasion upon which the troop paraded in uniform and very smart they looked too!

Here, each scout in turn swore the following oath on the flag

I promise on my honour that I will do my best

To do my duty to god and the queen

To help other people at all times

And to obey the scout law"

After this he was presented with his tenderfoot badge by the the guest of honour Major Harold William ('Bill')Tilman ,Honorary President of the 1st Barmouth troop.

Sadly, Major Tilman and his six shipmates disappeared in 1977 in the South Atlantic Ocean while on passage Rio de Janeiro to Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands.

Summer activities

I seem to remember that a Royal Navy inshore minesweeper of the TON class paid a courtesy visit to Barmouth every summer. As they were too deep-draughted to cross the Bar, they remained at anchor outside. The local ferrymen must have made a good trade as there was more traffic running from the harbour to the ship than I've seen before or since! A group of us even rowed out to her in the 'Monty' a clinker built rowing boat on indefinite loan to the troop. Fortunately, a kind ferryman offered us a tow us back; an offer that we couldn't refuse. Talking of ferrymen, 'Mermaid' was

owned by Skip's father Francis (Fan) Morris who, when he wasn't running an evening ferry service would allow us to take the 'Mermaid' upriver. Under Skip's watchful eye of course. This gave us an opportunity to practice steering, pilotage and so on.

The troop did not parade very often other than on Remembrance Sunday when they marched from the old primary school playground to the War Memorial on Park Road bearing the Scout flag and the Union flag. The only other occasion which we paraded as I remember was when the Queen visited Barmouth by train at which time we joined the crowds outside the railway station.



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A great favourite in the troop's year were the summer camps which were held on farms in the neighbourhood. The first year we camped on a farm near Tabor in the northern foothills of the Cader Idris range. Unfortunately, the farmer had not had time to mow the field thus giving us a chance to wield a couple of vicious looking scythes. Luckily, the field was cleared with everyone's limbs still intact. Far fewer people went camping in the early sixties and information on the subject was scarce. What all the the books on the subject agreed on was that you should sleep on a blanket on the ground having first excavated a shallow hole for you hip! I can assure you from bitter experience that that's a total waste of time and effort when sharing an eight-man "Patrol" tent with seven others.

The following year the summer camp was located at Pennal near Tywyn and was once more a great success. The only cloud on the horizon was that the G.C.E. results would be published while I was there. I was not particularly optimistic as I knew that hadn't done





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nearly enough work. When the results came through, it turned out that I needed one more pass for entry into the Merchant Navy or, as my mother put it, 'You got four good ones'. I decided to stay at school and re-sit two subjects. But in the meantime, I was going to enjoy myself!

The main component of the relaxation consisted of lying in a hammock in the shade of some oak trees whilst reading selected bits of an extremely tattered copy of Lady Chatterley's Lover.

I recall it being a very pleasant summer and, now that the pressure was off, I could relax. As I was approaching sixteen years of age, it was time to move up to a yet to be formed Senior patrol. Among the requirements for gaining my first class badge was to plan and complete a twenty mile hike in hilly terrain, spread over two days, cooking a meal and camping overnight. Our location at the south-western corner of the Snowdonia National Park was ideal as it was unfamiliar to me thus increasing the challenge. There only remained to find a suitable companion to go with me preferably one who is willing to laugh at my jokes even though he has heard them many times before. It could be no other than Dave Townsend who is still one of my best friends to this day. I have no recollection of the exact route taken other than a few highlights. Among the few places along the route that spring to mind were Tywyn , Happy Valley, (Cwm Maethlon) Llyn Barfog (Bearded Lake), Bryneglwys slate quarry and Abergynolwyn and returning to Tywyn, our start point, by the Talyllyn Railway. Dave set up the tent while I peeled some potatoes and presumably some vegetables too. I owned a genuine Primus half-pint paraffin stove in those days though whether I used it on this occasion I don't know. One thing is certain*, if* I used it, I could be assured that the paraffin would add extra flavour to the meal. The mandatory steak was extracted from the bloody remains of it's wrapping paper and committed to the flames By the time that we had eaten and cleared up, it was time for bed. We 'had a long but very enjoyable day behind us but tomorrow would be a piece of cake in comparison, namely a two mile walk down to Abergynolwyn station followed by a scenic trip down to Tywyn on the narrow gauge railway where we would be collected. No sooner had our heads touched our pillows than the local residents put in an an appearance. First it was a sheep with an extremely bad case of

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smoker's cough making it sound as if it wouldn't last the night. As we were camped in a slate quarry, we had ample ammunition to drive the beast away;. A few of the better aimed projectiles hit their target but it was obviously an armour-plated sheep as they just bounced off. Worse was yet to come though as it was obviously the evening that the finals of the Abergynolwyn & District Strictly Ewe Dancing contest were taking place and we were the guests of honour! We fell asleep out of pure exhaustion eventually only to be woken a few hours later by the compere of last night's show and her cronies standing just out of range and chatting loudly among themselves. Having discovered that our breakfast milk had gone off in the confines of our rucksacks the previous day we made our weary way breakfast-less down to Abergynolwyn to catch the first train to Tywyn.

P.S. A little author's licence was used in the sheep incidents at Bryneglwys Quarry otherwise this text is based on fact.

Richard Baker

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A new Ministry Area Leader for Bro Ardudwy

The Archbishop of Wales and the Assistant Bishop of Bangor are pleased to announce the appointment of the Revd Ben Griffith as Vicar and Ministry Area Leader of Bro Ardudwy Ministry Area which serves the communities around Harlech and Barmouth in the Archdeaconry of Meirionnydd.

Speaking of the appointment Bishop Mary says, "I am delighted that we are to welcome Benedict (Ben) Griffith to Bro Ardudwy and to our diocese. Ben is a talented and people-orientated priest with previous experience of ministry in Wales in Swansea and Brecon diocese. He is currently ministering close to Wales in Hereford Diocese and we look forward to welcoming Ben and his wife Jean in the spring."

Introducing himself Ben says,
My father is originally from north Wales and my mother from Cockney London. I am one of seven children and we were raised as Roman Catholics although we have a broad mix of denominations in the family. It was as a student at Trinity College, Carmarthen in the 1980s that I encountered Anglicanism and what has felt ever since as my spiritual home.
I met Jean when I was 49. She was a Radnorshire girl who lived over the road from the Vicarage I was living in at the time. We were married in 2014 and the family is completed by a bouncy 3 year old Black Labrador called Jack, he's not that used to the sea, so watching that develop could be fun.
Speaking of his appointment Ben says:
Bro Ardudwy is where part of my family originates and it's a part of the world that I've been visiting for as long as I can remember and despite never having lived there, it's the place I've loved more than any other on Earth. The idea of sharing the glorious adventure of the Gospel in a place I've loved from afar for so long feels like a dream come true, I'm really hoping that nobody's going to wake me from it anytime soon!

Having spent 18 years teaching Ben began his training for ordination in 2004 at Ripon College, Cuddesdon before being

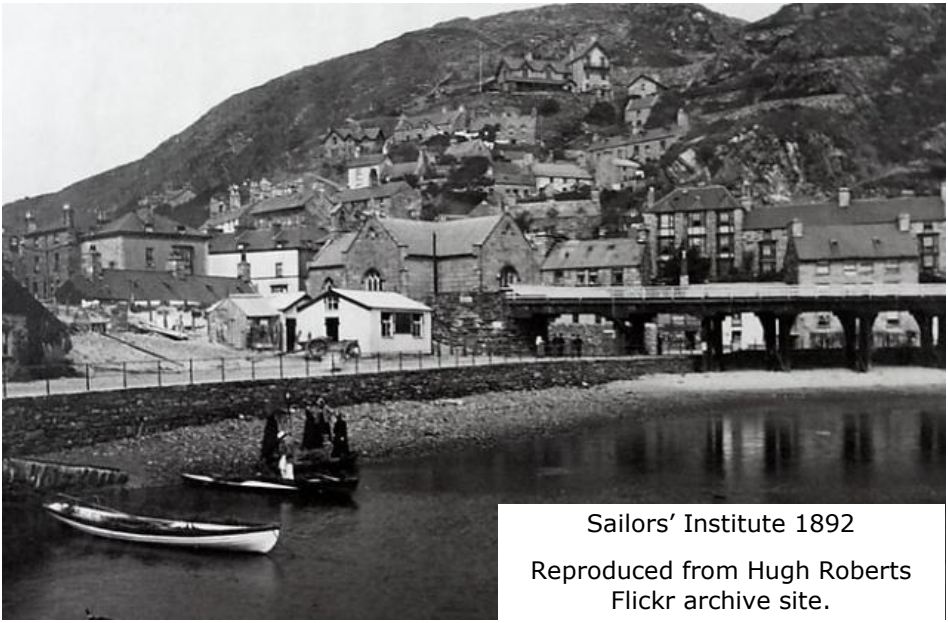
ordained a Deacon in Saint Alban's Cathedral in 2006 and then a Priest in 2007. He served his curacy outside Bedford before moving to Radnorshire in 2009 to become Vicar of the Upper Wye between Builth Wells and Llandrindod Wells.
The Archdeacon of Meirionnydd is looking forward to welcoming Ben, saying,

It is with great delight that I welcome the news of Ben and Jean coming to serve in the Archdeaconry of Meirionnydd and particularly to the Bro Ardudwy Ministry Area. I am sure that the people of the area will welcome them both warmly. It is interesting that Ben has family roots in the area and I am certain that this will serve them well as they settle into a new context. Again, it will be good to welcome a new cleric from outside the diocese to be part of our 'family' here in Bangor. I wish them well.

Ben will begin his new ministry on 22 March 2023, and will be licensed at Saint John's Church, Barmouth at 7pm. Please pray for Ben, Jean and the people of Bro Ardudwy as they enter a new chapter in their lives.

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Sailors' Institute 1892

Reproduced from Hugh Roberts Flickr archive site.

Barmouth History

Article reproduced from the Barmouth Heritage Trail web site

Early Barmouth

Little is known of the early history of Barmouth. High above the present day town lies the first patch of land ever gifted to the National Trust, and its name suggests that the place must have been inhabited a very long time ago - Dinas Oleu, the 'Fortress of Light'). More substantially the Parish of Llanaber, which covers Barmouth, listed over 100 tax-payers in a document dated to 1292, and many of the farmhouses in the surrounding area date to the 15th century, those buildings themselves being constructed on the sites of earlier occupations.

The earliest record we have of a community in Barmouth itself is in a survey from 1565, commissioned by Queen Elizabeth I. It merely states: Abermowe, (sic) being likewise a haven having no habitation, but only foure howses whereof there are owners Res ap Res; Haryy ap Eden; Thomas ap Edward and John ap Howard Goche. We know, however, that

Ty Gwyn y Bermo, on the Quay, was built between 1460 and 1485, and we also know that houses were built on the steep hill above the harbour as early as the 15th century in what is now known as 'Hen Bermo' or 'Old Barmouth'. Up until the middle of the 18th century the whole town was situated in this location, safely above the waves.

Maritime History

It was in the 1700's that Barmouth and the Mawddach estuary began to expand rapidly into a major boat-building centre, driven partly by the boom in coastal shipping. In just 20 years from 1770 records show that a total of 138 vessels were built on the river. This was helped by the growth of Merioneth as one of the major centres for the wool industry. With land routes still difficult the wool was shipped out of the port of Barmouth, feeding further ship building. In reality we should talk about the port of Barmouth-Dolgellau as although the two commercial centres were separate they were linked by the river Mawddach and in the late 18th century by a navigation, sometimes called a 'cut', linking the Mawddach to the river Wnion. The main exports were also mostly derived from the Mawddach valley; wood, (mostly oak timber and bark, used for pit props and poles), paving stones, slate and cloth from the mills in Dolgellau.

The ship building interests both around Barmouth and across the bay in Pwllheli may well have driven the slate trade with London that developed in the mid-1800s, but as Porthmadog blossomed as a slate port it also became the major ship-building location and Barmouth's industry declined. Today Barmouth has lost all of its commercial activity. A handful of small boats convey tourists on fishing trips and there is little evidence of the once thriving seafaring tradition.

Victorian Philanthropy

Philanthropy in the 19th century was largely based on a religious tradition that was centuries in the making. Historically, wealthy people in society gave to the poor as a Christian duty. Charity was seen as a way of saving one's own soul while also helping those in need. This was particularly strong in the Protestant churches, especially those with strong evangelical leanings, driven by the belief that social conscience demanded social action. Good works

were seen as part of the foundation of Christianity and something that paved the way to salvation. Through the 19th century the church increasingly became the vehicle of private and public social work, however although philanthropy was rooted in religious and church tradition it also spread outside the church. Philanthropy and religion are intertwined throughout history, but are not necessarily dependent on each other.

Barmouth had become a popular seaside resort by the Victorian era and was attracting an increasing number of visitors, even before the arrival of the railway. Some of these settled in the town and became an integral part of the town's development. Amongst the best known philanthropists associated with the town are Mrs Fanny Talbot, Mrs Sarah Perrins and John Ruskin. These people donated money, drove ideas forward, and made a significant impact on the life and appearance of Barmouth.

Victorian Barmouth

The arrival of the railway in 1867 was the trigger for a significant boom in building in Barmouth and many of the buildings in what is now the town centre date from this time. The influx of visitors brought problems as well as benefits and the small round lock-up, Ty Crwn, was built during this period to deal with drunkards. The two large churches, St David's and St. Johns, were both built to accommodate the growing number of visitors, (although St David's was built before the arrival of the railway, demonstrating how the town was becoming popular even then), as were the majority of the guest houses and hotels that still offer accommodation today. Together with accommodation the town began to provide other facilities to enhance the visitor's stay such as the Sailor's Institute and reading room, and the Bath House. Many of the elegant buildings from this era survive today and give Barmouth its distinctive character.

Travel and Tourism in Barmouth

For most of its history Barmouth was, like the rest of north-west Wales, isolated from the rest of the country by geography. Roads were few and traversed difficult landscapes so travelling was an adventure. During the 18th century well-to-do travellers interested in the 'romantic' and the 'picturesque' began to visit, and Barmouth became a

favourite stop on a tour of north Wales. A good number of notable people wrote of their experiences in this area, among them Charles Darwin, William Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, and John Ruskin. The town was also documented by a host of less well known travel writers. The common theme in all of their reports was the magnificent scenery. But it was the arrival of the railway in 1867 that transformed Barmouth's fortunes.

When the factories of the West Midlands closed their gates each summer for their annual shut-down the expanding rail network offered workers a new concept – the chance to take a holiday by the seaside. Summer specials transported thousands of factory workers and their families to the coast; south to Weston-Super-Mare and Torbay, west to Aberystwyth, Tywyn and Barmouth. Those trains transformed Barmouth's fortunes as the combination of great beaches, mountain walking and a friendly climate quickly established a reputation that drove tremendous loyalty.

That legacy lingers even today. Although the train still brings tourists to Barmouth the vast majority arrive by road, the fast 'A' roads from the Midlands offering an easy route to the coast. And that loyalty to Barmouth is still there. Listen to the accents along the prom on a summer's day and you'll realise that the West Midlands dialects dominate!

Article reproduced from the Barmouth Heritage Trail web site.

A hoard from the harbour

A regular visitor to Barmouth, **Darren Lamble**, his son **Callum** and his nephew, **Lucas,** have spent many happy hours digging around in the mud and sand in the harbour area.

Over the years they have found many items, including coins, nails, buttons, bullets and general small items lost over the years in the harbour waters.

A collection of these items will go on display in the Bronze Bell Museum later in the season but in the meantime here are some items from the collection:



Nails





Bullets



1799

George III

and Victorian

Halfpennies

185?



1906 Badge—compare with shop bought version.



Spoon

Barmouth Driving School

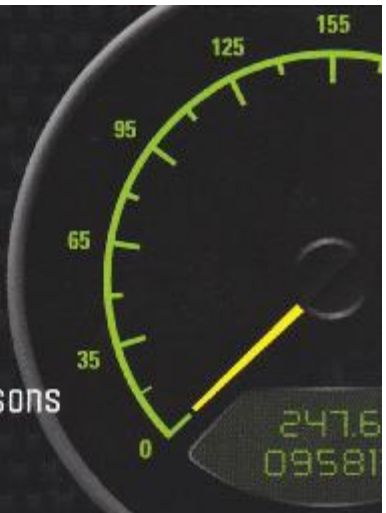
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Thank you:

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