

## The History of the Huts on the summit of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon)

Michael Freeman

The following article is based on a study of over 500 accounts of ascents of Yr Wyddfa, 1639-1900 and some other sources. The history of the huts is complex because, although there is firm evidence for their existence, details are negligible, and it has not always been possible to link descriptions to particular buildings. However, it has been shown that there was a shelter on the summit from 1804; that there were two huts under separate ownership by 1848, and with the arrival of the railway, disputes between landowners and applications for licences to sell alcohol on the summit resulted in the rebuilding of the huts at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The earliest known reference to a roofed shelter of some kind on or near the summit of Yr Wyddfa dates to 1804 when J.S. Duncan mentioned 'Lloyd's hut ... Lloyd a good civil useful guide'.<sup>1</sup> Earlier visitors to the summit referred to a circular wall against which they could take shelter. This was confirmed by Peter Bailey Williams, rector of Llanrug and Llanberis, in his guidebook published in 1821:

'There was a circular wall formerly on the summit, (which is not much more than from six to eight yards square) to shelter the visitors from the cold, but the Bethgelert Guide, named Lloyd, having collected a sum of money, (about five Pounds as it is supposed) from different Gentlemen; in order to build a small hut, or shed, he made use of the Stones [from the circular wall] for that purpose; but the miserable building which he erected, and which is nothing more than a heap of stones piled together in the form of a small Stack of Corn, could not have cost him more than twenty or thirty Shillings, and is on the East side, about ten yards below the apex; but at present is of no use, as it is nearly coming down: Here it is usual for Strangers to leave their names inscribed on the ruins of this small building'.<sup>2</sup>

Lloyd has been identified as William Lloyd, the Beddgelert Schoolmaster and Snowdon Guide. Duncan and another visitor recorded that he died in 1804.<sup>3</sup> Several tourists reported that this hut was very basic and one visitor described it as a shepherd's shelter.<sup>4</sup> In 1817 Paul Fisher

---

<sup>1</sup> Notes on a tour in the Diary of J.S. Duncan (of the Ashmolean) and his brother? P.B. Duncan, 'Tour Through Wales from Oxford', 1804, NLW MS 16714A, f. 8r

<sup>2</sup> Peter Bailey Williams, *The tourist's guide through the county of Caernarvon*: ... (1821), pp. 116-118

<sup>3</sup> J.S. Duncan, 'Tour Through Wales from Oxford, 1804', NLW MS 16714A, f. 12v which includes a memorial poem to Lloyd; Elisabeth Winington, 'Tour into North Wales September 1804' National Museum and Art Gallery, Cardiff, 147085/913 (42.9) W73 (typed copy), pp. 11-13

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, William Joseph, *A Peregrination through part of the Counties of Somerset, Monmouthshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire with a portion of South Wales and a tour round north Wales as performed in the Autumn of the Year 1810*, NLW MS 19405C, p. 182

described it as ‘a small low hut, having the roof as well as the walls of unhewn stone; and which, though dark, damp, and dirty within, would serve for a retreat in very tempestuous weather. Several names were carved and scratched upon the stones of this hut.’<sup>5</sup> In 1819, William Walmesley<sup>6</sup> found that the entrance was so small that he had to enter it on all fours. John Parker did not mention it when he ascended Yr Wyddfa at night in 1820 and needed somewhere to sleep while waiting for the sun to rise: he simply ‘lay down below the chief summit’.<sup>7</sup> In 1822, Anne Lister, the secret diarist, and her aunt ‘foolishly sat down in the little hut on the stone benches’ for some minutes and believed that this led to her aunt’s bowels becoming very painful.<sup>8</sup> In 1825, John Freeman described the hut as ‘a vile wretched house, which I saw a little distance on the eastern declivity!’ and thought it must have been built of rocks from the summit.<sup>9</sup>

In the late 1820s the hut was described by an anonymous tourist ‘as a cave, or rather a rude stone hut, the only shelter there to be found, and on creeping down the side of it, found a small entrance. There the whole [of the rest of the] party was seated, some on the ground, and others on along rough stone, which served as a bench’.<sup>10</sup>

On another visit to the summit in the late 1820s, John Parker understood that the workmen who built the cairn ‘slept in the hut for a fortnight, in the fine summer weather in 1827’. The cairn was on the very highest peak and supported two vertical planks which could be seen from great distances for trigonometric surveying by the Ordnance Survey. He continued: ‘It can hardly be called a shelter; the walls are built of loose fragments without any mortar.’<sup>11</sup> Prisiart thought that the hut was destroyed by the engineers who built the cairn<sup>12</sup> but in 1828 the musician and

---

<sup>5</sup> Paul Hawkins Fisher, *A Three weeks tour into Wales in the year 1817*, (1818), p. 34

<sup>6</sup> William Gerard Walmesley, ‘Journal of a Pedestrian Tour made in north Wales during the month of June, 1819, by William Gerard Walmesley and William Latham.’ London Metropolitan Archives, CLC/521/MS00477

<sup>7</sup> John Parker, (1798-1860), 1820, June, NLW MS 18256C, pp. 9-44

<sup>8</sup> Diary of Anne Lister, 1822, WYAS:Calderdale, SH: 7/ML/E/6, p.45, <https://editions.curiostravellers.ac.uk/pages/show.html?document=0023.xml>

<sup>9</sup> George John Freeman, *Sketches in Wales; or, A diary of three walking excursions in that principality, in the years 1823, 1824, 1825* (1826), pp. 195-196

<sup>10</sup> Anon, ‘Two Ascents of Snowdon at Midnight’, *The Leisure Hour Monthly Library*, Volume 6, (1857), pp. 396-399

<sup>11</sup> John Parker, (1798-1860), *The Passengers (Travels through Wales)*, (London, 1831), p. 191

<sup>12</sup> Richard Griffith, ‘Y Wyddfa, O Ysgrifau Gruffydd Prisiart, Beddgelert. Ysgrifenydd tua 1859, gyda Nodiadau gan Carneddog’, (Y Wyddfa, from the writings of Gruffydd Prisiart written in about 1859, with additional notes by Carneddog, (Richard Griffith, 1861 – 1947), *Cymru*, cyf. 19 (1900), pp. 262-266

cartoonist, John Orlando Parry (1810-1879), sketched the cairn and a structure which he called an igloo shaped hut.<sup>13</sup> Nothing more is heard of this early shelter after 1828.



Sketch of the summit of Yr Wyddfa by John Orlando Parry (1810-1879).

‘On the highest summit is a Pillar (no. 1 in illustration) and a little lower down – a little stone hut for travellers- to shelter in (no. 2 in illustration)’

Parry, John Orlando, (1810-1879), ‘A Journal of a tour in the Northern part of Wales, made in September, 1828’, NLW minor deposits 293B

Thomas Assheton Smith (1776-1858) was the owner of the Faenol estate which included part of Yr Wyddfa’s summit. He built the Victoria Hotel in Llanberis which was opened in 1832

---

<sup>13</sup> John Orlando Parry, (1810-1879), ‘A Journal of a tour in the Northern part of Wales, made in September, 1828’, NLW minor deposits 293B

and in that year it was reported that he was planning to construct a hut on or near the summit but there is no evidence that it was completed that autumn or the following year<sup>14</sup>. In 1834 the foundations of a hut were observed but the location was unidentified: they might not have been on the summit but near the spring where an unroofed stone building was later used to shelter the ponies while their riders walked the final few hundred yards to the top. A tourist called Tompkins wrote: 'we soon passed by the foundations of a house which one Mr [Assheton] Smith the proprietor of part of Yr Wyddfa is building for the accommodation of those who should be tempted to see the sunrise - it will have 9 bedrooms and 4 sitting rooms and will effectually [illegible] half the pleasure of the journey as it will take away all the difficulty.'<sup>15</sup> A newspaper report of July 1834 again reported that a cottage on or near the summit was anticipated.<sup>16</sup>

Only one reference to the summit is known for 1835: it mentions the cairn and wooden pillar but not a hut. There are no known descriptions of the summit in 1836 but in 1837 Francis Horace recorded the existence of a hut: 'We visited the hut erected on the summit for the purpose of accommodating those travellers who wish to ascend the previous evening in order to see the sun rise.'<sup>17</sup> It is not known whether this hut was the one built for Assheton Smith or another built on the Nantgwynant side of Yr Wyddfa (probably on part of the Hafod y Llan farm on the south side of Yr Wyddfa, which included part of the summit). It was said that this latter hut was built by Morris William or Williams, a monoglot Welshman, originally from Amlwch, Anglesey, an employee of the copper mine at Clogwyn Coch. Prisiart (of Beddgelert) writing in Welsh in 1859, provided more detail of this as did a local vicar, D.E. Jenkins, who wrote a book about Beddgelert and Snowdonia, based on an essay written in Welsh for the 1860 Beddgelert Eisteddfod by William Jones (Bleddyn). Prisiart and Jenkins believed that Morris Williams provided refreshments on the summit without a shelter for a few years but by 1837 or 1838 he had built a hut near the summit on the Nantgwynant side and took as his partner the botanical guide William Williams ('Will Boots', 1805-1861) who famously dressed in goat skin and died in a fall when gathering rare plants.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald, 29.9.1832

<sup>15</sup> William Graeme Tompkins, 'Travelling Reminiscences or notes of a Journey from London to Liverpool via [Wales], Denbighshire Archives, DD/DM/365/1, p. 80

<sup>16</sup> Manchester Courier, 19.7.1834; 2.8.1834

<sup>17</sup> Horace Francis, Journal of a tour 1837, NLW ms. 11597B, pp. 62-63

<sup>18</sup> Richard Griffith, 'Y Wyddfa, O Ysgrifau Gruffydd Prisiart, Beddgelert. Ysgrifenydd tua 1859, gyda Nodiadau gan Carneddog', (Y Wyddfa, from the writings of Gruffydd Prisiart written in about 1859, with additional notes by Carneddog, (Richard Griffith, 1861 – 1947) c. 1900), *Cymru*, cyf. 19 (1900), pp. 262-266; This may have been used by The Rev D.E. Jenkins enhanced version of the story in his *Bedd Gelert: its Facts*,

It was also said that John Roberts of Blaen y Dol, Llanberis and guide to Yr Wyddfa erected a tent near the summit on land owned by Sir R. W. Bulkeley where he could supply refreshments to climbers. D.E. Jenkins believed that this created significant competition for Morris Williams and William Williams who moved their hut nearer the summit. Morris Williams then sold his share of the hut to his brother Phillip Williams who soon went into partnership with John Roberts.<sup>19</sup>

Some of these sources for the early history of the two shelters near the summit might be more dependent on memory and local stories than on firm facts because there is a lack of evidence to confirm the existence of a new hut on the summit until 1842.

Although five tourists record first-hand descriptions of the pillar on the summit between 1840 and 1843, none mentioned the huts. In May, 1841, sappers began to build a cairn to support an Ordnance Survey staff on the summit ready for the resurvey of North Wales in 1842. In the same year a visitor suggested that the tents occupied by the Ordnance Survey officers who spent four months on the summit, were a 'circumstance fortunate for the tourist, as their tents will afford him shelter from the gust.'<sup>20</sup>

J.G. Kohl, a German tourist who also climbed Yr Wyddfa in 1842 confirmed that the Ordnance Surveyors took shelter in tents but he made no mention of huts. He wrote:

Snowdon narrows, as you approach the summit, into a complete cone, on the top of which, a surveying party found only room sufficient to spread a small tent, and arrange their mathematical instruments. The soldiers on duty at this tent, erected for the purpose of a new survey of the country, had constructed a pathway of stones around their frail canvass dwelling, which added considerably to the facility of commanding a prospect of the scenery on every side. The officer of the post, for the better accommodation of himself and his men, had raised several other tents on the little levels lower down.<sup>21</sup>

However, by October 1842, there were some huts substantial enough to withstand a storm. Edward Stanley, (1779–1849), the Bishop of Norwich, climbed to the summit of Yr Wyddfa that month to visit his son, Lieut. Charles Stanley, R.E., one of the Ordnance Survey Officers.

---

*Fairies and Folk-lore*, (1899), pp. 183-185; the essay by William Jones (Bleddyn), was published in 11 sections in *Y Brython*, (1861) as 'Plwyf Beddgelert'

<sup>19</sup> D.E. Jenkins, *Bedd Gelert: its Facts, Fairies and Folk-lore*, (1899), p. 184

<sup>20</sup> North Wales Chronicle, 25.5.1841; Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald, 22.5.1841; Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent, 18th June 1842

<sup>21</sup> Johan Georg Kohl, *Travels in England and Wales* [1845], (Translated into English by Thomas Roscoe), p. 104

They both slept in huts during a snow storm. His descriptions of the buildings on the summit, in a letter to his wife, are tantalisingly brief. There appears to have been more than two huts, some of which were of timber. When the bishop arrived near the summit, his son had to rush off to observe the light from the heliostat at Axe Edge in the Peak district, nearly 100 miles away which had just become visible for the first time: 'leaving me [the bishop] to the care of James [Pipon, his son's fellow officer] to do the honours of his house.' The bishop reported that they had an excellent and substantial lunch and continued: 'I took off my wet stockings & freezing shoes by Charles's stove ... In vain I poked in piece after piece of coal into the stove and sat with my hands ... over it to keep out the cold which now became unwelcome ... through cracks and crannies of the thin wooden walls.' A storm erupted but somehow, James came from the cooking room with an excellent supper.

'By the time [supper was] over, Boreas [Greek god of North Wind] was active in his vocation, he roared and bellowed angry on the hut which with all its force pelted and battered on the outward panels of the building, as if it insisted on its right to every square inch of space and would have ejected us from this its domain of storm and tempest. ... about 8 [p.m.] I turned into bed, covered over with blankets my sheet, fur coat etc. and one of Charlie's ... fur stuffed quilts ... a carpeting of snow which had drifted under the door & on [Charles] opening it to see how it could get in, we found the little covered in passage separating his house from Pipon's, well filled with snow.'

The bishop dreamt that there was someone nearby but

'as I well knew I & Charlie & his sappers were sleeping high above the rest of our fellow mortals, our nearest neighbour upwards being the man in the moon ... [In the morning] The head of [Charles'] cot was frozen to the panels, ... and his water jug a mass of ice. ... I should add that to my surprise, the building did not shake, the walls seemed to stand firm ... because literally they were founded upon a rock, but Charlie's rationale of the phenomenon was probably that true one, namely that the timbers were so hard frozen together it was impossible to shake them. ... [After breakfast was over] I visited the other houses of James, the men and the cook's home ... what a wild climb to reach the observatory not 20 paces above.'<sup>22</sup>

The Bishop also experienced an electrical phenomenon on Yr Wyddfa which he did not mention in his letter to his wife but described in a report to Michael Faraday. The letter refers to a hut, near the summit: 'It appears to me that the observatory which is about 10 or 12 yards above the officers' hut on the very pinnacle of the mountain must have received the discharge of an electric current.'<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Stanley of Alderley Records, DSA/201

<sup>23</sup> Royal Institution of Great Britain, ms. F1 K30; Michael Faraday, *Correspondence of Michael Faraday* (ed. Frank A J L James), vol. 3, 1841-1848, (1996), pp. 104-105, Letter 1443

It is possible that since the Ordnance Survey engineers stayed on the summit for several months, they built something more substantial than the tents which some visitors had noted earlier in the year, perhaps adding to existing huts. They had a labour force capable of rebuilding the stone cairn for the trig point and might have built the stone stable (which was later described as roofless) for their ponies and stores. Presumably, details of the costs of transporting the materials and erecting the buildings were recorded but many of the Ordnance Survey archives were destroyed during the Second World War.

An anonymous tourist described one of the huts on or near the summit in 1844. He or she found that the keeper was William Williams, dressed in his eccentric costume:

The most singular and amusing thing on the top of Snowdon is a rude hut constructed of massive stones piled one upon the other – interior cased in wood in which a most singular character named Williams, a second Robinson Crusoe, has taken up his abode during the season – a good natured careless sort of fellow ready to welcome every stranger, high or low to his hospitable abode. Luxuries he cannot boast of but a cup of coffee, probably without milk and a bit of home-made bread and good butter he sets before you and bids you eat and smile and be merry. He appears to have been disgusted with the lower world and declares himself happier on the top of Snowdon – surrounded with mists that drown the valley below.<sup>24</sup>

Carl Gustav Carus, a German physician, published an account of the King of Saxony's visit to the summit on the 12<sup>th</sup> July, 1844:

We found refuge in a small wooden shed, erected for the protection of travellers from the rain and wind, in which the host kept up a welcome fire. The man presently prepared a singular brown mixture, which he sold for coffee, and furnished some grayish oatmeal cake as an accompaniment. There were no spirituous liquors of any description to be had, because the occupier, with no small degree of self-satisfaction gave us to understand, that his wooden hut was to be regarded as a Temperance Inn. Not far from this mountain hotel, which I must state to be the first imperfect house of accommodation we had yet met in England, was a small stone hut, in which the rest of the travellers, together with their ponies, had found a harbour not much better than our own.<sup>25</sup>

In the same year, a husband and wife met at least seven people who had stayed in the hut all night:

On the 5<sup>th</sup> August we met on the summit two parties who had gone up the previous afternoon and not being able to see anything, had passed the night in a hut at the top -

---

<sup>24</sup> Anon, 1844, Lancashire Record Office, Preston, Ms DDX1282-4

<sup>25</sup> Carl Gustav Carus, *The King of Saxony's Journey Through England and Scotland in the Year 1844*, (1846), pp. 238-240 based on Carus, C. G. *England und Schottland im Jahre 1844* (Berlin 1845)

One party consisted of a gentleman and three ladies, the other of three gentlemen ... a cup of warm coffee procured at the hut was quite a treat.<sup>26</sup>

This reference to the occupier being teetotal suggests that it was John Robert's hut, which was immediately to the north of the summit cairn. Other visitors mentioned that Roberts was teetotal but he was later successful in his application for a licence to sell alcohol at the hut. It is possible that the other hut was an extension to the stone building, later roofless, used as a stable for ponies and was used on this occasion because there was only sufficient room in the wooden hut for the King and his entourage but it might have been the second hut built by Morris Williams, nearer the summit than his first hut, possibly on the site of the second cluster of huts to the south-east of the summit. This is the first known reference to one of the huts being described as an hotel and some visitors subsequently referred to it as the Saxony hut or hotel (because the King of Saxony had visited it).

In August, 1844, the following was published as a snippet of news in *The North Wales Chronicle*, and was subsequently published in the London *Guardian* and in at least seven other local newspapers including those for Liverpool, Durham, Berkshire and Cork (nothing equivalent could be found in Welsh language newspapers).

Snowdon. A couple of huts have been erected on the summit of this far-famed mountain, in which visitors may take shelter and refreshment, as occasion may require.

It is not at all clear why this was published at this date without any more details, especially in the Welsh newspaper. It was not at all unusual for national, regional and local newspapers to print extracts from other newspapers and it can only be assumed that editors thought that this brief sentence would be of interest to readers all over Britain. The evidence above suggests that the huts were built by 1842 and it might be that the editor of *The North Wales Chronicle* had recently been informed of their existence, possibly in an as yet unidentified publication of an account of an ascent of Yr Wyddfa.

One other visitor who ascended to the summit in the snow in October 1844 (against the advice of the guide) stated that there was more than one hut as well as a roofless stable near the summit.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> John and Hannah Matthews, 'Journal of a Tour in France, Switzerland, Germany etc. in 1842 by JM and HMM. Also a Tour in North Wales in the Summer of 1844', NLW MS 23063C, f. 111v

<sup>27</sup> Letter Shrewsbury Chronicle, 25.10.1844

By 1848, one hut was run by John Roberts and the other by William Roberts. One of the visitors' books for William Roberts' hut contains the following entry dated 4th September 1848:

Mr Roberts the proprietor of this hut a good fellow ... N.B. William Roberts the proprietor, David Roberts guide, Elias Roberts guide have no connection with each other or with John Roberts opposite.<sup>28</sup>

This might have been incorrect: elsewhere, Elias Roberts (the guide) and John Roberts (the botanist and hut keeper) were said to be brothers, but perhaps these were not the same individuals.<sup>29</sup> To add to the complexities of following the history of both huts, John Roberts had a son called William (John) Roberts and it is likely that some of the visitors recorded names incorrectly.

One of the visitors' books for what was described as William Roberts' hut contains an entry dated 31st August 1848 which shows that co-operation between the two huts was not always forthcoming:

On Thursday the landlord of the other house, not having sufficient provisions, borrowed some from the owner of this house. They were readily given and our party spent above 20s [shillings] with the landlord of the other house. This day we came up again and one or two of the party wanting some Porter, we sent to ask J and W Roberts of the other house to sell us some. He would not do so, and was uncivil and unkind.<sup>30</sup>

Both huts had slim, soft-backed books in which the visitors wrote their names and comments, mostly about the service provided by the occupants but also on the pointlessness of the effort they had expended on getting to the summit to 'view the mist, but missed the view'. An almost complete run of these books for 1845-1850 were later bound to form five volumes, some of which contain the original pages out of sequence and combine volumes from both huts.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Visitors' book, Bangor University Archives and Special Collections, ms. 4152, p. 53

<sup>29</sup> G., *The Journal of Horticulture, Cottage Gardener, and Country Gentleman*, vol. 7, new series, (1864), pp. 151-

<sup>30</sup> Visitor's book, Bangor University Archives and Special Collections, ms. 4152, p. 52

<sup>31</sup> NLW Minor deposit 34 (270 pages, 1845-1848) This has references to the owner, John Roberts, teetotaler, his wife Mrs Roberts and his son William (John) Roberts; Gwynedd Archives XM9254 (213 pages, 1847-1848). It refers only to John Roberts as the host of the Saxon / Saxony Hotel, but it also states that alcohol was served; Bangor University Archives 4151 (280 pages, 1848-1850) This refers only to John and William Roberts, presumably father and son, and also refers to the availability of alcohol; Bangor University Archives 4150 (113 pages, 1847-1848). This refers to the owner only as William Roberts and that his hut was teetotal but one tourist reported that his coffee was served with brandy; Bangor University Archives 4152 (275 pages, 1848-1850) "The Visitors Book, William Roberts"

The five volumes contain about 8,000 entries - an average of 1,300 visitors to the summit huts for the period mid to late May to early October each year. This equates to an average of just under 5 people every single day in each hut but there were many days, sometimes several at a time, on which no one signed the books presumably because the weather was so bad, as R.W. Long reported one of the hut owners telling him.<sup>32</sup> It is known that not everyone who visited the huts signed the books: for example, the Rev. Henry Wellington Starr visited one of the huts in 1845 but his name is not included in the visitors' books for that year. He died on his descent from Yr Wyddfa the following year.

In 1847 the geologists Sir Henry de la Beche (1796 -1855) and Andrew Ramsay, (1814-1891) visited the summit. Ramsay spent a great deal of time in Snowdonia between 1847 and 1852 gathering information for the British Geological Survey. He wrote: 'Confound the Cockney tourists, though, that one meets a-top, and confound the huts and coffee-pots, visitors' books and guides.'<sup>33</sup>

On some days there must have been large numbers of tourists who required refreshments at the huts. Quite how the occupants of the huts managed to transport to the summit sufficient food and drink for the visitors, themselves and the ponies, and fuel for the stoves, is unrecorded but it is possible that they had arrangements with local guides who took up extra provisions on days when the number of visitors was likely to be high. Fresh water, however, was available from a spring surprisingly close to the summit and was rarely known to dry up. Chamber pots were presumably available but no one mentioned them: 'Sanitary arrangements', in the form of a water closet of some sort, were not considered until 1895.

There were other issues about the logistics of getting equipment to the summit. The huts were completely closed during the seven winter months and were exposed to the most ferocious storms and long periods of deep snow. As a result, it is supposed that most of the delicate equipment, including blankets and some furniture were taken down at the end of each season and brought up again in the early summer. The presence of soft furnishing in the huts was confirmed by a Miss Dovaston in 1846 who noted that one of the huts contained couches and

---

<sup>32</sup> R.W. Long, Notes etc. of a tour of ten days among some of the beauties of north Wales in the summer of 1847, NLW MS 5912B. p. 158

<sup>33</sup> Archibald Geikie, *Memoir of Sir Andrew Crombie Ramsay*, (1895), pp. 104-106. Ramsay wrote *The Geology of North Wales*, vol. iii. of the Geological Memoirs, (1866, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1881).

sofas. She recorded that she left the Inn at Penygwryd at 4 am and reached the summit sometime after sun-rise, to find at least 21 other visitors enjoying the views.<sup>34</sup>

An anonymous writer who visited Yr Wyddfa sometime between 1848 and 1850 found that one of the huts was better than the other. He saw only one, by the cairn, when he arrived in thick mist and found that it was ‘a miserable and impoverished hovel, with only an exterior covering of boards, through which the rain, which now descended in torrents, oozed and dripped at every crevice, rendering it, but for a well-supplied stove, too damp to be safely tenantable.’ He later found the other hut at a short distance beneath the cairn of stones on the summit, which he thought was more comfortable.

By 1848, John Roberts and Philip Williams had decided to cooperate and they produced at least three joint adverts. The first, of about 1848 referred to only one hut.

Roberts and Williams Beg to announce that they have a house fitted up, on the top of Snowdon, for the reception of Ladies and Gentlemen. It contains Beds and Refreshments, and all other necessities required by Visitors. The house is situated on the right hand side of the path in going to the top of the mountain. We shall feel obliged to our visitors for their patronage; and no excursions shall be wanting to merit their approval.<sup>35</sup>

An advert published in 1849 states that they had two huts [Plate 2].

---

<sup>34</sup> S. Dovaston, *A Few Remarks on a tour to Shropshire and north Wales*, Cardiff Central Library, MS 3.149

<sup>35</sup> Pasted into a notebook of the renowned musician John Orlando Parry, (1810-1879), during a successful concert tour through north Wales Diary, 1848, NLW 17728A. He did not climb Snowdon that year.

# SUMMIT OF SNOWDON.

---

## **J. Roberts & Philip Williams,** **G U I D E S,**

Beg to inform Tourists visiting Snowdon that  
they have Fitted Up Two Houses on the Summit,

WHERE

### **REFRESHMENTS**

OF THE BEST QUALITY CAN BE OBTAINED,

AS WELL AS

BOTTLED PORTER, WINE, & SPIRITS,

ON THE

SAME TERMS AS CHARGED AT THE HOTELS AT  
LLANBERIS.

---

Parties wishing to Stay for a Night may be accommodated

WITH

BEDS, SUPPER, AND BREAKFAST,  
FOR FIVE SHILLINGS.

PERSONS DESIROUS OF COLLECTING

PLANTS OR BRITISH FERNS

AND EVERY SORT OF

STONES OF DIFFERENT COLOURS

FOR THE

Purpose of making Monuments before Gentle-  
men's Houses, may always be directed to the  
Places where they are to be found, by the said  
Philip Williams, as for Stones; and the said John  
Roberts, as to the Plants, &c.

JOHN ROBERTS.

PHILIP WILLIAMS.

Advert published in the Guidebook *The Triumph of Science* [Britannia Bridge] (1849)

In 1855, a visitor found the following notice, 24 x 16 inches, fixed to the wall of one of the huts:

SUMMIT OF SNOWDON

John Roberts

(The Oldest guide on Snowdon)

And

Philip Williams

Beg to inform tourists visiting Snowdon that they have

TWO HOUSES ON THE SUMMIT OF SNOWDON,

Where refreshments of the best quality can

Be obtained, as well as

Bottles Porter, Wines and Spirits,

At very reasonable terms.

N.B. Parties wishing to stay for a night may be accommodated

With BEDS

BED, SUPPER, AND BREAKFAST FOR FIVE SHILLINGS

Advert from William F. Peacock, *Welsh mountains: on and over them; being personal ascents of Snowdon, Cader Idris and Plinlimmon, with "The Visitors' Book at Bettws-y-Coed"* (London: Simpkin and Co. 1855), p. 12

The nature of the accounts of tours of Wales had changed by the 1850s: the gentry and the educated, who could afford the time and money for several weeks' tour of Wales no longer formed the majority of visitors. Their published accounts of a long tour of Wales, like their manuscript equivalents, ceased production almost completely during the 1850s. For those who came to experience sublime landscapes before the 1850s, the shelter of the basic huts was welcome; the five shilling charge for bed, supper and breakfast was not considered exorbitant: it was less than the charges for accommodation at various inns they had stayed at to get to the base of Yr Wyddfa, and it was similar to the charge for the hire of guides and ponies to the summit. As early as 1838 adverts were appearing in English newspapers announcing special trains leaving London at 7.30 am with connections arriving at Liverpool at 9 pm. The following day a steamship took trippers to the Menai Straits from whence a carriage would transport them

to Llanberis for an ascent of Yr Wyddfa. The return journey was cheap and took only a few days.<sup>36</sup>

There is no indication of how popular such trips were but it was not the only one. The first commercial package trip by Thomas Cook who founded a major travel company, was to Yr Wyddfa in the summer of 1845. He arranged for special trains to take 1,200 people from Leicester, Derby and Nottingham to Liverpool from whence they followed the same route as above. Bad weather delayed the steamer leaving Liverpool and the excursionists had only an hour in Caernarfon and were thus unable to climb Yr Wyddfa. On a second trip two weeks later, 30 of the 500 passengers managed to get to the top of Yr Wyddfa but saw nothing because of the mist. This appears to have been the company's last package holiday to Yr Wyddfa.<sup>37</sup>

In 1857, J.P. Hamer claimed that only he and Cook's railway tours from Leicester provided well-informed tours.<sup>38</sup> Hamer, a Liverpool bankrupt who moved to north Wales in about 1840, organised similar trips up and around Yr Wyddfa from at least 1846, offering tourists a complete package of a steam boat voyage from Liverpool to Menai Bridge followed by a round trip by coach via Caernarfon, Beddgelert, Llanberis and back to Menai Bridge for the return boat trip to Liverpool, with the option to stop off at the Snowdon Ranger inn by Llyn Cwellyn to ascend Yr Wyddfa and re-join the coach at Llanberis. It is very unlikely that this whole trip could be accomplished in one day, but there was nothing in the advert about accommodation, nor about the cost of the voyage. The coach journey alone cost £1 (outside), £1.10s (inside), with the promise that there would be no additional payments in the form of tips.<sup>39</sup>

Such well organised trips may have significantly increased the numbers of visitors to the summit, creating a greater demand for refreshments and shelter. Guidebooks contained detailed information on the various routes to the summit. From the 1850s, practical information and rather cynical warnings about the cost and state of accommodation were published for those who were perhaps more careful with their pennies and knew where they could buy a bottle of stout for much less than on the summit of Yr Wyddfa. An 1857 guidebook stated that there was

---

<sup>36</sup> Reading Mercury, 26.5.1838

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Cook, *Cook's Scottish tourist official directory, a guide*, (1860), Appendix, 'Twenty Years on the Rails', p. 4; Leicester Mercury, Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> August; *The Tourist's Guide: a Hand Book of the Trip from Leicester, Nottingham, and Derby to Liverpool and the Coast of North Wales*, (1845), (Thomas Cook Archives)

<sup>38</sup> J. P. Hamer, *Hamer's practical steamboat, railway, and road guide to Snowdon and around*. (1857), p. 46

<sup>39</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 24 April, 1846; 08 May 1846

a charge of 6 pence for using the facilities in the hut but perhaps this was levied only on those who took advantage of the seats and heat from the stoves but did not spend sufficient sums on food and drink.<sup>40</sup>

In order to cope with this increase in clientele, Roberts and Williams attached another building to their original one. A tourist whose account of an ascent of Yr Wyddfa was published in a guidebook to the summit in about 1850, described it as a town consisting of four huts made of wood. The evidence suggests that there were two huts, each consisting of two buildings. The guidebook continued:

Those huts are to be immediately papered, and to be provided with good fires, and they say, good beds too, and, strange enough, views [prints]—guide-books—stationery, &c., are to be bought there. ... What a change from the majesty of scenery where we had been standing a short time before! we step from the sublime (if not to the ridiculous) to a vulgar, and very dingy hut, about 12 feet long and 9 feet wide, a rusty stove in one corner, and a black coffee-pot keeping itself warm upon it! the wooden floor damp and wet as that of a vault, the paper black and falling off, the windows about 18 inches square, frames inclusive. But the hotel-keepers there, will soon be able to say, “Nous avous change tout cela.” [We have changed all this.]<sup>41</sup>

However unattractive the interiors were, even with new wallpaper which probably lasted less than a season, the external appearance of the cluster of huts spoiled the unique character of the summit. A fisherman in search of solitude thought that the huts were ‘unsightly, and the solitudinous stillness of the “lonely mountain top” – the great charm to us in mountain excursions – is now in a great measure destroyed’.<sup>42</sup>

In 1859, an anonymous visitor described one of the huts thus:

‘The very slender wooden structure which we found on the top were by no stretch of the imagination convertible into a building worthy of the name of hotel. We were ushered into a little room well-lighted, where stood two broken down couches and a bench: this was the waiting, dinner, tea, and supper room. A smaller room, divided from the waiting room by the slenderest of partitions, was the bed-chamber. Two beds, separated by a space of about two feet, filled the entire room.’<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> J. P. Hamer, *Hamer's practical steamboat, railway, and road guide to Snowdon and around*. (1857), pp. 82-83, 94-95

<sup>41</sup> *Mr H-B-Y's ascent in Humphrey's Guide to the Summit of Snowdon [by H- B- Y.], etc. embellished with fine steel engravings*. H Humphreys, Carnarvon [1850], pp. 19-2

<sup>42</sup> ‘Clyro’, *Hereford Times*, 25 September 1858. Republished as John Henry Cliffe, *Notes and recollections of an angler: rambles among the mountains, valleys, and Solitudes of Wales with sketches of some of the Lakes, Streams, Mountains and Scenic Attractions in both Divisions of the Principality* (London 1860), p. 150

<sup>43</sup> *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 27th August 1859

However much the external state of the huts spoiled the views and however poor the accommodation provided within them, those who had spent money and effort climbing to the summit had no choice, other than to avoid them. On fine days this was possible; on most days, however, the shelter offered by the huts was essential and although several described the rough nature of the facilities, few complained: it was all part of the experience of being on the highest place in Britain south of the Clyde. The huts were to remain in that state for another 40 years, despite the wishes of one visitor, who in 1858, hoped that they should be blown into the chasm below by a gale. He wrote a long tirade against the huts, complaining of the broken bottles and eggshells; the 'itinerant herd of drinking, smoking, and chattering barbarians'; the clattering of cups and saucers; the popping of bottle corks and the competing offers by the owners of the two huts with offers of accommodation for the night.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps because of the poor state of the huts, the manager of the Victoria Hotel in Llanberis decided to erect two lined tents near the summit, one for Ladies and Gentlemen, the other for Ladies only.<sup>45</sup> This was reported in 1858 and a tourist saw tents for visitors at the summit in 1860.<sup>46</sup>

A guide book of 1878 reported that there were

'three rude huts, where a man and his wife live during the whole of the summer. They provide tea, beer, eggs, bread, butter, and cheese; and accommodate visitors with bed rooms and small sitting room and fire, when they remain overnight to see the sun rise. The charge is 8s. for supper, bed, and breakfast; 1s. for a bottle of beer, and 2s. for a single meal.'<sup>47</sup>

There was no shelter at all for the first recorded winter ascent of Yr Wyddfa. On Boxing Day, 1860, John Tyndall the mountaineer, Thomas Huxley the English biologist and anthropologist and a Mr Busk took a train from London to Bangor. The following day they walked to Capel Curig where they stayed the night. They left early the next morning with Robin Hughes, the Capel Curig guide, to climb Yr Wyddfa through snow which was thick in places and stayed at Llanberis that night. On the following day they walked up the Llanberis pass to Pen-y-gwryd and on to Beddgelert where they spent another night and were back in London on New Year's

---

<sup>44</sup> Anon, *The London Review*, vol. 11, (1858), pp. 124, 127

<sup>45</sup> Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald, 7 August 1858

<sup>46</sup> Dumfries and Galloway Standard 26 September 1860

<sup>47</sup> Henry Irwin Jenkinson, *Jenkinson's Practical Guide to North Wales*, (London: 1878), pp. 206-207

Eve. They found the huts on the summit ‘encased in ice, and from their chimneys and projections the snow was drawn like a kind of plumage by the wind.’<sup>48</sup>

By the 1860s it seems that there were 3 or 4 bedrooms in each hut, available for those who wished to see the sun both set and rise, but getting a good night’s sleep might have been a rare occurrence. In addition to the dampness of the blankets, the noise of those who stayed but had no beds and the disturbances made by those who arrived overnight, the occupiers of the beds were likely to be kept awake by the howling of the wind, the creaking of the hut timbers and the pelting of the rain on the tin roofs.

The arrival of the main-line train to Llanberis in 1869 brought even larger numbers of tourists to Yr Wyddfa, making a day-trip from Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool possible. The accounts of these brief visits to the summit could be read in popular magazines and in newspapers published in many parts of Britain.

In 1869 a tourist and his two nieces stayed the night in one of the huts wrapped in blanket during a gale which carried off the roof of one of the cabins and the stones off the roof of the one they were sheltering in.<sup>49</sup> This particular storm is one of very few records of damage to the huts. Another storm raged around the summit on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1884. A flash of lightning struck John Roberts’ huts killing one of the occupants instantly. The other hut was also struck. As one of the occupants recorded at the inquest: ‘it reeled to its foundations, the tables were overturned, the windows stove in, and the flooring by the doorway was tilted up.’ The door was jammed shut forcing the keeper to enter by the window. The inquest was told that the huts were bound with iron bands, clamped to the rocks to prevent them from blowing away but these may have attracted the lightning.<sup>50</sup> This damage occurred at the end of the season but perhaps not too late for repairs to be made before the winter set in. Although it seems very likely that much repair was required when the huts reopened each year in April or May after seven months closure, none of the visitors, nor the visitors’ books give any clue to such work.

---

<sup>48</sup> John Tyndall, (1820-1893), *Hours of Excursion over the Alps* (1860, and new edition 1899), pp. 421-428

<sup>49</sup> Anon, An Account of tour in North Wales, 1869 – ‘Notes to Wild Wales’ NLW MS 11045E, pp. 26-32

<sup>50</sup> Flintshire Observer Mining Journal and General Advertiser for the Counties of Flint Denbigh, 25th September 1884; The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality, 27th September 1884 and other local newspapers.

In 1889 the Hafod-y-Llan farm on the south side of Yr Wyddfa was offered for sale by Mr. William Jones who inherited it from his uncle, an M.P.<sup>51</sup> It included a slate quarry, two copper mines and part of the summit. Sir Edward Watkin, M.P. (1819-1901), a railway entrepreneur was the successful purchaser with his bid of £5,750. In 1891 he built a chalet on the site of Ty'n y Coedcae at the base of Yr Wyddfa near Beddgelert where he later entertained Prime Minister Gladstone when he officially opened the new Watkin Path to the summit in 1892. The sale catalogue shows that the huts on the south-east of the summit, described as an Hotel, were held under two leases to R. and J. Owen for 21 years from Midsummer, 1887 for £25, considerably more than the Owens were paying to Assheton Smith for the land on which part of the huts had been built.<sup>52</sup> It is not clear why there were two leases and it is not known who J. Owen was – possibly a wife or other relative. The boundary of the farm passed through both sets of huts perhaps resulting in the need for leases for parts of each hut. This was certainly the case with the Faenol (Vaenol) estate which had been left by Thomas Assheton Smith (1776-1858) the owner of the enormously profitable Dinorwic quarries in Llanberis to his nephew George William Duff (1848-1904) who adopted the name Assheton Smith when he came of age in 1869. In May that year, Assheton Smith realised that parts of the two huts on the summit were on his land. John Roberts was charged 10 years back rent (from 1860) at one shilling a year and continued to pay the same rent until 1882. In May 1883, the rent was increased to £1 a year. For some unexplained reason, Assheton Smith did not begin to charge rent on the other hut until May 1871 from which time Phillip Williams paid 1s rent a year, backdated to 1862 and continued to do so until his death in 1875. David Roberts took over responsibility for the rent paying 1s a year until 1881 by which time, Robert Owen had become a partner and claimed that he had held the alcohol licence for that hut since about 1880.

A note in the rent books dated the 29 March 1881 recorded that John Roberts Junior (?Thomas John Roberts) and Robert Owen promised to build a new hut from 12th May 1881 and agreed to pay a rent of 10s a year but the records show that they were paying this amount every six months for the next two years.<sup>53</sup> It is possible that it was several years before this new hut was completed: an entry for 28 June 1884 in one of the later visitors' books records that 'The first meal in the new hut was taken this day by Arthur D Snow of Wimbledon'.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> D. E. Jenkins, *Beddgelert, Its Facts, Fairies and Folklore*, (1899), p. 250

<sup>52</sup> Sale catalogue, Bangor University Archives, SC/854

<sup>53</sup> Gwynedd Archives, Vaenol rent books, 3898 (May, 1869) – 3935 (November 1899)

<sup>54</sup> NLW MS 16084C, f. 57v

In May 1884, the rent book recorded a payment of £1 by Robert Owen and Thomas John Roberts (probably for the year) and noted 'This was previously let as two buildings'. They continued to pay £1 a year until 1885 when the rent doubled and the records show that this new rent was paid until at least 1895 when Assheton Smith served notice on the tenants to quit, and Owen demolished those parts of his hut which were on Faenol land.

In November 1894, the Faenol rent book contained a new entry: 'Snowdon Summit Hotel and Premises, no rent due / Rent allowed as hotel has not been built.' This records that the Snowdon Mountain Tramroad Company had agreed with Assheton Smith to rent an acre of land close to the summit for a new hotel to be built of stone, on which they proposed to spend £5,000, to serve the large number of people who were expected to travel to the summit on their railway, and in the same year they applied for a licence to sell alcohol in it.<sup>55</sup> In May 1895, £10 rent was due but might not have been paid because the hotel was never built. The company's application for a licence was refused three times, in 1895, 1896 and 1897 on the ground that there were already two licenced premises on the summit and the company owned two licenced premises very close to the station in Llanberis. In addition there was the temperance 'half-way hut' on the route from Llanberis which was managed by Moses Williams between 1871 and about 1899 for which he paid 10s a year in rent to the Faenol estate.

By the end of the 19th century, there were many organisations campaigning against the consumption of alcohol and this led to reductions in the number of licenced premises especially where there were several close together. This is reflected in the survey of licenced premises in Caernarvonshire in 1892 which recorded the distance between neighbouring licenced premises.<sup>56</sup> Although there was some concern that having another licenced premises on the summit might encourage drunkenness, it is likely that there were local factors, in particular the fear of competition that a new hotel would bring.

Sir Edward Watkin who owned the Hafod y Llan farm including that part of the summit on which the huts were built was known as a railway king and is said to have planned to build a rival railway to the summit of Yr Wyddfa from the Beddgelert side.<sup>57</sup> He opposed the

---

<sup>55</sup> Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors, 3rd September 1896

<sup>56</sup> Gwynedd Archives, XQA/L/10

<sup>57</sup> John Partington, *Railway Magazine*, (1897) quoted by Keith Turner, *The Snowdon Mountain Railway*, p. 78; John Neville Greaves in his *Sir Edward Watkin, 1819-1901 : the last of the railway kings* (2005); David Hodgkins, *The second railway king: the life and times of Sir Edward Watkin, 1819-1901* (2002)

application to build the new hotel on the summit on land owned by Assheton Smith. The villagers of Beddgelert were very concerned that Llanberis would take much trade away from them once the railway was built from that side and the directors of the Snowdon Summit Hotel Company who were to rebuild some of the existing huts, opposed the proposals made by the Snowdon Mountain Tramway and Hotel Company<sup>58</sup>. The landlords of the existing ‘hotels’ on the summit, John Roberts and Robert Owen, held the existing alcohol licences and shared their profits by the mid-1890s but they clearly benefitted from both the arrival of the railway and the refusal by the magistrates from granting a licence to the proposed new hotel.<sup>59</sup> Although there were objections to the building of the railway to the summit, mostly by outsiders, little was said about the effect that the new hotel would have on the attractiveness of the site.<sup>60</sup>

In August, 1895, before the first application for a licence for the railway’s hotel, Assheton Smith went to court to determine where the three land owners’ boundaries lay in order to establish on whose land the huts had been built. The defendants were Sir Edward Watkin and Sir Richard Bulkeley (both of whom owned land on the summit) and the tenants of the two huts, Robert Owen and Thomas J. Roberts. Both tenants were already paying rent to Assheton Smith but he had served them a notice to quit to take effect in the previous November. This may well have been done to enable Assheton Smith to have full possession of the land in order to prevent the owners of the huts from carrying on their business in competition with the Railway’s proposed new Hotel, which he supported. Unfortunately for historians, David Lloyd George, the future Prime Minister, representing Watkin, Owen and Roberts, negotiated a deal in private: if he had not succeeded in this, more details about the history of the huts would have been raised in open court and would have been reported in the newspapers. The agreement was brought before the judge who approved it but the reports of the case in four local newspapers are confusing and contain some basic errors and omissions. Perhaps in anticipation of this dispute, Owen had recently demolished his hut and rebuilt it on a slightly different site, which, it was agreed, fell within the boundaries of Watkin’s property. The boundary was defined as the watershed and since this ran through Roberts’ hut, Assheton Smith was to have possession of those portions of the huts which were on his property but Roberts would be allowed to stay

---

<sup>58</sup> It changed its name to ‘The Snowdon Mountain Railway Company’ on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1928

<sup>59</sup> The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard, 6th September 1895

<sup>60</sup> H. D. Rawnsley the Hon. Secretary of the "National Trust for the Preservation of Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty" wrote a series of letters as part of a brief and unsuccessful campaign against the railway, to the Times newspaper, Assheton Smith and his agent N. P. Stewart, all of which were published with a short editorial comment and an explanatory letter from N. P. Stewart *The North Wales Chronicle*, 10 November 1894, pp. 5, 7

in them until the end of the season.<sup>61</sup> The Vaenol estate agreed to lease Thomas Roberts that part of the hut on their land for £10 per annum. The boundary line through the middle of Roberts' hut was marked with iron pegs which are marked on the 1934 plan of the summit.<sup>62</sup>

In September 1895 the first of the three applications to the Portmadoc sessions for licences to sell alcohol in the Railway Company's proposed new Hotel were held immediately after Owen's application for his new hut. Unlike most licence applications which were passed without comment, the applicants and opponents were represented by lawyers and witnesses were called. The evidence, which was reported in great detail in local newspapers, shows that a year or so previously Owen had added three feet to the premises by building a new retaining wall on 'land that was not in existence before' (i.e. over what had been a small precipice) which cost him £25. The whole of the old hut had been pulled down and a new hut was built on Watkin's land. It was narrower at one end to avoid building on Assheton Smith's land. The new hut was two or three times larger than the old one. It was clad in corrugated iron and included four bedrooms, a coffee-room which would accommodate about 120 people and bar-parlour large enough for 12. There was special accommodation for ladies and sanitary arrangements were being made.

This cost Owen about £500, including, presumably, the demolition of the old shed and the transport of all the materials to the summit.<sup>63</sup> By this date, very few visitors kept a record of their ascent, and there are no records of when all this work was carried out but it is unlikely that the builders would attempt to risk delays and damage by winter storms. By September 1895 it was complete and described as 'a handsome structure ... erected by a Liverpool firm of repute, consisting of saloon, bar, kitchen, pantry, four bedrooms and a lavatory.'<sup>64</sup> It was called the Snowdon Summit Hotel. Once complete, Roberts' hut was rebuilt. It, too, was clad

---

<sup>61</sup> Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent, 16th August 1895 (which called Robert Owen, Owen Roberts and excluded Thomas Roberts, the tenant of the other hut on Snowdon, as one of the defendants); The North Wales Express, 16th August 1895; The Cardigan Bay Visitor, 17th August 1895; The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality, 17th August 1895

<sup>62</sup> D.L.F. Hoare, *Snowdon, "That Most Celebrated Hill"*, (1987), p. 127

<sup>63</sup> Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent, 6th September 1895; The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard, 6th September 1895. These two reports of the same hearing are slightly different, for example, one stated that the new hut was nearly three times the size of the old one; the other, that it was only twice the size.

<sup>64</sup> Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent, 13th September 1895

in corrugated iron and had a lean-to on the side nearest the cairn, near the end of which a massive brick chimney was soon added.<sup>65</sup>

The railway took the first public passenger train to the summit in April, 1896 but an accident on the way down, which resulted in the death of a passenger, delayed the enterprise for a full year.

By the time of the Railway Company's second application for an alcohol licence in 1896, the hut recently rebuilt by Robert Owen had a new owner: in April 1896 the Snowdon Summit Hotel Company was established to raise funds to take over the remaining 30 years lease of '4,520 square yards [of Assheton Smith's land] on the summit and southern slopes of Yr Wyddfa together with the building recently erected on part of the land ... and also the goodwill of the business carried on and the benefit of the Licence in respect of, and the furniture and effects in the said hotel'.<sup>66</sup> They immediately extended the new building. In June that year Robert Isaac of the Union Foundry, Portmadoc, undertook to build a large balcony along the south-facing side of the hotel under the supervision of Owen Jones, Tremadoc. It over-looked a precipitous slope from which magnificent views of the country beyond could be seen (on a clear day).<sup>67</sup> Robert Owen retired as manager and licensee of the new building but became a director of the company and was to take a share of the profits.

In September 1896 the Railway Company prepared new plans for their proposed hotel on a site nearer the summit than their earlier proposals but their application for an alcohol licence for this was also dismissed.<sup>68</sup> Their third application for a licence, in September 1897, was reported almost verbatim in local newspapers, possibly because the opponents were represented by two barristers, both MPs. By this time the railway had been open for five months and had taken nearly 10,000 passengers to the summit. There were arguments about the number of people which could take shelter in the two huts but it was estimated that they could hold all those who were on the summit at any one time except on a few fine days a year. It was stated that Owen's Hotel could hold 60 people in the large room at a crush, a further 20 in the bar, 300 in the three large unused rooms underneath and 100 on the unroofed balcony. In addition there were three

---

<sup>65</sup> Jim Roberts, *Snowdonia, Britain in old Pictures*, (2000), p. 12

<sup>66</sup> Summary of the prospectus, Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors, 2nd April 1896

<sup>67</sup> The North Wales Express, 26th June 1896

<sup>68</sup> The North Wales Express, 4th September 1896

bedrooms and a kitchen. Roberts' huts were capable of holding only 12-20 people. The Railway Company claimed that their new hotel would seat 200 in one room in addition to the shelter afforded by the summit railway station.<sup>69</sup>

As a result of the failure of the tramway company to get a licence for their proposed hotel they abandoned their plans and in February 1898 decided to take over the two existing buildings on a 14 years' lease and acquire the rights and the licences to them. Assheton Smith was in the process of building a wall, probably on the line of his boundary with Watkin's land, close to the front of Owen's new hotel which would have blocked the view from the hotel to the north-west but agreed to demolish it once the railway took over both buildings.<sup>70</sup>

**THE SNOWDON SUMMIT HOTEL**  
(CO., LTD.)

---

**T**HE Highest Hotel in the Kingdom. 3570 feet above the Sea. Situated on the Topmost Peak of the Monarch of Welsh Mountains, and commanding the Grandest Views in every direction.

---

**THE HOTEL**, which has been recently REBUILT, is now NEWLY-FURNISHED throughout, and under entirely New Management. THE COFFEE-ROOM WILL SEAT FROM 60 TO 80 PEOPLE.

COMFORTABLE BEDS.

Suppers, Breakfasts, Luncheons. Tea and Coffee; also Beer, Stout, Spirits and Cigars.

SUPPER, BED AND BREAKFAST. 10s.

---

Visitors who desire to see one of the Grandest Sights in the World, should ascend Snowdon in the coolness of the Evening and stay the Night to witness the Sunrise over the Snowdonian Range.

*Llandudno Advertiser* 8th April 1897

---

<sup>69</sup> Llandudno Advertiser and List of Visitors, 2nd September 1897

<sup>70</sup> Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent, 1st October 1897; Gwynedd Archives, Vaenol rentals, 3935, (1899-1900); Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald and North and South Wales Independent, 18th February 1898

# THE SNOWDON SUMMIT HOTELS

(Under the Management of the Snowdon Mountain Tramroad and Hotels Co., Ltd.)

**The Highest Hotels in the Kingdom, 3570 feet above the Sea.**

**Situated on the Topmost Peak of the Monarch of Welsh Mountains, and commanding the Grandest Views in every direction.**

**Frequent Train Service on the Mountain Tramroad from Llanberis.**

**THE HOTELS** have been recently **REBUILT**, and are now **NEWLY FURNISHED** throughout, and under entirely New Management. **THE COFFEE-ROOMS WILL SEAT A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE.**

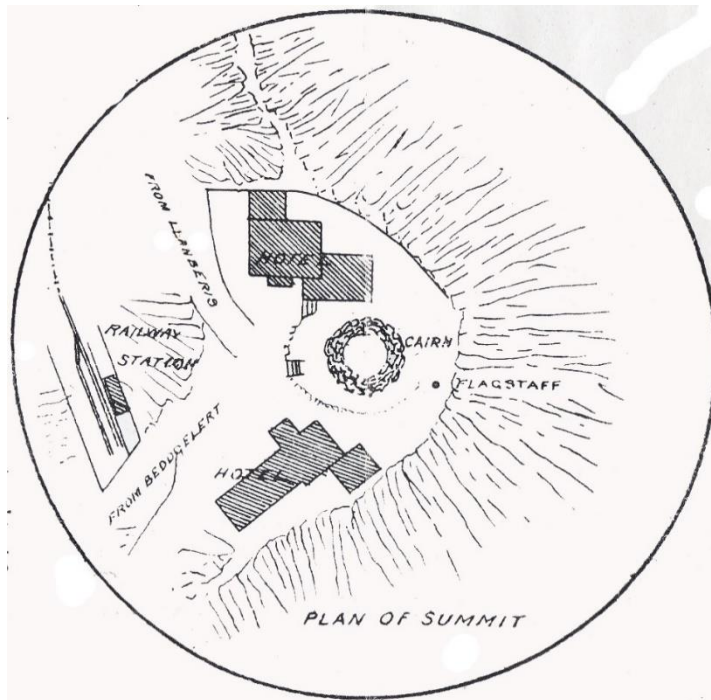
**COMFORTABLE BEDS.**

Suppers, Breakfasts, Luncheons. Tea and Coffee; also Beer, Stout, Spirits and Cigars

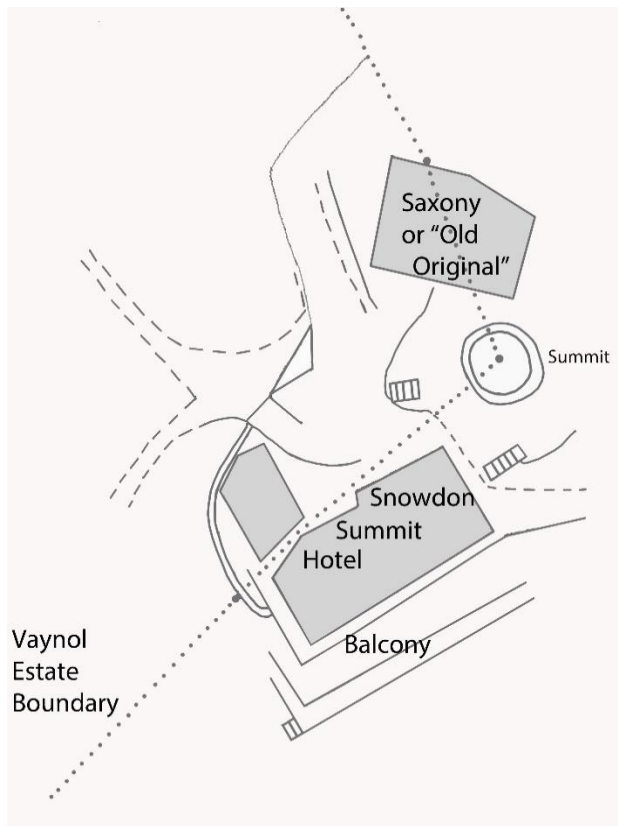
**SUPPER, BED AND BREAKFAST. 10s.**

Visitors who desire to see one of the Grandest Sights in the World, should ascend Snowdon by the Mountain Tramroad and stay the Night to witness the Sunrise over the Snowdonian Range.

The Snowdon Summit Hotel ran an advert in the *Llandudno Advertiser* regularly from the 22nd April 1897. The Railway Company used the same advert, adding their name to it from April 1898. This was published in the *Llandudno Advertiser* every week during the season until April, 1909, the only change being the removal of the references to the recent rebuilding.



Plan of the summit in 1895, from the leaflet 'Snowdon Panorama'  
Published by Littlebury Bros. Ltd., Liverpool. This shows the plan of the  
old huts and announced that the 'New Snowdon Summit Hotel'  
was to be opened in June [1895].



Plan of the summit in 1934. This shows the huts as rebuilt 1895-1897. They were demolished soon after the completion of the new station in 1935.

Owen's hut was further extended, possibly within a few years of the railway arriving. According to the plan drawn in 1934 for the new station building, the new block was not connected to the main hotel and lay entirely on Watkin's land. It appears to have been clad in timber. Both huts were still liable to suffer from storm damage. A photograph taken in April 1913 shows Robert's hut almost roofless, a result of a recent gale.<sup>71</sup> A postcard shows that the west end of the building was blown in during the winter of 1926.

The new station and shelter were designed in the modernist style by Clough Williams-Ellis<sup>72</sup>. It was built of steel and concrete but during construction, in 1934, the new large windows were blown in<sup>73</sup>. It was first used in July, 1935. The old huts were completely removed soon after completion of the new railway building, leaving the summit clear of all structures except for the remains of the cairn which became progressively smaller. Williams-Ellis's building was demolished in 2007 to be replaced by Hafod Eryri which was opened in 2009.

Michael Freeman

Llanbadarn Fawr, January 2023

---

<sup>71</sup> *The Graphic Magazine*, April 12th, 1913, p. 557

<sup>72</sup> RIBA plans PA442/15(1-3)

<sup>73</sup> D.L.F. Hoare, *Snowdon, "That Most Celebrated Hill"*, (1987), p. 131