



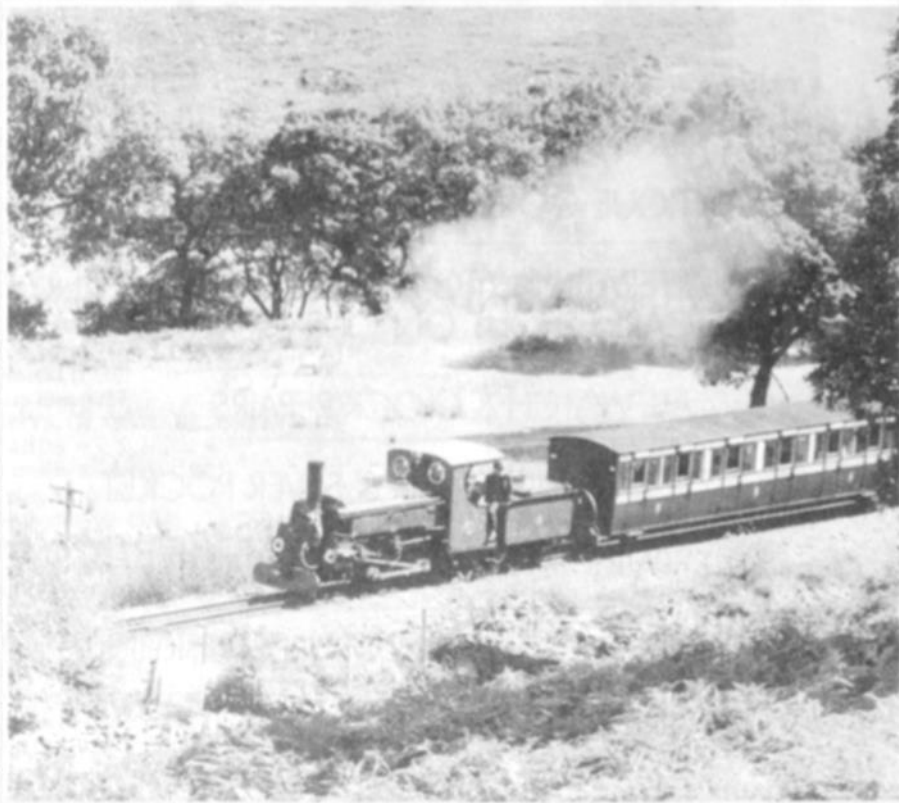
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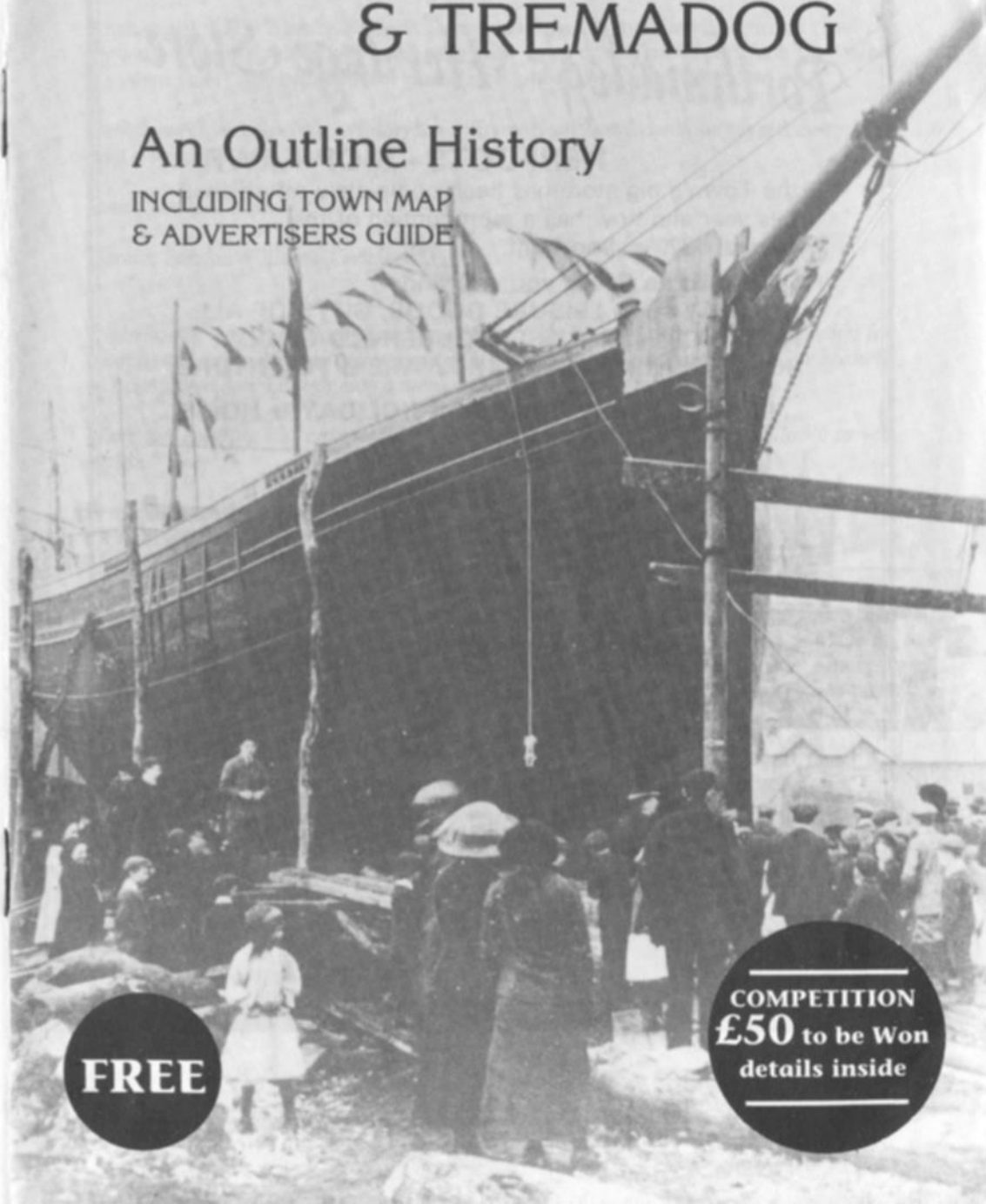
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# PORTHMADOG & TREMADOG

An Outline History

INCLUDING TOWN MAP  
& ADVERTISERS GUIDE



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## KERFOOTS OF PORTHMADOG



## Chairman's Welcome

Ar rhan aelodday y Siambr Fasnach Dymunaf estyn ein dymuniadau goreu i chwi am ymweliad hapus a phleserus ir ardal yma sydd yn un or rhai mwaf prydferth yn y wlad. Yr ydym yna i 'chynorthwyo as i wneud eich arhosiadyn un gofiadwy.

Cewch hwyl yn ceisio ein cyfamryson a chymerwch fantais or hollcynygiadau sydd ar gael o fewn.

Croeso cynes i chwi oll!

Geraint Ffestin Williams. Cadeirydd.

*On behalf of the members of our Chamber of Trade I extend to you our good wishes for a happy and enjoyable visit to this wonderful and most beautiful part of Wales. We are here to help you and make your stay a memorable one.*

*Have fun entering our competition and take advantage of the offers available to you inside.*

*A warm hearted welcome to you all!*  
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*Viel spass mit unserem Wettbewerb!*

*Sie sind uns allen herzlich willkommen!*

Geraint Ffestin Williams. Vorstand.

The following outline history and notes should be read in conjunction with the map (centre pages). A walk could be undertaken at the same time, beginning at the Madoc Hotel, Tremadoc and progressing to Porthmadog via the sites mentioned. Once in Porthmadog follow the High Street or Madoc Street to reach Ynys Tywyn (P) then wander to visit the remaining sites described.

Porthmadoc and Tremadog are comparatively modern towns.

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Neither town is yet two hundred years old. To understand why and how they came into existence it is necessary to know a little about William Alexander Madocks, 1773 - 1828.

Madocks was born into a Denbighshire family and from an early age developed a deep and lifelong interest in this part of Caernarfonshire. His father, John Madocks enjoyed a distinguished career at the Bar and it was assumed that William Madocks underwent



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the initial training and studied with a firm of solicitors, his interests were always too wide to be channelled into one profession. As a young man he found that anything connected with the land was fascinating: scientific management of property, new methods of farming and forestry and, above all else landscape, architecture and town planning.

Madocks first came to North Wales as one of a new generation of travellers, eager to reach and explore some of the remoter parts of the country, at home and abroad, and thence on return to regale their friends with tales of their exploits, the scenery and of the wonders (and horrors!), of travel.

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Madocks' interest however ran deeper than this and he was greatly struck by the wild north western corner of Snowdonia and in time acquired a house in Dolgellau. From there he was able to make more frequent journeys into the mountains and surrounding countryside. He had also at this time been left a sum of money in his father's will which had stipulated that it was to be used for the acquisition of land.

*Nigel Hughes*

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When he first saw the area where Tremadog and Porthmadog now stand Madocks looked on a wide estuarial area of marsh and sand flats which extended from the foot of the Tremadog hills on the one side and across the river Glaslyn to the Penrhyn peninsula on the other. These sand flats (Traeth Mawr) extended northeastwards up to the Glaslyn valley in one direction and almost to Penmorfa (a short distance west of Tremadog on the A487) in the other. There is an old road running

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from Penforma which you can walk that will take you past the old St. Buenos church (parts of which date from the 14th century) and Tyn Llan pottery. This road marked the western edge of the tides. A glance at the modern map of Snowdonia (Outdoor Leisure 1:25,000 series, Harlech and Bala sheet) will make this clear. Further seaward the estuary is even wider and includes another river, the Dwyryd.

Madocks realised that some of this land could be claimed from the sea and in time he was able to buy some small farms and lands on the Tremadog shore. One of the holdings he acquired was Ynys Fadog (B), a small islet in the sands of the estuary and traditionally the point from where the Welsh Prince Madog set sail for the New World.

It was from here that he constructed an earth embankment across the inlet and about 500 hectares were reclaimed and turned into good grazing ground. He was encouraged by this success to believe that he could reclaim the whole of the Glaslyn estuary. At about this time he began alterations to one of the cottages he had acquired. This was to become Tan-yr-Allt, a house which is in use today as the Snowdonia Steiner School.

It was at Tan-yr-Allt that Madocks began to direct the second stage of his 'grand plan'. On the land which he had newly created he laid out a new town, Tremadog. The site was also chosen for the fact that the main road to the Llyn Peninsula ran along the edge of his

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land, and it was thought at the time that this route, ending at Porth Dinllaen would become the main route for travellers to Ireland. (The present A5 road had yet to be constructed, but when it came it led to the choice of Holyhead as the Irish Packet station, and not Porth Dinllaen).

Madocks therefore felt sure that his new town would become the last staging post for travellers to Ireland. The town was conceived as a 'T' shape with the 'Irish' road forming the top of the 'T'. If you look for the plaque (C) you will find the street aptly named. Work began in 1805 and here Madocks built new coaching inn, now the Madoc Hotel (D) and continued to build around a square (E) forming a

market place, a town hall (F) in 1807 (Cara building), houses, shops and some smaller inns (G). He also made provision for a church and a chapel. Walk now around the square, the buildings are still as much as Madocks conceived them and it is considered an outstanding example of early nineteenth-century town planning.

Madocks did not intend Tremadog to be just a showpiece however, and he knew that it must have a sound commercial life if it

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was to survive and prosper. He built a woollen mill (J) which was one of the first buildings in Wales to be run along factory lines. The building is a ruin today but its elegant line can still be seen and the very low aspect roof is a

remarkable feature. The machinery was water-driven and the source of the water, Llyn Cwm Bach can be found in the hills above Tremadog. The woollen mill was completed by July 1805 and so that it would merge with the bare rocky crags behind, it was painted a dull olive colour. This attention to detail was typical of the care which Madocks lavished on his town. Local wool was available in abundance from the sheep farms in Snowdonia and it was not long before the mill was exporting considerable quantities

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of cloth to London. By 1810 however Madocks had been forced to sell the mill as a going concern to raise capital for the building of his great embankment. In addition to the woollen mill there was an ancillary fulling mill and a corn mill. Sadly, the mill building today stands empty and idle, and with each passing year it decays further

It will not be long before the roof falls in and there appear to be no plans to preserve this building.

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In an endeavour to promote further commerce, Madocks also built a canal (K). This ran from just north of the present harbour bridge to a basin that is now covered by a modern housing estate in Tremadog. Madocks believed it was essential to establish a link between his town and the coast. The route of the canal can be traced if you follow a footpath that begins to the west of Tremadog. The main road from Tremadog to Porthmadog crosses the canal close

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to the entrance to the secondary school, Ysgol Eifionydd.

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Road'. His little English church, St. Mary's (L) is on the left and a little further on is the fine Nonconformist chapel (M) (1807-10) with an imposing classical style portico. (Almost opposite is the Christian Mountain Centre (N). This house was the birthplace of T. E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia). Just after the church there is a left turning towards the woods which you take. Enter and follow the paths to your right. This wood is the site of a nursery (O) that Madocks created so that he could paint and stock his new estates. The mix is predominantly oak and beech. The glade ends at the rocky knoll Ynys Fadog (A). Emerging from the woodland it is now a short walk to Porthmadog where Madocks' story continues with his last and most



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ambitious project.

Encouraged by the success of his reclamation schemes he felt sure that it would be possible to seal off the Glaslyn estuary. Walk to the other end of Porthmadog where on the left just beyond the harbour bridge you will see a footpath sign. This leads to the top of Ynys Tywyn (P) (once, another rocky islet in the sand flats). The embankment (Q) you see today to the southeast is the result of Madocks' great enthusiasm and

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vision. Work began from both shores in 1808 and the gap was finally closed in July 1811. It is easy now to take the embankment for granted, but take a moment to consider what this work must have entailed and try to imagine the scene before 1808, a vast expanse of marsh and sand at low tide with the Glaslyn river dividing the two shores, and at high-tide a treacherous expanse of water nearly a mile wide. All vehicles would have been horse-drawn and all stones would have been manhandled into place. Furthermore, the Glaslyn river had to be diverted. This was done by cutting through the solid rock of Ynys Tywyn and by providing sluice gates (S) to control the flow. A footpath (R) runs around Llyn Bach and crosses the modern sluice gates.

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It is a great tragedy that Madocks did not live to see the fruits of his work. His ambitious schemes and the breaching of his embankment in February of 1812 (a combination of the forces of a high spring tide and an on shore gale) left him virtually bankrupt, and the strain and anxiety he suffered in attempting to see his project through seriously affected his health.

The breach was repaired and in

time it was found that the diverted Glaslyn river had scoured a deep-water channel which came to be used as a harbour and was the beginning of Porthmadog. A new Quayside, known as Holland's Wharf (T) was built and rented to Samuel Holland who owned one of the slate quarries near Ffestiniog.

The development of the slate trade through Porthmadog represents the final phase of the Madocks' enterprise. Various schemes were tried to bring the slate to the port before it was finally decided to build a narrow gauge tramway, the present Ffestiniog Railway (U), in 1836. By this time Madocks was dead and therefore was not able to see the slate trains crossing his embankment to unload there cargoes into the holds of



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waiting vessels at Porthmadog. (Empty trucks were drawn to the quarries by horses and on the return journey the horses were loaded into carriages behind the loaded trucks and the train ran down to the embankment by gravity).

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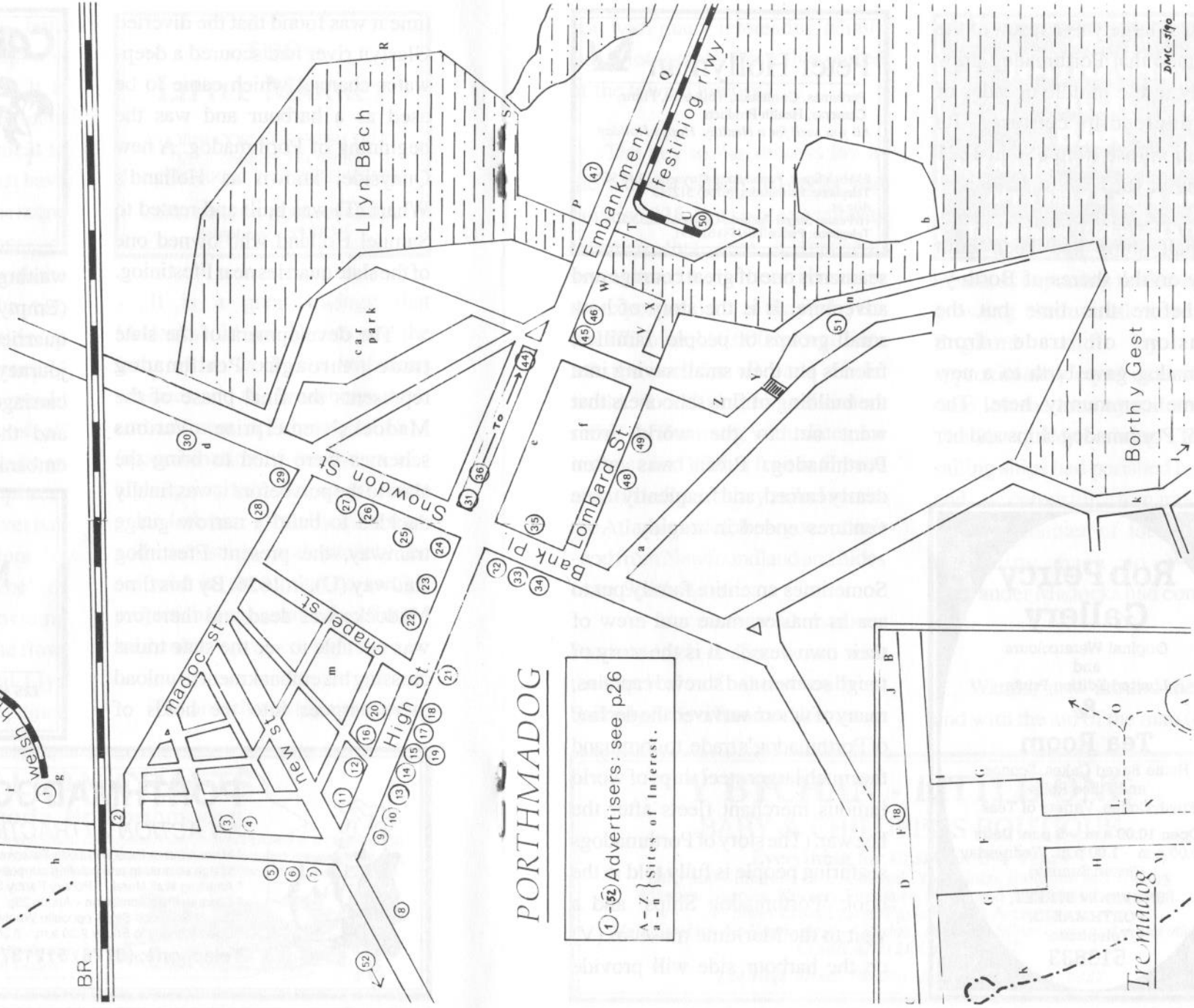
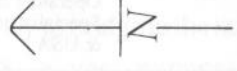
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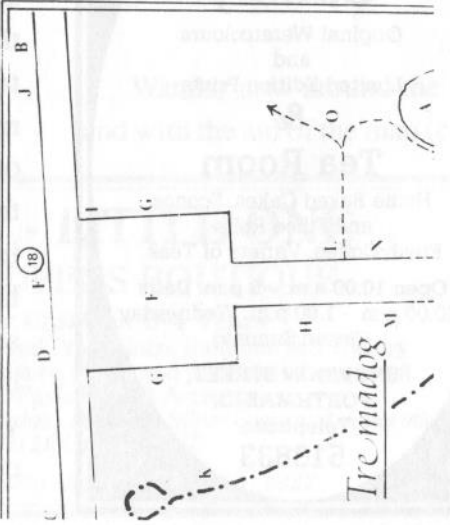
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To TREMADOG  
(see inset)



# PORTHMADOG


①-⑫ Advertisers: see p26  
A-Z Sites of Interest.





It was largely as a result of the slate trade that Porthmadog grew steadily in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Its population rose from 885 in 1821 to 3,059 in 1861.

Small ships had been built locally on the shores of Borth-y-Gest before this time but the expansion of trade from Porthmadog gave birth to a new maritime community here. The story of Porthmadog ships and her

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seamen is one of great courage and adventure. It is the story of how small groups of people, families, friends put their small saving into the building of fine schooners that went out to the world from Porthmadog. Profit was often dearly earned, and frequently these ventures ended in tragedy

Sometimes an entire family put to sea as master, mate and crew of their own vessel. It is the story of tough seamen and shrewd captains, many of whom survived the decline of Porthmadog's trade, to command the much larger steel ships of world famous merchant fleets after the last war. (The story of Porthmadogs seafaring people is fully told in the book 'Porthmadog Ships' and a visit to the Maritime museum (V) on the harbour side will provide

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you with many interesting details and photographs from this period of the town's history).

The key to the success lay in the harbour which Madocks had built in 1825. In a single year it was estimated that over a thousand vessels used the harbour, vessels in the export of slate. In the peak year of 1873 over 116,000 tons of slate left the port for all parts of the world. Locally built schooners sailed to Hamburg with slates for instance and loaded fruit in Greece and salt in Spain; they sailed across the Atlantic to fetch cargoes of salt - cod from Newfoundland and hides from South America.

As a commercial harbour Porthmadog's decline began with the arrival of the Cambrian Railway. This offered an alternative

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means of exporting the slate to the growing industrial towns of England and by 1900 approximately equal quantities of slate left the area by rail and sea. The last of Porthmadog's fleet of sailing ships had perished by 1945 and a colourful, romantic and exciting chapter of local history stretching back to William Alexander Madocks had come to a close.

Wander now around the town and with the aid of the map (centre

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pages) discover for yourself the visible reminders of this period. You will find photographs of old Porthmadog in the "Ship Inn/Y Llong" and at "Owens Cafe" for example. (The sites mentioned in the text and others are labelled on the map). It is hoped that Madocks' enterprising spirit lives on in Porthmadog and that evidence can still be found of the far reaching contacts this small town once had with the world.

The following brief notes supplement the text you have just

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read. The letter in brackets is referece to the map on the centre pages of this booklet and will help you to locate the site in the town.

(A) to (P) except (H). These have already been referred to in the text.

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(H). Ty Nanney. Madocks had intended that St. Mary's should replace Ynys Cynhaearn as Parish Church but this did not materialise. Ty Nanney was to be the vicarage. It was completed by David Ellis



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Nanney of Gwynfryn, Llanystumdy and although he never lived there the house still bears his name.

(Q) The Embankment. To celebrate completion of the Cob, as it is locally known, an ox was roasted on Tuesday, 17th of September 1811, as part of the jubilee celebration that included an Eisteddfod and horse races. The original embankment was 4 metres wide and 6 metres above the sands.

(R) Footpath around Llyn Bach. Walking from Ynys Tywyn around Llyn Bach will bring you to the Porthmadog Flour Mill (D), built in 1862. Today this is the home of Craft Centre Cymru and of the Porthmadog Pottery, where you can throw your own pot. A

notable feature is the mural painted onto the gable of the mill by the artist Ed Povey. This is the largest mural in Wales.

(S) Sluic Gates.

(T) Hollands Wharf. This was the first quay to be built once the possibilities of the new deep water channel had been realised. In time other Wharfs were built to accommodate the shipment of slates by other quarries.

(U) Ffestiniog Railway. The chief planner and engineer was James Spooner. In 1863 a special steam engine invented by his son, Charles Easton Spooner, was introduced. The Boston Lodge Foundry at the eastern end of the Cob was so-called from the

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constituency in Lincolnshire which Madocks represented in Parliament.

(V) Maritime Museum. Set up in 1979.

(W, X) Canol Y Clwt and Greaves Wharf. Once this was just a strip of sandy beach where ships were built in the 1820's and 30's, but shipbuilding ended here in 1850 to make way for new wharfs.

(Y) The steep hillside near the

harbour was the first part of the town to be developed. By 1850 there were up to 200 houses on the hillside. The area around the square, Cornhill was the maritime hub of Porthmadog. Here were found the offices of the Porthmadog Ship Insurance Society and in the building to the right of the steps a school of navigation was started in 1838. The steps were built to connect the quaysides with the houses on Garth Terrace. (a)

(Z) Blue Anchor Inn. This

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building was bought in in 1907 by the North Wales Womens Temperance Movement and was opened as a Sailors' Institute.

(b) Ballast Island. Ships returning to Porthmadog without

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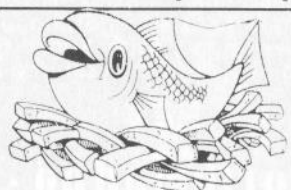
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cargoes did so 'in ballast'. This form of loading for stability included any number of different materials such as manure, lime, gravel, soil, stone and rubble. Originally this was off-loaded onto the site of the present South Snowdon Wharf (see Rotten Tare) but when this was eventually levelled ballast was dumped on a sandy bank on the Eastern side of the Glaslyn. The island you can see today consists of stones and plants from many parts of the world.

(c) Rotten Tare. Once the site

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of extensive shipbuilding. Ships were launched sideways on from here. The large photograph on the cover of this booklet is of the last ship to be built in Porthmadog in 1913, the 'Gestiana' as she was called was launched from Rotten Tare. The ill-fated, three masted schooner ran onto the Goodwin Sands on her first outward voyage, and was lost when only four months old in October 1913, 6 miles east of Louisburg, off Newfoundland.

(d) Flour Mill. See (R)

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(e) Breese, Jones and Casson. Porthmadog's first solicitor's practice. David Lloyd George and his brother William were articled clerks to the company.

(f) The Park. Y Parc. After the gorse-covered sand dunes were levelled this became a useful site for meetings such as the 'Horse and Dogs Shows'. It was also a ropewalk where ropemakers twisted the long lengths of rope and cable that were needed by all sailing ships of that period.

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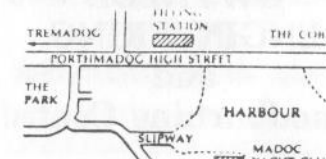
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(g) Welsh Highland Light Railway. Founded in 1923. Its original function was to carry slates down from the Croesor quarries and to carry passengers as far as Dinas, near Llanwnda. Several thousands of pounds were invested by local Councils. The line was unsuccessful and closed in bankruptcy in 1937. The rails were taken up in 1943. A new company was formed in 1964 and operates along a short stretch of track. It is the intention of this company to eventually reopen the line as far as

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Beddgelert.

(h) Queen's Hotel. The 'British School' was established here in 1838, but when the Cambrian Railway opened in 1865 many parents feared for the safety of their children, a factor which contributed to the decision to close and move the school. In 1868 the building was sold to the railway and was renamed the 'Railway Hotel' before becoming the 'Queen's'.

(i) Ysgol Eifionydd. Opened 1894.

(j) Ynys Galch. It is not certain whether this site obtained its name from a lime kiln or if lime was stored here for use during the process of extracting iron-ore once

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mined at Pencyflog. On top of the island stands a memorial to the local men who fell in the two world wars.

(k) Borth-y-Gest. Ships had been built here before Porthmadog was established and the business increased with the expansion of the slate industry. There were four busy yards at Borth-y-Gest and many ships were built here including the 'Pride of Wales' in 1870 and the 'Fleetwing' and 'Blanche Curry' in 1874. Like the 'S.S. Great Britain' until here

rescue and restoration, 'Fleetwing' ended her days as a coal hulk in the Falkland islands.

(i) Ynys Cyngar. (not shown on map but is the southernmost tip of land below Morfa Bychan). Once and island. So called after a 5th-6th century saint who, according to tradition landed here. Before Porthmadog Ynys Cyngar was the point where seagoing vessels would anchor to await and take on board slate cargoes which were brought down the Dwyryd river on barges.

(M) The newer part of Porthmadog, around 'Snowdon', 'Chapel', 'Madoc' and 'New' streets, dating from between 1851 and 1871.

(n) Slate Wharves. Here were the slate wharves of the Ffestiniog quarries. The Cwmorthin,

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Maenofferen, Votty and Welsh Slate companies all loaded slates here. Many slates were shipped to Germany and the Baltic following the great fire of Hamburg in 1842.

*(Those wishing to know more about William Madocks should read Elizabeth Beazley's excellent biography 'Madocks and the Wonder of Wales' 2nd Edition, 1985. The History 'Porthmadog Ships' is now out-of-print but copies should be available at libraries).*

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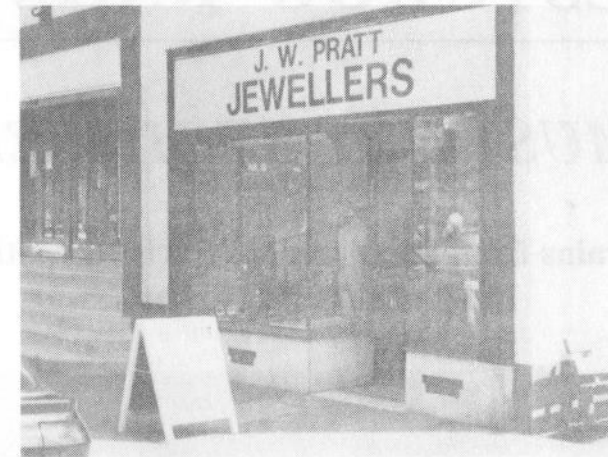
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