

6. Tourism

Although tourism took off a little while after the arrival of the railway, it had always existed in some form at Barmouth and the town had started to establish its reputation as a resort as early as 1766. The seasonal trade and maritime commerce established the town's prosperity during this time. In this same year a projected sale in Dolgellau had an untenanted house called Barmouth House situated above the quay. It was described as *“a delightful house for a family for the summer season for sea-bathing”*. Could Barmouth House be the Barmouth Hotel? When the road was dug up a few years ago a quay wall was found underneath the road outside the Hotel, the quay was located along Church Street at that time. This shows that tourism was considered alive and was advertised back then. By 1795 more accommodation became available with the opening of the Corsygedol Arms. At the time most of the town (now known as Hen Bermo) was built on the rock, many little cottages built on tiers and peering over the tops of the ones below them, with small paths linking them all. It was likened to Gibraltar and parts of Edinburgh. This fascinated visitors to the town.



Cors y Gedol 1859

It was observed that the women in the 18th Century were more industrious than the men. Women were very much involved in the commercial goings on of the expanding town. Many husbands and sons were away at sea so the women were left to get on with the business of the town. During the time of the Corsygedol Arms, the town was described as having showy fashionable shops and two or three large hotels, of which the Corsygedol was the most popular, with the principle street being covered by a bed of sand ankle deep.



Cors y Gedol 1885

The arrival of the railway did not affect immediate change on the town. Barmouth retained its usual visitors to begin with but the town experienced hard times with the decline of ship building, then about 10 years after the bridge was built an abundant crop of scurvy grass was found on the banks of the Mawddach. News of this increased the number of visitors especially those with scurvy disease. They would come to apply the herb and receive the benefit of hot and cold sea water baths in the Bath House (Now the large cafe on the sand at the quay). Horse Drawn Bathing Machines were available in the 1860s. They were probably reversed in to allow the bather to change and when finished pulled back out on to the beach, keeping their modesty intact. Many of the large granite buildings around the town were built during this time period as the town became busier. In 1880 *Slater's Directory Of North and South Wales* describes the town as containing 3 hotels (the Barmouth, the Corsygedol and the Lion) and 4 inns or public houses (the Anchor, the Henblas, the Last and the Half Way at Bontddu), 3 of these were run by women. There were also 2 temperance hotels and an assembly room. The directory also lists 113 Lodging House Keepers, an abundance of trade people and shopkeepers, 2 Banks and 13 pleasure boat owners. This shows that tourism was strong at this point. Ynys y Brawd would be engulfed in visitors, ferried across the narrow channel.



Henblas Inn 1872



Bathing 1895



The Bath House 1923



Postcard 1913

Tourism continued into the 1900s with Barmouth offering many of its staple attractions. The Fairbourne Railway opened, accessible by ferry from Barmouth and then a ride from Penrhyn Point to the village. At first the carriages were pulled by horses before being replaced later by narrow gauge steam locomotives. Entertainment groups would visit the area annually and put on shows. Some would set up outdoor stages and entertain on the beaches or the promenade. A grand building called the Pavilion existed where the fun fair stands today. Concerts were held there and eventually a cinema. Between 1931 and 1932 newspapers were reporting the following about the town:

St. James Budget – *“A tract of country which, for picturesque beauty, is absolutely without a rival.”*

The World – *“The first beauty of Barmouth is the Bridge across the Estuary. There is not such a promenade across Europe..... An ideal country.”*

Manchester Guardian – *“You hear much comparison made between Wales and Switzerland, and when the Panorama Walk of Barmouth is in question the comparison is not forced, nor is any apology needed for the Welsh Country.”*

Sheffield Daily Guardian – *“That wonderful estuary – which is part of the charms of Barmouth - One of the finest pictures of Europe is the Estuary of Barmouth.”*

Lady's Pictorial – *“Even lovely Wales can scarcely boast a more charming spot than beautiful Barmouth”*

Western Daily Press, Bristol – *“Barmouth is much in favour among a select class of visitors who go there year after year. Its charms are enhanced by its unrivalled walks and drives and its incomparable mountain scenery.”*

Westminster Gazette – *“Barmouth in winter is as sunny as Bermuda and as warm. Though as yet people – especially those to whom winter sunshine is life – but hardly realise this, the temperature being seldom under 40 degrees, while the scenery is as perfect as can be.”*

Land Agents' Record – *“The matchless combination of mountain and vale, moorland and waterfall, river and estuary, which has been the admiration of people from every clime, has attracted Authors, Artists, Scientists, and Naturalists, and the ‘Welsb Rhine’ with its wonderful association is – ‘ever changing, ever new’ – has for many years been an endless theme.”*

Nottingham Guardian – *“The best insurance against sickness is a week in Barmouth. Barmouth is an unequalled centre for seeing all the show places in North Wales. A day excursion will take the visitor to the top of these famous mountains: Cader Idris, Plynlimon, Moelwyn, Diphwys, Snowdon, and the two Arrans.”*

T P.'s Weekly – *“Barmouth gives one a great sense of rest. The cliffs keep off the East winds. Turner loved the district and painted thereabout.”*

The Christian World – *“Frost is rarely known in Barmouth, and snow seldom lies for many hours together. The winter is very late in coming here, and it seems to have spent a good deal of its ill temper before it arrives. The town is open to the sea and the sun to the south and the west. Wild flowers last from spring to spring. If people only knew what Barmouth can be like through the weeks that are bad to bear in other places, most of them would arrest their flight to the South of France and try Barmouth.”*

As we can see Barmouth was a truly desirable location to those all around the UK. The opening of the new promenade and sea defences transformed the look and feel of the town along the foreshore. Campsites began to expand providing basic camping facilities at first, to sites with shops, swimming pools, amusements, pubs, cafes and restaurants on site today.



Marine Parade 1913



Summer 1934



Camping 1936

In 1958 a Chapel on Jubilee Road was converted into what is now the Dragon Theatre giving another venue for shows and concerts. B&B's sprang up around the town and many cafes and pubs opened. A causeway was built over to Ynys y Brawd as a result of many drownings in the channel that used to run between the beach and the island. This made the island accessible to walkers but blocked the channel which many blame for the silting in the harbour today. At one point Barmouth had funfairs in two separate locations, the existing one and one on the main car park. Annual Regattas were held which drew in many tourists to the area. The town then experienced a slide in its fortunes with a reputation for being a "kiss me quick hat" type holiday catering to cheap vacations with shops in the high street boarded up, hotels closed down and many charity shops filling empty lets. However in the last few years thanks to the investment and innovation of local business people and a proactive town council who support and hosts many events Barmouth has seen a resurgence. The high street is now full of high end shops, the pubs and the hotels have all been rejuvenated and in some cases reopened. Barmouth can boast award winning eateries and top chefs.