

10. Myths. Legends and True Stories

The Diamond

The Diamond was a 3 masted square rigger built in New York City in 1823. She sank enroute to Liverpool from New York on 2nd January 1825 after colliding with St Patricks Causeway, a natural reef sticking out approximately 8 miles to sea from Shell Island. There were 38 passengers onboard, 8 of whom perished. There was also a cargo of cotton, pot ash and apples.

Most of the cargo was washed up along the coast line by Dyffryn Ardudwy. Seeds from the apple cargo were planted in the garden of Tŷ Canol, a house in Dyffryn. From these washed up seeds a small apple orchard of ten trees matured to fruit vast quantities of both cookers and eaters. Several generations of the same family lived at the house and during Blodwen Davies era she would tell her grandchildren the story of the trees and how they were sold locally as The Diamond Apples after the ship they had come from. These types of apples are very rare to the shores of the UK.

Ffosycutiau

As you leave Barmouth, to the east, there is a short section of straight road that's known as Glandwr straight. At the end of the straight there is a mill on the left and above the mill in the hills is a hamlet known as Cutiau. The mill produced flour which was transported by boat and had its own wharf known as Ffosycutiau. There was also a shipyard and local farmers used the wharf to transport goods. A creek gave access to the wharf from the Mawddach. With the realigning of the road to the shore a bridge was built over the Dwynant river which closed off the creek and therefore access to the wharf. It also prevented the local farmers loading and unloading their goods. This stopped the shipbuilding but the farmers carried on loading and unloading from the bank by the road side.

In 1877 the owner of the bank objected to this and took out legal proceedings against the locals. A London barrister, on holiday, heard of the case and believing it was unjust for the locals, took it on and subsequently won it. Local farmers such as Robert Williams of Tyddyn Pandy and Robert Williams of Caehir gave evidence, the former testifying that he remembered access to the wharf and its use from his childhood, which would have been the early 1800s. Enraged with losing, the landowner went in to Cutiau Chapel during a service and declared *"You will never worship in this place again!"* He then evicted all the cottage tenants and many other tenants. Cutiau went from being a bustling place to nothing almost overnight, there were said to be 100 chapel goers which were reduced to a handful. The dwellings were emptied. The chapel closed in the 90s, until then a local family had still been worshipping there.



Glandwr Flour Mill 1885

The Clock House (Coes Faen)

The Clock House has had many notable owners over the years. One owner was Charles Lowe who renovated it; the house did not have a clock tower originally. The building was originally a courthouse with cells. Prisoners would be brought in by boat and taken in under the house to cells in the dungeon. The courtroom was in the upper part of the house. Legend has it that there is a tunnel that goes from the house and under the road coming out in the courtyard opposite. Its purpose was to allow visiting judges to arrive by coach in the courtyard and pass safely to the courtroom away from the public.



Coes Faen 1880

The Circus

In 1890 Sangers Circus came to town. The circus arrived by procession coming around Aberamffra and through Church Street. The procession was headed by elephants and they were also seen on the beach here at Barmouth. Sadly one of the elephants died while it was here and was buried at Cae Glas, which are the gardens opposite the Last Inn.



Circus 1890



Elephants on the beach 1890



Cae Glas

The Min y Môr Ghost

A young Blodwyn Griffiths was sent to Barmouth to give birth to her illegitimate baby, the result of an affair with an English Gentleman. She was forced in to service as a nursery nurse for a local butcher who had seven children. One of her tasks was to take the two youngest children to the Min y Môr, which served as a school at the time. Once there she was to ring the bell in the tower to call the children to class.

While climbing the stairs she dropped her baby who succumbed to their injuries a week later. Blodwyn never recovered from the trauma and in 1889 could no longer cope with her guilt and her grief. One bleak and misty November night she was seen walking down to the shore where she bent down and picked up a small child. Cradling the child she continued walking until she disappeared beneath the waves. To this day when the mist rolls in people claim to hear the tolling of the school bell.



Min y Môr 1907



Min y Môr 1912

The Blind Harpist – Telynor Mawddwy

Dafydd Roberts was from Llannerch, Llanymawddwy and descended from highly cultured and musical families on both sides. At the age of 6 he contracted measles and went blind for the rest of his life. He learnt his craft at home and in chapel and ended up winning several National Eisteddfods. He tutored many singers to accompany the harp. In 1909 he moved to Barmouth and would regularly carry his harp alone to the prom where he would entertain the locals and visitors alike.



Telynor Mawddwy 1911



Dafydd Roberts 1930s

The Barmouth Sea Monster

For centuries there have been sightings of a strange creature in the waters around Barmouth. Large footprints have been seen in the sand in the Mawddach Estuary and in Llanaber with other reports of a large sea borne object speeding through the waves. In the 1970s a small group of local secondary school girls were playing truant on Barmouth Beach. After being reprimanded they claimed they had seen a strange creature approaching Barmouth Harbour. This became World News at the time, the story gathered traction when the decomposed body of a giant turtle was washed up on the beach, however 30 years after this particular sighting one of the girls involved confessed to a friend that the story was made up.

Hidden Cargoes

Outside St Marys Church there are tomb graves with large slabs across the top. When ships or shipwrecks would lose their cargoes, and they were washed up on the beach between Llanaber and Tal y Bont, locals would move the slab and hide the cargo inside the grave to escape the Customs and Excise that were looking for it.

The Egryn Lights

Tal y Bont is a village to the north of Barmouth. Between the two places is a chapel named Egryn. In early December 1904 a religious revival was occurring and Mary Jones of Islawrffordd was doing her revival work at Egryn Chapel. While there she saw a large auroral arc stretching from the mountain to the sea with a star. Later in the month 3 people saw a large light to the south of Egryn Chapel with a *“bottle or black person”* in the middle and *“some little lights scattering around the large light*

in many colours". In early January 1905 a man reports seeing 3 lights in formation above a farmhouse and a woman saw lights between Dyffryn and Llanbedr. Other sightings were reported around Gwynedd in the first few months of 1905. Mary Jones reported seeing the lights several times and having visions of Christ and of Satan in the form of a black dog. A Beriah Evans saw 5 separate lights with Mary Evans between Islawrffordd and Egryn Chapel. The lights seemed to appear wherever Mary Jones went and seemed to strengthen the religious revival. They appeared in Llanfair, Brynchrug, Pwllheli, Towyn, Froncysyllte, Wreccsam and Ystrad in the Rhondda; all at the same time that Mary Jones was in these places.

Reporters were sent from the Daily Mail, the Guardian, the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mirror who were full of scepticism but who were soon sending back reports of the lights, having witnessed them themselves. There were many witnesses to these lights and their occurrence in 1904 and 1905. In her later years Mary became a recluse and was said to have turned her back on religion. In 1936 she died and was buried in Horeb cemetery in Dyffryn at one of the biggest funerals seen in North Wales. These weren't the first strange lights seen in the area though. In Harlech in 1662 strange lights were seen that reportedly set fire to crops and barns and infected grass, then in 1877 blue lights were seen over Pwllheli and the Dysynni Estuary.



Egryn Chapel 1904

Barmouth grass is the finest grass

Grass seeds were taken from Barmouth football field to help reseed Wembley pitch. (Maybe that's why it's known as the sacred turf?!!)

The Grey Lady Of Fiddlers Elbow

In days of old the spirit of a lady in a grey dress wandered the once winding approach road to Bontddu, known as Fiddlers Elbow, seen on the Dolgellau side. She was said to have made the horses bolt if she disapproved of the cargo such as alcohol, tobacco or drugs. This was also extended to the morals of the driver.



Fiddlers Elbow 1896

Murder Most Horrid

Murder in Barmouth is extremely rare especially historically. However, about 200 years ago a jeweller was stabbed by his man servant at Belle View Mansions (the large building behind the Carousel Cafe). It's said the jewellers hand print appears on the pane of glass where he was killed, now and then. This is despite the glass being replaced a few times.



Belle View 1859

King Arthur's Stones

Not the one's with Excalibur but the circle near Sylfaen Farm are said to possibly be the marker stones to the entrance porch of the original site of St Mary's and St Bodfan's Church.

St Mary's Demon

The porch of the church of St Marys and St Bodfan is said to be haunted by a demon trying to get in to the church but who can't cross the threshold. When leaving the church at night time, as you walk through the graveyard, keep your back to the church and keep walking, keep walking. Never be tempted to look back at the church and then look forward again, as people that have say they witnessed a faceless demon confronting them. Although there used to be an inn called the Old Bryn Gwynt Inn behind the church, so maybe the shortcut home through the graveyard after a few refreshments may have accounted for these sightings.



St Marys



The Path Away from the Porch

The Sword Stones

High up in the hills above Barmouth are two large slabs of rock, one lying on its side and one on its back. It sits in the middle of a field. What makes these stones special is that each one has the impression of a sword in it. There are many theories on how this has come to be, but two popular stories stand out. One is the sword in the stone and King Arthur legend, fuelled by the nearby King Arthurs Stones. The more known story is that the Ordovicians (a Celtic tribe, led by Bendigeidfran) did battle against the Romans in AD76. The battle took place throughout the day on "The field of swords". The Ordovices (the ancient Britons/ the original Welsh) outnumbered the Romans but the Romans were better armed. After battling all day the chieftains agreed a peace and as a pledge that they would observe the treaty, Bendigeidfran through his sword in the air. As it landed it split a rock in two leaving the outlines of a sword that can be seen today.



Flat Sword Stone



Sword Stone lying on its side

Two Train Crashes

If you look towards Fairbourne you will see Friog where the village meets the cliffs and runs along the coast. The railway runs along these cliffs from Fairbourne to Llwyngwril and a section of tunnel can be seen from Barmouth. This was the site of two separate train crashes with similar circumstances and similar consequences with only fifty years between them. On January 1st 1883 a locomotive left Machynlleth for Dolgellau where the Eisteddfod was being held. The name of the engine was Pegasus and it was driven by William Davies. As he approached Friog, where the section of tunnel is now, he slowed down. As he reached the decline on this most treacherous piece of track, several tons of soil and rock came crashing down. The Pegasus derailed and went crashing down to the sea, killing William and his fireman. Luckily the couplings to the carriages snapped and the passengers were spared.



Train crash 1883

Then fifty years later in 1933 the 0610 passenger and mail train from Machynlleth to Pwllheli approached the same cutting at the same spot where disaster had occurred half a century before, two thousand tonnes of earth and rock began to move. The train had slowed to fifteen miles per hour and synchronised with the slide. The engine and the tender were lifted over the parapet wall and turned where they became uncoupled from the coaches, again saving the passengers. However the engine and tender landed on the beach. Once again the Driver and the Fireman were killed instantly.



Train Crash 1933