Catherine Hutton’s Tour of Wales: 1799

1799

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By Mary-Ann Constantine



Catherine Hutton at the age of 43 (Herald Press, Birmingham)

Catherine Hutton (1756-1846) was one of the more perceptive and thoughtful writers of Welsh tours at the end of the eighteenth century. Her observations, as sharp as they are sympathetic, stand out for their easy elegance and their readability. The accounts of her travels in north Wales are preserved in National Library of Wales MS 19079C, a neat, hand-written volume with a carefully laid-out title page:

Letters from North Wales
Written by Catherine Hutton
To Thomas Hutton, her Brother
from 1796-1800
And printed in the Monthly Magazine
By Sir Richard Phillips, 1816
Catherine Hutton
January 4th, 1842.

Like many title-pages, it doesn’t quite tell the whole story. From the style of the handwriting and the ‘1842’ inscription at the bottom, it looks as if it has been drawn up several decades after the years of the letters it describes. The volume also includes, as an appendix, extracts from reviews and letters from friends responding to the publication of Catherine Hutton’s novels, a piece about female writers from the *Monthly Magazine* of 1821, and an obituary of Hutton, who died in 1846. The bulk of the volume, however, is indeed a copy of the letters from Wales, and these are written in an earlier form of Hutton’s hand. Various marks, deletions, insertions and notes suggest that it was her attempt at pulling all four tours together, perhaps in preparation for their serial (and partial) publication in the *Monthly Magazine* in the 1810s.

This rather complicated manuscript history matters because tours are in and of themselves historical documents, and can bear witness to lives and landscapes which have changed for ever; there is a world of difference between 1800 and 1840, and even between 1796 and the 1810s, and it helps to consider what kinds of editorial interventions may have taken place between the writing of the original correspondence (which has not been located) and this particular recension. Hutton was an assiduous letter-writer all her life, and her three novels (*The Miser Married*, *The Welsh Mountaineer*, and *Oakwood Hall*) all draw on the epistolary form. It seems likely that the text preserved here is close in tone, style and content to the letters received by her brother Thomas (and possibly other recipients) over the course of the Huttons' journeys through north Wales, but that some revisions have been made, and that the more personal comments usual to such letters— on friends, or family, or current affairs—have been removed. What is clear, however, is that the manuscript copy was itself edited, revised and considerably truncated for publication in the *Monthly Magazine* between 1816 and 1819. This in itself justifies the inclusion of Hutton's text in a corpus of unpublished tours in Wales; the nature of the revisions is discussed in more detail below.

Catherine Hutton: writer and traveller

Born prematurely in 1756 to the Birmingham bookseller and historian William and his wife Sarah, Catherine Hutton was, according to her father, 'perhaps the smallest human being ever seen', but grew up healthy enough in a comfortable town house in New Street; the family also built a country house, Bennett's Hill, just north of the city at Washwood Heath. William Hutton published the first history of Birmingham in 1781, and moved in Dissenting circles, attending the New Meeting house where Joseph Priestley preached. Catherine describes Priestley's visits to their home, and, like her father, wrote a vivid account of the 1791 Church and King riots, when not only Priestley's house, library and workshop were destroyed, but the properties of seven others—the Huttons amongst them. Both the New Street town house and Bennett's Hill were looted; the latter was burnt to the ground.

Sarah Hutton was an invalid over a long period, and her daughter, besides caring for her, took on many of the household responsibilities. The family visited Buxton in attempts to improve Sarah's health; and in the summer of 1787 they undertook a journey to Aberystwyth, a small coastal town just beginning to find itself on the tourist itineraries. Three of Catherine's letters from this visit were published in a later memoir compiled by her cousin Catherine Hutton Beale, and (judging from Beale's treatment of later letters) are likely to have been quite heavily revised before publication. William and Catherine Hutton would return to north Wales four more times after Sarah's death in 1796, and both father and daughter wrote accounts of their journeys. William's were published as *Remarks Upon North Wales* (1803); Catherine's appeared as a series of 'Letters' published in the *Monthly Magazine* between 1815 and 1819. The *Monthly*'s editor, Sir Richard Phillips, was a friend and correspondent of Catherine Hutton, and in 1821 she was included in the list of 'twenty four ladies of pre-eminent talents as writers in various departments of literature and philosophy' (a list from which Jane Austen, whom Hutton admired, is conspicuously absent). Besides her three novels, Catherine Hutton also published a *Tour of Africa* (1819–21), a compilation of travel narratives by other writers. Recent work on Hutton as a novelist, letter-writer and tour writer can be found in **Further Reading**, below.

Comparison between the published letters and the manuscript shows a range of different revisions. The published 1796 Tour is very close to the printed version, with the significant omission of only a few paragraphs in which Hutton describes a particularly irritating fellow-guest at their hotel in Barmouth. Thereafter the changes become more significant, as the 29 letters written out over 138 pages are condensed into a mere 18, often conflating accounts where the Huttons have taken the same road more than once: moreover, while the 10 MS letters of the 1796 tour fit comfortably into 9 printed letters in the *Monthly*, the equally extensive tours of 1797, 1799, and 1800 are squashed down to a mere three apiece. This has implications for the published tour as historical witness: for example, sections of Letter 16, dated 'Caernarfon 28 August, 1800' (which appeared in the *Monthly* for September 1818), appear in the manuscript version as Letter 23, dated from Ruthin a week earlier. One notable loss is the conflation of two separate journeys from Caernarfon through Bettws Garmon to Beddgelert; the first of these, fascinating because Hutton is deliberately following in Pennant's footsteps and cites him at length, leaves only the ghost of an impression in the published version, and omits the references to Pennant altogether (1799 Tour, MS Letter 13; MM (June, 1818, 387-99). It also omits Hutton's typically droll (and self-ironizing) comment on her preparations for the next stage of the journey, the notorious 'rock road' linking Beddgelert and Pont Aberglaslyn to the main coach road on the coast: 'Having armed myself with an unusual quantity of excellent cold roast beef, I rode to Pont Aber Glaslyn, and entered upon the celebrated road from thence to Tan y Bwlch.'

Publication in the *Monthly* certainly altered Hutton's voice, shifting the emphasis to objective, factual observations in the style of other published tours, and slicing away many of the elements that give her narrative its particular life and tone. These include details of her own struggles with the experience of travel in wild Welsh weather ('surely such petticoats were never seen!'), admissions of fatigue and illness, and spontaneous expressions of judgement or enthusiasm: the only woman wearing cotton (rather than the more laudable native wool) at a market in Cerrigydrudion in 1797 is described in the manuscript as 'a dirty trollop, who seemed the refuse of another country'; in the published version she is a 'dirty creature'. There are memorable pen-portraits, such as that of the landlady of the Cross Foxes at Llanarmon, or of the courteous and intelligent boatman, Richard Williams of Cwm-y-Glo. Occasionally a brief paragraph half-opens a door into another life, such as that of the Irish emigrée with whom Hutton and her father share the guest-house in Caernarfon in 1799, the summer of the aftermath of the Irish Rebellion:

I have made another acquaintance, directly opposite. Pity for her forlorn situation attaches one to her. She is an unmarried woman, turned of thirty, of a noble family in Ireland, whom the troubles there have driven into Wales. She has not been in any personal danger; but her brother's house has been plundered by the rebels, and his domestics threatened with instant death. Such is her terror at these proceedings, that she declared to me she would not have slept another night in his house for a thousand guineas; and I am told, that here she sleeps in her cloaths. She is at Caernarvon without either friend or servant. The people here have a notion she is a little deranged. This, however, is not the case. She appears to me not only rational but sensible. She is so grateful for my attention, and her manner is so affecting, that sometimes I can hardly refrain from tears. (Letter 19, 1799)

Hutton is also concerned with the impact of tourism on the culture and economy of Wales, restricting her 'good opinion of the people of Wales to those who have had little intercourse with the English' and noting the visible and rapid differences made by 'swarms' of tourists in recent years: 'the roads are improved; the farms are raised; money is introduced; and the people are rapacious.' A clergyman tells her that 'the English Mountain-hunters' have 'made his country so dear that he cannot afford to live in it', and she worries about the treatment of horses, driven to exhaustion on the new, frantic post-roads. (Letter 12, 1797)

Welsh landscapes bring out some of her finest qualities as a writer, and she is in turn vivid, passionate, and wryly humorous about her own responses to the various scenes encountered on the road, and to views of mountains in particular. She found the 'view from the hill above Harlech […] so stupendous it shook my whole frame', and took evening walks from the guest house in Caernarfon to gaze at the Snowdon range 'with awe, almost with reverence' (Letter 5, 1796; Letter 12, 1797). For someone who suffered as badly as Hutton did from vertigo, mountains are as fascinating as they are 'forbidden'; and even riding along coach-roads cut into steep hillsides can be enough to force her to dismount and walk. The Huttons travelled on horseback, with Catherine riding pillion; they were accompanied by a servant, John, who figures in some of William Hutton's poems on their Welsh tours. Hutton notes that this 'mode of travelling places us in rather equivocal light at inns', where guests in carriages, who could be charged much higher rates, were rather more welcome than riders on horseback, or, even worse, pedestrians (Letter 29, 1800).

Hutton's experiences in north Wales fed directly into her second novel, *The Welsh Mountaineer* (1817) which, making ample use both of letters and of travel narratives, develops Wollstonecraftian theories about female liberty by exploring two sharply contrasting women's lives, one metropolitan, physically weakened and trammelled by social mores, and one fresh from the mountains of Meirionydd, wilder, more energetic, if socially more naïve. There is no doubt where Hutton's sympathies lie. Another appeal of these tours, then, beyond their intrinsic merit, is the way they can be read in direct conversation with other texts, from Hutton's own novels (written as she was revisiting these Welsh tours for publication), to her father's *Remarks Upon North Wales*, a witty, more succinct, and more cerebral account of the same roads travelled. Accounts of north Wales by other writers in this digital corpus, both women and men, offer further material for comparison; and it is also intriguing to think of Hutton covering much the same ground as the young J.M.W Turner, at much the same time.

Catherine Hutton appears to have done much of the planning, and researched the itineraries of these journeys. In 1796 the Huttons were based at Barmouth, travelling there from Birmingham via Shrewsbury, Montgomery and Mallwyd and returning via Bala and Llangollen. Excursions from Barmouth included a memorable journey to Harlech castle, and a brief glimpse of Tan-y-Bwlch. In 1797, 1799 and 1800, they stayed at Caernarfon, travelling via Llanrwst and

Conwy, and making shorter journeys out to the Lakes of Llanberis, Anglesey, Clynnog and Beddgelert. In 1799 they returned through the mountains via the 'rock road' to Tan-y-Bwlch. Father and daughter seem to have felt comfortable making some of their explorations of the area separately: William Hutton was a tough and avid walker; in 1801, aged 78, he would become the first person to walk the length of Hadrian's Wall. He certainly climbed Snowdon and crossed the sands of Traeth Mawr on his own; but (though her use of first person singular and plural can be misleading) Catherine seems to have headed up from Barmouth to Harlech accompanied only by John the servant, and perhaps followed Pennant to Llyn Cwellyn by herself. She too was capable of covering impressive distances, writing to Thomas after her trip to Beddgelert:

Besides the usual types of observations on customs and costumes, language, food, dwellings, and Methodism, the Huttons witnessed two consecutive years of extreme weather conditions, and Catherine's account describes the aftermath of devastating floods in 1799, and a drought in 1800. She also catches occasional slantwise glimpses of people known better from other contexts in Wales, such as the schoolmaster and poet Dafydd Ddu Eryri, and the writer and vicar Peter Bailey Williams. Above all, what carries her through wind and rain and the everyday setbacks of travel as a tourist is an enduringly positive attitude to Welsh people and Welsh culture: 'who, that did not deserve reproof, would disparage the country to its natives; or who, that had eyes to see, and a heart to feel, would speak contemptuously of Wales at all'? (Letter 6, 1796)

There is an intriguing echo here of the well-known 'Triad' penned by the Welsh bard Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg, 1747-1826), who happened to be in Beaumaris in August 1799, and was another witness to the devastation of the flood that swept away bridges and livestock, and left the Huttons battered by wind and rain on the road to Abergwyngregyn (Letter 18, 1799). Williams claimed that a true poet required 'an eye that can see nature, a heart that can feel nature, and a resolution that dares follow nature'. Catherine Hutton—observant, sympathetic and determined — certainly possessed all three.

1796 Tour

Letter 1, Mallwyd, July 26th 1796; Letter 2, Mallwyd July 27th 1796; Letter 3, Barmouth Aug 4th 1796; Letter 4, Barmouth Aug 7th 1796; Letter 5, Barmouth Aug 12th 1796; Letter 6, Barmouth, Aug 18th 1796; Letter 7, Bala, Sept 2nd 1796; Letter 8, [Llangollen] Sept 3rd 1796; Letter 9, Shrewsbury, Sept 5th 1796.

1797 Tour

Letter 10, Llanrwst, Aug 24th 1797; Letter 11, Caernarfon, Aug 27th 1797; Letter 12, Caernarfon, Sept 13th 1797; Letter 13, Caernarfon, Sept 22nd 1797; Letter 14, Caernarfon, Sept 29th 1797; Letter 15, Denbigh, Oct 6th 1797; Letter 16, Chester, Oct 7th 1797; Letter 17, Nantwich, Oct 9th 1797.

1799 Tour

Letter 18, Caernarfon Aug 20th 1799; Letter 19, Caernarfon, Aug 30th 1799; Letter 20, Caernarfon Sept 10th 1799; Letter 21, Caernarfon, Sept 14th 1799; Letter 22, Bala, Sept 16th 1799.

1800 Tour

Letter 23, Ruthin, Aug 20th 1800; Letter 24, Caernarfon, Aug 28th 1800; Letter 25, Caernarfon Sept 2nd 1800; Letter 26, Caernarfon, Sept 12th 1800; Letter 27, Capel Curig, Sept 18th 1800; Letter 28, Capel Curig, Sept 19th 1800; Letter 29, Shrewsbury, Sept 21st 1800.

The *Monthly Magazine* can be accessed via the Hathi Trust Digital Library.

1796 Tour

Letters 1&2, vol 39 (June, 1815) 410-413; Letters 3&4, vol 39 (July 1815) 489-491; Letter 5, vol 40 (Oct 1815), 226-228; Letter 6, vol 40 (January 1816), 503-505; Letter 7, vol 41 (March 1816) 109-111; Letter 8, vol 41 (April 1816), 205-207; Letter 9, vol 41 (May 1816), 304-306.

1797 Tour

Letter 10, vol 41 (July 1816) 503-505; Letter 11, vol 42 (Sept 1816) 111-113; Letter 12, vol 42 (Nov 1816) 323-25.

1799 Tour

Letter 13, vol 44 (Jan 1818) 496-498; Letter 14, vol 45 (March 1818) 111-113; Letter 15, vol 45 (June 1818) 397-399.

1800 Tour

Letter 16, vol 46 (Sept 1818) 128-131; Letter 17, vol 47 (May 1819) 306-308; Letter 18, vol 48 (Aug 1819) 19-22.

- *The Miser Married* (London: Longman, 1813)
- *The Welsh Mountaineer*, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1817).
- *Oakwood Hall*, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1819) Catherine Hutton's *Tour of Africa* (1819–21), a compilation of travel narratives by other writers, was recently reissued in the series *Women's Travel Writings in North Africa and the Middle East*, Part II (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015).
- Catherine Hutton Beale, *Reminiscences of a Gentlewoman of the Last Century: Letters of Catherine Hutton* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1891).
- William Hutton, *An History of Birmingham, to the End of the Year 1780* (Birmingham: Pearson & Rollason, 1781).
- William Hutton, *Remarks upon North Wales* (Birmingham: Knott and Lloyd, 1803)
- William Hutton, *The Life of William Hutton F.A.S.S, including a Particular Account of the Riots at Birmingham in 1791, to Which Is Subjoined the History of his Family, Written by Himself and Published by his Daughter Catherine Hutton*, 2nd edn (London and Birmingham: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1816).

Secondary

- Hutton's fiction is briefly discussed in Peter Garside and Karen O'Brien (eds), *English and British Fiction 1750–1820: The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, Volume 2 (Oxford: OUP, 2015), pp. 464, 472–75; and more fully by Cheryl A. Wilson in '"Something like mine": Catherine Hutton, Jane Austen, and Feminist Recovery Work', *The Eighteenth Century*, 56.2 (Summer 2015), 151–64. For her wide-ranging correspondence, see Bridget Hill, 'Catherine Hutton (1756–1846): A Forgotten Letter-Writer', *Women's Writing*, 1.1 (1994), 35–50.
- Hutton's Welsh Tours are discussed in three articles by Mary-Ann Constantine: '"The bounds of female reach": Catherine Hutton's fiction and her tours in Wales', *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* , no. 22, 92-105 (Spring 2017)
- 'Celts and Romans On Tour: Visions of early Britain in eighteenth-century travel literature', in Francesca Kaminski-Jones and Rhys Kaminski-Jones (eds) *Celts, Romans, Britons: Classical and Celtic Influence in the Construction of British Identities* (Oxford: OUP, 2020) 117-139
- 'Consumed landscapes: coal, air and circulation in the writings of Catherine Hutton', *Romanticism* Special Issue: 'Change of Air' eds Erin Lafford and Rhys Kaminski-Jones (forthcoming, 2021). Hutton's work also features in Constantine's forthcoming monograph: *Curious Travellers: Writing the Welsh Tour 1720-1820* (Oxford: OUP, 2021).

My thanks to Liz Edwards for patiently tagging this edition, and above all to Michael Freeman for introducing me to Hutton in the first place.

Letter 18

Caernarvon Aug 20 1799

My Dear Brother,

We have made our third sally into Wales, but as we are come here by the same route as we did two years ago, I have little to trouble you with, except the weather and [~~xxxxx~~] this ^ subject will hardly have novelty to recommend it; for you must have been singularly fortunate if it has not troubled you before. Our share ^ however has been so extraordinary that you must be content ^ to bear a part of it with your own.

~~The fine old windows and door of the Abbey Church at Shrewsbury, with the figure of Roger de Montgomery, kinsman of the Conqueror and one of his commanders at the Battle of Hastings, high above, had always attracted my admiration. I determined now to see the inside but found nothing to repay my pains, except a very ancient statue of the same Earl, who was the founder of the Abbey, and died there,~~

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~~one of its monks, in 1094. The legs are broken, the face is a shapeless blank, but the right arm is visibly drawing the sword. "And did this repay your pains?" I hear you say. I think it did, but its age was its sole merit.~~

At Llangollen the waiter, who is the first personage in the house and minds everybody's business but his own, overwhelmed us with civility and gave us nothing to eat. Instead of setting the machine in motion, and letting it move by its own impulse, he is pushing here, driving there, shouting every where, and fancies that not an atom can stir without him.

We passed Owen Glyndwr at Corwen, regardless of the intreaties of our horses, who, remembering the rest and refreshment it had twice afforded them, were very desirous to enter its stable, but I was determined to try the Druid, a true Welsh inn, about two miles and half further, in preference to stopping at one of the mongrel posting inns on this great road. I had no reason to repent my choice. We had a good parlour, a good fire, and a good dinner. The furniture of my bed was modern printed cotton, and all the royal family, with many of the saints, arrayed in the brightest scarlet and the deepest blue, ornamented the walls of my chamber.

I have formerly told you that the munificence of English tourists, as far as it extended, has spoiled the Welsh, and I cannot help reflecting now, that it is very difficult not to spoil them, since we, who are neither immensely rich, nor extravagantly generous, could scarcely refrain from contributing to it! I told the good woman at the Druid she charged too little for our mutton chops and chickens, and obliged her to be paid for a slice of bread and butter she wished to give me, at setting out. Such conduct must, in the end, cure people of moderation and hospitality.

I was desirous of going from the Druid to Bala, and from thence to

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Caernarvon, the mountain road, by Festiniog and Tan y Bwlch, and the rock road to Pont Aber Glaslyn. I consulted our landlord on the subject, and asked, "What sort of road from here to Bala?"

"Up an town roat, put very coot"

This I had travelled, and knew the <u>up and down</u> to be true; though I differed a little in opinion, with regard to the <u>very good</u>.

“What from Bala to Festiniog?”

“Mountain, put very coot roat”

“From Festiniog to Tan y Bwlch, and Pont Aber Glaslyn?”

“All up and town, put very coot road”

I found that, to the honest Welshman, who had never been out of his own country, all its roads were good; and as the weather was now become very bad, I resolved to keep the high road, through Llanrwst and Conwy, which had the suffrages of other people.

The rain ^ had begun as we were ascending the mountain from Llangollen, and it continued without intermission for twenty four hours. While we were detained at the Druid, our landlord produced his library, to amuse us. It consisted of a treatise against popery, of six hundred pages, dedicated to James the second, when Duke of York; the Causes of the Decay of Christian Piety, four hundred and fifty pages;[1] and an old Geographical Dictionary. You will, perhaps, imagine that when I had made myself mistress of the title pages, and quantity, I took up my netting; and if [xxx] ^ such is your conjecture, you will not be mistaken.

At one o’clock the rain abated and we took leave of our worthy host and hostess, but it increased gradually, and from Cerniogeu to Llanrwst, was a second deluge. The beautiful Vale of Llanrwst was half under water, ^ and the corn that, two years ago, was a bright yellow, was now green [xxx]. I entered the inn as wet as before.

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We had the good fortune to reach Conwy the next day in dry weather, but we passed through the remains of a great flood that had swept down hedges, rails, and banks; and as we were told, a house.[2] At Conwy it rained throughout the night, and till five o clock the following afternoon. We were safe under the shelter of the Harp. We were informed that this irresistible flood had carried away the bridge at Aber, and enquired of the guard who brought the mail from thence of it were true. He gave us small encouragement to proceed. He said one end of the bridge hung by about a foot, and we might pass it, but he did not know how our horses could be got over. Stones, he added, came rolling down the torrent, from the mountains, like thunderbolts. Though it is probable he never heard the noise of a thunderbolt, ^ any more than myself, it was not difficult to guess his meaning.

I wished myself at Aber, on the other side of the bridge. How I should have enjoyed this tremendous mountain scene! Being at Conwy, however, we thought it best to stay there, till the next morning, when we mounted our horses and rode away. At the pass of S#chnant, the wind was terrible, and we were obliged to tie our hats on with our pocket handkerchiefs. At the [xxxxx] foot of Penmaen Mawr, we dismounted, and sent our horses round to Aber by the sands. I had a walk before me of four miles. I crept slowly up the mountain, and tripped down it as lightly as feather.

By this time it rained, ^ though moderately, and I was obliged to put on my great coat, and beat up against the stormy blast [xxxxxx] till I got to Aber. I had resolved not to murmur at fatigue – if I could help it. But I could no longer help it. I thought, with the force of the wind, the flowing of my drapery, and the weight of my wet coat, I should have sunk to the ground! I turned my back to the wind for a moment and with a deep sigh, and a low voice, said ‘Oh! This is hard work!’

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The bridge at Aber afforded us just safe footing and no more, but the torrent had so far subsided that our horses might have forded it [xxx] above, and I, had we known it, might have been spared this cruel walk. Such a season has not been known in the memory of man. I have borne it with patience, when exposed to it, and been grateful for the houses which sheltered me from it; but I am glad I did not come by Festiniog and Tan y Bwlch; for I believe my fortitude, if not my reason, would have forsaken me, in such weather, among the mountains.

At Aber we were again confined the whole day by rain. In the evening I was fortunate enough to get a peep at Rhaiader Vawr, ^ the Great Waterfall. The fall itself was inaccessible, as the approach to it lay on the opposite side the river, and the two bridges which crossed it were one broken and the other swept away. The first was a modern bridge of stone, on the mountain road leading to Llanrwst; the other, higher up, was of wood, for the convenience of the peasants. We advanced nearly to the place where the latter had stood, and from thence, at the distance of about a mile, saw the river pouring down a hollow in the mountain, from a prodigious height, a cloud resting on its top. A noble sight, but at too great a distance! Chrystal streams ran over our road; the river rolled over huge stones at the bottom of the glen; and we found, at the village of Aber, its rapid course had carried away a small field of barley, and making itself a new channel, had left a mill stream empty.

Yesterday morning, having made all tight for foul weather, we determined to stop no more till we reached Caernarvon. Our precautions were needless; for the weather proved fine, and we arrived here in safety at eleven o' clock.

This morning I have been dusting the furniture of my chamber, and

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putting all things in order. I might, it is true, have called up the housemaid and desired her to be the operator; but, besides that Welsh ideas of cleanliness do not accord with mine, I thought it less trouble to do it myself. My ^ employment brought to mind Madame Roland in the prison of the Abbaye. I resemble her in my taste for neatness, books, and flowers; and though I am more weak and timid I might, perhaps, resemble her in resolution if a great occasion called it forth; but that occasion would have no connexion with politics. I have several loves stronger than the love of my country.[3]

Letter 19

Caernarvon Aug. 30 1799

My Dear Brother,

Caernarvon is not the same place it was two years ago. I then took my solitary walks, unseen by any, but the blue cloaks of the country; the streets now present, continually, elegant women in fashionable dresses. In this Emporium of Tourists I have already met with two families that I know. These are birds of passage; but there are many others, like ourselves, resident here for some time. Four ladies and two gentlemen, who are on what is called a party of pleasure, lodge in the same house with us. They are one day driving about in an Irish car; the next at the Lakes of Llanberis; and the next at Pont Aber Glaslyn. They play at cards before and after supper, and when not at cards, are talking, three or four at a time. They might each be agreeable if separate, but as our dining rooms and sleeping rooms join, they are, all together, terrible neighbours to one. I should prefer the house of mourning to such mirth as theirs. [xxxxxx]

I have made another acquaintance, directly opposite. Pity for her forlorn situation attaches one to her. She is an unmarried woman, turned of thirty, of a noble family in Ireland, whom the troubles there have driven

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into Wales. She has not been in any personal danger; but her brother's house has been plundered by the rebels, and his domestics threatened with instant death. Such is her terror at these proceedings, that she declared to me she would not have slept another night in his house for a thousand guineas; and I am told, that here she sleeps in her cloaths. She is at Caernarvon without either friend or servant. The people here have a notion she is a little deranged. This, however, is not the case. She appears to me not only rational but sensible. She is so grateful for my attention, and her manner is so affecting, that sometimes I can hardly refrain from tears.

I was so unfortunate as to take a cold when I first came here, which brought on a slow fever. I struggled against it with all my might, but at length lost all hopes of shaking it off, without the advice of the physician of the place. I was informed that morning was the time to get him; for that his intellects were then generally unclouded by the fumes of wine. I sent twice yesterday morning, without success. I suppose he had taken a double dose of his own prescription the night before, and took a longer time than usual to recover it. He was in bed, and could not come. I then ordered my horse, rode out, and was better. I have done the same today, with the same effect. If I keep mending, I shall think the Doctor the best physician I ever knew, for not coming when he was sent for; and will endeavour to get a diploma for my horse.[4]

^ see page 51 & page 62

I have had the pleasure of seeing the devotion of the Methodists, if not at its highest pitch, at a degree of extravagance sufficiently striking.

When I entered the crowded chapel, the service was almost ended, and the preacher was pronouncing short sentences, with the greatest energy of voice and violence of gesticul[ation], which the congregation repeated, in a murmuring cadence. When his part was finished, theirs began. At first the

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roar was universal, but it subsided by degrees, and the multitude became spectators, while eight or ten of the most inspired were actors. Each of these repeated some particular sentence that he had caught, and all roared out the same monotonous tune, till they had worked themselves up into a frenzy; flinging about their arms, clapping their hands, rolling their heads and bodies from side to side, and at intervals, jumping, at least a dozen times together. The jumpers were chiefly in pairs, and held each other by both hands. I observed, that the women pair with women; and men with men. It would not have been quite decorous to have done otherwise, as some of their gestures were very familiar. When a couple of men came across a couple of women, they shook hands, as brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus; but I believe their heavenly love was so sincere, at the moment, that no other sentiment could find a place in their breasts. The friends of the females were very careful to adjust their garments, when they became a little disordered.

When I first witnessed this scene I felt amazed, mixed with horror. The yell was insupportable; I seemed surrounded by lunatics, in their most outrageous paroxysm. These feelings, in some degree, yielded to pity; and my next concern was for my watch and my purse. Recollecting, however, that I was in Wales, I did not trouble myself to feel if they were safe. My ignorance of the language added to the strangeness of the scene. I at first imagined, from the hideous

tones, that touched with remorse they were bewailing their sins, and imploring forgiveness of Almighty God; but I after[wards] understood that they were chaunting songs of triumph, believing themselves his favourite children.

The preacher sat some time with a handkerchief thrown over his head, to prevent his taking cold, (for his exertions had thrown him in a bath) viewing the pranks of the demon he had raised; and then stole silently off. The friends of the performers, when they thought they had displayed

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sufficient proofs of inspiration, led them to his house; where I was told he would spend some hours in bringing them to their senses. It is not often that the Methodists are raised to this degree of frenzy; but the present orator was a very popular man, and had spared no pains to work upon their passions.[5]

The straits of Menai, which divide the county of Caernarvon from the Isle of Anglesey, may be crossed at five different ferries. The first is from Aber to Beaumaris, fifteen miles from Caernarvon. The second is at Bangor, nine miles from Caernarvon. It is about half a mile in breadth, at high water, and sixteen fathoms in depth. The third is called Moel y Don, Hill of the Waves, from a large round rock which there shoots out into the sea. This is four miles from Caernarvon, the water is there three quarters of a mile, when the tide is in; and eleven fathoms deep. The fourth ferry is at Caernarvon itself, and is called Tal y Foel. It is about two miles across. The fifth is that of Aber Menai about three miles beyond Caernarvon, where the straits open to the sea. There is also a ford, I believe, opposite Aber, where, when the tide retires, the greatest part of the channel is dry sands; but I would not be one who should cross it.

Notwithstanding the fever I mentioned, I have made a trip to the Island, urged by an ardent curiosity to see the Carnedd and the Cromlech.[6] We rode to Moel y Don ferry, and sent our horses on, to that of Bangor, chosing to walk along the opposite shore of Anglesey. We sailed across the Menai in ten minutes; we then pursued a path along two charming fields, to the church of Llanedwin, and entered the park of Lord Uxbridge. I thought myself here on hallowed ground, and looked around me with a scritinizing eye, expecting every moment to

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see some monument of the religion of my ancestors rise before me. We had walked through the woods, perhaps, a quarter of a mile, when pointing to a hill on our left I cried, What's that? My father went to see, and I, who durst not make one step in vain, sat down under a tree. He beckoned and I sprung up. It was the Carnedd, the sepulchre of some distinguished Briton.

The Carnedd is [a circular hill], about four hundred feet in circumference, and about fourteen in height. It is composed of the stone of the country, hewn into small angular pieces. The whole surface is so covered with grass, that the stones would pass unnoticed, without attention; and the interstices are now filled with earth to such a depth, that it affords nutriment to four or five moderate oaks, which grow on one side. The Carnedd has [been] formerly opened, and a part of the stones carried away. In the area thus formed stands, now exposed to view, a stone six feet in length and breadth and one in thickness, supported by others set on end, and leaving a hollow underneath, probably for the body.

From hence we continued our way through the wood, until we came to the house of Plas Newydd, on which it is said Lord Uxbridge has expended £60,000. The principal front commands the Menai, and the grand range of Caernarvonshire mountains. Our road lay at the back, and we did not go out of it, for fear of being deemed impertinent. The stables, which are newly erected, are an imitation of a castle, adorned with battlements, and turrets; and, I suppose, are much admired. I like them not. I would never build castles for horses. No person is a greater admirer of real castles

than myself. Nobody one has viewed those of Harlech, Conwy and Caernarvon, with more veneration and pleasure. But bulk and strength are so essential to these kind of buildings, that all imitations of them are paltry.

Nearly opposite the stables is the Cromlech; I believe, ^ one of the most perfect re-

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maining in Great Britain. Is one huge, rude stone, twelve feet in length, nine in breadth, four and half in thickness at one end and three and half at the other; supported by five stones, which raise the underside four feet above the ground. One or two other supporters now lie prostrate on the earth. Adjoining to the Cromlech is another, of the same kind, but smaller. The soil has accumulated in the hollows of both, till they are in several places covered with fern, wild geranium, and other plants.

While I looked with awe on the works of man that had lasted, perhaps two thousand years, and figured to myself the white-robed Druids and their smoaking fires; my heart recoiled at the idea that, on this very altar, my fellow-creatures, possibly my progenitors, had been sacrificed by the dictates of a barbarous religion.

The scenery, a venerable wood, is proper for the subject; but the predecessors of Lord Uxbridge committed a grand mistake, in planting ashes rather than oaks; and his lordship, instead of lamenting the error, has planted sycamores. By oaks, the native produce of our islands, and their pride, these sacred remains of antiquity were once surrounded; and I still consider, as an appendage to the Cromlech, all other wood prophane.

I left this interesting spot with reluctance, and cast many a longing, lingering look behind. My only comfort was the Caernarvonshire mountains. They were indeed a noble consolation, not only for the curious relics I had left behind [~~me~~], but for many a weary step I had before me. Never did I see them look so sublime. On their own shore one is too near them: here the eye takes in the whole range at once; with their different summits, rising above and between each other.

Our road led us through a village called Llanfair, and between two hills of disjointed pieces of rock, many of which were ready formed by nature for the slab of a cromlech, and required only to be loosened on one side. I believe the cromlech, itself, grew there.

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In the small part of Anglesey I saw, the roads were good, and the lands poor, with some exceptions in favour of the latter. The country is well inhabited, and the cottages are decent.

We crossed the Menai at Bangor ferry, and took some refreshment at the inn, where we found our horses waiting for us. It is beautifully situated on the steep bank of the Menai, and is, undoubtedly, the first inn in the Principality.

Letter 20

Caernarvon Sept 10 1799

My Dear Brother,

In spite of fever, medicines and apothecary ^ all which I have at present and which last, by the way, is a very worthy, skillful man, I have this day been at Llanberis.

The road from the inclosures to the foot of the mountains, that two years ago was the worst of the way, is now ~~mended and~~ become some of the best. Each year does something to facilitate travelling in Wales.

Having deposited out horses in a barn, at Cwm y Glo, we entered the boat of Richard Williams,[7] who, as well as his wife, was armed with a pair of oars. I felt some difficulty in trusting myself to the care of the female rower, but the man assuring me that she was as strong and as skillful as himself, which I had no reason to doubt from her appearance; and recollecting Pennant's Margaret Evans, who used to wrestle and hunt on these mountains, and fiddle and row on these lakes, I concluded myself safe in her care and keeping.[8]

The first lake of Llanberis is, at the beginning, little ^ more than a marsh, with one channel just deep enough to carry a boat. But having gone half a mile ~~and doubled~~ ^ and passed some rocks which jut out, ~~and~~ a sheet of water opens two and half miles in length, and nearly a mile in breadth. This fills the whole space between the mountains. They are inaccessible rocks

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which rise from its very edge, and no doubt, from beneath it. In a small hollow, on the left, is a green patch and cottage where lived Margaret Evans, the above-mentioned amazon of the lakes. But death has put an end to her exploits long ago.

At the end of the first lake the lands project again, and form a narrow channel for the water, not more than fifteen or twenty yards across, over which is thrown a neat, light, wooden bridge, resting upon four piers of slates, and secured with railing. We passed under the centre, now higher than the man, standing upright in his boat. But he passed it after the late flood, when he was not only obliged to sit, but to stoop. Beyond the bridge, the water was now so shallow that he got out to lighten the boat, and haul it up against the current.

About the division of the two lakes is an opening, between the mountains on the right, cultivated and sprinkled with cottages and trees; though this, after having displayed a waterfall, terminates in a mountain. On the left, also, in two different hollows, are cottages, with each a tree or two and a small spot of green. One of these is a farm, for which the tenant used to pay thirty shillings a year; but Ashton Smith, Esqr , his landlord, has raised his rent to five pounds, and it is said the man will be ruined. Sheep and goats were basking on the rocks; but these goats are never milked. They are wild, and yield their owner no other advantage than their flesh and skins - when he can catch them.

We now entered the upper lake, which is a mile and half long, and about three quarters of a mile broad; but deeper than the lower, being in the deepest part twenty fathoms, while that is only fourteen. At the end of the second lake, on a high, round projecting rock, partly covered with heath and moss, stands Dolbadern Castle. At a distance it had the appearance of a prodigious stone, but nearer it look

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ed more important. It is a large, round ivy-mantled tower, having many windows, of varying sizes. What could have been its use, it is difficult to conceive! It is too small to have defended this pass into the mountains; and as to a watch-tower, it is secluded from all created objects [~~xxxx~~] by the mountains above and the lakes below! I wished to visit the castle, and our boatman offered to set us on shore; but I was obliged to hoard my little strength, and give up something, that I might be enabled to do the rest.

The mountains which inclose the upper lake are higher than those of the first. Crib Coch, one of the mighty sons of Snowdon, forms the right boundary of that and the vale beyond it; and along his side lies the ascent from Llanberis to Y Wyddfa, which I traced, with aching eyes. Crib Coch, is not, however, his tallest son. The highest, and almost the rival of his father, is Crib y Distil. I think I am now acquainted with the whole family.

I saw, on the left, a slate quarry, high up the mountain, and the road by which the slates are brought down to the lake. The method of conveying them [~~xxx~~] is by small carts, with one horse before, and another behind. To me the destruction of the poor animals seemed inevitable; I could not conceive how they could not escape being precipitated into the lake: but it seems a different fate awaits them—they are only killed by the labour.

On the right, near the top of the second lake, are two copper mines, one of which runs nine score yards under the mountain. We landed at the extremity of the lake, on the opposite side, where are machines for breaking the ore, and a succession of pits, where the earth is washed from the copper. I might have seen the whole process, but I have no fancy for metals or minerals, and an utter abhorrence of ill smells.

The space between the mountains, which was now reduced to half a mile in breadth, and extended about the same distance in length

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is meadow, as level as the water we had quitted. At the end of this is the village of

Llanberis, consisting of eight houses intermixed with trees, and a church.[9] Above the village, the mountains approach each other so as to leave only a narrow glen; a horrible bwlch is then to be climbed, after which the road divides, that on the right leading round Snowdon, and through Nant Gwynan, to Beddgelert; that on the left through D#ffryn M#mbr to Capel Cerig and Llanrwst. Farther than Llanberis I saw not, ~~but did~~ ^ for my strength ^ did not equal my inclination, ~~I would see it~~. We have all a certain portion of curiosity; that of many persons lies in their ears, and inclines them to listen to small matters of fact regarding their neighbours. Mine is seated in my eyes, and Wales is the place to gratify it.

The church of Llanberis[10] is lowly without, and gloomy within. Not, however, owing to the proximity of the mountains, as I had been informed, but to the smallness of the windows. We entered it, and found it was the parish school. About a dozen boys were reading Welsh. The clergy[man] followed us ~~in~~, and began a conversation, by observing, that it was an old church. I beg his pardon—not suspecting his profession, by his blue coat, silk handkerchief, and brown stockings; we made some slight assent to his remark, and he retired. I feel both remorse and regret at this circumstance; remorse, for having failed in the respect due to his situation; and regret, at having missed the information he could have afforded us.[11]

Having looked with great satisfaction at this humble village, almost cut off by lakes and mountains from communication with the rest of the world, we entered its principal inn; for there are two.[12] As guests above the

common rank, we were shewn into the parlour—a parlour, whose walls and floors were of black, rugged stone; whose top was rafters; whose only light came through a dozen very small panes of glass;

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whose partition wall was a mat; and whose furniture, one ~~small~~ table, two ~~small~~ benches, and a plank, supported by slates. The good woman of the house repeated the word 'Welcome!', spread a table-cloth; brought a jug of cwrw out of an adjoining pantry, (for cellar she had none;) shewed us butter and brown bread, and by the boatman, our interpreter, offered us eggs. We declined her civility, though we paid her for it; having brought wine and cold provisions of our own.

After this refreshment we set out on our return, and after a pleasant voyage, arrived in safety at the bottom of the lakes.

We were much pleased with Richard Williams, our rower. He speaks English, a rare qualification, and we found him very civil and intelligent. His civility was of the true Welsh sort, and would be better understood by the term kindness. Seeing me look ill, he offered me ~~a little of~~ something, ∧ that the gentleman ∧ had left with him. That something, I dare say, was brandy – a treasure he could not possibly replace.

The general road between Cwm y Glo and Llanberis is on the lakes, and slates are daily carried along them in boats; but there is another, which instead of winding down Cwm y Glo, keeps on the side of the mountain, on the right of the lake, at a frightful height above the water. It then descends and goes over rocks near the shore, passes behind Dolbadern Castle, and through the cultivated opening between the mountains; becomes a terrace just above the lakes, and in one place runs close to the water's edge. I took the pains to trace it the whole way. This road is so improved that I saw a gig travel along it; but, till lately, it was terrible, even to the Welsh. It was, sometimes up or down steps of native rock, and sometimes so narrow, that, when one horse met another, the two riders were obliged to dismount; and one hauled his horse up ∧ the side of the mountain, while the other passed. An English horse has been seen to stop and tremble before he could be made to venture along it.

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Two years ago I was told that on a dreadful windy day, in the preceeding winter, a poor woman left Llanberis on horseback, to go to Caernarvon market, and that neither she nor her horse were ever heard of more. It was supposed they were blown down one of the precipices, into the lake, and swallowed up for ever.

Letter 21

Caernarvon Sept 14th 1799

My Dear Friend,

I will take this opportunity of assuring you, once and for all, that it is my sincere desire to speak the truth, and that only; but at the same time I will not venture to affirm that I have always done so. I saw the Lakes of Llanberis two years ago, as I then informed you. I even went more than half a mile upon them in a boat, which I had the discretion not to tell you; for though I might have made a flourishing description of what I heard, saw and conjectured, it would have had one fault at least – it would not have been a true one. Some obvious reflections occurred to me on my second visit to the lakes – How much I had been deceived in the first! How could I blame travellers for differing from reality

and from each other, when I, who meant to tell no falshood, who wished to make no system, could not hear the same tale twice over, or see the same thing twice in the same light! Well might I forgive a recent tourist for making the river Dee rise at Bangor! I therefore would not be understood to make positive assertions, but to stipulate for such a share of your credence only, as the best exertions of my senses and my memory deserve.

Public weddings are the universal custom throughout the principality among the common people. ^ Here, if the father of the bride can afford it, he provides the marriage feast and it is her portion. If he cannot, or if she have no parents, she is trusted by some friend, or obtains credit at some public house; and, after repaying the money out of what is left by the guests, the remainder is her own. Every man who dines pays a shilling; every woman sixpence;

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though many chuse to give a shilling; every person who drinks tea sixpence. Every pint of ale is scored up to the person who calls for it, each comes and goes as he pleases, and many come only to drink and dance. 1 [A poor]

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2 In south Wales, when a poor couple marry, they send a printed hand-bill to every person by whom they are known, signifying that they mean to be married on such a day, and to keep their wedding at such a place, where they hope to see the person to whom it is addressed. This is called a bidding. On the day appointed, after the ceremony is performed, the new married couple, attended by the bridemaid and brideman, repair to the house fixed upon, which is always a public one, and sit, from eleven o'clock in the forenoon till seven in the evening, to receive the contributions of their friends. Their equals give half-crowns, the better sort crowns, or even pounds, according as they are esteemed and respected. If either of them have been a servant, it is said, in the bidding, late servant to Such a one, and all the friends and visitors of the family shew their generosity on the occasion. Every donation is registered by the clerk of the parish, who attends for that purpose; and when the giver marries, [xxxx] it becomes a debt. No person ever fails to pay at the wedding of another what he received at his own; except through absolute inability. The same obligation prevails in the higher class:- I always give at the wedding of your servant, what you give at the wedding of mine; or more, if I think she deserve it better, or have lived longer in her place. The money thus raised amounts commonly to from twenty to fifty pounds, and sometimes reaches a hundred.

The young people of the better sort scamper away ^ on horseback, in parties of twenty, at a bidding. After having made their presents, the men treat the girls with cakes; load them with as many as they can carry, and then they gallop off ^ together, and try who shall be first home. Such as chuse it stay to dance in the evening.

The poor people regale at the expence of the new-married pair, who

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provide bread, butter, a cheese, and sweet drink (that is ale with sugar and spice) in another room. [3, when a common man dies &c].

1 A poor man, in the hollow of the mountains, has married his daughter since I have been here. He brewed a quarter of malt for the occasion. The cloth was laid out of doors; for his house consisting of one room, could not contain the company. Forty persons sat down at once, and as soon as they had dined, forty more took their places. My father who gave me the account, remained there not quite two hours; and saw about a hundred and fifty people, two only of whom

could speak English.[13] The bride, her father and mother, waited on the guests. The banquet resembled that prepared by Esop for his master, except that instead of tongues, tongues, tongues, it was beef, beef, beef.[14] Five rounds were ready to succeed each other; the variations were bags of peas and mountains of cabbage: but these were delicacies to people accustomed to live on oatmeal and buttermilk. The cwrw was good, the man having done justice to his malt. The company ate off wooden trenchers, and sat on wooden planks, supported by slates.[15] A harper made one of the party; and another was expected. The desert was butter and cheese. The house served for an occasional drawing-room; and two beds that were in it supplied the place of sophas. Not a female appeared in anything other than woolen, which some had fashioned into gowns, and others into bedgowns, nor one without the beaver hat except the mother of the bride, who being cook, might be obliged to take it off.

I saw a sailor married to the daughter of a shoemaker at Llanbeblic, the parish church of Caernarvon. The bridegroom marched first with his bridemen; or, as they were here called, his servants, one on each side. The rest of the men followed, three abreast. Then came the intended bride, between her servants, and the rest of the women, in the same order,

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closed the procession. These town ladies were not clad like the mountaineers, in woolen, but in flowered cotton gowns, white petticoats, and white stockings. The bride and her maids wore white satin ribbands in their caps; the beaver hat is ever the same, but these were ornamented with a smarter bow than those of the rustics. Part of their finery, however, the morning being rather cloudy, was eclipsed by their blue cloaks, which nothing but the hottest sunshine ~~ever tempts them to lay by~~, and sometimes not even that, can tempt them to lay by.

When the clergyman came to a certain part of the service, he stopped and the sailor stepped forward, and laid four shillings on his book. The parson very quietly gave one to the clerk, pocketed the other three himself; and thus sure of his reward, proceeded to make the ^ lovers man and wife. The ceremony ended, the two bridemen flew at the two poor defenceless maids; and after some struggling, each ravished a kiss. This is an established custom among all ranks, and also between Godfathers and Godmothers, at a christening. If the lady leaves the church unsaluted, she claims a pair of gloves: if the gentleman succeed, she is supposed to be satisfied.

The new-married couple kept their wedding at a public-house, not far distant from our lodgings, where they dined, and two of their female friends sat making tea from three o'clock in the afternoon till seven. At seven the next morning, I saw many of the company, ~~women as well as men~~, mounting their horses to return home.

[~~xxxx~~] Every person acquainted with either of the families makes it a point of honor to attend the wedding feast. A considerable sum is thus collected, for the benefit of the young couple beginning the world; and each, receiving it in his turn is only laying up a fund against his own marriage, or paying a debt contracted at it. 2 In South Wales

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3 When a common man dies at Caernarvon, a small bell is rung about

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the streets, as an invitation to all persons to attend the funeral. Those who arrive first fill the house, the others crowd about the door, and each is presented with a small cup of cwrw, holding about a quarter of a pint; they all accompany the corpse to the church, singing psalms by the way. Should any person acquainted with the deceased fail in his attendance, it would be construed as an affront; but the clergyman would have the most solid reason to resent it.

Having provided for our own table, I can give you the present prices of provisions here. If you have no occasion for such information yourself, it may be amusing to your grandchildren, when you have any, to compare it with the prices of their day; if they should chance to visit Caernarvon see page 52

Mutton and beef are sixpence a pound, veal, five pence, salmon five pence and sixpence., flour threepence halfpenny, butter eight pence halfpenny to nine pence halfpenny, and potatoes two pounds and a half for a penny. Chickens are from four pence to eight pence a piece, ducks from eight pence to ten pence, rabbits sixpence, and eggs a halfpenny. But the difficulty is to get these things. Meat is plentiful on a Saturday, but is scarcely to be had on any other day. Poultry is scarcely to be had on any day. Rabbits can only be had by chance. Fish depends on an uncertain element; and most of the poultry and all of the rabbits depend on the facility of crossing it; as they come from Anglesey.

Entering upon our lodgings at the beginning of a week, famine stared us in the face, and I thought myself very fortunate in being able to seize upon a set of calves' feet and a piece of ham. Hearing ~~by good luck~~ ^ accidentally that a sheep was killed, I sent and secured a quarter of it, for the next day.

Not one of the market people understand a word of English. If you send a servant to market, he must find an interpreter in the street;

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and if provisions are offered at the door, he must call up one of the maids of the house to transact the business. Many of the ^ country people, are not ignorant, however, of the practice, common to every tongue and kindred, of extorting a higher price from strangers than the current value of the thing to be sold.

We are preparing to leave Caernarvon, and my own next letter will be addressed to you from some place on my way home. With a small degree of lurking fever, I am going to attack the rock road between Pont Aber Glaslyn and Tan y Bwlch, so long the object of my curiosity and dread. A road that every mountain hunter goes once, but I never heard of any Englishman going it twice except my father. This will be his third time.[16]

Letter 22

Bala, Sept 16th, 1799

My Dear Brother,

See p 54 The road as ^ far as Beddgelert presented nothing new, except the ravages of the overwhelming flood that we had our share of on the way to Caernarvon. Lying close under the mountains it was, at first, impassable in places and is still covered in earth and stones deposited there by the torrents. In one place a breach is made in the wall which divides the road from the mountains, and the road is raised to the level of the wall, when standing. At Beddgelert the water ran over the causeway on which the inn stands; but did not enter the house. At a house below, a young man saw it rushing in, and shut the door. The water forced it open. He then opened an opposite door, to give it vent; but before he could escape, the current jammed him in between the door and the door case, and he was squeezed to death.[17] The

mother of the man that keeps the inn, a cheerful pleasant old woman of ninety two years of age, who has lived in that house sixty five years, never saw such a flood.

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Having armed myself with an unusual quantity of excellent cold roast beef, I rode to Pont Aber Glaslyn, and entered upon the celebrated road from thence to Tan y Bwlch. To give you a general idea of this road I must tell you, that between the Glaslyn, whose estuary is called Traeth Mawr, and the river which flows through the Vale of Tan y Bwlch, whose name I unfortunately do not know,[18] and whose estuary is called Traeth B#chan, is a tract of high, rocky land, the refuse of the mountains. It is seven miles across, and universally acknowledged to be the worst carriage road in Wales; but, as it is the grand pass from Caernarvonshire into Merionethshire and is travelled by gigs, curricles, post chaises and gentlemen's carriages. The Welsh, themselves, say, that the only way to pass it in safety or pleasure is on foot, and accordingly, if their business can be made to suit the tide, they always go by the sands, and ford the traeths; but strangers, not so well knowing how to escape the dangers of the water, generally encounter the inconvenience of the rocks.

After going up and down several short steeps, from Pont Aber Glaslyn, we climbed a long hill, so steep that it required my utmost efforts to keep my seat upon my horse. Time was, when we would have divided the toil, but now I was obliged to save myself for walking down hills. The summit is a gap between two rocks; and the descent, which begins immediately, made all I had ever seen appear trifling. It is native rock, in steps and ledges; huge stones, in holes and ridges, and so steep, that it shook my

whole frame to walk down them, though I leaned half my weight on my father. I wondered that the horses could keep on four legs so unequally placed; as I saw them led down before me. In short the

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road is all that is bad, except dirty. That it can never be; for there is not a particle of soil, or any material, of which dirt can be composed.

There are only two descents of this description, which succeed each other, down from the gap: a few more, of less consequence, brought us to the bottom. We then entered on another hill, steep at intervals, rugged without intermission, and toiled up it for an hour, on foot (for having left half my journey behind me, I felt more confidence for the rest) we looked back, and were surprized to see our old friend the gap not far behind us. Our road now became tolerably level, though still rugged, till we came to a second gap; from whence the descent was not so rapid as the first. It is then as fine a road as can be imagined, and winds down the steep of Tan y Bwlch; the charming woods of Mr Oakley on the right, with squirrels leaping from tree to tree; and the beautiful Vale of Tan y Bwlch and Festiniog below.

The sum total of the country between Pont Aber Glaslyn and Tan y Bwlch is a high, rugged rock, divided into two distinct hills with a vale running along it, and subdivided into many ups and downs, as they were called by the good man at the Druid. We crossed the vale towards the top, mountains rising on our left; but we saw it expanding towards the sea, on our right, and containing the village of Llanfrothen, ^ with a church, and a gentleman's house. From the heights we had constantly a view of Traeth Mawr, and, latterly, of both traeths at once. They seemed near each other; the land which separates the rivers growing narrower, as it approaches the sea.

For six miles we saw neither horses, cattle, nor houses, except in our look down the vale of Llanfrothen. The country is, in some places, bare

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rock; in others it is covered with heath and moss, intermixed with blades of grass, affording subsistence for a few straggling sheep. Yet even this is private property, divided by stone walls; and we should have had the trouble of opening eight or ten gates, if a party of boys had not walked by the side of our horses, and rendered us that service.

With something like the sensation one finds at meeting with an old friend, I saw the castle at Harlech; the woods of Maesyneuadd; the hills of Llantegwyn; and that on which I took my first view of Tan y Bwlch. Near the bwlch we passed a cottage. Exhausted by fatigue, and parched with thirst, I shewed a piece of silver and pronounced the word cwrw. In vain! The inhabitants possessed no such luxury; and I gave them, from compassion, what I would have given for a draught of beer.

The green fields, green hedges, winding river, and good road of the Vale of Tan y Bwlch appeared, as it has been called, a terrestrial paradise. M^{r} Oakley, situated in a fine wood, near the bottom of the bwlch, commands it all, in every sense of the word.

We passed the inn, crossed the vale, rode upwards of a mile on the opposite side, and mounted a cultivated steep to Festiniog, which is situated in a flat on the side of a mountain. We were five hours in coming from Beddgelert hither; only eleven miles, and I never toiled so hard in any five hours of my life. At Festiniog I could neither eat nor rest; but I drank milk like a calf.

The situation of Festiniog is beautiful; on the top of one of the steeps [~~xxx~~] which surround the vale; and mountains behind rising far above it. It is a neat compact village, and for this country, a large one, contain

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ing a church, two inns, and several creditable houses.[19] The lands about it are fruitful, and the women not less so; for I was informed, that they seldom bring fewer than a dozen or fourteen children each, and sometimes, five and twenty.

Village as it is, Festiniog may be called the metropolis of the mountains. In a circumference of more than a hundred miles about it, there are nowhere so many houses assembled together. It is twenty-three miles distant from Caernarvon; eighteen from Llanrwst, eighteen from Bala; twenty from Dolgelleu, twenty two from Barmouth; and twelve from the little town of Harlech; and the whole road to every one of these places is over, or between, or under, mountains. The people of Festiniog go to market to Bala, and fetch their wheat from Llanrwst. The latter road is supremely bad, and never marked with English footsteps.

I have been more unsuccessful in my designs on water-falls than any other subjects in this country. I was told there was a water-fall half-a-mile from Festiniog [20] with two singular rocks starting up in it, called the Parson and Clerk; but I was so far from making one of the congregation, as I ardently wished, that I had great difficulty in walking downstairs, from the distension of the muscles of my legs on the ups and downs of the Tan y Bwlch road. I was told that there was another waterfall about three miles on our way to Bala, and only a quarter of a mile from the road.[21] To make myself some amends I determined to see this, and, for fear we should miss it, took one of the inn-keeper's sons, a boy of ten or twelve years of age, for our guide. It is true the boy could not speak a word of English; but he had often, as his father told us, shewn the waterfall to ladies and gentlemen; and we were sensible it did not need an invocation in that language to make itself visible. The father made a long oration to his son, in Welsh, and the boy trudged on before our horses.

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When we had gone three miles, by our own computation (for there were no mile-stones) we had a deep glen on our right, and fancied we heard the sound of water. We could not communicate our ideas to the boy, who still marched on before us; we stopped, however, and pointed to the right. He beckoned us forward, and we obeyed. The sound ceased; the glen grew narrower; it ended; and a small river appeared in view. The boy stopped at a cottage to make enquiries, and we passed him; as we had done the waterfall. He then beckoned us to return, but this was too much, in a stage of eighteen miles, and he no longer found us obedient. We pursued our journey, without seeing the cascade, and he returned home without his reward.

From Festiniog our road ascended gradually about four miles, when we reached the top of the mountain. The descent is about three or four more. In this space there is no house, except the cottage where the boy learned that we had passed the waterfall, and the whole country is peat and bog; though the road is good. From the foot of this mountain our road lay, for two or three miles along a narrow rocky vale: we then skirted and wound up another mountain; and a descent of four miles brought us to Bala: so that the whole eighteen miles from Festiniog to this place, is composed of one mountains at each end, and a vale in the middle. No part of the road is very steep. In the last mile and a half, three lovely fertile vales open to the view, in the junction of which Bala is situated.

During this mountain ride my father [~~xxx~~] told me that I mended a guinea a mile. True it is that I now found myself, for the first time of almost a month, totally free from fever.

Editorial Notes

[1] Richard Allestree, *The causes of the decay of Christian piety, or, An impartial survey of the ruines of Christian religion, undermin'd by unchristian practice written by the author of The whole duty of man* (1667).

[2] In a letter from Beaumaris, 18 August 1799, the Welsh poet Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg) wrote, ‘A continual rain for three weeks has occasioned such dreadful floods in north Wales that it is truly lamentable to see how the country has been torn by them; cattle, hay &c in abundance lost; hares and foxes found amongst the drowned; cows, sheep, horses &c in the Menai houses swept away, corn laid flat on the ground; and what is worse, people drowned in their houses. Amongst the many bridges carried off is that ornament of our country, the beautiful bridge of Llanrwst. I could weep for the loss of it. Hay carried down by the flood stopt up the arches till the pressure of the accumulating flood became so great as to thrust the bridge from its rocky foundation whereon the great Inigo Jones had laid it in 1636. The damages done by the floods in the Vale of Conwy are very great, as they also are in many other places. A set of pretty milkmaids were swept by the flood into the Menai, but their lives were saved. Geraint Jenkins, David Ceri Jones and Ffion Jones (eds), *The Correspondence of Iolo Morganwg Volume II (1797-1809)*, 220. The bridge at Llanrwst did not sustain lasting damage.

[3] This intriguing reference to Manon Roland, executed in Paris in 1793, and the plight of the Irish refugee mentioned below, are explored further in Constantine, *Curious Travellers; Writing the Welsh Tour 1720-1820* (forthcoming). A second edition of the English translation of Roland’s memoir came out in 1796.

[4] In *The Welsh Mountaineer* (1817) the heroine Dorothy Penrose persuades her cousin to take the same medicine: “I dare not sit out of doors” said Bridget; “and you know I cannot walk.” “Try my Taffy”, said I; “I will warrant him an able physician.” (*WM*, 1817 III, 219).

[5] Methodists (often called ‘Jumpers’) were another perennial source of interest to tourists in this period. See Michael Freeman here. William Hutton gives a lively account of this meeting in Caernarfon, and makes some observations on Methodism, in *Remarks upon north Wales* (1803) 94-101.

[6] For a discussion of the responses of both Huttons to the prehistoric monuments on Anglesey see Constantine, 'Celts and Romans On Tour: Visions of early Britain in eighteenth-century travel literature', in Francesca Kaminski-Jones and Rhys Kaminski-Jones (eds), *Celts, Romans, Britons: Classical and Celtic Influence in the Construction of British Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 117-39.

[7] 'R. Williams' is one of four independent boatmen at Cwm y Glo paid by the Dinorwic slate quarry company for services in 1787 and 1789. J.S. Illsley and O.T.P. Roberts provide an interesting account of the development of boating activities on lakes Padarn and Peris in 'An 18th century boat in Lake Padarn, North Wales', *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration* (1979), 8.1:45-67.

[8] Although Pennant did not meet her on his visit to Llanberis, the 'Amazon' Margaret Evans (Marged ach Ifan) became well known to later tourists through his vivid description in his *Tour in Wales* II, 158-59.

[9] This refers to the settlement now known as Nant Peris; modern Llanberis developed in the C19th further down near the lake.

[10] St Peris' Church, Nant Peris. For a print of the area by Moses Griffith (1810), see here.

[11] This may well be Peter Bailey Williams (1763-1836), rector of Llanrug and Llanberis from 1792 until his death. A graduate of Jesus College Oxford, he was an enthusiastic educator, opening Sunday schools in the area. He was also an adventurous mountaineer. In 1798 he acted as a guide for the botanist (and fellow clergyman) William Bingley, making the first recorded 'rock-climb' in Britain on the east face of Clogwyn Du'r Arddu. In 1821 Williams published the *Tourist's Guide to the County of Caernarvon*, a detailed account of many key sites in Snowdonia which knowledgeably references and updates Pennant's Tours. See here.

[12] Cf P.B. Williams, 'Persons going up the Lake may be landed either near the New Inn, or on the Meadow below Mr. Smith's Cottage, or they may proceed to the extremity of the upper Pool, and walk from thence to the Village, which is about a quarter of a mile distant, and procure refreshment at Robert Closs's, who keeps a small Inn there; the Landlord of this House, as well as Pierce Jones, who lives at the other Inn, are both very civil and obliging men, and will either act as Guides themselves, or will procure persons to attend any Gentlemen up Snowdon, or to any of the neighbouring Villages.' *Tourist's Guide*, 1821), 113-14. Robert Closs took over T#'n Llan from his father John Closs (1725-1799), who had moved from Flintshire to work for the Llanberis Mine Company. Thomas Pennant stayed there before climbing Snowdon in 1781 (*TiW* 1784, II, 168) as did William Bingley some years later.

[13] William Hutton has a lively verse description of the festivities held at Cwm y Glo in 'The Welch Wedding (September 13, 1799)', *Remarks upon North Wales* (1803), 87-93.

[14] In 'Aesop's Feast' he serves tongue to his master Xanthus at every course, claiming that the tongue encompassed the full range of human emotion.

[15] From which William Hutton and two young women tumbled: 'When the board which we sat on too feeble was found/To support Wales and England—we fell to the ground!' (p. 90)

[16] For the notorious 'rocky road' from Beddgelert to Tan-y-Bwlch see Richard Moore-Colyer, *Roads and Trackways of Wales* (2nd ed. Ashbourne: Landmark, 2001), 164.

[17] T# Isaf, Beddgelert (also known as Llewelyn Cottage) is now a National Trust property; the young man was apparently Robert Jones, aged 21. See here and here.

[18] Afon Dwyryd.

[19] See Moses Griffith's view in Thomas Pennant's Extra-Illustrated *Tours in Wales* (NLW), here.

[20] Possibly Rhaeadr Cymerau, on the river Goedol, close to Llan Ffestiniog.

[21] Rhaeadr Cynfal, which contains a rock also known as 'Huw Lloyd's Pulpit', is off the modern B4391