

BENLLECH IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY IN POSTCARDS

Introduction

I have been collecting picture postcards of Benllech and the surrounding area intermittently for a while, and recently placed them in some kind of order. I am attracted to the postcards, not just because of the visual changes to the village over the years, but also because of the words on the other side and what they tell us about what was happening during the period.

A few of my postcards are shown here; this essay deals with the pre-1914 and the immediate post-War periods.

Background

Benllech is located on the east coast of Anglesey in the parish of Llanfairmathafarneithaf. It was originally a small cluster of houses, with most of the social activities taking place at Ty'n-y-gongl, around a mile inland. The main employment in the area, apart from farming, was quarrying along the coast and inland.

The postcards illustrate the development of Benllech as a holiday destination from the early 1900s onwards, centred on a long sandy beach which extends towards Traeth Coch (Red Wharf Bay). There is mention of Benllech in E. A Williams' book '*Hanes Môn yn y bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg*' (1925) which was subsequently translated and published as '*The day before yesterday*' (trans G. Wynne Griffith, Llangefni, 1988):

'There was also a call for a railway to Moelfre. Each year the village attracted an increasing number of summer visitors, and together with Traeth Coch and Benllech, was becoming a popular bathing-place. (Traeth Coch is first mentioned for sea bathing in 1871 and Benllech from 1887.)'

A local committee was formed in 1891 to support the building of a railway; the line from Holland Arms to Benllech was eventually completed in 1909.

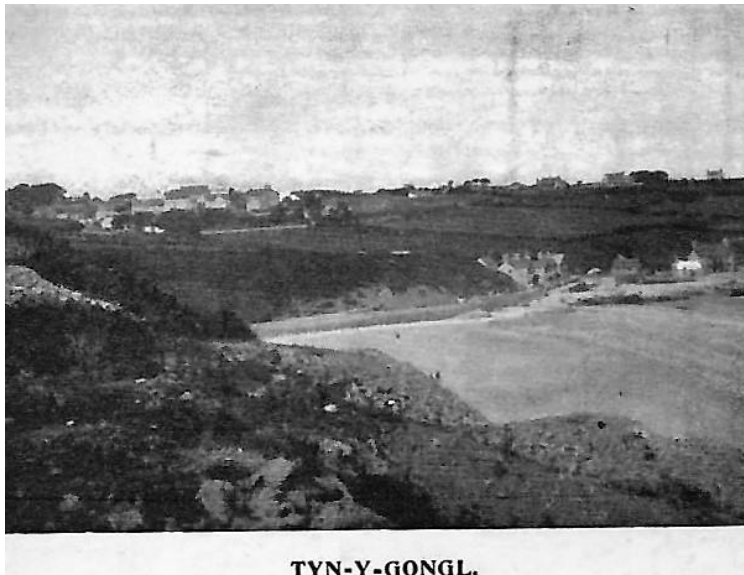
'The line was never a great commercial success and, consequently, plans to further develop it never came to fruition. It did, however, succeed in significantly boosting tourism in the area.' (*Benllech*, Jane L Robinson, 1993)

The line closed to regular passenger trains in 1930.

It is as a seaside resort that Benllech is best known, and the large variety of postcards reflect its growth in the early part of the twentieth century.

1900-1918

The earliest cards in my collection date from the early 1900s; one shows a photo of the beach and the village of Benllech, but is titled 'Tyn-y-Gongl' and reflects the relative importance of the two locations at the time.



Several of the cards were published by 'J.P. Williams & Son, Merchants, Post Office, Tyn-y-Gongl. Established 1838' and show pictures of The Creek, The Headland and one of 'Red Wharf Bay with Great Orme's Head in the distance' and Benllech in the foreground; John Prytherch Thomas was the postmaster at Tynygongl stores for many years.

The Creek



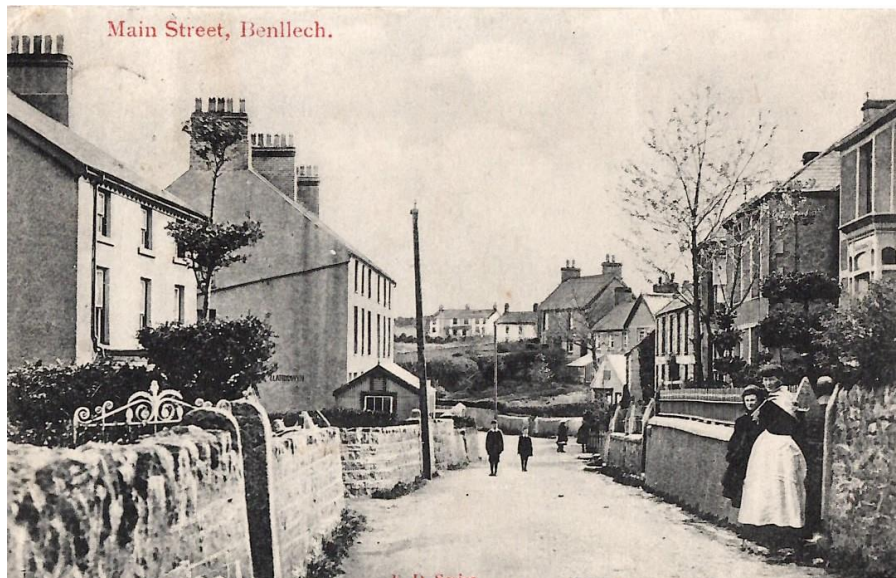
The Headland



Red Wharf Bay – taken from Benllech



A postcard sent in 1907, published by 'E. Davies, Bangor', shows the main street of Benllech.



Another local publisher was 'Pritchard, Tynyngol'. It is noticeable how few people are in these photos, while the surrounding fields await harvesting. The promenade is a narrow walkway, with low sand dunes behind it.

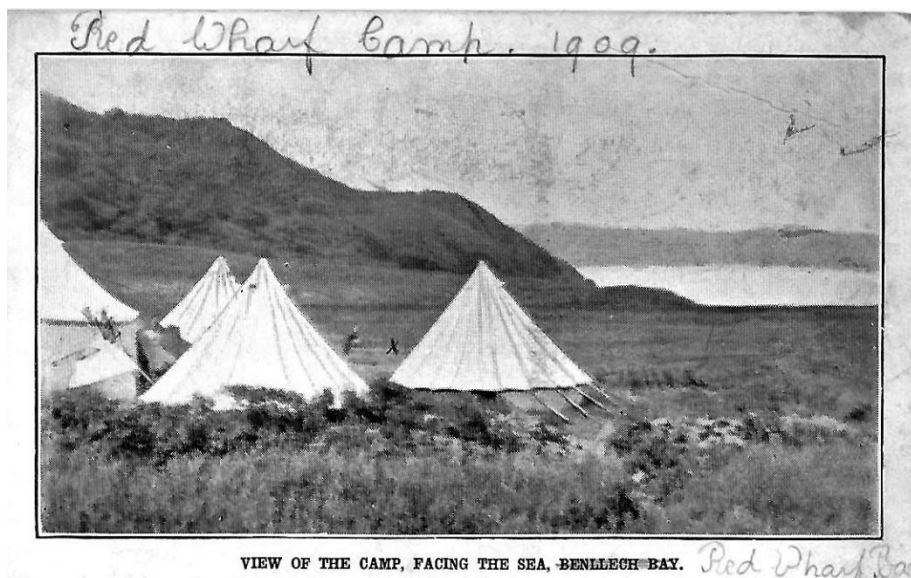
The Promenade and Tent Ground



The Beach



The area was popular for camping, with a postcard from 1909 showing 'The Encampment, Min-y-Don, Red Wharf Bay'.

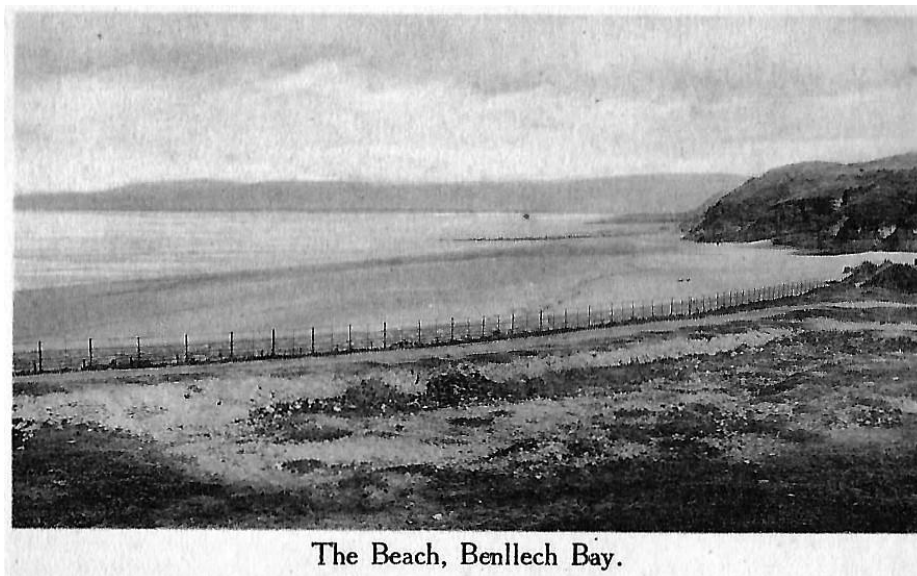


Also during this period, 'Lewis, Tynyngongl' published his 'P.O.S. Series'; there are several dozen of these, including a number of views of Benllech and the beach, Moelfre, Red Wharf Bay and the home of the poet Goronwy Owen. A selection is shown below.

Village Street, Benllech



The Beach, Benllech

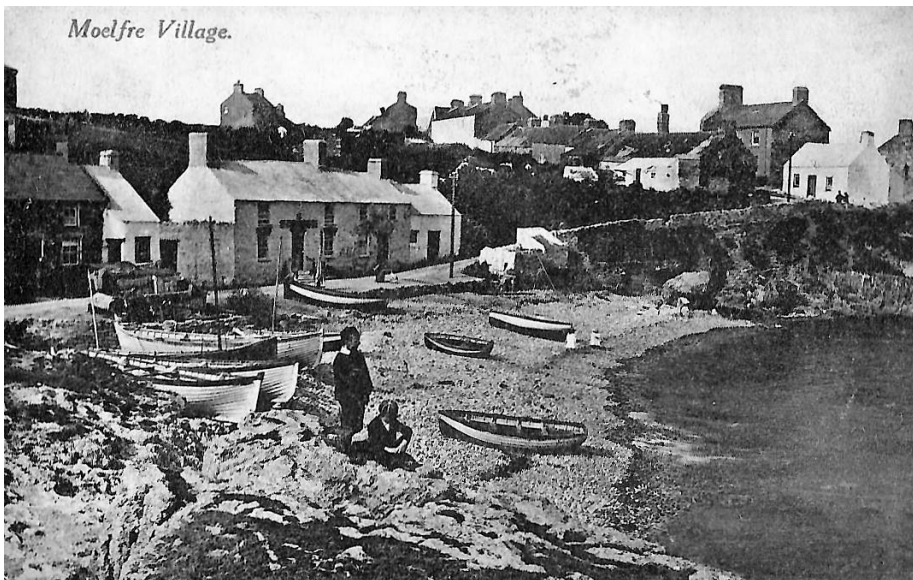


The Home of Goronwy Owen.

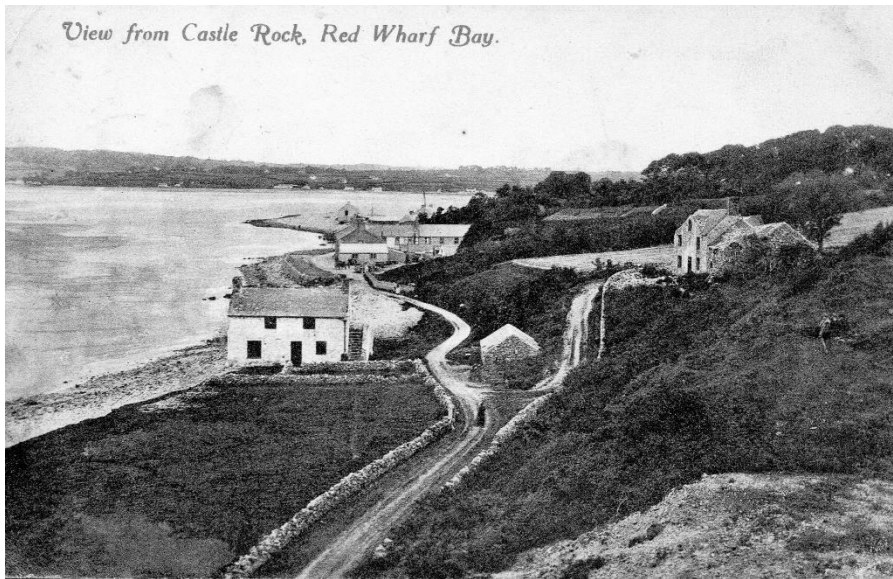


Cartref (Home) Goronwy Owen.

Moelfre Village



View from Castle Rock, Red Wharf Bay



Two other perspectives of the village show the relatively few houses at the time – the Glanrafon Hotel is visible on the left hand side in the first card.





This is a postcard from the early 1900s of the church at Llanfairmathafarneithaf, a scene that has barely changed since then.



My favourite of this period shows a family group posing together on Benllech beach (the card was subsequently re-printed by the Gwynedd Archives Service). The card was sent to 'Mrs Jones, Groeslon, Penymynydd, Llanfair P.G., Anglesey' with the note:

'We all had a nice paddle here this afternoon. Lle iawn am hwyl. Yr hen chwaer anwyl, Yours truly, So & So'



The postcards were mainly sent by holidaymakers, staying in local farms and houses such as Bryndon, Carreg Winllan, Bryn Mor, Hyfrydle, Tyddyn Tirion, Mor Annedd, Trem-y-Don, and Bryn Adda; the Glanrafon was the only hotel of any size during the period. From their comments, most appeared to be enjoying their vacation:

'You really ought to have been here, it is glorious. We return next year.'

'Having a rippling time'

'Although I had a girlie for the visit to Llangefni yesterday, you and Marj are still my only sweethearts, so you won't be jealous, will you? Love from Uncle Fred.'

'We went to a concert. Tynygongl are playing cricket at Bangor today.'

'It is very nice here but a bit too quiet. Lovely weather today. We had a rotten journey from 8.40 till 2 o'clock. It is an awful long way.'

'A lovely spot and nice dipping, feel sure we shall like the place. We have the whole house to ourselves.'

'On Wednesday I cycled with Daddy to Moelfre a little fishing village to see the lifeboat launched.'

IMMEDIATE POST WAR PERIOD

Very little changes during the immediate post-war period, though later in the 1920s we begin to see the main development of Benllech, with occasional tents on the headland becoming more numerous, and the in-filling of fields by housing.

This is a card from early in the period, showing the 'Beach Café Corner', later the 'Seashell café' – there is a car on the side, and again the fields await harvesting.



Postcards also began to be published by the national companies, including Valentine's, Tuck, Frith's and Lilywhite, although 'H & KH Alker, The Gift Shop, Benllech Bay' and 'Lewis Roberts, Vron, Tynyngol' continued to print cards ('Y Fron' was the main grocery shop on the square at Benllech). This one is of the village in the 1920s:



The postcards increasingly showed pictures of bathers on the beach.



The comments of the holidaymakers reflect their enjoyment in a tranquil village:

‘Trem Arfon, Brynteg. Went to church concert given by visitors on Wednesday night.’

The postcards are a valuable record of the beginning of the development of Benllech as a holiday resort during the early part of the Twentieth Century.

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