

# Johnnie Roberts, y Bala

Johnnie Roberts was one of the camp guards who also worked in the canteen. He was 17 years old when the Irish prisoners were there.

...they wanted to move to the north camp because there were huts there, that was a far better camp, there were places for them to wash and 'latrines'... they complained that the camp was wet and cold. The old south camp was warmer because there was a huge boiler house there and a large chimney... at the other camp there was no heating at all, you had to make your own heat, they would lie in their clothes all night and they were riddled with fleas... then the old Irish boys would go down to the field to plan what to do... when things were going very badly, it came to the attention of the people in the House of Commons... after the MP's from Dublin visited it was decided that they would be offered work at the Arenig Quarry, and the train would carry them up and back...

... the food they had wasn't proper food, black bread and potatoes was the mainstay of their diet.. The hunger strikes in the camp were awful. They would sometimes continue for two weeks... they would refuse to eat and would throw their food back. They would complain fiercely that they were given too much frozen red herring...

...they really liked 'cherry wood pipes'... they would ask 'Have you got cherry wood pipes?' and I would say 'yes' and I would go under the counter... and then one of them would tell you 'They want you at the other end of the counter' and I would go to the other end of the counter and they would steal ... but the Commandant told the manager that it would be better not to complain to the army as things were quite bad, only a little excuse was needed for them to destroy the place, destroy the beds, and make a mess in their beds... It was serious there, burning beds in the boiler houses and similar things... one of the officers said that it would be best to have a word with the leaders... the main man was Michael Collins... he said he'd go through their pockets and if they were suspected of thieving he would take their names and they'd be banned from the canteen for a time...

... The Irish called me the little Welshman and I was a messenger of sorts for Michael Collins... Mr.Edwards said that if the Irish wanted to hold a Night Class [for learning Welsh] then it would be better for them to have *Spurrell's Dictionary*, and Mr.Edwards lent his dictionary and alphabet cards to them... they were allowed to use the food kitchen for an hour and a half to conduct the lessons, and would use the top of the baking oven as a blackboard.

Johnnie Roberts gave an interview about his experiences at Frongoch Camp which was recorded between October and December 1987 (Archifdy Gwynedd-Archifdy Meirionnydd).