

Cwmystradllyn Slate History and Background

Both the Gorseddau and Prince of Wales (Cwm Pennant) quarries were developed between 1850 and 1870, the “Golden Age” of the slate industry in Gwynedd. Their development testifies to the fact that everyone that invested in the slate industry expected to make a fortune. Huge sums of money were invested in these two quarries from 1850 onwards. But both failed within a few years of opening, because of the poor quality of their rock.

Gorseddau Quarry - As at Penrhyn Quarry, Bethesda, galleries or terraces have been used to develop Gorseddau Quarry. Each of the 8 galleries has survived, along with their splitting and blasting shelters. There are barracks here as well, where single quarrymen would have stayed overnight.

Moving Slate - Railways from both quarries met and were served by a narrow-gauge line to Porthmadog. The quarry railways had important differences. Brunlees and Fox - who designed railways in several countries - built the line to Gorseddau in 1857. This was of a high standard, designed for horse haulage. In comparison, the line to Prince of Wales quarry was designed for use by steam locomotives and built by a local man, James Davids of Caernarfon, to a far lighter standard. Very little use was made of both railways. Along their route lies one of the most remarkable buildings in the history of the slate industry.

Ynysypany Slate Mill - Ynysypany Slate Mill was built for use by Gorseddau quarry and was active between 1857 and 1866. It is an imposing building, inspired by foundry design, reflecting the background of its investors. Its machinery was powered by a water wheel, with slabs arriving at an upper level. After the quarry closed, it is said to have been used as a community hall for some time.

Life and Living - The village of Treforys between Ynysypany and Gorseddau quarry was developed in the 1850s. Eighteen pairs of two roomed cottages were erected on sour, unsheltered marshland. The manager’s house was nearby. This is a planned village, possibly inspired by the village of Mynydd Llandygai in Dyffryn Ogwen. The name is a reminder that a local banker, Richard Morris Griffith, helped to raise capital required to develop the quarry. This must have been a challenging place in which to live and smallpox was reported here in 1859.

