

22 February 2012
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Campbell's Platform

Last updated: 20 March 2007

Huw Jenkins on his historic home, Plas y Dduallt, and former owner Colonel Campbell's productive relationship with the Ffestiniog Railway.



Col Andrew Henry Knight Campbell retired from the Black Watch having served as a lawyer in many places, including Palestine in the build-up to the creation of Israel.

In his day he was the youngest serving colonel in the Army. But where could he go next? Without retraining and re-qualifying, Scotland was not an option. North Wales, with its rugged landscape, Celtic traditions and legal jurisdiction was a good alternative.

His epitaph is Campbell's Platform, a private halt on the Ffestiniog Steam Railway. It's a great place to start or end a journey and exclusive to the residents and guests of Plas y Dduallt, the manor house he bought at auction in 1962. He had no intention of buying it, he put in a bid and was surprised that it was accepted and that the bank lent the necessary money!

At that time there was no vehicle access to the house, not even a tractor could make it up the precipitous cliffs. As such the platform was much more than a tourist attraction, it was the colonel's lifeline and he had his own engine to drive up and down the line.



His daily commute began with checking all was clear before moving the engine off the siding and onto the line. He had a 'running powers agreement' with the railway which was a right to use the track so long as he did not interfere with the rest of the

railway.

He would then travel down the line to the next station where his car was parked and thence by road to the old market town of Dolgellau. It was here that he worked as solicitor for the county council.

I suspect he preferred the return journey, home to freedom and his mountain kingdom. In the early days he would wheel his provisions down from the platform in a wheelbarrow, but later on he installed an electric winch to hoist the goods through the trees down to the house below.



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Sunday
max 16°C
min 9°C



Monday
max 12°C
min 7°C

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The relationship with the railway was two-way with the colonel putting his explosives expertise and licence to productive use helping blast through the new route to Blaenau Ffestiniog. People who knew him from these days remember him keeping the explosives under his bed for safe-keeping!

He also made the old barns available to the railway volunteers working on the line and these became known as Dduallt Mess, sleeping (officially) 14 in bunk bed accommodation. Many a relationship began or blossomed during volunteer weekends at Dduallt and the hospitality of the Campbells is fondly remembered.

When the Campbells eventually moved in, after much re-roofing and rebuilding the stone spiral staircase, they did so with a furniture train. This job was a bit too specialised for Pickfords.

His epitaph might be the platform, but his greatest achievement must be the restoration of the medieval house which had been home to the Llwyds for several hundred years, a noble family descended from Llewelyn the Great.

The history of Plas y Dduallt.

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Tai Hanesyddol

O blastai crand i ffermydd gwledig, camwch dros drothwy rhai o dai mwyaf

hanesyddol yr ardal

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Campbell's Platform contd.

Last updated: 20 March 2007

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The oldest part dates back to the 1400s and was a hall house, open from the slate slab floor through to the rafters. Today this is the dining hall with a fireplace big enough to roast an ox in and with a four-poster oak truss bedroom above.



Connected to this is a much more modern house built in 1630. Built on four levels this was quite an architectural achievement in its day. At its base is a very solid cellar said to have been used to lock up prisoners during the Civil War en route to gaol in Ffestiniog.

It's just as well the Llwyds built this extension as they subsequently had unexpected guests in the form of Cromwell's officers, billeted here during the siege of Harlech, the last outpost of the Royalists.

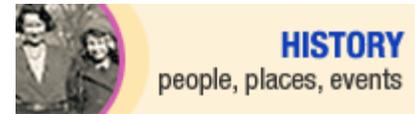
Much of the work was done by the colonel or under his close supervision. He had a passion and a flair for stonework and carpentry. The house has many eccentricities built into it by the colonel, including a minstrel's gallery in the vaulted kitchen and arrow slits built under the balcony.

Above the fireplace in the master bedroom is one of the colonel's many carvings. This one depicts him in medieval costume with a heart beating for M (where M stands for his wife Mary) and on the other side there is a carving of Mary with a heart beating for A (Andrew). His home-made antiques built out of ancient wood and scavenged fittings, are very effective and in keeping.



A tribute to the work of the colonel was the inclusion of the house on the front cover of the Historic Buildings of Wales. It's one of the oldest inhabited houses in Wales and without the intervention of the colonel, supported by the Historic Buildings of Wales, it would no doubt be a pile of rubble today.

The story of his daily commute was the subject of a BBC documentary in 1974 titled *The Campbells Came by Rail*.



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He was a man of action who got things done. The current trackway up to the house was chain-sawed and bulldozed over a weekend through a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Who was going to prosecute the county council solicitor?

Huw Jenkins

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your comments

Nigel from London

There is a wonderful documentary, made by the BBC in 1974, about Col Campbell, Plas y Dduallt, and the Colonel's daily commute down the mountain using his own engine on the Ffestiniog Railway. When visiting the area recently we got off the train at Tan-y-Bwlch and walked back up to Tanygrisiau where we had left the car, in so doing passing Plas y Dduallt. It's a fine house in a glorious but extremely isolated location, now connected to the outside world by a small lane. However Colonel Campbell's platform is still there. It's astonishing to imagine this elderly, charming gentleman making his daily commute.

Thu Oct 16 09:23:18 2008

Gwynant - Cwmbowydd

I and some teenage friends looked after Dduallt for two weeks in the 1960s whilst Col Campbell & his wife Mary went on holiday. We slept in four-poster beds, doing our best to entice girls back there. Much to the consternation of one of my friends I fired the Colonel's elephant gun into a tree (he kept a few firearms in the house). Ghostly noises were heard in the night, it was reputed to be haunted by a girl-child. Oliver Cromwell was said to have slept there.

Fri Jan 25 09:30:14 2008

Anglesey.

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