

## TAN-Y-GARTH

(Under the Hill)

As has already been said, the Club had been searching for a permanent base in the mountains right from the beginning and in fact did well to secure the Llanrwst hut as a stop-gap measure in its second year of existence. It first became aware of the Chapel in 1971 while still based at Llanrwst and its acquisition and early development can be interestingly traced via the minutes of various committee meetings during that period:

10th June 1971:

*"There were no further developments on the chapel at Capel Curig. It was to be offered to a local youth organisation and then, if declined, probably auctioned. A cottage at Deiniolen was inspected but was subsequently found to have been sold for £1000. Another property at Fachwen, near Llanberis, on offer at £1200, was to be looked at".*

16th August, 1971:

*"A letter had been received from Cecil Francis (the Club's solicitor) stating that no local interest in the property had been established and that tenders were to be invited, returnable by 31st August. Cecil was now going to apply to Messrs Bob Parry for the details. It was agreed that we should obtain an official valuation to enable us to submit a realistic tender. Also, it was thought that an approach to the Rev Williams at Colwyn Bay was worth considering, with a view to establishing the amount of the highest tender and seeking an opportunity to match it on the grounds that our initial interest in the property was the reason for it being on the market at the present time. The property to be sold now consisted of the Chapel and the Cottage".*

(The Club had tried to buy the Chapel only as the cottage had a sitting tenant. However, the agent felt this would be impracticable due to rights of way and other complications)

By 10th January 1972 things had moved on:

*"The searches for the deeds had now been dealt with and there was no difficulty over restrictive covenants. Permission for change of use had been applied for and no problem was expected over this. It was felt that the club would have £1000 available in the near future and it was known that a bank loan of £1000 was obtainable. It was therefore agreed that the solicitor should be instructed to proceed with the purchase of the property. There was a discussion of what facilities should be provided at the Chapel with Mike McEneaney and Maurice Ewing of the building sub-committee".*

1st March, 1972:

*"The January-June meets list was to be held in abeyance in view of probable developments on the Chapel. A cheque for £200 in respect of the deposit had been sent to our solicitor. Completion was expected in mid-March".*

The final nights at the Llanrwst hut were 6th/7th May 1972. At the Committee Meeting on 22nd May the Hut Warden's report solemnly stated:

*"During the final seven weeks of occupation a net profit of £6 had been made. Receipts stood at £23.84 and about £8 was outstanding. 134 member nights had been spent at the hut during this period".*

and:

*"The Conveyance relating to the purchase of the Chapel was signed by the Trustees. A cheque for £1800 covering the balance due had been sent to the solicitor on 19th May. Completion was expected around 2nd June. Financial arrangements had been concluded as follows: £300 overdraft with the Natwest Bank, secured by the trustees, £670 in loans from members, £300 from Life memberships(10 @ £30) and the balance from cash at the bank. It was noted that fund-raising activities must continue if any money was to be available to fund improvements and developments. To this end, a jumble sale was to be arranged in the near future\*. A recent fund-raising party had proved successful, bringing in £8."*

\* (a precursor of the famous " Bring and Auctions ", no doubt!).

At the time we had begun to use the camping area of Kerry's Orchard as a temporary measure, much to Mrs Kerry's horror. *"Oh, you're back!"* she exclaimed with a frozen smile.

At a Club Meeting on 23rd May 1972 the Building Sub-Committee was authorised to spend any available funds on the initial development of the Chapel, which would comprise the following:

*Repair of roof and windows.*

*Removal of the pews.*

*Provision of an electricity supply.*

*Clearance of land at the front for car-parking.*

Mike McEneaney, previously nominated as building adviser, plus Maurice Ewing and Fred Heywood, were to be the members of the Building Sub-Committee. The purchase of the Chapel by John Beamer, Roger Hughes, Pete Collis and Les Fowles (who would hold it as trustees on behalf of the Club) was formally approved.

Following completion on 12th June, the Chapel was opened up on June 17th, 1972 and we walked into a building that had not seen human activity since its deconsecration in 1957. It was exactly as it had been left, with the lectern and bible still in position at the front of rows of wooden pews. In September the Chapel was used for the first time by Club members, the trusty old metal bunks having been re-erected. Application to Nant Conwy Rural District Council for change of use had been made and forwarded to Caernarvonshire County Council (CCC). At a committee meeting on 14th September 1972 it was learnt that:

*"Change of use had been refused on the following grounds:*

- (1) That it would lead to additional and excessive use of a sub-standard county road*
- (2) That the ground in front of the Chapel was unsuitable for use as a car park by virtue of its gradient and visible position".*

These details were obtained by phone and written confirmation was still awaited. However, Mr Douglas at CCC had indicated that restricting car parking to the terrace (i.e. about five cars) might answer both points. Mike and Roger were to visit Caernarvon as soon as possible after written confirmation of the decision was received. It was agreed that the grant application to

the DOE should go ahead in spite of the change of use problem. Following a meeting between Roger Hughes, Les Fowles and Mr Douglas at Caernarvon, a revised application for change of use was submitted on 31st October.

Committee Meeting, 14th December 1972:

*"Guttering and rainwater pipes for the Chapel had been purchased and would be put up as soon as possible. Provision of electricity was urgent; Jim McGinty, a friend of Joan Craddock was willing to carry out the work and a plan was to be passed to him. CCC would consider the revised application for change of use on 4th January 1973. A fund-raising party would be held at 16, Shrewsbury Road when the flat was ready."*

12th February 1973:

*"CCC had approved change of use subject to connecting the property to the main sewer and limiting the number of cars to a maximum of four. It was decided that, in order to spread the load, Mike in future would act as professional adviser (responsible for drawings and quotations only); Paul Jensen would be site co-ordinator on working weekends; Fred Heywood would be manpower co-ordinator for nobbling people on Tuesdays. Working weekends would be every six weeks starting on 24/25 Feb."*

*Following our application to the DOE, the Sports Council had offered a grant of £1422 towards the project".*

At that time there were a relatively large number of dogs owned by Club members. At the AGM on 27th March, one motion read as follows:

*"The meeting shall consider whether dogs should be excluded from the Chapel between midnight and 10.30.am. and that owners should be asked to keep them under control at other times ".*

The motion, unsurprisingly proposed by Chris Hall (a non dog-owner) but surprisingly seconded by Maurice Ewing (a dog-owner), was lost.

7th May :

*"The work programme for 26/28 May and 2/3 June involved taking out the old floor, laying hardcore and then concreting, self-mix being the only option as ready-mix could not be delivered".*

11th June:

*"There were now thirty paid-up members, of whom twelve were life members; there was a need to submit estimates to Sports Council for the whole project by 26th July so as not to jeopardise any further grants; CCC planning permission was needed for the independent steel structure to support the upper floor, the position of which would comply with building regs; following their quote of £45, Manweb were to be given the go-ahead for laying on power to the Chapel; building, rather than buying, a septic tank was discussed; work on the fixing of bolts for the steel structure was to happen on 7/8 July"*

9th July:

*There was to be a working weekend to complete the concrete floor on 18/19 Aug; sanitation was the next priority and Chris Hall was to be approached re the septic tank; Manweb had wired up the Chapel; Jim McGinty would be asked to install light fittings and power points so that the supply could be connected"*

13th August:

*"All electrical fittings would be done by the end of September, with connection shortly afterwards; efforts were in progress to find a sponsored walk partner and to come up with other fund-raising ideas."*

10th September:

*"The Treasurer reported that the Club had no money. However, a joint sponsored walk with Guide Dogs for the Blind was being arranged".*

23rd October:

*"Planning permission for the whole project had been granted in a letter dated 14/9/73. There was to be a work weekend on 27/28 October. Jim McGinty would start work on the lighting and there would be some repair work done on the windows and a trial dig for the septic tank, the local authority having agreed. John Hall was to make enquiries re steelwork for 1st floor. There was to be a meeting with the Guide Dogs people on 24/11. Two calor gas heaters had been purchased."*

In 1974, work continued apace, and I am indebted to Paul Jensen for his detailed notes from here onwards. In January the Club scrapped plans for a prefabricated septic tank, which had been under consideration, and switched to the idea of building one in brick. During this year and the next the Sports Council met our claims against the grant as the work proceeded. The first sponsored walk between the Club and the Guide Dogs for the Blind took place and was a great success, raising £500 for the Guide Dogs and £300 for the Club. During this tremendously active year on the development front, the septic tank was dug (causing a JCB to break down part way through), the steelwork erected by Wirral Welding at a cost of £430.10, and a wooden floor to provide a sleeping area constructed.

1975 was equally busy: in March the concrete base to the toilet extension at the rear of the Chapel was poured. In May/June bricklayers began work on the toilet extension and the septic tank. Later in the year, the gap between the timber floor and the walls was sealed.

In 1976 the steel staircase was welded into position by Club members, replacing the potentially lethal ladder which had been the stop-gap solution. In March the second sponsored walk took place, this time raising £688 for the Guide Dogs and £458 for the Club. During the year, the car park was completed (another JCB job), the water supply connected, and the toilets completed. The dramatic First Flush took place on 17th October and the internal walls were built, creating the lounge and the kitchen.

1977 saw the raising of the false ceiling by over two feet, to give more headroom in the sleeping area and the tiling of the kitchen floor.

Since then the building has been tiled throughout, bunks have been built at the north and south ends of the sleeping area, and extensive fire precautions installed in order to comply with the requirements of the Gwynedd Fire Authority.



Tan-y-Garth, the Chapel and House



Early morning tea for Christine Davies  
and Kim Lloyd



Roof repairs on the toilet extension





The kitchen in 1980 with Lin Jensen, Kathy Penny, John Huxley and Les Fowles



The sleeping accommodation before Paul Jensen built the bunks

Les Fowles has kindly put together the following report on the development of Tan-y-Garth Cottage, 1979-98:

*"When the Chapel and House were purchased in June 1972 the cottage had a protected tenant who paid a rent of £3 per month. All our efforts were therefore put into developing the Chapel. In 1979 Mrs Jones (our tenant) moved to another property in Capel Curig and the cottage then became available to the Club.*

*A prolonged debate about its future began. There were three options: take out a loan secured on the property and convert it into a holiday home for commercial letting; improve it to hostel accommodation standard to serve as an extension to the Chapel; or demolish it and use the land as an extended car park.*

*The majority view favoured the holiday home option but I can recall a fairly vociferous demolition lobby at the Special General Meeting held at the end of October 1979. The meeting agreed to develop the cottage as a holiday home and to arrange a loan of up to £5,000.*

*Having made the basic decision we then proceeded initially with the arrangements for financing the project. Roger Hughes produced a cash flow statement and a friendly bank manager at William & Glyn's, Stockport Branch and before long the funding for the scheme was available. It was decided, in order to obviate any local difficulties to employ a local design consultant, Terry Davies (trading as T J Designs) who was an ex-Council employee. He drew up a specification for the work, provided estimates and, by March 1980, was in a position to invite formal tenders from two local contractors.*

*The two quotations received were from G Pierce of Rowen and H Morgan of Trefriw for £4,862 and £5,250 respectively. The lower tender was accepted and work commenced on 5 May with completion on 12 July 1980. The renovation was largely satisfactory, but there was a 3 month Defects Liability Period at the end of which we met the Contractor and our Design Consultant to agree a list of items to be put right. Members helped with some internal decoration which was not part of the renovation specification and by October we were in a position to start letting the property. Roger Hughes took on the task of organising the bookings.*

*To begin with most bookings resulted from local contacts some of whom were able to donate various items of furniture which were most welcome. In March 1982 Les Fowles took over the newly created post of House Booking Secretary. During that year the cottage was advertised in various publications including Climber and Rambler, Angling Times, Wirral Globe and, in the following year The Great Outdoors and Birds Magazine. The summer of 1983 was the first season during which we secured a substantial number of external bookings and since then the level has been at least maintained and in a number of years the main summer period has been fully taken up.*

*Since letting the cottage as a holiday home the Club has adopted a policy of ploughing back revenue to maintain and, when possible, to improve the property. A number of major improvements have taken place. The principal ones were:*

*1984 : Installation of new kitchen units by Dave Davies.*

*1985: (May) Roof renovation carried out by a team of members.*

*1985: (November) Installation of night storage heaters.*

*1988: Repositioning and installation of new kitchen sink unit.*

*1990: Purchase of new lounge suite and furniture for twin-bedded room.*

*1994: (February) Installation of new bath.*

*1994: (November) Cottage completely re-roofed by contractor.*

*1996: Purchase of new furniture for double bedroom.*

*1997: Purchase and fitting of new carpet throughout the cottage.*

*Apart from these changes there has been an annual internal repainting/spring clean which, until recently, has been undertaken by a small group of members at a special working weekend. During the past two years Bob Burton has carried out a more detailed and professional job which has much improved the appearance of the interior decoration.*

*Although the vast majority of visitors have been favourably impressed with the property we sustained a few celebrated disasters resulting in partial or total refunds. The most notable have been :*

*Easter 1982: the new venture got off to a bad start when the Polings from Brighton arrived to find unwashed dishes, used tin cans in the fireplace and vomit dripping from a bedside table. Our new cleaner had failed to attend to any of this and soon ceased to have the job. Two mediators were sent out, a partial refund was made and this group booked again the following year.*

*June 1994: the Baldwin from Norfolk found part of the kitchen ceiling on the floor as a plumber who had fitted a new bath earlier in the year had failed to fit the waste water pipe correctly. A different plumber was able to restore a water supply and the couple stayed for the week with the hole in the ceiling. A full refund of £150 was allowed.*

*November 1994: the cottage re-roofing scheduled for October had slipped into November and a couple from Preston were scheduled to stay for a week at the end of that month. We had been assured by the Contractor that the property would be habitable throughout the work period and therefore the booking was not cancelled. On their second day the Contractor arrived to strip the roof and proceeded while the couple lay in bed. They were not impressed when various items of debris presumably ranging from nails to bat droppings appeared on the duvet. These particular visitors made a huge fuss and threatened legal action but were duly placated by a full refund and used the cottage for the week. They have enquired about booking again.*

*We have suffered two break-ins during the past eighteen years one of which also occurred in 1994 when the kitchen door was kicked in and the electricity meter plus contents stolen.*

*The booking levels in that year were also down on previous years and it must go down as the least favourable year to date in the history of Tan -y-Garth cottage. The continued success of the cottage as a holiday venue could not have been achieved without the assistance of a local cleaner. After a disastrous start we were lucky to be able to secure the services of Hazel Jones in 1982, but she was forced to give up the job after a short time. She found a replacement, Mrs Pierce who provided us with an excellent service for about 12 years. Her husband, Wally, was also able to carry out small repair jobs and, on a number of occasions sorted out the garbage problem when the local authority collection had let us down. When Mrs Pierce could no longer carry on the job we reverted to Hazel who has been with us ever since.*

*1998 has seen the highest level of bookings to date and the number of reservations for 1999 (as at October 1998) are the most we have ever received at this stage in the previous year".*



Owning a property, particularly one seventy miles away from the Club's base, is a responsibility that needs to be taken seriously. Things can go wrong, as with any property, and need to be dealt with expeditiously. Fortunately, we have good local contacts such as the Wainrights at the nearby Tyn-y-Coed Hotel and especially Hazel Jones, who does much more than simply clean the cottage for us. The advantages of having a permanent base in a mountain area are numerous: members stay free of charge at the Chapel and are entitled to substantial discounts on the Cottage; there is also the facility to hold social events there such as Bonfire parties and to provide accommodation on the Club Dinner weekend.

## **ADDITIONAL MATERIAL**

To add to the account above of how the Club acquired the Chapel and Cottage, Mike McEneany and Roger Hughes have provided the following accounts:

### **How We Acquired The Club Hut by Mike McEneany**

From the very outset of the Club it was always the members' ambition to own a property, preferably in North Wales.

With this goal in mind, whilst out walking/climbing, we always kept alert to possible buildings that might be suitable. I recall viewing a Forestry Commission cottage above the "Ugly House" on the A5 (too expensive) and some ruins beyond Dolwyddelan (too remote).

Shortly after we had been served notice to quit our temporary hut in Llanwrst, a group of us were descending Moel Siabod by the north ridge, through the farm down to the back lane leading to what is now our Hut. We noticed an empty church on our right (now converted into a house). "This may be suitable" we all thought.

It just so happened that we then spotted two nuns in the window of the cottage next door. We knocked and enquired about the empty church. "Go and speak to the vicar, he lives in a cottage on the A5, just beyond the bus stop". This we duly did. He thought we were talking about the chapel which is now the Hut.

He gave us the keys and off we went to explore. Despite a large hole in the roof the chapel was just what we were looking for. Would the church be willing to sell? The vicar said he would enquire on our behalf.

The response was "not to a mountaineering club". Shortly afterwards the church put the Chapel up for sale.

A friendly solicitor in Colwyn Bay, a close friend of the "mother" of the Club, advised us how to proceed. Purchase was by tender in writing. We submitted, "£100 above the highest bid received". Needless to say this was not admissible.

Our solicitor enquired how the bids had gone. No other bids had been received, the church really wanted to sell to a Youth Organisation, but none appeared to be interested. How much would the church accept? "£2,000 but we are not selling to any Mountaineering Club".

The answer? The solicitor's secretary submitted a bid of £2,000, this was accepted, the secretary duly sold the Chapel on to the GMC.

Mission accomplished, the rest is history, as they say. It was meant to be.

## **How we raised £2,000 to pay for the hut and the cottage by Roger Hughes**

(Roger was the Club's first treasurer)

From Mike's account above "From the very outset of the club, it was always the members' ambition to own a property, preferably in North Wales".

So - to really understand how we raised the money, we need to go back to the very start of the club in early 1967.

Beer had just gone up from 2 shillings a pint to half a crown, two and sixpence; that is 12.5p in today's money. This reflected the huge move over to mass production by the big breweries, the introduction of Whitbread Tankard and Watneys Red Barrel and the disappearance of cask ale.

As we wrote the constitution we agreed we needed to start saving, that there should be some sort of subscription to belong to the club, and beer played a very large part in those early discussions.

It seemed a good idea to collect half a crown off every person who came to the weekly pub gathering, and a further half a crown off each person on each meet. This way, we began to accumulate funds steadily rather than asking for an initial subscription to an organisation which might not continue. This became a bit of a chore for the treasurer, and after a couple of years we moved to an annual subscription of £4. I realised how successful this policy had been when in 1971 I was working in Cardiff and went to a South Wales Mountain Club meeting in the pub in Taffs Well. They were agonising over the cost of work on their hut at Deiniolen above Llanberris and I asked them what their subscriptions were. They were struggling to collect £1.10 annually. They were incredulous when I said our subs were £4, and I was able to tell them rather grandly that £4 had been a substantial reduction to our members who had been paying half a crown a week until recently!

This then explains how we had £300 in the bank after 5 years – worth £4,070 in today's money.

But it was £2,000 we needed, so I made an appointment with our bank manager to arrange a loan.

Thus John Huxley, Les Fowles, John Beamer and I were ushered into the manager's office at NatWest Bank 22, Castle Street to borrow £1,700 to make up the £2,000 needed to buy Tan y Garth.

The manager pursed his lips and talked a little about our ability to repay, and asked us what security we had. We asked what he had in mind, and he said "Stocks and Shares, Property, Insurance Policies maybe .....". We said we had none of those, and he tapped his finger tips together, looked at each of us in turn and said "you are what we in the bank call men of straw". We were shown out.

Back on Castle Street, I was asked what we were going to do now. I said we should go round to Brunswick Street and review the situation in the Slaughter House over a pint or two.

The solution we came up with was to go to the members and ask each of them to apply for an unsecured loan of £100. This would be like borrowing just under £1,500 today, but of course there were no credit cards that you could simply run a debt on, you had to go to your bank and apply for a loan.

History tells us that 14 members were able to come up with the sum one way or another, and we had the great pleasure of going back to the bank a fortnight later with £1,700 and able to say “here is £1,700, now will you lend us the other £300?”.

Happily, he did!

For the record, a number of the 14 who raised the money agreed to leave their £100 with the club for it to be treated as purchase of life membership, and this is the origin of a few life members still with us.

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