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Llangollen



Llangollen is a town and community, situated on the River Dee, in Denbighshire, Wales. Its riverside location forms the edge of the Berwyn range, the Dee Valley section of the Clwydian Range and the Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The easternmost point of the Dee Valley Way sits within the town.

History

Llangollen takes its name from the Welsh *llan* meaning "a religious settlement" and Saint Collen, a seventh-century monk who is said to have arrived in Llangollen by coracle and founded a church beside the river. No other churches in Wales are dedicated to Saint Collen.

Above the town to the North is Castell Dinas Brân, a stronghold of the Princes of Powys. Beyond the castle is the impressive Lower Carboniferous limestone escarpment known as the Eglwyseg Rocks, with the outcrop continuing north to World's End in Wrexham. The single track road North of the castle forms the Panorama Walk, and a monument to poet I. D. Hooson from the village of Rhosllanerchrugog is located near its easternmost end.

The ancient parish of Llangollen was divided into three *traeanau* (*traean* being the Welsh for "a third"): Llangollen Traean, Trefor Traean, and Glyn Traean.

- **Llangollen Traean** contained the townships of Bachau, Cysylltau, Llangollen Abad, Llangollen Fawr, Llangollen Fechan, Feifod, Pengwern and Rhisgog.
- **Trefor Traean** contained the townships of Cilmediw, Dinbren, Eglwysegl, Trefor Isaf and Trefor Uchaf.
- **Glyn Traean** contained the townships of Cilcochwyn, Crogeniddon, Crogenwladus, Erwallo, Hafodgynfor, Nantygwryd, Pennant and Talygarth.

The bridge at Llangollen was built across the Dee in the 16th century to replace a previous bridge built in about 1345 by John Trevor, of Trevor Hall (later Bishop of St Asaph), which replaced an even earlier bridge built in the reign of King Henry I. In the 1860s the present bridge was extended by adding an extra arch (to cross the new railway) and a two-storey stone tower with a castellated parapet. The stone tower became a café before being demolished in the 1930s to improve traffic flow. The bridge was widened in 1873 and again in 1968, using masonry which blended in with the older structure. It is a Grade I listed structure and a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Plas Newydd ("New Mansion" or "New Place") on the outskirts of the town, was from 1780 the home of the Ladies of Llangollen; the Honourable Sarah Ponsonby, Lady Eleanor Butler and their maid Mary Carryl. They share the same grave memorial in the church.

Economy

Today Llangollen relies heavily on the tourist industry, but still gains substantial income from farming. The majority of the farms in the hills around the town are sheep farms, and the domestic wool industry, both spinning and weaving, was and still is prominent in the area. Several factories were later built along the banks of the River Dee, where both wool and cotton were processed. The water mill opposite Llangollen railway station is over six hundred years old and was originally used to grind flour for local farmers.

Culture

In the late 19th century, Llangollen had a weekly newspaper, the *Llangollen Advertiser*.

Llangollen hosted the National Eisteddfod in 1908. The Gorsedd ceremony was held on the Hermitage Field, next to Plas Newydd, and the circle of stones was later moved into the grounds of the hall. The eisteddfod itself took place on the old Vicarage Field at Fronhyfryd and was visited by David Lloyd George, accompanied by Winston Churchill.

Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod

The annual Llangollen International Eisteddfod is a large international music festival. It starts on a Tuesday and ends on the following Sunday. It opens with a parade led by the Llangollen Silver Band, in which both locals and visitors take part in dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments.

Llangollen Fringe Festival

The Llangollen Fringe Festival is an independent arts festival, usually held in mid-July in the town hall. The Fringe includes music, comedy, theatre, dance, and workshops. Artists who have taken part in the Llangollen Fringe include Clement Freud, Rhys Ifans, the Damned, Cerys Matthews, Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst, Juan Martín, the Black Seeds, John Cooper Clarke, Will Self, Gang of Four, Lee Scratch Perry, Victoria Coren Mitchell, and Gruff Rhys.

Dee Rocks

Dee Rocks is a local fundraising music festival, usually held during May when the town hall is transformed into a music venue. The inaugural event took place on 29 May 2004, and the now annual fixture raises in excess of £12,000 for local worthy causes.

Transport

Llangollen was an important coaching stop for the mail coach on the old mail route which is now the A5 from London to Holyhead.

Buses

Various buses serve the town, including buses to Wrexham, Barmouth and the Ceiriog Valley. National Express Coaches operate through the town on route 418, with journeys to Wrexham and to London via Shrewsbury, Telford, and Birmingham.

Railways

The railway, operating both passenger and goods services, was extended from Ruabon, via Acrefair and Trevor, to reach Llangollen by 1865. The Ruabon to Barmouth Line became part of the Great Western Railway. However, under the Beeching Axe of 1964, the line closed to passengers in early 1965, and to freight in April 1969. The line was lifted in May 1969. However, a 10-mile stretch of the line has been restored between Llangollen and Corwen and operates as the Llangollen Railway, a now tourist attraction. In 2002, the Rainhill locomotive trials were re-staged on the line.

Waterways

The Ellesmere Canal intended to connect the coal mines and ironworks at Ruabon and Wrexham to the canal network and onward to the sea via the River Mersey and the River Severn. The plans were altered, and instead of connecting Trevor northwards to the sea via the River Dee and southwards to the Severn, the canal ran eastwards to join the national network at Hurlston Junction on the Shropshire Union Canal near Nantwich. A feeder canal, navigable to Llangollen, was constructed from Trevor to divert water from the River Dee at Llantysilio (at the weir called "Horseshoe Falls"). After company mergers, the canal became part of the Shropshire Union System. Until recently it was properly called the Llangollen Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal, though it is now known as the Llangollen Canal.

The canal stocked enough water to supply Crewe and Nantwich, and when commercial traffic failed in the 1940s, its sole function as a water supply enabled it to stay open. The canal is unusual amongst Britain's artificial waterways, having a strong flow (up to two miles per hour). Since the use of canals for leisure took off in the 1970s and 1980s, the route, twisting through Welsh hills and across the Dee Valley on the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, is an important part of Llangollen's attraction as a holiday destination. A marina, built at the end of the navigable section, allows summer visitors to moor overnight in Llangollen.

Sport

Llangollen on the River Dee hosts white water Slalom canoeing and kayaking, being host to International and UK events. The International Canoe Federation (ICF), the European Canoe Union (ECU) and the British Canoe Union (BCU) all hold events in Llangollen.

Cricket, football, and rugby union teams play at Tower Fields, which overlooks the town and the International Eisteddfod field and pavilion.

Thermals rising up the valley sides to the south of the town are used for paragliding. Mountain bikers enjoy the hills.

Llangollen was the starting point of the first massed-start cycle race held on British roads, on 7 June 1942. The 59-mile Llangollen Wolverhampton race was organised by Percy Stallard in defiance of the sport's governing body, the National Cyclists' Union, but with approval from all police chief constables through whose districts the event ran.