

TENBY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

TENBY GUIDEBOOKS

An Introduction by Neil Westerman.

The dictionary definition of a guidebook is ‘a book which gives tourist information on a place’. Two hundred years ago the very first guidebook to Tenby was published. Called simply ‘The Tenby Guide’ and published in Swansea by J. Voss the 142 page book established a pattern followed by nearly all subsequent guidebooks. A general description of the area is provided followed by more detailed accounts of the main buildings in the town together with details of amusements and walks. Accommodation and public transport details are also included. The book continues with a description of neighbouring towns and attractions.

‘The Tenby Guide’ was dedicated to Sir William Paxton ‘under whose auspices the town of Tenby is arrived at its present state of celebrity’. Tourists had been visiting Tenby for many years prior to the publication of the first guidebook however. A memorial in St. Mary’s Church to Peggy Davies who died in 1809 records that she served as a ‘bathing woman 42 years to the ladies who visited Tenby’. This suggests that Tenby was already welcoming visitors as early as 1768.

Tenby guidebooks are useful to historians today because they include a wealth of contemporary information on the town. The 1810 guidebook for example records that along with Shaw’s Hotel there were between 40 to 50 lodging houses available and two good inns, the White Lion and Globe. The guide states that the population of Tenby was not less than 1,100 and there were about 234 houses in the town. Bathing machines were available at ‘one shilling each time and six pence the guide’. The book also provides us with details of how visitors utilised their time. Along with details of promenades and walks the guide mentions various pastimes including public assemblies, private balls, bowling, archery, fishing and cards. Sailing boats and saddle horses could be hired. Interestingly the North Beach is referred to as the ‘Norton Sands’ and the South Beach as ‘Whit Sands’. Some of the information provided in old guidebooks must be treated with a certain amount of caution however as subsequent research has improved our understanding and knowledge. This is particularly so in connection with the historical and architectural accounts included in old guidebooks.

A few years later the first illustrated guidebook to Tenby was published written by Charles Norris. ‘An Account of Tenby’ is a larger and subsequently more detailed account of Tenby. The second edition (1820) includes a map and six fold out lithographs drawn by Norris. It mentions two inns and a large hotel or boarding house but does not actually name them. It does mention that the Globe has been converted into a family mansion. The new baths and reading rooms built by Paxton along with a ‘neat little theatre’ are also recorded.

Over two decades were to pass before the next Tenby guidebook appeared. ‘A Guide to Tenby and its Neighbourhood’ by Mary Anne Bourne was published in Carmarthen in 1843. Mary Anne Bourne was a bookseller located in the High Street who clearly saw the need and the commercial opportunity presented by producing a new guidebook. In the introduction she mentions the ‘continual demand from the annual visitors to Tenby for a guidebook...induced me to venture upon the present undertaking’. Mary Anne Bourne’s work is the first guidebook to contain a section of advertisements. Four pages are taken by some of the leading businessmen of the day including the Cobourg Hotel, Harries (Grocery Warehouse), Walkington (Chemist),

Thomas (Grocer), Henton (Tailor), Rolland (Hairdresser) and Sleeman (Wine and Spirit merchant). The principal hotels mentioned are the White Lion and the Cobourg along with the White Hart in the Norton. Numerous lodging houses have appeared on the Croft, Rock Houses, Marine Terrace, High Street, Crackwell Street and the Norton. Annual race meetings were held on the South Sands during August. Getting to Tenby had become easier as two steam packets (paddle steamers) were now plying between Tenby and Bristol. The Star commanded by William Rees and the Phoenix by Lieutenant Jackson. The Tenby agent was Mr G. Hughes. A coach was also operating every other day between Tenby and Carmarthen.

Fanny Price Gwynne's 'Sketches of Tenby' was next to appear published by Richard Mason, another bookseller in Tenby. During the second half of the nineteenth century several guidebooks were published. Richard Mason published C. S. Hall's 'Tenby' (at least three editions), and 'Mason's Guide to Tenby'. The photographer Charles Smith Allen published 'Allen's Guide to Tenby' written by Fanny Price Gwynne. This guide was illustrated with C. S. Allen's photographs and includes 28 pages of local advertisements at the back. A useful source of information for anyone researching local businesses in Tenby. The best selling of these guides was undoubtedly 'Mason's Guide to Tenby' which ran to at least seven editions. The 'Gentleman's Magazine' review was full of praise. To quote 'We have rarely met with a book of its class so much to our taste; it is sensible, practical, useful, and almost entirely free from the bombastic nonsense which usually constitutes the staple of a local guidebook'. Towards the end of the century Richard Mason's son F. B. Mason published 'Mason's Sixpenny Guide to Tenby', a thin paper covered book.

By the end of the nineteenth century there was a need for a more practical and up to date guidebook. This need was met by Arthur Leach's 'Guide to Tenby' published in 1898 by John Leach, the publisher of 'The Tenby and County News' newspaper. With a cover design drawn by local artist E. J. Head and photographs by H. Mortimer Allen and R. Truscott the new guidebook was well received. The Welshman stated that 'it would be almost impossible to produce a better book locally for a shilling'. A second edition was published in 1901 containing additional drawings by E. J. Head. A third edition appeared in 1908. Arthur Leach subsequently wrote 'Leach's Handbook to Tenby' which ran to over ten editions.

In October 1901 the 'Tenby Improvement Association' was formed by leading businessmen in the town with the aim of promoting Tenby as a holiday resort. The association placed advertisements in leading newspapers of the day and by arrangement with Messrs Mate Ltd produced and circulated an illustrated official guide to Tenby. Written by Douglas A Reid 'Mate's Illustrated Tenby' (1902) was the first Tenby guidebook to be described as the 'Official Guide'. It was well supported by local businesses and features numerous advertisements. The following year Tenby Corporation published 'Tenby' again written by Douglas A Reid, the medical officer of health for the borough. Described as 'The Official Publication of the Corporation' it had a print run of 3000 copies. The 'Tenby Observer' dated 7 August 1902 states that 'similar guides have for some years been largely distributed by other health and holiday resorts with the result that a large increase in the number of residents and visitors has taken place. The Corporation are most anxious to secure visitors in large numbers'. The Health Resorts Association published the book annually on behalf of the Corporation.

With the exception of the war years Tenby Corporation continued to produce an annual official guide until local government reorganisation did away with the Borough Council. In the early 1920's Vickery, Kyrle & Co published 'Tenby, The

Naples of Wales' as the official guide. This was followed by 'Tenby, South Wales' written by E. H. Leach (brother of Arthur Leach) and R. L. C. Morrison from approximately 1926 through to 1940. Featuring a drawing of the Five Arches on the cover this guide was again published by the Health Resorts Association.

The first official guidebook to appear after the war was 'Tenby the Official Guide' published by McMillian Graham & Co in 1947. The cover design features a painting of the harbour taken from the pier with the spire of St. Mary's in the background. The print run was 10,500 copies. The covers of subsequent guidebooks feature paintings of the North Beach from the Croft (1949) and Goscar Rock (1950). These are arguably the most attractive covers of any Tenby guidebooks but unfortunately the name of the artists involved have not been recorded.

By 1959 'Tenby the Official Guide' was being printed and published in Tenby by the local firm of H. G. Walters. The print run had increased to 18,000 copies. In the early sixties colour photographs were included inside the guidebook for the first time. Following local government reorganisation the annual Tenby Official Guide came to an end being replaced by the 'Tenby and South Pembrokeshire Official District Guide'. The official guidebooks are today very useful for researchers because they contain a wide variety of advertisements not only of hotels and guesthouses but also High Street shops and businesses.

Alongside the locally published guidebooks there were also available a range of guidebooks published and distributed nationally. These usually covered a much larger geographical area such as the whole of South Wales. For example in 1848 the second edition of 'The Book of South Wales' by Charles Frederick Cliffe was published. This work contains an interesting account of the approach to Tenby by paddle steamer. In 1908 Thomas Nelson and Sons published 'South Wales and the Wye District of Monmouthshire' written by C. S. Ward and M. J. B. Baddeley. By 1910 A & C Black's 'Black's Guide to South Wales' had already reached its eleventh edition. However, perhaps the best known are the red covered books published by Ward Lock & Co. which ran to several editions. The third edition was published in 1921. Another series of early guidebooks was the 'Abel Heywood's Penny Guides' published in Manchester. They published over 60 local guides to resorts in England, Wales and Scotland. Their 'Guide to Tenby' published in 1869 and sold by E. S. Lockyer at Campbell House, High Street, Tenby consisted of 16 pages of local information together with an additional 13 pages of local advertisements.

The Reference library at Tenby Museum and Art Gallery, Castle Hill, Tenby holds a good collection of Tenby Guidebooks that can be consulted by appointment.

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