

Cefn Onn Notes

Lisvane Station

Lisvane and Thornhill, this station was built in 1986 as a replacement for Cefn Onn Halt railway station. The name Lisvane is believed to mean 'stone court', and may be linked to the remnants of an old iron age earthworks in the area.

Cefn Onn Halt railway station

Cefn Onn Halt railway station was a halt on the Rhymney line between Cardiff and Rhymney. It was opened in 1915 but closed on 27 September 1986 and was replaced by Lisvane and Thornhill, a short distance to the south. The station was close to the entrance of Caerphilly Tunnel.

Untruth: Trains coming out of the tunnel, heading towards Cardiff, had trouble seeing the station in the sunshine, and stopping. They invariably used to miss the station and stop a few hundred yards further on. In the end it was decided to move the station to where Lisvane and Thornhill now is to make things easier for train drivers.

The railway line: Built to avoid having to use lines owned by other railway companies and a faster route through to Cardiff. The tunnel started in 1865 and finished in 1870. Just over a mile in length. Has a bit of a kink in it as the lines didn't quite line up. Jan 1867: one man killed in Shaft 4. 1867 – 7 men killed in Shaft 3.

The station was adjacent to and served Cefn Onn Park (now known as Parc Cefn Onn), which was laid out from 1911 to 1933 by Ernest Prosser, a director of the Rhymney Railway, which owned the line. The park was bought in 1944 by Cardiff County Borough Council, which developed it as a country park

The gates were constructed in the late 1990s by Bob Francis, who was a blacksmith with the Parks Service.

Its tumbling streams and winding paths take advantage of the gentle valley containing the Nant Fawr stream.

Grade 2 listed historic park:

Woodland garden: laid out after 1944 in the southern part of the site. The Nant Fawr stream, which eventually runs into Roath Park. There are no early postcards of Parc Cefn Onn, because it originated in private ownership and was not open to the public until acquired by the Council in 1944, well past the peak of postcard production.

The Dingle: the historic northern garden was laid out by Ernest Prosser. This area contains a collection of rare and exotic plants

Summerhouse and former swimming pool: The pond and summerhouse are early features of the Dingle, constructed to alleviate the symptoms of the tuberculosis suffered by Prosser's son, Cecil.

Coed Transh yr Hebog: a semi natural Oak and Beech woodland lying north of the more formal parkland near the top of Caerphilly mountain.

Spring displays: the park is a glorious sight throughout the spring with its floral carpets of spring bulbs and exotic Camellias, Rhododendrons and Azaleas.

Reference: [Cefn Onn Park – Cardiff Parks Website](#)

In the film, the gentleman wearing the mayoral chain is Edward Ewert Pearce, who became Lord Mayor of Cardiff in 1961. The other gentleman is William Nelmes Senior, Director of Parks from 1936 to 1967. He was responsible for the acquisition of Parc Cefn Onn, as well as the design of the park and much of the exotic planting.

Untruth: Cefn Onn is named after a boy called Kevin who had the habit of turning lights off when leaving a room, even though his parents and others were still sitting in the room. There were forever shouting out "Kevin, On!"

Ernest Albert Prosser.

Born in Cardiff, grew up on Woodville Terrace, Cathays : died 4 October 1933. He began work in a shipbroker's office and then became a junior clerk on Rhymney Railway. He rose to Deputy General Manager in 1900 and General Manager in 1905. He married Florence Emily Gottrell from Keppoch Street, Roath at St Andrew's church in 1891. They had one son but Florence died five weeks after giving birth and is buried in Llanishen church. Prosser purchased Cwm Farm with the idea of building a home. He concentrated on the garden, Dingle, first. The son became ill serving in WWI and contracted TB. Son Cecil dies in a sanatorium in North Wales in 1922. He is also buried in Llanishen. The summerhouse in the Dingle was built to help him recover. In 1917 he also became general manager of the Cardiff Railway and in same year of the Taff Vale Railway.

Prosser died in 1933. The estate passed to his nephew who had no interest in the garden. It ended up being sole to the Council who named it Cefn Onn and opened it up to the public.

The purchase of Parc Cefn Onn

The undated note which follows relates to the purchase of the upper section of Parc Cefn Onn, called The Dingle, from Donald S. Prosser and was almost certainly written by William Nelmes senior, who was at the time Cardiff's Director of Parks.

Brief Notes on Parc Cefn Onn

The area of land comprising the Dingle, Golf Course and adjoining hill side (altogether approx. 160 acres) was acquired by Mr. Prosser - who was Manager of the old Rhymney Railway before amalgamation with the GWR system. This was in the early part of the century, before the first world war.

Most of the established exotic trees and the older rhododendrons and azaleas (e.g. the azaleas bordering the long walk) were planted immediately before the first world war and during the 1920's.

It was intended to build a house in the field (where the picnic field now is situated) but both Mr. Prosser and his only son died before the 2nd war so this project was never carried out. Mr. Prosser lived at Llanishen.

During both wars the Dingle was very much neglected due to labour shortage and particularly so during the latter part of the 1930's and up to 1944 when the property was acquired by the City Council. The property had been left to Mr. Prosser's nephew who found it very difficult to maintain and eventually decided to sell it.

On a Saturday evening in 1944 Mr Tom Jenkins who had been in charge of the Dingle for many years (during later years single handed) telephoned me and said that Mr. Prosser had that day been to see him and had told him that he had reluctantly decided to sell. Tom said that he was certain the Llanishen Golf Club would be interested (particularly in purchasing the Gold Course, Club House & Pro's Bungalow) but he wondered if the City Council might be interested in buying all or part (eg Dingle) of the property.

Knowing the value of Cefn Onn, horticulturally and as part of the green belt I decided that prompt action was necessary and on the next day (Sunday) I waylaid Ald. Hill-Snook (Chairman of Parks Committee) on his way to Church and Ald. Sir W. R. Williams (Chairman of the Finance Committee) who was preparing to go to Chapel! and took them to inspect Cefn Onn. Both were much impressed with the place. On the Monday Morning I took up Alderman George Williams (Chairman of Estates Committee) who was unable to join us the previous day.

Alderman George Williams that same day went down to the Estate Agents and bought the property (privately) for the sum of £7,500.

On the next day a joint meeting of the appropriate Committees was held (Members contacted by telephone) and Ald. G. Williams said "Gentlemen here is the receipt for the money I paid yesterday for the property, I will sell it to you for the same price" (or words to that effect!). The acquisition was unanimously approved.

Subsequently an additional area of approx 40 acres of woodland toward the top of the hill was purchased from the Plymouth Estate and parts of two small fields to provide a car park and entrance on to the Cherry Orchard Road.

During the past ten years or so the lower woodland has been developed by extending the planting of Rhododendrons, Azaleas and allied shrubs also appropriate trees and Primulas, Meconopsis etc on the bank of the stream and in moist spots.

Within recent years the lease of the Golf Club has been extended and this allayed their fears that it might become a municipal course.

Probably no public park in South Wales is so popular in "rhododendron time" as Parc Cefn Onn.

Japanese style metal bridge

The Japanese style metal bridge was constructed as an exhibit for the Leisure & Amenities Department Chinese Garden entry in the Cardiff Flower Show held in 1986 in Coopers Field. It was also used in a scaled down version of the same display at the Swansea Show held at Singleton Park in the same year. It was designed and constructed by Andris Erglis, a blacksmith and welder with the Parks Service based at Wedal Road.

After the show, the bridge was stored in the nursery in Bute Park for some years. It was installed in Parc Cefn Onn in the early 1990s at the instigation of Terry Davies who was then Superintendent of Parks for the Northern District. This bridge was to replace an earlier one which was constructed from three railway sleepers wired together.

Cefn Onn - Picnic field

On the edge of the field adjoining Cefn Onn Farm was a cafe, a green corrugated iron structure open during the summer months. The catering service was provided by a contractor but lapsed in the mid 1980s. The cafe was demolished when the Llanishen Golf Club took over the farm.

In the field was a green-painted steel building, consisting of a row of windows with a long bench on either side, providing a viewpoint as well as a shelter in bad weather. In good visibility it was possible to read the time on the City Hall clock from this point.

PUSHFUL PROSSER.

WHO RUNS THE COAL TRAINS.

THE Cardiff, Taff Vale and Rhymney Railways, recently amalgamated under the management of Mr. Ernest A. Prosser, carry the bulk of the steam coal which feeds our fleet.

They may be likened to the blood-vessels which supply and vitalise the human body, for through them passes the coal that, transformed into steam, gives life and energy to the British Navy, converting our battleships from mere masses of inert metal into living, moving fighting machines—the most efficient and terrible the world has ever seen.

No better man could be found to control this work of urgent national importance than Mr. Prosser. All his life has been devoted to railways, and mostly to these particular railways.

He started as a junior clerk on the Rhymney line in 1881, and worked his way up by dint of sheer hard work to the topmost rung of the ladder. Consequently he has a practical working knowledge of all departments—goods management, traffic superintendence, engineering, and so forth.

A Difficult Task.

Early in 1917 Mr. Prosser was appointed Deputy-Director of Military Train Movements, in which capacity he was responsible for the smooth running of military supply trains all over the kingdom, to say nothing of the hospital trains, and conveying drafts and other military units to and from the Front.

It is difficult for the ordinary man to appreciate the tremendous nature of a task such as this. Practically it means the keeping open of our lines of communication, for upon the home railways, and especially upon those converging on the South and South-East coasts, depends the feeding, clothing and munitioning of our armies abroad.

And the work must be done always under high pressure. Ammunition especially must be got into the firing lines in a ceaseless stream, and at the earliest possible moment. When a great offensive is on as much as two thousand tons a day are passed from our factories and arsenals over the lines of Southern England to the guns behind the trenches.

The ruins of the summer house still exist, a short distance beyond the middle pool, on the slope east of the path. Repairs to its thatched roof were carried out in 1951 at a cost of £25-10-0. The building was repaired and re-roofed again in 1975 so that it could be used as a shelter for visitors to the park. It was still usable for this purpose at the turn of the century and included a large bench from which visitors could look across the valley. It was subsequently damaged by fire and the roof destroyed, though the stone structure remains.

Carved on one of the pillars by the steps up to the summer house can be seen the initials of Ernest Albert Prosser (EAP), his son Cecil Ernest Gotterell Prosser (CEGP) and his nephew Donald Sidney Prosser (DSP). Lower down are the initials of the Head Gardener, Thomas Morgan Jenkins (TMJ).

References

The information used in these notes is obtained from various sources but mainly the excellent Cardiff Parks website at: <https://www.cardiffparks.org.uk/>