

The Cosy Castle

From outside, the towers, turrets and ramparts of Glandyfi Castle appear somewhat imposing. Giselle Whiteaker discovers that it might be a castle from the outside, but on the inside visitors will certainly feel at home.

Glandyfi castle is a building of romance and imagination. Stately yet intimate, imposing yet informal. Above all the castle is quirky, due largely to the whim and imagination of owner Maureen Holmes.

Maureen describes the castle, located between Aberystwyth and Machynlleth in Wales, as a true folly, designed to bring pleasure to the eye as well as to the heart.

This refurbished Regency Gothic Castle blends the new and the old. Historical features sit alongside modern additions - without contradiction. The premier room in the castle, the Osprey room, is a prime example of this. A four poster bed, as befits a castle, sits in the spacious room amidst period furniture, while the attached bathroom has modern panache, with its oversized round spa bath, purple tiling and square lines.

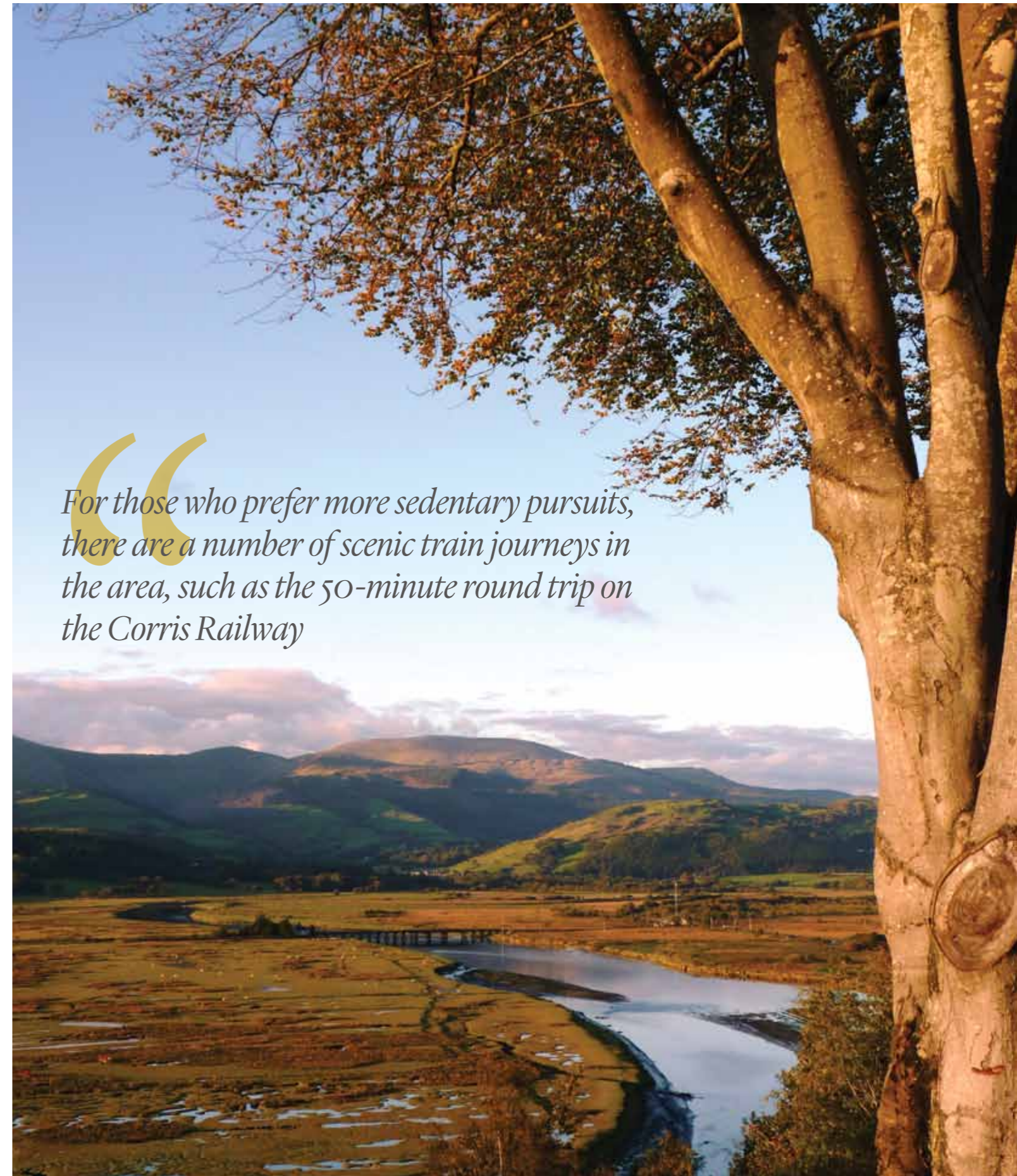
Glandyfi Castle was built in 1820 by George Jeffries, descendent of the infamous Judge Jeffreys of Shrewsbury. The castle was built as a display of status and it never housed royalty. It was designed so that the façade appeared larger to passers-by, implying entitlement.

It remained in the family for more than 100 years as did the entire acreage. Notably, Sir Bernard and Lady Docker of BSA motorcycles bought the castle during the 1950s from BSA funds. This led to a shareholder rebellion which lost Sir Bernard his job, along with the castle.

Maureen discovered the castle hiding amongst the ivy and surrounding grounds in 2007 and performed extensive work over a five-year period to return the building to its former glory, adding modern amenities. The emphasis was on retaining the original features such as the beautiful oak staircase carved in 'strawberry hill' style, while adding contemporary accents. Perhaps the most spectacular feature is the derelict courtyard that has been glazed to create a dining room with a difference.

Maureen and husband, Peter, have renovated properties previously. "He is much more practical than me," says Maureen of her husband. "He sees the rooms and how they can be altered and what we can do to make them better. I walk into a room and for me it is about the space and I think the room tells you what colour it wants to be."

Maureen admits this may seem crazy to some, but there is no denying that in the case of Glandyfi Castle, not only has it worked, but it has worked beautifully. "It is to do with the light, it is to do with the aspect - you have to have something that is going to be harmonious. Spaces have to



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make people feel good," explained Maureen.

For this reason each room has a different colour scheme and a different feel, which elicits a different response. The Wren Room features gentle shades of wisteria blue, offering a light yet cosy gentle and neutral space, while Skylark, suggests a softer, more romantic feel, with muted cream tones. Curlew, on the other hand, is bolder with red hues and a contemporary chic style.

Maureen took on all the design work herself and despite no formal training in hospitality, is the consummate hostess. "I want this to be the kind of place where people come and without even knowing it, find themselves relaxing," she affirms. "I don't want people to come here and feel intimidated or feel that they have to be on their best behaviour. That's not what it is about at all."

"This is not somewhere you have to go in your best frock to have lovely meals, and it is not the kind of place you go if you are a walker or a cyclist where you think it's okay, I can just wear whatever when I'm eating. It's the kind of place where you can do both.' You can do all those things because actually when people lived in houses like this, that is what they did."

You can also eat exceptionally well. Food at Glandyfi Castle is all about indulgence. Fresh, healthy, local produce features heavily on the menu. The fish is sourced from local rivers and meat is provided by a local butcher.

Even the castle gardens contribute, in the form of seasonal fruit, vegetables and herbs. These elements combined with Maureen's flair for cookery result in a mouth-watering menu guaranteed to sate even the biggest appetite. This is no nouvelle cuisine experience, but rather, generous portions of hearty country fare with a dash of style.

Gazing at the spectacular view across the estuary does not work off the abundant eating, although it is without doubt a highlight. There are, however, plenty of rambling opportunities in the surrounding countryside. Whether it is a stroll through the lovely castle grounds, a walk along part of the nearby Mawwdach Trail which winds for 9.5 miles along a flat path on the southern edge of the Mawddach estuary, or the challenge of ascending Snowdon, outdoor opportunities abound.

For those who prefer more sedentary pursuits, there are a number of scenic train journeys in the area, such as the 50-minute round trip Corris Railway journey. This was the first narrow Gauge railway in Mid-Wales, built in 1859. Another unforgettable journey travels through the Rheidal Valley by narrow gauge steam train. The 11¾ mile journey between Aberystwyth and Devil's Bridge takes approximately one hour in each direction.

Aberystwyth's sweeping promenade and broad beaches allow seaside access, but even more of a draw card is the peaceful seaside village of Aberdovey (Aberdyfi), a half-hour's drive away. Continuing through Snowdonia National Park, spectacular views are around every curve of the winding coastal road. Harlech Castle ruins are a worthwhile stop on the way to the eminently quirky Portmeirion, an out-of-place colourful Italianate Village, famous as the setting for *The Prisoner* television series.



After a day of exploring, walking or cycling in the Welsh countryside there could be nothing more welcoming than returning to Glandyfi Castle, kicking off your muddy boots, and curling up in front of the warming fire in the study with a good book. ■

Glandyfi Castle will soon be licensed for weddings. For an intimate wedding weekend, contact: info@glandyficastle.co.uk.