

Busy bees at the Ugly House in North Wales

Submitted by: Visit Wales

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The T Hyll (the Ugly House), a magical and unique cottage in Capel Curig, will soon become a haven for the Welsh honey bee, allowing visitors on their UK short break (<http://www.visitwales.co.uk>) to view and learn about this fascinating and threatened species and even taste the local honey and other hive products in a cosy cottage tearoom.

T Hyll is widely reputed to be a 'T unnos', supposedly built overnight in the 15th Century to guarantee the freehold. Others say it was inhabited by bandits who terrorised travellers along the old road through Snowdonia (now the A5). Whatever its origins, it's hard to imagine how it was constructed from huge rough boulders from the surrounding hillside, giving it its unusual name.

T Hyll was purchased by Esmé Kirby, legendary founder of the Snowdonia National Park (<http://www.visitwales.co.uk/regions-of-wales/national-parks-in-wales/>) Society, in July 1988. It was extensively renovated by her husband, the late Major Peter Kirby and stalwart volunteers. It was subsequently opened to the public and generously gifted to the Society some years later. It was used as the Society's headquarters until October 2010, when the office moved to Caban at Brynrefail and plans were developed to ensure that T Hyll could fulfil its potential as an iconic heritage attraction, thereby securing the future of the cottage for many years to come and providing education and enjoyment to residents and visitors of North Wales.

The Society has now teamed up with the National Beekeeping Centre for Wales (due to open in the Conwy valley in 2012) and a local caterer to develop the site as a visitor centre and tearoom, focusing on the protection and promotion of the Welsh honey bee through the T Hyll Welsh Honey Bee Initiative, and a great addition to any UK short break (<http://www.visitwales.co.uk>).

Queen bee mating and drone rearing hives and pollinator friendly plants will be installed in the extensive garden and woodland, which are managed entirely by volunteers to benefit wildlife, while exciting interactive information about bees and other pollinators, as well as the mysterious origins of the house and the wider natural heritage of Snowdonia, will be provided in the grounds and on the upper floor of the house itself. The ground floor will be refurbished as a cosy tea room offering local Welsh produce with a particular focus on honey and hive products.

Building work is due to begin on site in January 2012, and the attraction will be open for business in early summer.