

# The Great Strike

The strike which took place at the Penrhyn Quarry at the turn of the twentieth century is referred to as the Great Strike. A number of factors combined to make the strike the longest dispute in British Industrial history. The strike was to last for three years. In 1886 George Sholto Gordon Douglas Pennant took over the estate and was keen to

introduce changes to what he saw as antiquated working practices in the quarry. At more or less the same time, new men at the Union believed that a vigorous and militant approach was called for. It was at a time of change in Caernarfonshire, some years earlier in 1868 George Pennant had been defeated in the parliamentary elections



Strikers, circa 1901

for the Caernarfonshire seat by the son of a Bethesda quarryman TLD Jones Parry, a Liberal.

There was also a language barrier that separated the two sides, it is claimed that the English owners and managers had a colonial outlook, and looked down on the Welsh speaking quarry workers. To cap it all, the new Lord Penrhyn seems to have made a poor choice in appointing Emilius Alexander Young, a personal friend and formerly the accountant for the quarry, as the new quarry

manager. In his drive for greater profit and efficiency he suspended long serving quarrymen. It was said he sacked good men and scrapped long tolerated practices. He introduced outside contractors and 'safety inspectors' who were seen as management spies. In a letter written in 1900, he said that 'the Welshmen are so ignorant and so childish that there is no arguing with them'.

In October 1900, a riot broke out on one of the quarry galleries. 26 men were prosecuted and at the court proceedings they were represented by Lloyd George. When these men returned to the quarry after the proceedings, the entire work force walked out and went on strike. Disturbances resulted in troops being called in and arrests made. Families were evicted from Penrhyn-owned houses. In 1903, a vote to end the strike was passed by a narrow majority and the men returned to work. The strike scarred the community, with several hundred men emigrating, and others moving to the coalfields of South Wales.

## PENRHYN QUARRY. NOTICE.

Inasmuch as a number of the Penrhyn Quarry Employees has during the last fortnight actively participated in certain acts of violence and intimidation against some of their fellow-workmen and officials, and to-day nearly all the Employees have left their work without leave, Notice is hereby given that such Employees are suspended for 14 days.

**E. A. YOUNG**

PORT PENRHYN,  
Bangor, November 6th, 1900.

## Chwarel y Penrhyn.

### RHYBUDD.

Yn gymaint ag i nifer o weithwyr Chwarel y Penrhyn yn ystod y pythefnos diweddaf gymeryd rhan weithredol mewn ymosodiadau o greulondeb a bygythiadau yn erbyn rhai o'u cyd-weithwyr a swyddogion, ac heddyw i agos yr oll o'r gweithwyr adael eu gwaith heb ganiatad, rhoddir Rhybudd drwy hyn fod y cyfryw weithwyr yn cael eu hatal am bedwar diwrnod-ar-ddeg.

**E. A. YOUNG**

PORT PENRHYN,  
Bangor, Tachwedd 6ed, 1900.

NID OES

**BRADWR**

YN Y TY HWN.

Notices from both sides during the Great Strike. The sign below translates as "No TRAITOR in this house."

## THE SLATE TRAIL

Follow 'The Slate Trail' along Lôn Las Ogwen, where you can find a series of information boards recounting the unique story of Ogwen slate, Penrhyn Quarry and the people involved in its production.