

The Royal Valentia Hotel

A Little bit of History



The Beginning

‘A Neat and Very Comfortable Little Inn’



The Valentia Island Slate Quarry opened in 1816 and very quickly built a name for itself around the world. Expansion was quick and by the 1850's the quarry employed a total of 500 men on Valentia. Business and trade began to spring up around the quarry and one such business, described by its proprietor as a '*neat and very comfortable little inn*', opened its doors in 1833. The Inn was established at 'The Foot' before the village of Knightstown had even been fully developed.

Knightstown, although initially designed by Alexander Nimmo in 1830-31, began to really develop in the early 1840's when the quarry was expanded and the works moved to the village. It was one of the very first 'town-planned' villages of Ireland. In his design, Nimmo had envisaged a bridge when he lined up the main street with Renard Road on the mainland.

Youngs' Hotel

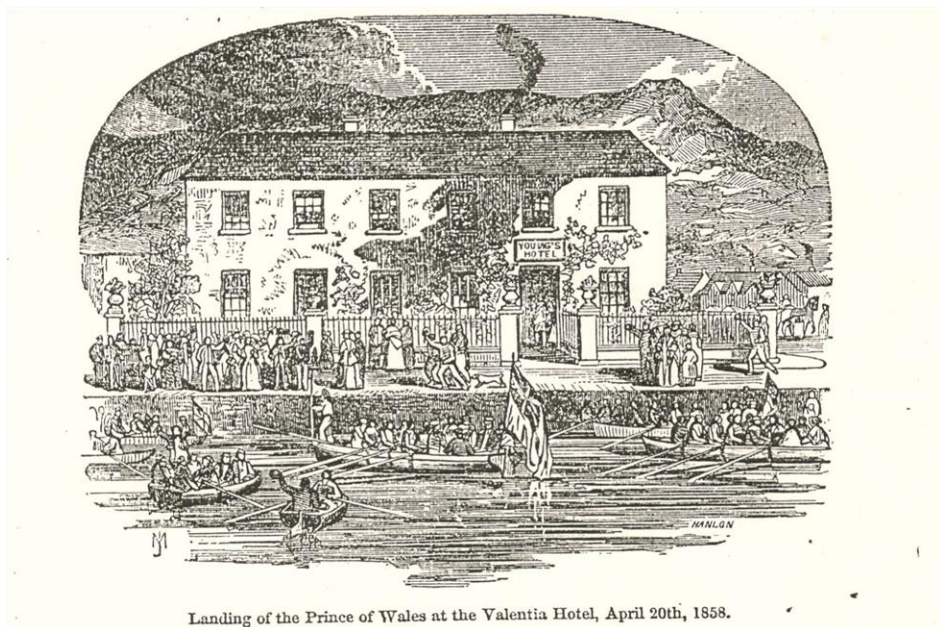
It was around this time that Thomas Young, a carpenter by trade, built the new hotel on the site of the old inn. He ran the hotel alongside his family (Mrs Young in the picture). It grew in stature and in 1858, 'The Right Honorable Lord John Manners described the hotel as *'the neatest, cleanest, most comfortable little hotel in all of Ireland'*. It was remarked by Lord and Lady Adare in 1858, after a two month stay at the hotel, that *'there is no village or other miserable little cottages near to make it disagreeable'*.



Figure 1: Mrs Young

Although initially known as the Valentia Hotel and subsequently Young's Hotel, it wasn't until after a visit from **Prince Arthur** (the son of Queen Victoria) in 1869 that it took the name 'Royal'. However, its first brush with royalty came a little earlier, when in 1858, a young **Prince of Wales** visited Valentia.

A Visit from a Future King



Landing of the Prince of Wales at the Valentia Hotel, April 20th, 1858.

Figure 2: The landing of the Prince of Wales in Valentia Harbour in 1858

The picture above is a depiction of the landing of **Albert Edward Prince of Wales** (later **King Edward VII**) on April 20th 1858 with Young's Hotel in the centre of the picture. The young Prince visited Valentia in the company of his personal tutor soon after receiving his confirmation. He started his tour of West Cork from 12 – 14 April and from there he sailed towards Co. Kerry on the royal yacht *Osborne*. While in Valentia he visited and observed the working of the Slate Quarry. The Prince went on to enjoy a two-week holiday in Killarney. During his subsequent ten-week stay in



Figure 3: Albert Edward
Prince of Wales

Ireland for military training in 1861, the **Prince of Wales** referred to his 1858 visit, saying that he had ‘*conceived a strong attachment to the peasantry*’. It was around this time that Valentia was also at the centre of a potential breakthrough in global communications. Efforts were being made to fund a transatlantic cable effort and interest at the time was high. **Queen Victoria** herself had a keen interest in the transatlantic cable effort, having exchanged formal introductory and complimentary messages with **American**

President James Buchanan during the brief period of the first successful cable in 1858. Unfortunately, despite this and her visit to Ireland and indeed Kerry in 1861, no record exists of her having visited Valentia Island during that time.

Hotel Rates in 1859 (taken from the map records of Capt. Brines)

Bed.....1sh 6d.

Breakfast.....1sh 6d.

Dinner.....2sh

Tea.....1sh

Private Room...2sh 6d.

**A labourer at the time would not earn 2sh for 3 days’ work*

The Atlantic Telegraph Company & the First Transatlantic Cable



Figure 4: The Great Eastern setting said with the cable

Prior to the laying of the Transatlantic Cable, it took approximately two weeks for a message to reach North America from Europe (weather permitting) as all communications were sent via boat. Then, to get a reply took another two weeks.

The idea of a transatlantic cable was first proposed in 1845, but it wasn't until 1856 that the Atlantic Telegraph Company was registered with a capital of £350,000 (then about \$1,400,000).

After some initial success in August 1858, it was in 1866, under the direction of **Cyrus Field**, that a fully operational stable cable was established and opened for business, cutting the communication time between the two continents from 2 weeks to 2 minutes. The Cable Station remained in operation for the next 100 years during which time, Valentia Island took its place at the centre of world communications and the Royal Hotel Valentia thrived.

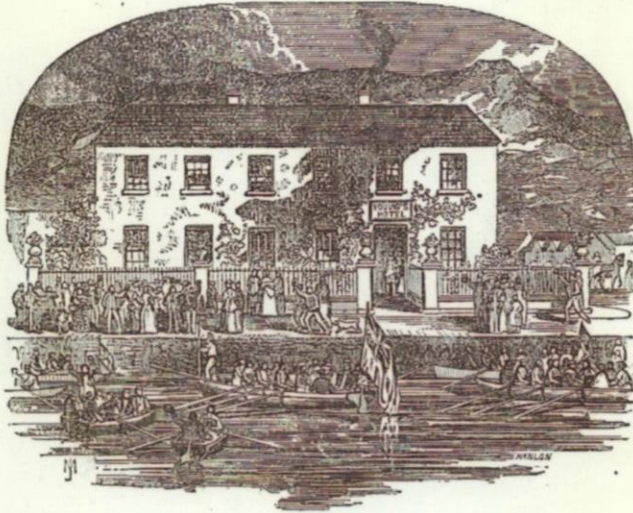
Extensions & Refurbishments



Figure 5: The hotel before the renovations

Following the success of the cable and thus a huge influx of visitors, the Youngs, made the decision to extend the building and incorporate the mill in the slate yard. In the above photograph you can see the hotel as it was before the renovations with the old barn alongside it. As soon as the renovations were complete, Mrs Young went about informing tourists of the improvements that had been made to the hotel. Below is one such notice from the time.

VALENTIA HOTEL, ISLAND OF VALENTIA.



Landing of the Prince of Wales at the Valentia Hotel, April 20th, 1858.

MRS. YOUNG,

The Proprietress, begs to inform Tourists the considerable additions and improvements to her House, rendered necessary by the influx of Visitors last year, consequent on its proximity to the landing-place of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable, are now on the point of completion. Her Charges continue on the most moderate scale, and she feels confident her House will be found to deserve the character given of it by the Right Honourable Lord John Manners, in his *Tour through Ireland*, even before it had been honoured by a visit from His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, as "the neatest, cleanest, and most comfortable little hotel in all Ireland."

Figure 6: Promotional material after the hotel renovations

A Look Inside the Royal Hotel at the Turn of the Century



Figure 7: The Coffee Room



Figure 8: The Drawing Room



Figure 9: The Lounge



Figure 10: The Smoking Room

Renaming the Hotel

In 1869 Queen Victoria sent her youngest son **Prince Arthur** (later **Duke of Connaught**) to Ireland to build and smooth diplomatic relations with disaffected parts of the empire. The **Knight of Kerry**, **Sir Peter Fitzgerald** had written to invite Prince Arthur to Valentia on his trip and his invitation was accepted with word sent to reserve rooms at the island hotel. At 3pm on 22 April 1869, the Prince arrived at Renard Point greeted by locals dressed in their holiday best. After a brief visit to Glenleam House, the residence of the Knight of Kerry,



Figure 12: Prince Arthur

Prince Arthur arrived at Youngs Hotel (henceforth to be known as The Royal Hotel). Unfortunately, beds although telegraphed for, could not be had '*at any price*' according to The Freemans Journal at the time and so it appears the prince did



Figure 11: The Duke and Duchess of York

not stay overnight. He '*inspected the hotel and spoke kindly to Mrs Young*'. Later that evening he returned to Glenleam house for a dinner hosted by the Knight of Kerry and guested by a number of nobilities of the island including the parish Priest The Rev. Thomas Maginn.

The hotel was renamed not long after and in 1897, Valentia was once again visited by members of the Royal Family, **The Duke and Duchess of York** (later **King George V** and **Queen Mary**) the future

grandparents of Queen Elizabeth II

Below is a promotional piece for the hotel again referencing the royal visits over time.



Shortly after that last royal visit, in 1901 the hotel was taken over by Timothy Galvin and then by The Huggards in 1937. The Huggard family bought up hotels along the local railway line and at one point owned the Royal Hotel Valentia, The Butler Arms Hotel in Waterville, The Carragh Lake Hotel and The Lake Hotel Killarney along with Ashford Castle in Connemara. Since 2006 the hotel has been operated by the Kidd Family who have been lovingly restoring the hotel to its former glory over the past ten years.

We hope this has given you an appreciation of just some of the history that is held here at the Royal Hotel Valentia and we hope you enjoy your time here.

