

## Chapter 1

# THE HISTORY OF THE NARTH

The first question to answer is what is The Narth? For the purposes of this book, we have included The Narth, Maryland and Pen y Fan as a distinct and separate area. It has proved very difficult to investigate the origins of The Narth. Books on local history make plenty of reference to Whitebrook, Trellech, Penallt and even New Mills, but never The Narth. At the turn of the 20th Century, there were indeed very few houses in the area, and of those that did exist, most were on the Whitebrook side of the hill. Where did the name come from? Was it a derivation from the Welsh “narth”, meaning a clearing, or was it a corruption of north? If so, north of Trellech would be most likely. Certainly the most common mistake in outsiders addressing correspondence to the place seems to be to call it The North!

The best expert advice seems to be in the book “The Place Names of Eastern Gwent”, by Osborne and Hobbs. This states:-

### **“THE NARTH”**

*‘Wasteland called The Narth (1612-1682)’*

*This village lies some 2 miles to the north of Trellech. The name appears to have come from the Welsh “garth”, enclosure, (or hill or ridge), ie yn arth (‘soft mutation with loss of definite article’), “in the enclosure”.*

It seems most likely the community as we know it owes its origins to the industry in the Whitebrook valley. There were up to 6 paper mills operating in the valley during the 19th century, with the last closing down in the late 1880’s; (source: “Paper Mills of the Whitebrook Valley”, by D G Tucker D Sc.) As land for houses and factories was used up in the valley, people moved up the hill. It seems strange to think of The Narth starting life as a suburb of Whitebrook, but that appears to be the case.

At the start of the 20th century most of the land covered by this book was probably owned by the Duke of Beaufort, and then the Marquis of Worcester. This latter gentleman, about 1920, offered land for sale to the local inhabitants. One, Mr W Morgan, bought, for £50, a parcel of land, extending on both sides of the road to Monmouth, from Oxmoor Lane to Robin’s Way, and up The Narth Road as

far as the house now known as Carlingwark. It included the field on which Badgers' Dene was built. He borrowed the money from the Vicar of Llandogo, who apparently lent money to many local people. The vicar would drive his pony and trap around the district, once a month, to collect money from his creditors. If they had no cash, he would accept eggs, meat etc. Mr Morgan had 10 children, and in his will, signed with a X, he left one tenth of the land to each child.

The relative insignificance of The Narth and Area is also borne out by census information. The area is included in the Parish of Trellech, and there are no figures for The Narth in its own right. Nevertheless it is possible to gauge the growth in population during the 20th century from the figures available. In 1901, the population of Trellech Parish was 682, but in 1991 this had grown to 2360, an increase of 350%.

For most of the 20th century, The Narth was a fairly harsh place to live, with few facilities and poor communications. People lived in small cottages and had to work hard to make a living, with few comforts. There has been considerable development in the last 30 years of the 20th century, and this is due to good communication links being established, and a desire to live in the country. Consequently The Narth has developed as a commuter area for Bristol, Cardiff, Newport and further afield, and this seems to be its role for the foreseeable future. The old cottages have been extended and modernised, and many new, large houses built. The current Monmouthshire County Council development plan restricts development, for housing only, to the odd "infill sites" which remain in the centre of the village. This has resulted in single building plots being sold for close to six figures sums, a far cry from the 1960's, when cottages with an acre or two were selling for between £1000 and £2000!

A continuing question is whether one lives IN The Narth or ON The Narth. Most locals will tell you quite forcibly you live ON The Narth.