

# holidays



# Take in a dream break

By Malcolm Fletcher



Plas Dinas country house hotel, North Wales

It was like being in a dream . . . lying in a steaming bath, glass of wine to hand, watching the football results roll in on television.

And it was all with Royal Approval too, a picture of a young Princess Margaret adorning a wall of the huge bathroom adding a real touch of class.

In fact our weekend stay at Plas Dinas country house hotel in North Wales was just that – a touch of class – from start to finish, leaving this humble sports journalist feeling like he had indeed been in a dream.

The beautifully restored 17th-Century property was the former childhood country residence of Lord Snowdon.

It was where he and his former wife, the late Princess Margaret, spent much of their early married life, and where Lord Snowdon was based as he set up Prince Charles' investiture ceremony at nearby Caernarfon Castle in July 1969.

## Roman settlement

Plas Dinas sits at the end of a quarter-of-a-mile of tree-lined drive beside The Mount, the site of a Roman settlement, from which the views across the Menai Straits over to Anglesey are superb.

So much so that stunning sunsets often have guests hurrying from the dining room to take them in.

Sadly, there was no sign of a sunset as we made haste up the A5 from Shropshire on a miserable Friday autumnal afternoon.

That unfortunate accompaniment of a Welsh holiday – rain – had the upper hand and hopes of shrugging off a world weary feel were receding fast as it got heavier.

But from the moment we stepped into Plas Dinas, and got our first glow from the roaring fire in the magnificent drawing room, our spirits were lifted.

And once shown up to the Princess Margaret Suite – with four-poster bed taking up only a small part of the large room, plus huge adjoining bathroom – the nightmare drive was soon turning into a dream.

Pre-dinner drinks in front of that roaring

fire, followed by a top class three-course meal, and we were ready to discover what makes hoteliers Andy and Julian Banner-Price tick and how they have created such a refined ambience.

Piercely proud of Plas Dinas' new five-star status, they are determined to stay at the top of the range, as far removed from an anonymous hotel as is humanly possible.

Having quit high pressure jobs in the Midlands, the friendly duo took on much of the restoration work themselves and are very much hands-on when it comes to keeping the decor and lush grounds in pristine condition.

The family of Lord Snowdon are so impressed with their work and stewardship of the property that they have sent treasured family heirlooms to be re-homed there, including one stunning crystal chandelier.

In fact Plas Dinas is packed with royal memorabilia, family portraits and many items that catch the eye.

None more so than in the Gun Room, the oldest part of the house that dates back 400 years and features a magnificent fireplace (big enough to roast a whole pig!), and the Armstrong-Jones mini museum.

It's character that could not be manufac-

tured and yet the attention to detail to cater for today's world is spot on, even down to fresh milk in fridges in rooms.

Andy and Julian have breathed new life and fresh, modern comforts into Plas Dinas – and if you are looking for somewhere to go and treat yourself, in a super location near the very heart of Snowdonia, then this is the perfect place.

Their top-quality conversion of what was once a Welsh gentleman's home into a 10-room country house hotel has made Plas Dinas a fabulous place to stay.

A real warmth of welcome, grand staircase leading to inviting corridors to the spread of 10 plush en suite rooms, fine food, attentive hosts . . . what more could you ask for.

Already relaxed in the space of a couple of hours, the centrepiece of our weekend away in an area that means so much to my wife Margaret and I still lay ahead.

Riding the Welsh Highland Railway's first train to go all the way into Porthmadog in nearly 80 years was something I had dreamed about for decades.

In fact that stunning narrow gauge railway line runs under the drive to Plas Dinas.

Or was I just dreaming that too . . .

## FACT BOX

● Room rates at Plas Dinas are currently at £99 per room, per night bed and breakfast. From Easter this will change to £140 per room, per night B & B – but there are various offers, including discounts for longer stays, "early-bird" bookings and repeat visits.

● Evening meals are available Tuesday to Saturday if booked 24 hours in advance. Two courses for £26 and three courses at £30. Meals served around 7pm in our dining room.

● Private Functions: Plas Dinas are happy to cater for special occasions up to 26 people such as birthday celebrations. They also have self-contained accommodation available on site, ring 01286 830214 for details or email [info@plasdinas.co.uk](mailto:info@plasdinas.co.uk)

● Things to do while staying at Plas Dinas: Caernarfon Castle, Welsh Highland Railway, National Slate Museum at Llanberis, Snowdon Mountain Railway, Beaumaris Castle on Anglesey, Bodnant Garden, Portmeirion near Porthmadog. There's also flights over Snowdonia from the nearby Caernarfon Airport, numerous walks – including Newborough Forest on Anglesey, pony trekking centres, cycle routes and mountain bike hire plus various other activities sports.