

The British 'Fortified' Residence

Theory by Stephen J. Davies

The 'British Residence' is described in Bill Howell's "Antiquities of Margam Mountain" as having been *'of importance, eclipsing all other house platforms in the area, suggesting it was the home of a notable Briton'* and can be found just above Maescadlawr Farm, alongside the lane running down to the A4063 Maesteg – Bridgend road, sitting in a commanding position over the valley. The site was excavated in 2011 by Time Trackers Research Incorporated who are based in the USA and Europe.

During research for my book "The Manor of Tir Iarll", I acquired some old maps of the manor and one was a map of Llwyn Gwladys and Bryncynan farms from 1798 with field layouts which remain much the same today. The 'British Residence' is clearly marked as 'Ruin', situated in a field called Coed y Park which was part of Bryncynan Farm which itself is adjacent to Maescadlawr Farm.

Other References:

Web source: https://ancientmonuments.uk/wales/llangynwyd-middle-bridgend#.WltA_-RLEiQ - Scheduled Monuments in Llangynwyd Middle, Bridgend

Entry Name: British Fortified Residence

Scheduled Date:

Source: Cadw

Source ID: 2241

Cadw Legacy ID: GM086

Schedule Class: Defence

Category: Deserted Rural Settlement

Period: Medieval

County: Bridgend (Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr)

Community: Llangynwyd Middle (Llangynwyd - Canol)

Traditional County: Glamorgan

Description: The monument comprises the remains of a deserted rural settlement. Probably dating to the medieval period (AD 1066-1485), a complex of earthworks contains a number of square house platforms and holloway. The site lies at 215m above OD on ground falling to the east.

The complex of buildings covers an area approximately 45m by 55m in a large hollow scooped out of the hillside. An entrance on the north-west leads to a centrally placed square house measuring 9.1m each way, with three rooms. To the east of the entrance is a long house, 19.8m by 7.3m, divided into two rooms. Another entrance to the site exists on the south-east.

The monument is of national importance for its potential to enhance our knowledge of medieval settlement and subsistence practices. It is an important relic of a medieval landscape and retains significant archaeological potential, with a strong probability of the presence of both intact archaeological deposits, together with environmental and structural evidence, including buried land surfaces. Their importance is further enhanced by their group value.

The scheduled area comprises the remains described and areas around them within which related evidence may be expected to survive.

Extract from web source: <https://www.heritagetortoise.co.uk/2014/02/the-holy-rood-of-llangynwyd/> by Professor Madeleine Gray - Medieval Historian at the University of South Wales.

This is called 'Farmstead' on the modern OS map but older maps call it the 'British Residence'. When the archaeologists Cyril and Aileen Fox were surveying this area in the 1930s, they thought this and the house platforms on Mynydd Ty-talwyn were the remains of early medieval farmsteads. They eventually decided they were later, probably built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when the climate was better, and you could farm the hills. When the climate got dramatically worse in the early fourteenth century, there were famines followed by the Black Death and most of these settlements were deserted. Recently, an American archaeologist has revived the idea that this was an early medieval settlement. My friends in the Archaeological Trust say it is much, much later, possibly post-medieval.

Madog Fychan:

Madog Fychan, one-time steward of Tir Iarll, flourished in the latter part of the 13th century and early part of the 14th. In 1316, during the reign of Edward II, Madog Fychan of Tir Iarll assisted Llewelyn Bren in his rebellion against English rule and possibly led the attack on Kenfig castle. The revolt began in the cantref of Senghenydd and was supported by men from all over the Blaenau regions. However, the rebellion failed and the most important insurgents, including Madog, were taken to the Tower of London. He was one of a number of prisoners who were to be given perpetual imprisonment. His standing in society is clearly indicated in both record evidence and in poetry. His elegy by Casnodyn reveals him as a man of power and authority in his community and establishes that Madog was among the earliest of Welsh landowners of the 14th century who provided a new social basis for the renaissance of Welsh court poetry. His participation in the revolt of 1316 suggests that more than a literary convention may lie behind the poet's lines which describe Madog's savage and bloody onslaught upon the English in battle. Records clearly show that a Madog Fychan of Tir Iarll and Owain ap Madog, his son, were released in November 1316 but more likely that the release was delayed until 1317. (*Glamorgan County History, Vol. III*).

The chapter on the 'Literary Tradition of Morgannwg' in the "Glamorgan County History", Vol. III, states: *Casnodyn's most interesting composition from the purely historical standpoint is the elegiac awdl which he sang to Madog Fychan of Coetref, Llangynwyd, steward of Tir Iarll under the Lord of Glamorgan.* In a biography of Casnodyn on the National Library of Wales (NLW) website we find that Madog was "a man of considerable importance about 1330".

Madog was alive in 1329 when he was a witness to a grant of lands to Margam Abbey on the 18th February. He was buried in the abbey. Casnodyn was found living between 1320 and 1340 and is the earliest Glamorgan poet whose compositions are found in Welsh manuscripts.

The return of a questionnaire for Llangynwyd, sent out to parishes by Edward Lhuyd in his Parochialia of the late 17th century, contains the following: '*Nant y Dylles, ye ancient house of Madog Vychan*'.

Cadrawd in his "History of Llangynwyd", in the late 19th century, tells us that Madog Fychan lived at a place called Nant Dulais which at that time he could not identify. Early surveys of Tir Iarll, from the 16th and 17th centuries, refer to Nant y Dylles which was in Middle Llangynwyd, listed around the farms of Gelli Siriol, Gadlys, Maescadlawr etc. However, the rent rolls of Tir Iarll for the year 1765 inform us that Nant y Dylles had an alias of Bryncynan Farm which included the 'ruin' of the 'British Residence' in 1798.

Further information on Madog Fychan can be found in 'The Lords of Afan' from 'Transactions of the Port Talbot Historical Society No. 3, Vol. 2, 1974', of which the following extract informs us of a further rebellion to that of 1316.

Leisan D'Avene (Lord of Afan Wallia- Aberavon/Baglan) was again in arms in 1321 when he and Madoc Fychan joined forces with the barons who rose against Hugh Despenser the younger, who acquired the Lordship of Glamorgan in 1317. Despenser manors were ravaged and the entire county was devastated, Kenfig and Neath again being attacked. The war continued through the early part of 1322 and on February 14th, The Sheriff of Glamorgan was ordered to seize all lands, goods, chattels, etc. of William Fleming, Henry Umfraville, John le Norreys, Leisan D'Avene, Edward de Stradling and others from Glamorgan, into his bailiwick (Cal. Fine Rolls, 1319-27, 100). Further evidence of Leisan's complicity in the revolt is provided by the same source (189) in an order dated the 3rd December 1322 which runs:

"Commitment during pleasure of the lands in Kilvey in Wales, late of Leissand de Avene of late the king's enemy and rebel, which are in his (the King's) hands by his forfeiture".

Presumably Leisan was subsequently pardoned along with Madoc Fychan, who was certainly received into the King's grace, being commissioned by the ill-fated King (by writs issued in October 1326) to enlist men in his service in Avenlonde (Afan Wallia), Tir Iarll and elsewhere in the county.

This suggests that Leisan was then dead, Madoc being commissioned, as his heir was still a minor. In any case, Sir John D'Avene succeeded his father shortly afterwards.

This demonstrates just how important Madog Fychan was in the area.

Theory:

The listing of Nant y Dylles with an alias of Bryncynan in the 1765 rent roll could mean that the buildings of Nant y Dylles had been vacated and a farmhouse built lower down the hillside where Bryncynan farmhouse now stands.

During the excavation at the 'British Residence' site in 2011 some 14th century pottery was found but nothing earlier than that period. Madog Fychan was active in the latter half of the 13th century and early part of the 14th.

The name Nant y Dylles suggests that it was near to a stream and the Welsh word 'Nant' translates as 'stream'. By looking at the site using Google Earth, a wooded area is shown nearby which suggests the path of a stream and further investigations at the site showed that the stream is only 50 – 100 yards away from the 'British Residence' with the source coming directly out of the hillside a couple of hundred yards back up the hillside. At a point further down from the water source but near to the ruins, the water is dammed by a small stone structure, causing a short, fall of water. Farmhouses were built near to a water source.

I don't know if 'Coetref, Llangynwyd' is mentioned in Casnodyn's elegy or if the writers of the Glamorgan County History and NLW biography inserted it. However, I looked up the meaning of Coetref and I found "settlement in the wood" which could be a romantic, alternative name given to Nant y Dylles. It's quite possible that there were many more trees around back in the 13th and 14th centuries around the British Residence. Certainly, there are a number of trees flanking the stream near the site.

Conclusion: I suggest that the 'British Residence' was Nant y Dylles, one-time home of Madog Fychan.