

VALE OF GLAMORGAN
AMBASSADOR



LLYSGENNAD
BRO MORGANNWG

Vale of Glamorgan Folklore, Customs & Dialect

'The Vale of Glamorgan & Glamorganshire'

Not surprisingly, historical records about the Vale of Glamorgan, often refer to just 'Glamorgan' or 'Glamorganshire' and each will be mentioned in this account.

Glamorgan or, sometimes, *Glamorganshire* was one of the thirteen historic counties of Wales. It was originally an early medieval petty kingdom of varying boundaries known as Glywysing until taken over by the Normans as a lordship. In later years, Glamorganshire was represented by the three counties of Mid Glamorgan, South Glamorgan and West Glamorgan. The name now survives in Vale of Glamorgan, the most southerly county in Wales, neighbouring those of Cardiff, Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

Introduction

The Vale of Glamorgan's soil is rich in folk traditions, and fragments of a distinctive culture that have been shaped over as much as two thousand years. Even with its proximity to the industrial capitals and regions of south Wales, the Vale has maintained a strong rural folk air and a culture steeped in the agricultural cycles, faith and village life, that are still core to the way of life here today. Here is a taste of the richness of the Vale's culture and colloquialisms.



▲ Iolo Morganwg commemorative plaque, Costa Coffee – Cowbridge

Folktales of the Vale

There are very many folk tales, ghost stories and legends from this part of Wales, too many to include here, but here's a taster from the rich, bubbling cauldron of stories.

LADY OF THE COMMON

A folktale is remembered in these parts, which may well have its roots in the history of the early Norman lords of Ogmore. During the twelfth century when the De Londres family ruled much of the land in the western part of the Vale of Glamorgan, and the castle of Ogmore, Hawise, granddaughter of Maurice de Londres, the founder of Ewenny Priory championed the cause of the common people of this area.

She is said to have taken pity on a proud young Welshman of good birth who had been caught stealing a deer from de Londres land, so that he could feed his family. He was condemned to be blinded for his crime. Hawise came upon him, standing proud, but shackled to the castle walls as she preparing to join her father and grandfather just before dawn, to ride out on a hunt across Ogmore lands.

She spoke up for him and the plight of the poor people who had no lands they could freely hunt, and so regularly ran the gauntlet of such harsh punishments for trying to sustain themselves as they could.

That day happened to be the anniversary of her birth, and she appealed to her grandfather – as was traditional – for a birthday boon: the prisoner's life. He refused her that, but agreed that whatever land she could encircle by foot between dawn and dusk that day would become free land, common land.



▲ Hawise de Londres' tomb at Ewenny Priory

Her horse was returned to the stable, and as the sun rose in the east, Hawise set off up the hill from Ogmore castle, but the brambles and gorse thorns tore at her legs and cut her feet. She travelled over the downs and woodland to the south and east of the castle and down towards the sea, each of her steps leaving a bloody footstep in her wake that men in de Londres livery followed, recording each yard of land that she traversed. By sunset she was approaching the castle once more. She came from the coast, enclosing with each step an area of land which has been used freely by the common people of the area to hunt game and graze their livestock ever since.

Hawise de Londres is buried in Ewenny Priory.



FLOUTING THE RAVENS

A notebook filled with stories and accounts of life in Glamorgan was published posthumously in 1839 under the title 'The Vale of Glamorgan, Scenes and Tales among the Welsh.'

Local folklore is deeply embedded in landscape. This entry in the notebook tells of a mysterious cave on the Vale moors in which there is hidden a hoard of gold, guarded by ravens.

These cave guardians are however, no ordinary ravens. It is said that *"nobody could face those ravens, and that there would be, to begin with, no small thundering and growling along the sky before he would get far into the cavern."*

A "swaggering Brecknockshire drover" staying at a local inn hears tell of this cave and decides to set out to 'flout the ravens' and find the treasure. After much bravado and swagger, he and a party of local men set out for the *Ogov Kigvrain*, a Welsh name which translates as Cave of Ravens.

One among the party is Davy, nephew to the notebook's author. He returns after some hours to the inn, somewhat disturbed by the experience, and relates the story of how the cave seekers were hampered by mysterious, thick mist; how flocks of sheep and mountain goats follow behind them. Once, the silence of the moorland and thick mist was broken by a terrible screech they attribute to "*Gwrach y Rhibyn – the Hag of the mountain dribble,*" which the men take as a bad omen.

Eventually, the party arrive at *Ogov Kigvrain*. It is described as being *"surrounded with a black stunted brushwood, and some pieces of rock, besides a few old oaks that have struggled to grow there, but have all their branches, after many contortions, tending downwards."*

Five cart-ropes are tied together, and the drover secures one end about his waist, in case he would need to be pulled out. He takes a candle and lantern and silently enters the cave. Little by little, the men outside let out the rope, waiting for some catastrophe.

Before they reach the end of the rope, a low growl of thunder is heard in the distance. It comes nearer and the atmosphere about the cave grows *"more dark and appalling."* With that, cracks of thunder break overhead and lightning flashes. It is followed by a loud shriek echoing through the cavern, heralding the re-emergence of the drover, *"pale, aghast, horror-struck!"*

We are not told what the drover sees or experiences in the cave, and it seems that over time, *Ogov Kigvrain* and its buried treasure have been forgotten. If you know where it is, please let us know.





A BASKET FULL OF *place names*

The Vale of Glamorgan's place names reflect the diverse cultural influences upon this part of Wales. Some are clearly Welsh – you only have to look at the number of Llan-somethings on the OS map to recognise the area's Welsh heritage. Other's such as the names of nearby islands Flatholm and Steepholm are undoubtedly Scandinavian in origin and are more than likely the result of Viking settlement of these islands as raiding bases in the 10th century. Other names are distinctively Norman, for example Boverton.

Here's an explanation of some of the Vale's place names taken from Thomas Morgan's *The Place-Names of Wales*



ABERTHIN:

signifies a place of sacrifices. It is supposed that Druidical sacrifices were offered here.

EWENNY:

Ewyn-wy, the frothy water, is the name of the river that flows through the place. Some think the correct wording is y-wen-wy, the white water.

LLANBLEDDIAN:

History tells us that Bleiddian (*Lupus*) a contemporary of St Garmon, founded the first church here in the sixth century. The root is blaid, a translation from lupus, a wolf.

GLOSSARY OF *Words*

ENGLISH	WELSH	PHONETICALLY
Tradition or custom	Traddodiad	<i>Trab-ddob-die-add</i>
Folk	Gwerin	<i>Gweb-rinn</i>
Song	Cân	<i>Kahn</i>
Poetry	Barddoniaeth	<i>Bar-thonn-eea-eeth</i>
Dance	Dawns	<i>Dao-ns</i>
Melody	Alaw	<i>Alow</i>
Language	Laith	<i>Eea-ith</i>

MARCROSS:

Many think the place derives its name from a large cross that is supposed to have been raised here in memory of St. Mark; but we rather think the name is an Anglicanism of the Welsh Mer-groes, the cross on the sea-shore. The place is situated on the Bristol Channel coast. A large cromlech, called "yr hen eglwys," the old church is still visible, around which the ancient Christians are supposed to have assembled for worship, before any sacred edifice was built here.

WICK:

Some think the name is indirectly derived from the Norse wic, a bay; but wic had a secondary meaning of hamlet, village. It was anciently called Y Wig Fawr, the great wood, suggesting that the locality was sometime thickly wooded, and the present name is an Anglicized form of the Welsh minus 'fawr', great, large.

YSTRAD OWEN:

The parish derives its name from Prince Owen, the son of Morgan Hen, King of Morgannwg, who took up his abode here. In a field adjoining the churchyard is a large tumulus supposed to indicate the site of his house, or as some say, the grave of Ovi-en and his wife. Owen's remains were buried here in 987.

Folk Traditions

THE MARY LWYD

Certain times during the year were traditionally dedicated to the cultivation of good fellowship. One such was the week or fortnight before Christmas, when the labourers' wives and poor women of Glamorgan would go about in groups from one farm house to the other, children and infants in tow, to collect donations of wheat or barley in small bags from the local yeomen and farmers.

Twelfth Night also had its peculiar custom. During December, young men would prepare a *Mary Lwyd* or *Mari Lwyd*. This is a decorated horse's skull, carried on a pole by a man hidden beneath a white sheet that forms the Mari Lwyd's neck and body. It is said that young men coaxed *'their sweethearts into a loan of the silken fillets, and rosettes, and other ornaments which may be wanted'* to decorate the *Mari Lwyd*.

On Twelfth Night, they would set off taking the *Mari Lwyd* from house to house. Outside each door in turn, the party would sing some introductory verses. Then came a battle of wits (known as *pwncu*) in which the people inside the door and the Mari party outside exchanged challenges and insults in rhyme. At the end of the battle – which could be as long as the creativity of the two parties held out – the Mari party bounded in with her attendants.



▲ The Mari-Lwyd on parade



'The fun was in the running and screeching of the girls, pursued by the Mari Lwyd, capering and neighing in very fine style... ..while the old people had a hearty laugh, and the children were fixed in mute astonishment.'

The *Mari Lwyd* party usually opened with the following verse, or a version of it:

Wel dyma ni'n dwad /
Cyfeillion diniwad [x2]

I ofyn cawn gennad [x2]

I ganu

*("Well, here we come / innocent friends /
to ask for permission / to sing")*

In Cowbridge, where during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Welsh was becoming less commonly spoken, the *Mari Lwyd* parties sometimes interspersed the traditional verses with English versions:

We have a fine Mary /
We've dressed it so pretty

With ribbons so plenty

This Christmas

If you are good natured /
Go down to the cellar

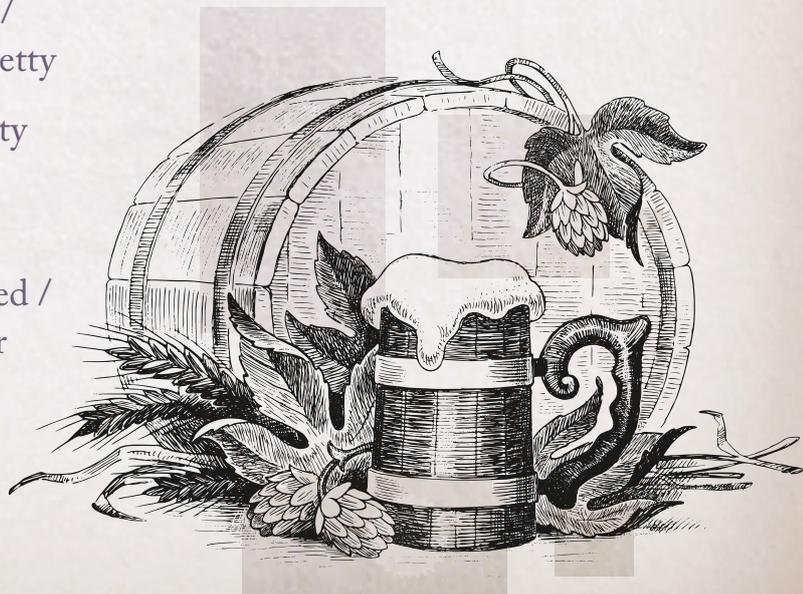
And fill the jug over

This Christmas.

As the exchange progressed, both parties might start to improvise verses, sometimes descending into personal insult.

After dancing and feasting on cake and ale, the *Mari Lwyd* party departed, offering a farewell verse outside the closed door, singing words that express *'thanks for their good cheer, and a prayer that prosperity and happiness, long life and health and a well stored cellar and plenteous living, might long continue to be the lot of the hospitable dwellers under that roof.'*

In some places across Glamorganishire the *Mari Lwyd* is enjoying a revival, and from Llantrisant to Llangynwyd she walks on Midwinter nights. A troupe usually journeys across Vale Inns on New Year's Eve.



LLANTWIT ANWYL DAY

Llantwit Anywl Day or 'annual' day was held on 3 May, allegedly, the anniversary of a victory gained by the people of Llantwit Major over a band of Irish raiders led by one John O'Neale.

Irish raids had been a constant threat to settlers on the Glamorgan coast since early times. Irish raids were followed by those of Vikings, and coastal place names evidence Norse settlement along the south Wales coast: Flatholm and Steepholm and Skokholm, are all names of Viking origin.

On Llantwit Anywl Day, people gathered in great numbers at a dingle called 'Col-Huw' which opens onto the seashore. This is the field area between Cwm Col-Huw and the road to Llantwit beach today.

The proceedings are described thus in a contemporary account recorded in 'The Vale of Glamorganshire: Scenes and Tales Among the Welsh': *"A fellow personating the Irish Captain pitches his tent one side of it [the brook], while all the rest of the revelers keep on the other. Then the men of Llantwit approach the edge of the brook, and tauntingly call upon John O'Neale to leave his tent and give them battle."* They call repeatedly, until eventually, *"out pops the squalid figure and unshaved face of the mock Captain."* He sets his tent on fire and then scurries away to great shouts and jeers from the Llantwit men.

However, the revels do not end there.

Next, a great Lord and Lady are impersonated by *"a proper young man and a strapping wench."* They are described as being dressed in fine costumes borrowed from St Donats and Boverton castles. They mount horses and come galloping onto the field, again to great cheers. Then they turn and lead a grand triumphal procession into the town.

The hijinx of the event often turned to rowdy behaviour; fights were common and even a couple of murders seem to have been associated with it. Perhaps that is why it eventually died out. In about 1839 however, the event was revived by the St Illtud lodge of the Oddfellows society. This was a much more sedate affair than the original Anwyl day and continued until the beginning of the 20th Century.





THREE SPIRIT NIGHTS

There are three '*spirit nights*' that were traditionally marked in the Glamorgan calendar. They are known as *Ysprydno*s and considered nights when the veil between the worlds is at its thinnest. Traditions associated with these nights involve divination of the future, particularly predicting one's sweetheart or future spouse. These *Ysprydno*s fall on All Hallows eve – our modern day Halloween – Christmas Eve and May Day Eve.





The narrator of '*Scenes and Tales Among the Welsh*', relates the story of how he once determined to see his future bride on All Hallows' Eve, and the intricate series of 'rituals' he undertook to do so. Firstly he turned his coat and waistcoat inside out and walked around the church 'the right number of times'. The next thing to be done was obtain a pair of ladies garters! The narrator is given a pair by an obliging girl in the local hall, he ties them together with what he describes as 'a true lover's knot' and lays them next to his heart until going to bed. The final part of the ritual involved placing the 'charm' – the knotted garters – beneath the seeker's pillow, presumably either to induce a vision in the dark or to dream of one's future partner. In the case of our by now rather terrified narrator, he does indeed see a vision beyond his bedclothes, a woman dressed in garb which suggested that she dwelt 'in a land that is beyond the sea.'

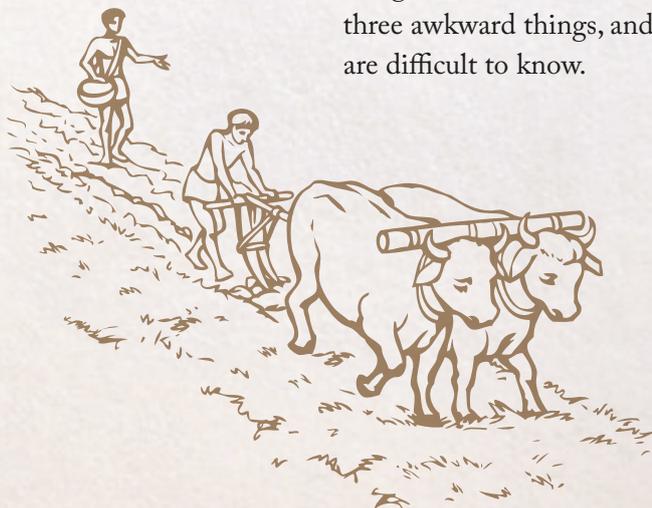
Glamorgan shares these *Ysbrydnos* traditions with places across the British Isles. Many a mountain-top, Neolithic burial chamber, spring and stone circle have such folk rituals associated with it, though of course the specific customs differ from place to place. They are the echoes of the rites of our Celtic and pre-Celtic ancestors, handed down generation to generation, surviving many social and religious changes.



SINGING TO THE OXEN

Iolo Morgannwg notes the tradition of singing to the oxen in Glamorganshire, and recorded many of the associated *tribannau*, the very ancient, strict metered and alliterative form of four line poetry that was used for such songs here in the Vale of Glamorgan. While the ploughboys sang on other meters, it seems that the triban was a firm favourite. The tradition of singing to the oxen was still alive in Glamorgan until about 1870. Cadrawd described the tradition thus:

“To his beloved oxen the swain poured forth his hopes and fears, his experiences and his aspirations. And they, patient and gentle in turn, seeming to recognise the confidence reposed in them sweetly yielded to the fascination of song, which lightened the burden of the yoke, beguiled the time’s haste, and shortened the way’s length.”



Can y Cathreinwr / The Ox-Driver’s Song – “*Mi geso ’ngwawdd i swpar*” is a typical example of an ox ploughing song. It was collected from the singing of Robert Thomas, who remembered singing it while ploughing with oxen as a young boy in about 1873 on a farm near St Nicolas.

The first verse is a humorously sarcastic complaint about food:

Mi geso ’ngwawdd i swpar
Gan ŵr bonheddig hawddgar
A chael nidir wedi’i lladd
A phetar gwadd a wiwer!
Ma-hw

(“I was invited to supper / by an amiable gentleman / and I got a dead snake / four moles and a squirrel! / ma-hoo!”)

The second verse continues in a similar vein. Then follow triadic verses that are lists of three things – in this case three things a lad likes, three awkward things, and three things that are difficult to know.

In practice these would not have been 'songs' in the sense of a particular set of verses matched with a particular melody. Rather, the plough-boy might know many *tribannau* (hundreds have been recorded), and would sing whichever ones came into his head (or expressed what he was feeling) at the time, in whatever order he chose. He might well have made ones up as he went along, back and forth, driving the oxen and guiding the plough across the field.



▲ Guto Dafis, Musician, Songwriter and Storyteller, performing a Tribannau



Tribannau weren't just used for ploughing. The collections of *tribannau* that survive suggest that they were a commonly used form of folk poetry used to convey and commemorate a broad range of every day experience amongst the lives of common folk in Glamorganshire during the 19th century and earlier. Many appear to have become very popular, and consequently were collected with slight variations across the county and further afield across Wales. Many are anonymous, but others have retained a record of their author's name, telling us that these were composed by folk bards from every walk of life: ploughmen, weavers, inn keepers and priests, all seem to have turned their hand and their *awen* or muse to the *triban* to mark moments in their lives.

“
Language
”
Dialect

Cymraeg, or Welsh to give the language its English name is a member of the Brittonic branch of the Celtic languages that arrived in the British Isles along with the Iron Age Celts from northern Europe. Until the Saxon Invasions of the late fifth century, it was spoken across the British Isles south of Hadrian's Wall. Their incursions across the south and middle section of Britain, what we generally think of today as England, pushed the language into the western and south western extremities of Britain, what we today know as Wales and Cornwall.

It emerged as the Welsh language that is recognisably an early form of what we speak today around about the 6TH Century, and we have poetry from this period such as *Y Gododdin*, that Welsh speakers can still read and understand.

Over the centuries the fate of the language has ebbed and flowed as it was repressed by numerous Norman and later English kings and governments. Despite this, our native language survived. In the late 1960's with the folk revival came an upsurge in interest in the language and moves were made to pass legislation and measures to safeguard its future. Today, Welsh medium schools at both primary and secondary levels continue to flourish and grow and more and more of our young people are speaking the language.

Today it is still a living language in Wales with about 20% of the population of Wales speaking the language fluently, and, perhaps surprisingly, it is also spoken by the community of Y Wladfa (a Welsh colony in Chubut Province of Argentina).

It is the oldest living language in Europe, and is closely related to the old Cornish language and Breton. The Welsh Language Measure of 2011 gave Welsh official status in Wales, making it the only official language in the United Kingdom alongside English as the official language of the UK.





GLAMORGANSHIRE DIALECTS

Had we recorded the Welsh speakers of the Vale 200 years ago, we would have discovered that each town and parish would have had its own distinctive dialect, however, by now it would be difficult for even the most experienced dialectologists to decipher subtle differences from place to place. In the main, this is because we're all so mobile these days, and the influences upon language and accent in any one given area are now broad.

However, there are still a few Welsh speakers among the older generation whose speech and pronunciation still tends towards the Gwentian dialect. Most often than not, these days, we recognise it in the way certain place names are pronounced. Gwentian is the dialectic group under which most of old Glamorgan and the western parts of Gwent belong to.



It's not only Welsh that had distinctive dialects. There was a well documented English 'Llantwit' dialect that was believed to have been heavily influenced by incomers from Somerset.

The Rev. Robert Nicholl wrote about Llantwit in the 1790's. He made particular comment about the dialect. He notes 'the Somersetshire dialect has not long been discontinued here'.

A little later in 1804, Benjamin Heath Malkin recorded that inhabitants of Llantwit commonly conversed with each other in a 'barberous kind of English... ..yet they can all speak Welsh, and indeed make as much use of it among themselves as of the English'.

This 'barbarous kind of English' was referred to in the Vale as 'Saesneg Llanillyd' or 'Llantwit English' and seems to have often been an object of ridicule.

A popular *triban* of the time put it this way:

Three things I cannot relish-
A woman that is peevish,
To meet a parson with no wit,
And Lantwit's broken English.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the last traces of Llantwit English seem to have disappeared as local writer, the Rev. William Williams records:

"Y mae y Gymraeg wedi adennill yr holl wlad hyd lan y mor; ac y mae 'Saesneg Llanillyd', erbyn hyn, yn llawn cystal a'Saesneg y Bontfaen"

[Welsh has recaptured the whole land even to the coast; and Llantwit English is by now just as good as that of Cowbridge.]!

The Vale's team of Ambassadors are there to help facilitate your visit, and share their knowledge and passion for the Vale with our visitors. If you would like to know more about this dedicated team of volunteers and how they might be able to help enrich your visit, have a look at:

www.moretothevale.com or

www.lovethevale.com or

www.visitthevale.com

and check out the Ambassadors section of the site.

creative 
RURAL COMMUNITIES

VALE of GLAMORGAN

BRO MORGANNWG

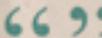


Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu
Gwledig; Ewrop yn Buddsoddi
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development; Europe Investing in
Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Produced by Angharad Wynne

 Angharad Wynne
www.angharadwynne.com

Designed by
countryside 