

SPECIALIST EVIDENCE
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HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND TO RHIW'RPERRAI

Curriculum Vitae

[I obtained an Honours degree in History and Joint Honours in Welsh and Welsh History (1st class) at the University of Wales, Cardiff (as it then was). I also obtained the research degrees of Master of Arts (1967), Doctor of Philosophy (1974) and Doctor of Literature (2001), a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (1959) and a Diploma in Palaeography and Archive Administration (1961). I lectured in medieval and early modern Welsh History at the University of Wales, Cardiff, and was promoted to Senior Lecturer (1975), Reader (1994) and a Personal Chair in Welsh History in the School of History and Archaeology (1996). I have published 18 volumes on the gentry order, the Protestant Reformation and allied themes in Wales, as well as a large corpus of articles in historical and literary journals (in Welsh and English). I am a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and the Society of Antiquaries of London.]

1. It is argued that, in view of Rhiw'rperrai's historical and cultural background, the new building proposals are not compatible with the historic environment of the region in which this large castellated mansion is located

2. Sources prove that the cultural tradition in this area extending back to the post-Roman centuries was essentially Welsh. South-east Wales before and after the Norman Conquest and settlement from the late eleventh century onwards maintained its native social and cultural structure. A buoyant Welsh-speaking community formed an essential feature in the emergence of the Welsh nation and development of national consciousness. 'Yr iaith' (language) in the Middle Ages had a broader and more conceptual meaning, namely 'the inseparable bond between concept of race and culture'. This bond was felt as strongly in south-east Glamorgan and Gwent as in west Wales and Gwynedd. Traditions survive concerning the celebrated King Arthur, whose court, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136), was moved from Gelli-wig in Cornwall to Caerllion-ar-Wysg. Also, in the First branch of the *Mabinogi* tales, references are made to Teyrnnon, Lord of Gwent-Is-Coed. Doubtless this part of south-east Wales was fundamental to the cultural identity of the whole of Wales.

3. It was in such a thoroughly Welsh environment that Rhiw'rperrai house was built in early Renaissance style in 1622-6 for Sir Thomas Morgan, a member of a junior branch of the Morgan gentry family of Tredegar and steward of the household of the Earl of Pembroke at Wilton, a notable centre of Renaissance culture. He was a younger son of Edmund Morgan of Penllwyn-sarth, in the parish of Mynydd Islwyn. Rhiw'rperrai is located on the eastern boundary of south Glamorgan, an area which maintained its Welsh character throughout the Middle Ages. The land had previously been in the possession of the Lewis family of Y Fan, who may have built a smaller residence on the site in the mid-fifteenth century near a ridge where an Iron-Age hill fort existed.

Five broad themes need to be examined when evaluating the cultural background to the region.

4. **(a) Political structure.** Wales was divided in the early Middle Ages into *cantrefi* and *cymydau* (commotes), all of which constituted political kingdoms, principally Gwynedd, Powys, Deheubarth, and a number of independent kingdoms in the south-

east. After the Norman Conquest and establishment of the Norman marcher lordships, Glamorgan or Morgannwg, the old kingdom of Glywysing, between the Rhymney and Usk rivers, and other border regions, such as Gwent, became lordships in the possession of Norman lords and remained so until the Act of Union (1536) when the shiring of Wales was completed and when the *cantref* of Gwynllŵg (derived from St Gwynllyw) was transferred to the newly-created Monmouthshire. The lordships of the south-east, like other regions of Wales, were divided into two broad areas, the Englishries and Welshries which continued to maintain their Welsh identity as did other native regions, such as Deheubarth and Gwynedd.

5. **(b) Social and Linguistic features.** The eastern part of Glamorgan in the Middle Ages constituted the *cantref* of Senghennydd, which, in turn, was divided into three commotes, Uwch-Caeach, Is-Caeach and Cibwr. Rhiw'rperai was located in Is-Caeach commote, in the parish of Llanfihangel-y-fedw (also known as Llanfedw), an area which formed part of the old Welsh kingdom of Morgannwg. The majority of the population there spoke the Welsh Gwentian dialect (*Y Wenhwysseg*) as a first language which was customarily used by the Welsh inhabitants throughout south-eastern Wales. The dialect has survived and some native speakers still use it to this day. It is also interesting that the patronymic style of personal names survived into the sixteenth and even seventeenth centuries, especially among the middling and lower orders.

6. **(c) Placenames.** As expected, these native areas were characterised by placenames which were Welsh in origin. Ruperra, for example, is a corrupt English form of Rhiw'rperai ('hill of the pear trees'). Field and farm names surrounding the mansion are almost all entirely Welsh, such as Coed Craig Rhiw'rperai, Craig Rhiw'rperai Coed Wern-ddu, Coed Llwyn-hir, Coed Llanfedw, Coed y Goetre and Coed-y-budrwm. Considering their close proximity to the English border and the amount of foreign intrusions which affected the area over the centuries, many of the placenames have surprisingly retained their original Welsh forms. Notable examples are Bedwas, Machen, Rhiwderyn, Basaleg, Llanfihangel-y-fedw, Pen-coed, Senghennydd, Draethan, Rhydri, Tredelerch, Penllwyn-sarth and Gelli-gaer. This social phenomenon is remarkable and is found throughout Gwent (which itself is a Welsh name derived from the Latin *venta* [market-place]), where Welsh forms are numerous, such as Llanwynell (Wolverston), Llangatwg Feibion Afel, Llanfihangel Tor-y-mynydd, Llanfihangel Nant Teyrnnon (corrupted to Llantarnam) and Maerun (Marshfield). The famous *Book of Llandaf* (c. 1135-40), contains a large collection of Latin charters and other documents relating to the church, in which many land boundary names are recorded in Welsh. Also, medieval and early modern manuscripts, notably manorial and estate records relating to the east Glamorgan and west Monmouthshire border, contain a large corpus of Welsh placenames relating to early agricultural settlements and other rural properties, most of which have survived to modern times.

7.**(d) Native gentry families.** Despite the increasing Anglo-Norman power in Glamorgan and Gwent in the Middle Ages, the descendants of prominent families of noble stock formed the first generations of what later became known as the gentry or *uchelwyr*, heads of families of gentle birth who became landowners and holders of local and regional offices and who prided themselves on their privileged native ancestry. Many manuscripts survive which contain their pedigrees, and printed sources by Lewys Dwnn in the sixteenth century, Sir Joseph Bradney and P. C. Bartrum among others in later years record the lineages of a substantial number of upper and lower gentry families. Patrons kept manuscripts, one major example being Trahaearn ab Ieuan ap Meurig of Penrhos in the lordship of Caerllion in the late fifteenth century. He owned the *Seint Greal*, a fourteenth-century Welsh copy of a

translation of two earlier French texts relating to the Arthurian legend. *Y Cwta Cyfarwydd o Forgannwg*, an early fifteenth-century manuscript containing ancient prophecies, prose texts and a portion of the history of Glamorgan, was owned by a member of the Lewis family of Y Fan and subsequently by Sir Thomas Morgan, who built Rhiw'rperai.

8. In this area, the most notable native families which rose in the ascendancy were the Morgans of Tredegar Park and its branches at Machen, Rhiw'rperai, Gwernyclepa, near Basaleg, and elsewhere. The Lewis family of Y Fan near Bedwas (who owned Rhiw'rperai in the fifteenth century) and the Mathew family of Radyr and Llandaff, were also families of good Welsh stock who cherished their cultural affinities.

9. **(e) Bardic patronage.** Following on from the previous section on native gentry families and their cultural interests it is remarkable how much literary evidence survives, particularly in the form of bardic eulogies to members of these auspicious houses. A large corpus of strict-metre poems, composed in honour of prominent members of such families, has survived in manuscripts. Professional bards plied their trade within newly-built gentry mansions, praising the prosperity of their owners, their public accomplishments and their honourable house-keeping in eastern Glamorgan and the fringes of western Gwent. The most prominent examples are the Lewis family of Y Fan who patronised Rhys Brychan, Rhisiart ap Rhys, Lewys Morgannwg, Dafydd Benwyn and Meurig Dafydd; the Kemeys of Cefnmabli, to whom Dafydd Benwyn, Lewys Dwnn, Meurig Dafydd, Lewys Morgannwg sang; and the Herberts of Cardiff, particularly William Herbert, Baron Cardiff and 1st earl of Pembroke of the second creation, who was praised by Siôn Brwynog, Lewys Morgannwg, Huw Arwystl, Wiliam Llŷn and Dafydd Benwyn. This William Herbert obtained the monastic lands at Wilton, Wiltshire, from Henry VIII.

10. The houses of the illustrious Morgan family of Tredegar and its satellites at Llantarnam, Pen-coed, Bedwellte, Machen, St Julians (Sain Silian) and elsewhere were visited by Gwilym Tew, Rhys Brychan, Dafydd Benwyn, Lewys Morgannwg, Meurig Dafydd and Lewys Dwnn. Of this family, Ifor ap Llywelyn, known as Ifor Hael of Gwernyclepa, Basaleg, is regarded as the most eminent patron. He flourished in the mid-fourteenth century and Dafydd ap Gwilym, the most celebrated poet of his age, composed several eulogies in his honour. Iorwerth Fynglwyd, a Glamorgan poet, sang to Dafydd Goch ap Dafydd ap Llywelyn of Gwrhai in the Sirhywi valley and Gwilym Tew to his sons. Among other minor gentry who welcomed poets was Morgan ap Rhosier ab Adam of Gwynllwg to whom odes were composed by Guto'r Glyn and Hywel Dafi in the mid-fifteenth century. Of interest also in this context is William Evans, chancellor and Treasurer of Llandaf in the latter half of the sixteenth century. He was a native of Gwent who was entertained by poets in his household. Evidence exists to show that he himself (hailed as the 'Ifor Hael of Llandaf') was well-versed in the bardic craft and, with Thomas Lewis of Llandaf, son of Edward Lewis of Y Fan, presided over an assembly of poets – an early type of *eisteddfod* or assembly of bards -- at Llandaf.

11. It is undeniable that the bardic profession played a vital role in the survival of the Welsh language and national consciousness in the Middle Ages in eastern Glamorgan and western Gwent in the Middle Ages, and the eulogistic tradition continued in the Morgan family well into the seventeenth century. Rhiw'rperai, whose owners continued to patronise the bardic tradition, was suitably located to benefit from the wealth of that worthy cultural heritage which it had inherited and fostered.

12. Rhiw'perrai is located in a distinctively Welsh region, and in view of its historical and cultural background it is evident that the new building proposals are not compatible with its historic environment.

