

Mynydd Epynt



**From Various
Sources**

Abandoned Communities Mynydd Epynt

I WILL NOW TURN TO THE PROCESS OF EVICTION. I want to deal with the way in which the intentions of the War Office were communicated to the local people, the emotional and practical responses of the people, and the way in which protests against the eviction were expressed.

The first indication that Mynydd Epynt would be taken over was provided in an informal manner. On a Monday in mid September 1939 a khaki coloured Hillman Minx visited several farms and the primary school. It was driven by someone described by a male onlooker as a very attractive blond ATS girl, and she was accompanied by an army captain. The captain's task was to explain that the War Office were thinking of taking over the area and he was required to carry out a survey. See Ronald Davies, *Epynt Without People*, Talybont, c 1971.

Memories recorded by Epynt residents suggest that from the beginning the War Office intended to take an authoritarian approach to the process of eviction. Edna Williams was present when the captain visited her home. Her father asked him "What if we cannot find somewhere else to go?", to which the reply was "Then you will be thrown out on the road". There was no attempt to consult the local people on the general principle of eviction or on any aspect of the way in which it would be put into practice.



Left: The site of Cilieni School in 1940

At Cilieni School the captain spoke to the teacher, Mrs Olwen Davies, apparently in front of the pupils. They would not, however, have understood much of what he said as he spoke in English. Mrs Davies was immediately distressed and alarmed, but found herself unable to pass on to the children the information she had received. She endeavoured to complete the last one or two lessons of the day as normally as possible,

leaving it to the parents of the children to break the news when they got home.



The Names of the Headmistress and Pupils at Cilieni School in 1940

There is no evidence that the people of Epynt received any further communication from the War Office until early March 1940. A registered letter was then sent to each property owner stating that vacant possession was required by 30 April. It said that the formal notice of requisition would be coming a few days later, and that an agent would then visit to collect a signed copy of the requisition order and to discuss the question of compensation. No assistance was offered in relation to finding alternative accommodation, in moving possessions, searching for new employment, or in the case of the younger children transferring to another school.

The general response of local people to the visit of the army captain in September 1939 was one of shock. For some time after the captain spoke to one group of farmers there was a stunned silence before anyone could speak. When it sunk in that people might be required to leave their homes there was great distress, especially among older residents. In the interviews recorded by Herbert Hughes many people reported that their parents were heartbroken.

After the initial reactions two things seem to have happened. On the one hand there was a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety about the future. There may have been a hope that the evictions would not in fact go ahead, as early in 1940 some farmers could still be seen with teams of horses ploughing their land. On the other hand there was a failure to mount any

sort of protest against the proposals. There may have been a sense of helplessness, a feeling that in the face of the demands of the War Office no effective resistance was possible.

As a result little or no effective action was taken between September and early March. The arrival of the requisition orders, however, made it clear that the War Office fully intended to proceed. Various interests and organisations were in a position to provide support to the people of Mynydd Epynt, but on the whole their action was half-hearted or directed towards encouraging the residents to accept that they would have to move. The National Farmers Union, for example, were eager to ensure that adequate compensation was paid, not just to the farmers living in the area required by the War Office, but also to others who were entitled to graze their sheep on the common land within the area. However, they seem to have assumed that it was inevitable that the requisitions would occur.

At the beginning of World War II the War Office urgently needed extra land and facilities for training purposes. One particular requirement was for an area at least three miles long that could be used for artillery practice. Mynydd Epynt and a smaller mountain to the west of it, Mynydd Bwlch-y-groes, were selected. The process of acquisition was completed by 30 June 1940, and the area became known as the Sennybridge Training Area, usually abbreviated to SENTA. Sennybridge itself is a small town on the A40 a few miles west of Brecon, and the training area comprises about 12,000 hectares to the north of it.

Until 1940 the area was occupied by a community of farmers and their families. In order to create SENTA 54 homes had to be vacated and 219 people were obliged to leave. At the same time a primary school, a church, and the Drovers Arms inn were closed.

There is evidence that the military authorities had carried out an initial reconnaissance of Mynydd Epynt in 1912. When World War II began it was clear that the area satisfied the criteria used by the War Office for selecting land for training. Although it was home to a community of farmers it was perceived as being sparsely populated, and it did not have a major road running through it. It would be interesting to know whether

other places were considered at the same time and some kind of option appraisal carried out, but I have so far been unable to discover whether this was done. It seems more likely that as the authorities were already aware of Mynydd Epynt and regarded it as suitable for their requirements they quickly went ahead with its acquisition.

A detailed and often moving account of the way of life of people living on Mynydd Epynt has been given by Herbert Hughes.

Herbert Hughes, *An Uprooted Community: A History of Epynt*, Gomer Press, 1998.

Hughes' book was intended to act as a lasting memorial to those who were displaced, and the names of all 219 of them are listed in an appendix. Much of the book is based on interviews with some of the former residents, and it is illustrated with photographs of pupils and staff at Cilieni Primary School, several farmsteads, Babell Chapel and its accounts book, and the Llangamarch Horse Fair. Photographs of residents show people standing outside their homes, having a drink together, rounding up sheep, and, in the case of Mrs Caroline Evans, the landlady of the Drovers Arms, operating a plunging churn.

Some of the interviews transcribed by Herbert Hughes talk about methods of agriculture, and the diversity of ways in which the products of agriculture were used. Wheat and oats were grown. Sheep were reared, and pigs and cattle were kept. The area had for centuries been renowned for its horses. Indeed the name Epynt comes from a Brythonic word meaning the place of the horse.

Brythonic was the Celtic language from which Welsh emerged.

Farmers and their families have a reputation for leading somewhat isolated lives, but there is no doubt that the people of Mynydd Epynt formed a close and cohesive social community. There were everyday informal contacts and the sharing of farm work, and in addition regular markets, the primary school, and the chapel each provided a focus for interaction. On a television programme in 1972 Annie Williams, who lived near Babell

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chapel, described the Plygain, the service that took place early on Christmas morning. She would light the oil lamps and the stove in the chapel at 5 o'clock and then from the window of her home would watch people arriving for the service. Each family would be carrying a stable lamp to help them see the way. Mrs Williams was able to name the farms that each family came from.

A special form of social gathering was the eisteddfod, a series of musical competitions with particular emphasis on choral singing. Eisteddfodau were held in several villages in the area as well as at Babell chapel. To get to them people would walk long distances over the mountains, and it is said that such was the eagerness to take part that they would sometimes continue until two o'clock in the morning.



Ffrwd-wen farmhouse, once the home of the Jones family

Similarly it appears that the local council, the Breconshire County Council, quickly bowed to what they took to be inevitable. It may have been true that the War Office had the authority to take over Mynydd Epynt without consulting the County Council, but even so it is likely that there would have been scope for the Council to make much stronger representations against the proposals.

The local press, both in the Breconshire area and more widely in South

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Wales, failed to offer any real support for the people of Epynt. The Western Mail and the Brecon and Radnor Express were English language newspapers often assumed to be unsympathetic to the needs and culture of Welsh language communities. They reported on a number of relevant meetings, and also on what happened when a deputation went to London to protest to the War Office, an event to which I shall return in a moment. But they did not provide the sort of editorial indignation that might have led to more effective opposition to the evictions.



The Drovers Arms Inn

Welsh language newspapers were much more outspoken. Rev J Dyfnallt Owen referred in Y Tyst on 14 March to the intention to appropriate "one of the most romantic regions of Wales" and invited readers to "consider the odiousness of the crime simply from an economic viewpoint". He continues: "On the one hand the Government blusters about improving the land, about rearing animals, or breeding sheep, and in the same breath a part of the country which produces these essentials is vandalised". And then: "The despoliation means uprooting a part of our nation which has been here for generations. They will be exiled from their lands and homes".

After visiting some of the farmers J Dyfnallt Owen wrote again "We saw tears flowing down the healthy cheeks of the hill farmers as we discussed with them the unholy wrong done to them. We chatted with some whose forebears had lived on the same farm for three hundred to four hundred years. The melodious Breconshire dialect remains like music on their lips. But between the fear they entertain for their future, the lack of clear, strong leadership, and the temptation to strike a bargain in the face of the iron fist of militarism, there is a great danger that Wales will lose a tract of land which is an important defence against the English flood".



Cefnbrynisaf, in its original state the home of the Lewis family

One organisation that expressed its view forcefully was the South Wales Association of the Presbyterian Church, the denomination that administered Babel chapel. At a meeting in Swansea on 3 April it passed a motion deploring "the depopulating of such a vast area, the ruin of its ancient homes, the economic loss to an industrious people and the dispersal of a community which has dwelt there from time immemorial, the closing of its sanctuaries and the inevitable destruction of its distinctive culture". The motion was sent to the Ministry of Agriculture in the form

of a telegram, and it was followed up by a meeting in London between members of the Presbyterian Church and Lord Cobham, Assistant Secretary of State for War. Lord Cobham expressed sympathy but made it clear that it was too late to reverse the decision.



A New Building

The only organisation that mounted a sustained protest was the Committee for the Defence of Welsh Culture, which included representation from the Welsh Nationalist Party, the party which later became Plaid Cymru. Frequent meetings were held, petitions were organised, and members of the Committee worked hard to offer support to the people of Epynt and encourage them to resist the evictions. During the first two weeks in April, for example, J E Jones, General Secretary of the Welsh Nationalist Party, visited all the farms under threat. He wrote that at that time only nine farmers had found alternative accommodation, and "they would have preferred to stay. No one wants to move, not one family". He described visits to three homes where women in their eighties were living. They told him: "If we could only move together to one locality we wouldn't complain so much, but to be thrown out amidst strangers - some families having to live amongst Englishmen even - it is terrible".

At a meeting on 10 March the Committee for the Defence of Welsh Culture reported that they had sent a telegram of protest to the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain. They urged that a deputation should be sent to meet the Prime Minister, or if it could not be received by the Prime Minister,

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the Minister of Agriculture. This was agreed, and it was decided that the deputation should include Members of Parliament, representatives of Breconshire County Council, and representatives of the farmers, as well as senior members of the Committee for the Defence of Welsh Culture.



In the event the deputation was received by Lord Cobham, Assistant Secretary of State for War, near the end of March, in a meeting that lasted about an hour. The deputation seems to have wanted to stress that it supported the general war effort at a time of national crisis, but it argued that the Government's proposals would lead to a major loss of agricultural land and it would be wrong to uproot and disperse a traditional Welsh community. It urged the War Office to go on seeking an alternative site.

Members of the deputation seem to have come away believing that their views and arguments would be given further consideration. However, it is clear that the Government had gone too far down the road towards completing the requisitions, and the plan duly went ahead. The Government had in fact already granted an extension of the deadline, but everyone was required to leave by 1 June. Livestock were to be removed by 30 June as it was intended that live firing on the artillery range would begin on 1 July.

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In June 1940 Iorwerth Peate made several visits to Mynydd Epynt and Mynydd Bwlch-y-groes. On the staff of the National Museum of Wales, he had been asked to carry out a final survey and take photographs. On his last visit near the end of June Peate found "locked doors, unadorned windows with the panes staring vacantly at me, a cat which had been left behind retreating nervously through a hole in the cowshed door, an occasional cow or heifer, which would be collected on a last visit, running confidently towards me on seeing a living being in that deadly silence which they could not understand".



**The remains of Caerllwyn farmhouse, where Griffith and Megan Price and their family lived until 1940.
This photograph was taken by Philip Evans.**

A few people were still in the process of moving. Iorwerth Peate passed the family from Hirllwyn "with their load of furniture on a cart coming through the mountain gate". He met a lady of eighty two who was expecting to leave later that day. "She had dragged an old chair to the furthest end of the yard and was sitting there motionless, gazing towards the mountain with tears streaming down her cheeks". She told Peate to

get back to Cardiff as soon as he could, adding "it is the end of the world here".

Some of the people of Epynt found accommodation nearby. Others had to move further away. A large number of them found only temporary homes at first and had to move again at least once before they began to feel settled. The teacher at Cilieni School, Mrs Olwen Davies, obtained another post at Llanddulas, now known as Tirabad. Rev. William Jones, who had been the "pregethwr" at Babell chapel since 1909, took retirement.

Pregethwr means preacher or minister.

Landowners received payments amounting to the value of their property. They also received compensation for such items as farmyard manure, temporary pasture, and fencing, and they could be paid the equivalent of two years' rent in recognition of their "claim for disturbance". If, however, you were a shepherd with no property of your own you were likely to lose your livelihood and receive no financial compensation.

Some of the residents attempted to maintain contact with Epynt, perhaps hoping that the war might end soon and it might be possible to return. Thomas Morgan from Glandwr used to slip back to his farm and light the fire to keep the house aired. One day he arrived to find his home in ruins. An army captain told him it had been blown up and he was not expected to come back again.

Rhys Price was more fortunate. He would go back to tend the cemetery at the chapel, lay flowers on the graves, and trim the hedges. Travelling by bicycle he would carry a scythe and enough food to last the day. At a later date the army provided transport for him, and he continued to perform his duties until 1985, when he was 82.

Today the graveyard remains, but the chapel has fallen into ruin and has been tidied up. Only the foundations are still there. On the site of the chapel is a plaque bearing a magnificently appropriate quotation, Isaiah chapter 2 verse 4.

I'll leave you to look it up.



I will now give a summary of the functions served by the Sennybridge Training Area since 1940. An account of the various military training uses up to 1990 has been given in a book by Captain R G Church published to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of SENTA.



Simulated church in the FIBUA village

Apart from artillery practice there was anti-tank training, especially after the opening of Anti-Tank Range South in 1977, not far from Blaenegnant-uchaf. There was training in throwing grenades, at first by hand and later using shoulder controlled launchers, the Grenade Ranges being in the vicinity of Llawr-llamarch. There were a number of battle shooting ranges, and again a progression from targets that had to be moved and placed upright by hand to radio controlled targets.



A Mock Grave Yard

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In 1983 a Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Battle Run was opened, not, we are assured, to provide practice in the use of weapons of mass destruction, but to train troops in methods of defending themselves against them. There were assault courses and areas for training in demolition, in particular the Practical Demolition Area just south of Cwm Egnant. During warm weather trainee soldiers were prone to exhaustion and heatstroke, especially if they were wearing a Noddy protective suit and respirator.



A Mock House

Isolated farmhouses were of course of little use for training in urban warfare. At first a small village was constructed for this purpose, comprising a couple of farms and a few purpose built mock dwellings. In the late 1980s, however, the FIBUA was developed, a simulated German town. It lies on a hillside east of the Cilieni valley. It was built during the Cold War, when military planners believed that any close quarters fighting with Soviet forces was most likely to happen in Germany.



Two More Views of The FIB



I have gained information about current training facilities from a fascinating meeting with Charles de Winton, a chartered surveyor based at Sennybridge Camp. As well as talking to me in his office Charles de

Winton was kind enough to provide a guided tour of the training area in his Land Rover.



Maintenance at Disgwylfa

Charles de Winton partially justified the three hours spent touring the range by regarding it as an opportunity to conduct an informal inspection. In a wooded area he observed that the Forestry Commission have fallen behind in their obligation to maintain the road surface, and later he spotted a farmer with tractor and trailer apparently putting down hay for his sheep.

The annual usage of the facilities at SENTA is now 370,000 person training days, with training available on 350 days of the year. The facilities are used not just by trainees in the UK armed forces, but also by service personnel from elsewhere and by private firms such as security companies.



Service of Repentance held by Cymdeithas y Cymod

There is now much less need for artillery practice. Very occasionally, however, when long range firing is taking place the only public road across

the training area, the B4519 from Brecon to Garth, is closed for short periods as there is a danger that live shells might reach it. With that exception all firing of any weapons is directed into the Impact Area, a region in the centre of SENTA that runs for roughly seven kilometres in a south-west to north-east direction. Nowadays tanks are not permitted on the range, but certain other tracked vehicles are still employed. The Royal Air Force are permitted to practice low level flying over the range, and there are opportunities for live firing by ground-attack fighter aircraft and air-dropping zones.



Left: Gyto Prys ap Gwynfor leading the service of repentance

The training area also has non-military uses. 93 sheep owners have grazing rights, several of them descendants of the farmers who departed in 1940. The sheep graze in the summer, returning to their farms outside the range during the winter. They number roughly forty thousand, and farmers are charged £2.50 per head per year for the right to graze them. They are not excluded from the Impact Area, and from time to time they become casualties. I have not been able to ascertain whether these incidents are always accidental. The view is taken that the farmers are aware of the risk, and therefore no compensation is paid when a sheep dies.

No other livestock are permitted in SENTA. In the early years horses used to wander into the area. One was spotted in 1954 and promptly shot.

The Ministry of Defence has two other major objectives at Epynt, namely the conservation of vegetation, bird life, insects, amphibians, and small mammals, and to make a presumption in favour of public access. With regard to conservation, the area contains three Sites of Special Scientific Interest. 173 types of trees and plants have been recorded, there are at least ninety species of birds, and over fifty types of fungus, the most celebrated

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being the wax-cap mushroom. Red squirrels and wild mink have been seen. A conservation centre has been opened at Disgwylfa.

Members of the public can usually drive across SENTA not only on the B4519 but also on a minor road that leaves the A40 just west of Trecastle, crosses Mynydd Bwlch-y-groes close to the main area of forestry, and takes you to the village of Tirabad. This and other roads are also used for rallying. In particular the Network Q Rally of Great Britain, usually the last event in the World Championship, comes this way, and a base is provided here. Owners of other vehicles can seek permission to use parts of the area, but motorbikes and four wheel drive vehicles are not popular as they tend to be driven off the roads and may damage the surface of the ground.

On the whole SENTA officials are happier if you stay on foot. Several walks have been devised, and a lot of work has gone into developing the Epynt Way which will eventually allow the public to walk around the perimeter of the entire area.

If you have time for a walk around SENTA use the excellent guided tour provided on the Discovering Britain website. Or for a lot more photographs of the Training Area, taken by Tarquin Wilton-Jones in August 2010, go to the Caving UK website.



Left: Members of Cymdeithas y Cymod

Now and then staff at SENTA have to deal with complaints from the public. People have been upset by the noise produced by training activities. The loudest protests came during the Foot and Mouth epidemic in 2001, when SENTA was used to incinerate a large

number of cattle. Clouds of dense smoke were seen coming from the pyres, and brown water was detected in local streams.

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From time to time members of Cymdeithas y Cymod visit the Sennybridge Training Area. Cymdeithas y Cymod is the Welsh branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Their aim is to promote peaceful methods of resolving conflict. They go to SENTA to maintain the memory of the people who lived there and to hold a service of repentance for the use of the land for military training. They notify the Ministry of Defence that they intend to go, but do not ask for permission. Their visits begin with a picnic at the Drovers' Arms, and then the group travels to the site of Babell chapel for the service of repentance. They may then take a look at the site of Cilieni school and walk around the FIBUA village.

Go to Mynydd Epynt. Make up your own mind about the place.



More About Mynydd Epynt

Celtic Saints of the Epynt

MYNYDD EPYNT IS A BEAUTIFUL, remote, wind-swept upland area north west of Brecon underscored by the River Usk in the south, and enclosed by the Wye to the east. The high moorland has a steep scarp to the north from which there are spectacular views towards the distant Cambrian Mountains; while to the south the slope are more gentle towards the Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountain, with a number of parallel streams, the Honddu, Yscir Fawr, Yscir Fechan, Bran, and Cilieni, cutting beautiful, sheltered valleys deep into the plateau.



An Epynt landscape

In 1940 much of the Epynt was controversially taken over by the military to form the Sennybridge Training Area (SENTA). It's now the fourth largest military training area in Britain, with 31,000 acres owned by the

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MoD and a further 6,000 acres of forest leased by from the Forestry Commission. When the military took over, 49 farms were forcibly requisitioned by the MoD, displacing a long established, scattered Welsh-speaking community, effectively destroying a way of life that had continued there for many centuries.

Only the road north from Brecon via Lower and Upper Chapel crosses the Epynt in the east. It divides part way, the B4519 heading towards Llangamarch, while the B4520 heads for Builth Wells. These roads are desolate, at each end a cattle grid, a red flag and an abandoned sentry box marking the SENTA boundary.

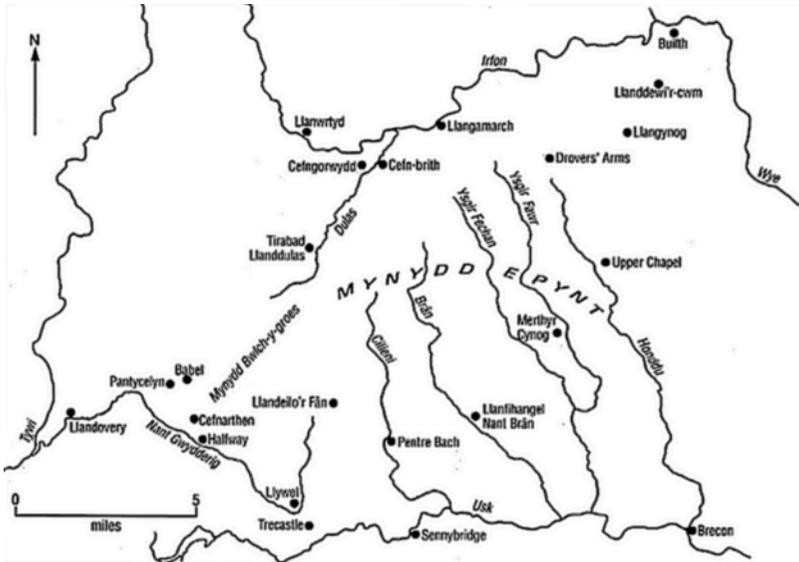


A SENTA sentry box, on the edge of the Epynt, above Llangammarch Wells

The old drover's inns on each of them, one in Cwm Owen and at the other the aptly named Drover's Arms, are both now defunct - the one a private house right on the edge of the artillery range, and the other, high above Llangamarch taken over by the army. One of the old farm houses at Pentre Dolau Honddu has been rebuilt as an Epynt Visitors' Centre as

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a public relations exercise by the army, but I have never seen anyone stop there. The others have long since been demolished. To the west, the army do now normally allow public vehicles to use their own Llywel to Tirabad road along the ridge of Mynydd Bwlch y Groes. Drivers tend to scurry through in response to the 'no stopping' warnings at each end of the range, happy to re-enter the softer civilian landscape beyond it to the south, or the sheltering evergreen forest to the north.



Mynydd Epynt Map

Yet for all the sense of this being a land dispossessed and forbidden, there still lingers in places a sense of significant traditions that have been lost. Here and there in the middle of the endless gorse and bracken, and partly hidden down in the shallow stream-cut valleys are the little clumps of trees and broken down field boundaries that mark the sites of the old farms. Sheep farmers, hitherto kicked off the land during World War Two, now have grazing rights on the land; and there are probably more sheep on the Epynt today than there were before the army took over.

There is also, the occasional ancient cairn or burial mound; and two prehistoric stone circles, one at Ynyshir near the head of the Nant Bran valley, and the other at Banc y Celyn on the eastern edge of the Epynt

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witness to a long history of occupation going back to the Bronze Age and earlier. The very name Epynt may relate to those times, for it means haunt of the horse; and Epona was the name of a Celtic horse deity. Up until relatively recent times the only sensible way of crossing the area was on horseback. In fact, horse breeding was practiced on the Epynt right down to 1940, providing ponies for the collieries of the south as well as for farmers from near and far. But in 1940, horses were completely cleared off the mountain. Today you will still see them in the area but just outside the boundaries of the SENTA range itself.

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Horses on the Epynt

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**Craig-yr-wyddon
where the early
Dissenters of the Epynt
worshipped secretly.**

In spite of its isolation, the Epynt is rich in Christian history, which goes right back to the very early days of the early saints. It's a witness that is also strongly connected with the post-Reformation voices of Dissent which emerged a thousand years after Christianity first arrived in the area.

Notably, the early Welsh martyr John Penry (1559-1593) was born at Cefn-brith near Llangamarch, on the northern edge of the Epynt. He is still revered in the area today, and will shortly be the subject of another of these blogs. The Epynt continued to be a heartland of Dissent in the troubled seventeenth century, when Dissenters from the western part of the

uplands worshipped at Cefnarth, a chapel which still hosts an active though much diminished church; and in times when gathering to worship was illegal, at a cave at nearby Craig-yr-wyddon. The Cefnarth story has already been told in an earlier blog.

A century later, it was in this area that Welsh Methodism initially began to be most strongly felt. The great Methodist leaders Howel Harris and Daniel Rowland first met each other at Defynnog just south of the Usk from the Epynt, forming a hugely influential alliance; while William Williams, Pantycelyn, the great hymn writer who partnered with them came from just a couple of miles west of the Epynt. He used to travel right across the wild moorland on horseback every week, regardless of the weather, to serve as a curate at Llanwrtyd.

It was these mountains that inspired many of his great hymns. The result of decade of revival from the 1730's onwards also resulted in many tiny scattered chapels being established right across the Epynt, most of them Calvinistic Methodist, but with a strong sprinkling of Baptist, and some Congregational, chapels also. It is singularly impressive that such a thinly populated area of only sixty or so square miles should have so many of them - I've counted eighteen so far. Their story will also need to be told in a later blog.

Saint Cadmarch

However, for the moment the focus is on the early Christian witness in the area which came in the 5th and 6th centuries through a number of Celtic saints. Some remain shadowy figures about whom we can only conjecture: Cadmarch and Llywel are such. Others we know a lot more about, and the best known here are Cynog and the important Dyfrig. All these established cells on or at the edge of the Epynt, two of which became very influential, and their stories are worth retelling.

There's also a connection between one of the churches these saints established, namely Llywel, with major moves of the Holy Spirit in both the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which I'll squeeze in somehow.

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Llangamarch has the air of a place stuck in a time warp. It is eerily quiet nowadays, in spite of having a railway station on the very beautiful Shrewsbury to Swansea line. There's one small post-office cum village store, a chapel, and a hotel built in the days when the place aspired to being a spa before it was elbowed out of that game by its near neighbour Llanwrtyd.

Yet once Llangamarch bustled with one of the biggest horse fairs in Wales, when hundreds would come from all over both England and Wales to buy horses, many of which were bred on the Epynt immediately to the south of the small town.



St Cadmarch's Church, Llangamarch

The church looks older than in fact it turns out to be. While it is of very old foundation, the current building dates from the time of the Great War, and was completed in 1916 according to a design by the great English church architect William Douglas Caroe (1857-1938). The tower was added even later, in 1927. In fact, the church remained incomplete for a planned north aisle was never constructed. The modern building

replaced one which was only put up a little over half a century before, a Victorian gothic structure which apparently had little to commend it. The 1850's structure had in its turn replaced one that had become a complete ruin by 1840 as the influence of the chapels in the area steadily grew, fuelled by frequent revivals.

There had in fact been a significant place of worship on the site of Llangamarch church from the very earliest times. A tax document dated 1291 refers to the 'Ecclesia de Langamarth' which cites it as being worth £13 6s 8d - an enormous sum at that time, relatively speaking. It points to the church having been established for a very long time, and to have been very influential.



The old 'gothic' church built in the 1850's

An ancient stone dating from the 9th of 10th century which can now be seen at the apex of the porch of the new church building shows it was in existence long before that, probably from the early medieval period. It depicts a child, with arms extended, a coiled serpent overlaid with a Celtic style cross. Some think this a very old pagan religious carving which was 'Christianised' by the superimposition of the cross. This seems quite possible. A Roman coin hoard found buried in peaty soil near the station in 1871, just opposite the church suggests that there was a

settlement of some kind here at that time, and the church may well have been established on a pagan religious site not long after that time.

The church is dedicated to St Cadmarch, who was supposedly a grandson of Brychan, the legendary King of Brycheiniog. It was Brychan's many children and grandchildren who between them largely Christianised South Wales in the 5th and 6th centuries. It seems that Wales effectively became Christian nation through the witness of one important and influential family.

The earliest ecclesiastical establishment in Llangamarch, probably dating from the sixth century, may well have been a class community. In other words it was bigger than a simple saint's cell, and involved a community of dedicated worshippers who were trained by an abbot. Initially the abbot would presumably have been Cadmarch himself. Just to complicate things, one authority suggest that Cadmarch is simply another version of the name Cynog, though I don't personally find that particularly convincing. Another authority believes that the church was originally dedicated to St Tysilio, as the poet Cynddelw (c. 1155-1200) attributed the church to him in his *Cân Tysilio* (Song to Tysilio). But there is little more that can be said with any certainty about St Cadmarch, though a

local writer had produced an imaginative account of the supposed life of the saint, a copy of which can be bought in the village Post Office.



The Celtic stone above the church door

In the churchyard is the grave of Theophilus Evans, who was the rector of Llangammarch from 1738 to 1763, and a great Welsh prose writer. He was born in 1694 and lived in the farmhouse of Llwyn- Einon in Llangamarch until he died in 1767. He was responsible for the curacies

at Llanwrtyd and Llanddewi Abergwesyn, then attached to the parish; and William Williams, Pantycelyn (1717-1791), the great Welsh Methodist hymn-writer, was his curate in Llanwrtyd and Llanddewi for some years at the start of his ministry. Theophilus Evans was something of a traditionalist, and was suspicious of Methodism. The result was that Williams was refused ordination as a priest, which pushed Pantycelyn more strongly into supporting the work of Daniel Rowland(1713-1790), the great Methodist preacher of Llangeitho. Theophilus Evans' grandson, Theophilus Jones was born in Llangammarch in 1759. He became Deputy Registrar of the Archdeaconry of Brecon, and was the author of an important early history of Breconshire. He too is buried in the churchyard.



Saint Llywel

Mynydd Epynt

If you drive south west out of Llangamarch you will pass through Tirabad, a small village which today consists of mostly council housing built to house forestry workers.

The name of the place suggests a religious foundation, for it means the land of the Abbott. It was formerly known as Llanddulas, and was one of the more important villages on the eastern edge of the Epynt, where it shades into the Mynydd Bwlch y Groes (mountain of the pass of the cross'). It was right on the old drover's route that crossed the Epynt from west to east, and in fact a third drover's inn once stood nearby, the Cross Inn, though it is now just a pile of stones within the SENTA boundary.

Not far from it, and just outside the SENTA area, are the more substantial ruins of another rival tavern, the Spite Inn Farm. One theorist has suggested that the name of this place derives from it having been a 'hospital' (Welsh: 'ysbyty') for pilgrims travelling to the Cistercian abbey at Strata Florida; but this theory has been strongly questioned recently. If it were true that the drovers' road followed the line of an old pilgrim route, it would provide yet another level of Christian significance to the Epynt.



Spite Inn Farm, Tirabad

However, it seems possible that the owners of this farm set up a tavern to spite the owners of the nearby Cross Inn who up to that point had enjoyed a very lucrative monopoly of trade with the drovers passing through. The drover's 'road' in the nineteenth century would, however, barely have been more than a rough passageway through the gorse and bracken of the Epynt, unlike the military road which at one point is even a dual carriageway, as it winds from Tirabad nine miles south to Llywel. Here, another Celtic saint was sharing the gospel with the people of the area in the 6th century.

In 1239 the church at Llywel was described as the 'church of the three saints', known to have been Dewi, Teilo and Llywel. Dewi (David) and Teilo are famous saints both with a wide range of influence with many churches dedicated to them in their memory. The last of the three is much less well known, and quite possibly the saint whose cell once stood on the spot. Llywel was a 6th-century disciple of Dyfrig and Teilo, who is also remembered in the church at Llanllowell Monmouthshire.

Llywel is thought to have founded a church on the banks of the Gwydderig stream, close to the Roman road connecting the vale of Tywi and the Usk valley. The place is referred to as Llan yn Llywel in about 1180 - before the dedications to Dewi and Teilo were added.

The name is also recorded as Luhil in the 12th century, and as Luel in 1291, when it is recorded in the 'Taxatio' to have been worth £14 a year, an enormous amount at that time - even more than Llangamarch, which suggests it was a very important and influential place. Its importance might also be reflected by the size of the round churchyard, which is the biggest in Breconshire. It was in 1203 century that the church passed into the sphere of the bishops of St Davids, and it presumably at that time that it received its threefold dedication.

According to Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), who at one stage was archdeacon of Brecon, the church was burnt down in a Saxon raid, presumably in the late 12th or early 13th century. The present church of St David was constructed towards the end of the 15th century, though the tower may be older. The church was extensively repaired in 1869, with further work being done on the tower in 1877.

Mynydd Epynt

Inside the church is a Latin and ogam-inscribed stone dating from the 5th and 6th centuries which was moved into the church after it was discovered a couple of miles away near the river Usk in 1954. A second stone, the so-called 6th-century Llywel Stone is represented by a plaster replica, the original being in the British Museum. Both of these testify to a Christian witness in the area in very early mediaeval times, and may well be associated with Llywel himself in some way. But we don't know much about him.



Llywel Church

We do know that he was a 5th century saint, and a disciple of Saint Dyfrig and later of Saint Teilo. He was with Teilo for a period in South-west Wales in the court of King Aercol. At one point it is said that Llywel saved the king from being poisoned. When he came to the valley of the Gwydderig stream, Llywel established a cell on its banks, and would have claimed the spot as his own though fasting and prayer for a period of forty days, according to the desert traditions of Martin of Tours. The cell became the focus of a small community which grew up around the original mud and wattle structure he built. In later generations it clearly

Mynydd Epynt

became a place of influence, though to is only a very small village today, overshadowed by the newer community of Trecastle which is the biggest village in the parish of Llywel.



Llywel village and the former Cross Keys Inn

Saint Cynog

Not much remains of the small, isolated parish church in Llangynog, dedicated to Saint Cynog. It is situated just off the road across the Epynt which runs south from Builth Wells; and is right on the edge of the open moorland of the Epynt. All there is now is within a protective circle of tall trees, is a raised circular enclosure with a small, simple altar built of the stones from the ruined building.

The church itself was demolished for safety after it fell into ruin in the late 20th century. There are a few headstones stones remaining beneath the trees The small, scattered community of the area traditionally hold an annual service focussed on the altar on the first Sunday in June, when

the old bell from the church is brought from its present home in nearby Maesmynis.



The Llywel Ogham Stone



Above:the Site of Former Llangynog Church

The church, dedicated to Saint Cynog, was first established in medieval times. It was a small, single- celled structure dating from the 17th century, though the circular enclosure blues its much older origins. It was largely rebuilt in 1882. By the 19th century it was only used infrequently because of the parish's very small and declining population, and was last used for worship before closure in October 1956.

It was deconsecrated in 1963 and it was subsequently demolished. Whether the church was actually established by Cynog himself or simply dedicated to him at a later date is not clear, though given the fact that Cynog became a martyr, and therefore came to have a number of places dedicated to him, the latter is quite likely. However, it is a place that suggests that Cynog had considerable influence in the Epynt area.



The ruins of Llangynog

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St. Cynog

Cynog was eldest son of Brychan Brycheiniog, and therefore an uncle to the Cadmarch who established a cell not many miles away at Llangamarch. His mother was reputedly Benadulved, the daughter of Benadyl, a prince of Powys from near Llanrhaeadr-ym-mochnant whom Brychan seduced while a hostage at the court of her father. Cynog was born in Talgarth about 434 AD.

He is supposed to have represented his father as ruler of Brycheiniog, and the gold torque his father is supposed to have given him may well have been a symbol of the authority he had invested in his son. In 1188, Geraldus Cambrensis wrote that the torc still existed and that he had had seen this relic while travelling through Brycheiniog. He wrote of it:

Moreover I must not be silent concerning the collar which they call St. Canauc's; for it is most like to gold in weight, nature, and colour; it is in four pieces wrought round, joined together artificially, and clefted as it were in the middle, with a dog's head, the teeth standing outward; it is esteemed by the inhabitants so powerful a relic, that no man dares swear falsely when it is laid before him: it bears the marks of some severe blows, as if made with an iron hammer; for a certain man, as it is said, endeavouring to break the collar for the sake of the gold, experienced the divine vengeance, was deprived of his eyesight, and lingered the remainder of his days in darkness.



A Celtic Torc

Mynydd Epynt

After his conversion, he was committed to the care of a holy man named Gastayn, who baptised him. Then, Cynog is supposed to have left his father's court and to have joined a community of religious men living on Y Fan Oleu, a mountain in east of the parish of Merthyr Cynog. The mountain towers over the valley of the Honddu just to the west of what is now Lower Chapel. There Cynog built a small hermitage under a steep rock near the mountain's summit.



Rock Outcrop at the Top of Y Fan Oleu, Merthyr Cynog

The hermits had no water except that which they fetched from the river at the foot of the mountain. One story goes that a spring suddenly emerged from the rocks near the top of the mountain to provide Cynog with water. Some time later Cynog is said to have been murdered. There are two versions of what happened. One account says that he was slain by invading Saxons; another that he was murdered by other hermits jealous of his water supply, and wanting it for themselves. Immediately after his death, the spring is supposed to have dried up. Cynog was buried

Mynydd Epynt

a short distance away in what is now Merthyr Cynog churchyard, the church itself being built upon this significant ancient shrine. Cynog's feast day has traditionally been observed on 7th or 9th October each year. He is chiefly commemorated in Brycheiniog, where Defynnog, Ystradgynlais, Penderyn, Battle, Llangynog, and Merthyr Cynog, are all named after him.



From Y Fan Oleu Looking down on Lower Chapel in Cwm Honddu

The hilltop church of St. Cynog, where the saint was buried, is basically 14th-century structure, though parts reputedly date back to the 12th century. It was partially rebuilt in 1862 and 1866. The building is unusually large given the very small size of the community it serves. It has an undivided nave and chancel and a massive battlemented square tower set on a plinth.

The size and shape of the churchyard at Merthyr Cynog supports the tradition that this was originally a clas church and was of more than local importance. Certainly, it became a place of pilgrimage during the Middle

Mynydd Epynt

Ages probably because the church possessed Cynog's torque or collar, a 'potent relic' which Geraldus Cambrensis described.



St Cynog's, Merthyr Cynog

Saint Dyfrig

Of the four Celtic saints associated with the Epynt area, there is no doubt that Dyfrig is the most important. He was based on the eastern edge of the Epynt, in the village now called Gwenddwr, about five miles north-east of Merthyr Cynog, and close to Erwood on the Wye. It's right at the edge of the Epynt upland area.

Tradition has it that Gwenddwr was founded in the 6th century by Saint Dyfrig, or Dubricius as he is known in Latin, to whom the church is dedicated. He is said to have had a 'seminary named after him on the banks of the Wye in the parish of Gwenddwr'. Interestingly, just a short distance from the church in Gwenddwr is Cwm Nant yr Offeiriad - or valley of the priest's stream - a name which suggests that there a

Mynydd Epynt

significant Christian influence in the area going back into the mists of time, probably initiated by Dyfrig.



Cwm Nant Yr Offeiriad, Gwenddwr, with the Heights of the Epynt behind

The single cell church of St. Dyfrig's, obviously not the original which would have been of wattle and daub, was extensively restored and reopened in 1886 after a fire in 1875, although some elements from the 14th century survive.

There may well have been a stone building which predated that. Two fields facing the church on the north side of Nant Gwenddwr also contain extensive earthworks which are now a scheduled ancient monument. At least ten platforms form a group of house sites indicative of a deserted village settlement. This seems to show that Gwenddwr was very much larger in the medieval period than it is today.



Gwenddwr Church

St. Dyfrig, the Bishop of Ergynig, who died in about 532, was the son of the unmarried Princess Efyreddyl, the daughter of King Peibio Clafrog ('the Leprous') of Ergyng. The King was furious when he discovered his daughter was pregnant, some say because he was the father of her child, and he tried to destroy her by casting her into the River. He failed and some months later, Dyfrig was born at Chilstone (Child's Stone) in the parish of Madley (Herefordshire)

It is said that when the baby Dyfrig kissed his grandfather, he cured him of his leprosy and that the King Peibio quickly grew to love him, in spite of his illegitimacy. He gave Dyfrig the whole area around Madley called Ynys Efrddyl. Here, Dyfrig, who became a Christian at a very early age due to his father's influence, founded a monastery at Henllan (Hentland) where he entered the religious life. After seven years, he began another establishment at Moccas and, at these two places, he became the discipler

Mynydd Epynt

of many saints, including Teilo, Samson, Ufelfyw, Merchwyn, Elwredd, Gwnwyn, Cynwal, Arthfoddw, Cynnwr, Arwystl, Inabwy, Cynfran, Gwrfan, Elhaern, Iddneu, Gwrddogwy, Gwernabwy, Ieuan, Aeddau and Cynfarch - a singularly impressive list of disciples. Dyfrig ultimately became Bishop of Ergyng, and then Bishop of the whole of Glywysing & Gwent. Later, he was supposedly, raised to be Archbishop of Wales by St. Germanus, with his base at Caerleon. In this role, he is thought to have consecrated St. Deiniol as Bishop of Bangor Fawr, and to have crowned the High King Arthur at Caer Fudi (possibly either Silchester or Woodchester).



Dyfrig

Dyfrig was a great friend of St. Illtud and supported him in the foundation of Llanilltud Fawr Abbey (Llantwit Major) which he often visited. He would always spend lent nearby on Ynys Byr (Caldy Island) and it was there that he consecrated St. Samson as Bishop of Dol in 521. He also liked to visit St Cadog at Llancarfan and had a small cell built a mile away where the Fynnon Ddyfrig can still be found.

n AD 545, Archbishop Dyfrig attended the Synod of Llandewi Brefi in order to condemn the Pelagian Heresy and, with St. Deiniol, persuaded St Dewi to attend and to speak. Dewi preached so eloquently that Dyfrig resigned his Archiepiscopate in Dewi's favour. Dewi moved the Archiepiscopal See to Mynyw (St. Davids) while Dyfrig retired to the Abbey on Ynys Enlli (Bardsey). He had not been there very long before he died on 14th November, and was buried within the confines of the island church. His resting place became a site of pilgrimage for many. Six hundred years later, his body was transferred to Llandaff Cathedral in 1120 in order to attract influence to that place. His shrine can still be seen there today, just a mile or so up the road from where I now live.



Dyfrig's tomb, Llandaf

Mynydd Epynt



Above 2 Photos - A Last Look at Mynydd Epynt



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