

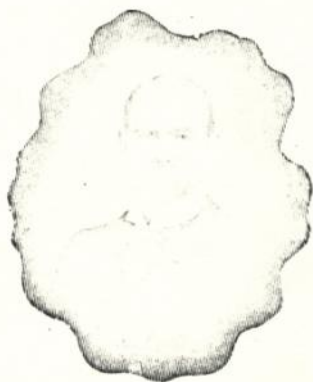
History of
Castell - y - Mynach

And surrounding district of
CREIGIAU, near Pentyrch.

Prize Essay by W. M. MORRIS.

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PREFACE.

It is only necessary to explain that the publication of this Essay in printed form was brought about by the numerous applications received from interested visitors and friends who desired a copy of the same, and my inability to meet their demands in manuscript.

The information herein was chiefly contained in the Prize Essay on "Castell-y-Mynach," given at the First Annual Eisteddfod held at Creigiau on September 19th, 1901.

HISTORY OF CASTELL-Y-MYNACH.

CASTELL-Y-MYNACH is situated immediately on the West side of the Barry Railway, and within five minutes' walk of Creigiau Station, abutting the main road from Llanilterne to Llantwit Vardre, and notwithstanding the many centuries now passed away since its connection with any religious fraternity, it still bears numerous traces of its ancient importance, and is full of quaint reminiscences of the past.

The surroundings abound in tradition, legend and historical associations, yet comparatively nothing can be found recorded in the way of reliable information earlier than the 16th Century. Even since then the authentic history obtainable is very meagre, neither folk lore or manuscript of any kind can lead us to anything definite.

According to the "Topographical Dictionary" published in 1843 by Sam Lewis on Page 326, Castell-y-Mynach, or "The Monk's Castle," is described as "an old Mansion in the Parish of Pentyreh belonging to Lord Dynevor, and formerly used for religious purposes, but nothing is known of its history."

This is not very encouraging for an Essay, so we have nothing to do but search further and try to find some other source of information.

At the present moment it is an interesting specimen of a Welsh Farmhouse, and may be easily found as the name is printed in modern style on the Gateway at Entrance, although the house itself, with its ancient associations, is hidden away amongst a profusion of foliage with some exceptionally old and stately Elm and Sycamore trees to form a slight avenue down the approach.

The road now deviates slightly into farmyard, but originally formed a straight course right through a fine Archway into the Courtyard of considerable area,

containing at that time a beautiful aviary and a sparkling fountain. A spring now gushes forth where the fountain once stood. The large green paddock at present surrounded by a high wall has been known for years as "Y Cwrt Glas," or The Green Court. It was no doubt originally covered by some portions of the old castle. There are no doubt at present, subterranean passages and dingy dungeons underneath this part, as when a horse is trotted or any heavy beast allowed to pass over, there is vibration and hollow sound about the place, which confirms this theory.

The greater portion of the old buildings has been destroyed, and a large quantity of limestone was burnt in a kiln near by, and the lime used to cultivate the land, but to all lovers of the Romantic, to the Archæologist and Antiquarian, such sacrilege and vandalism as the destruction of this ancient Old Castle is greatly to be regretted. At present we find all the sheds and outhouses ranged on the right side, whilst on the left is the house, including what remains of the structure which represented this Mediaeval Castle. Some of the walls and partitions of the ancient

stronghold being incorporated in the present building.

What is now used as a stable was at one time a Cider Mill, and the Millstone is there now buried in the ground. Behind was an extensive Orchard, where in addition to Apples and Pears, Walnuts and Chesnuts once grew in abundance. Some of the Walnut Trees, which were of huge dimensions and fruitful to the last, have been removed to make room for new buildings.

Perhaps I may here touch upon the words Monk's Castle, or Monastery, which is derived from the Greek "Monachos," solitary or alone. It was the house of a community who lived rather as hermits, or pursued an ideal life of spiritual perfection above the common, in middle ages. They divided their time between meditation on heavenly things, prayer, study of Scriptures, writing, and manual labour; but were seriously interfered with by the Reformation in the 16th Century, and again by the French Revolution in the 18th Century.

A Monk is a man who retires from the ordinary

temporal concerns of the world, and devotes himself entirely to religion.

Christianity holds all God's Creation to be pure, while urging man to rise by self-denial and self-sacrifice to a closer resemblance of Christ. At the present time in the English speaking world a deeper sense of civil and religious liberty encourages the pursuit of self sanctification and devotion to the good of others, and respects the right of individual conscience to seek and follow what is thought to be the better way.

These Monasteries were distributed over various parts of the country ; and this Castell-y-Mynach must have existed close upon a thousand years ago, at any rate long before the Reformation and the time of Cromwell.

There appears to be some connection with Royalty at Castell-y-Mynach, as at present in the large reception room, which, bye the bye, is considered to be the finest room for miles around, may be seen the King's Coat of Arms (anterior to the reign of Queen

Anne), emblazoned on the wall, with the two latin Mottoes, which being translated, mean : " Evil unto they who evil thinketh," and " God on my right." This Royal Coat of Arms is assigned to the period named above owing to the presence thereon of the Fleur de Lys of France, which Emblem was retained by the Kings of England until Queen Anne's time, when it was removed as being considered an anomaly.

There is also on the opposite side of this room a Royal Stag's Head as a fixture on the wall with a fine pair of Antlers, said to be off one of the Royal Stags from Windsor Park.

Again, we find over the massive stone Mantel, carved upon the wall of this reception room, Lord Dynevor's Coat of Arms. There were three ravens attached to this at first, but one appears to have been removed or broken off at present. The motto or inscription on this design is : " If God is with you, who can be against you."

The Castell-y-Mynach estate is an inheritance from the Dynevor family, and is now in the possession of

E. Merlin George Rice Wingfield, Esq., son of the late Edward Wingfield, Esq., of Barrington Park, near Cheltenham, whose mother was daughter of Lord Dynevor.

The house was the residence of the Mathew family, scions of the lordly house of Llandaff, of which there were eight generations in succession, and the marriage connections of these became associated with all the leading County families, including the Herberts of Cogan Pill, Raglans of Llysworney, and Llewellyns of Rhydlavar. The Mathews were in their day men of importance in state and municipal affairs.

During the Civil War, Charles the fugitive King is believed to have found shelter at Castell-y-Mynach, ere he was finally captured in the wilds of Radnorshire.

It was, probably, as a reward for the loyalty and devotion of the Mathews family that the right was conferred upon them to erect the Royal Arms upon the walls of their domain.

A favourite motto at Castell-y-Mynach was : " Heb Dduw, heb ddim."

Thomas Mathew was Sheriff of London in 1613, and twice Lord Mayor. The initials of his name are still inscribed upon the keystone of an arched barn door, T.M.Kt., and the date 1616. In this building was probably housed the noble horses which figured in the grand Lord Mayor procession at this time. His son, who was also a Thomas Mathew, was Sheriff of London in 1668, and the records about this date refer to the name of the place as "Castell-y-Mynarch."

Wm. Aubrey, Rector of Pendoylan, married Jane, daughter of Humphrey Mathew, who had previously married one of the daughters of Sir Lewis Morgan, Rhiwperra, and lived at Castell-y-Mynach. Another connection by marriage with the County family is recorded by the following: "Christopher Turberville, of Penllyne, married Catherine, daughter of Robert Mathew, Castell-y-Mynach, who had married Alice Thomas, the heiress of Pantycorred." This latter marriage accounts for the two estates becoming merged into one, and it has remained so ever since.

One of the Mathews family was commonly known as "Matho Dew," and was rather a terror in the

neighbourhood, as he would take anything he fancied from any of the local farmers. He was particularly fond of boasting about his cash, and used to frequently state that he had enough Golden Guineas in the house to reach from Castell-y-Mynach to Pentyrch in one straight line.

The legend goes that a Shoemaker lived at Efail-y-Castell at that time, and he took into his head to punish the tyrant "Matho Dew," so he placed a Cobbler's Awl up through the cushion on a seat upon which "Matho" usually reclined when he entered Efail-y-Castell. The result was, sitting on the Awl caused his death. Another story relates that it was a domestic who committed this treachery upon "Matho Dew." However, the antique seat or bench is to this day preserved in the Chapel at Castell-y-Mynach, and is pointed to as the seat upon which he met his death.

The Mathews family appear to be the first authentic owners of which we have any record, and their name terminated, as well as their occupation of Castell-y-Mynach, when Cecil the heiress married Charles

Talbot who was created Baron Talbot of Hensol, and he became Lord Chancellor in 1732. His wife Cecil died in 1737. His son William was made Earl Talbot of Hensol in 1761, and afterwards Baron Dynevor in 1780 through marrying the heiress of Lord Dynevor of Carmarthen, and he died in 1782. It then passed into the present owners, the Wingfields, through other marriage relations.

The numerous branches of this important family of Mathews are fully treated upon in the Genealogies of Glamorganshire by the late Godfrey Clark, Esq., of Talygarn.

I shall now endeavour to give a little information concerning the upper rooms at Castelly Mynach. Ascending a winding staircase from the aforesaid large reception room, we enter through a low doorway (with a rather peculiar wood barrier to secure the door when necessary) into an ecclesiastical looking room which is said to have been the chapel where the monks worshipped. The carved woodwork in the roof still testify to the sacred use made of this room, and

some of the windows are decidedly ancient in style. Outside on the landing an old disused staircase, now walled up, points to a loftier building as well, in the olden times, and some old carved windows with prison-like iron bars in the long corridor betray its ancient origin. One of the bedrooms leading from this corridor is all panelled out, wainscotted and corniced, with the remains of a very old fire-grate, with white tiles set to fill up between the grate and the mantel. This wainscotted room in its original glory must have been a palatial and imposing chamber. It is said this was the chamber set aside for Lord Dynevor when paying his periodical visits to his estate in the neighbourhood. Leading off from this room is also a dressing room, which is at present in a good state of preservation, the entire side emblazoned with a very fine decoration or embellishment, and the date of which is clearly shown to be 1602, inscribed near the ceiling in one corner, together with the following quaint couplet in Old English style, viz. :—

“ The world is vain and all therein,
And man is vain because of sin.”

It is a unique specimen of mythical decoration, with profuse combinations of strange-looking leaves and creepers intermingled with dragons, and without the least regard for uniformity or design. Three hundred years have passed, and yet this work of an unknown and long forgotten hand remains to witness the truth of the couplet mentioned above, which was inscribed in the year before Queen Bess parted this life. One of the bedrooms opening on this corridor was until recently windowless, and had for many years therefore been cold and beyond the reach of the sun's rays. Modern requirements demand more light, and the various alterations from time to time tend to break up its antique appearance.

This Essay contains all there is known concerning Castell-y-Mynach of a trustworthy nature. The place abounds in legendary tales of ghosts, ghouls, and hobgoblins; of massacres by Roundhead soldiers; love, tragedy, and romance—but upon which very little reliance can be placed. It has been said, but with no possibility of truth, that subterranean passages existed at one time between Castell-y-Mynach and Castell

Coch, at Taff's Well. That it was a place of importance and in existence long before the 16th century there is not the slightest doubt, as Monasticism held sway long before this time.

That the Castle passed through the usual vicissitudes common to the Middle Ages goes without saying, but nevertheless there is no record of even a paltry skirmish—let alone an exciting skirmish of any kind—as having taken place within its precincts.

The first tenant farmer who occupied the Castle appears to be a Mr. Davies, who lived there from 1726 to 1768, and eventually removed to Maesmawr Farm, Croesfaen. He was father of the Mr. Davies who conferred a perpetual annuity upon the Wesleyan Churches of Llantrissant and Llancarvan, which endowment exists at the present day.

After Mr. Davies came Mr. William John, who held a 21 years lease upon the farm at £80 per annum, and the farm was then some 220 acres in extent, but since the introduction of railways in the neighbour-

hood some of the best land has been taken away, and now only about 200 acres remain. Yet the rent has since been maintained at about £200 per annum, although it was held by the Johns family for five generations, down to the year 1888, when it was taken by Mr. Cook. The farm is partly in three parishes, 20 acres being in Peterston-super-Ely, 16 acres in Llanilterne, and the remainder in the parish of Pentyrch.

At one time this castle, or at least some buildings very closely associated with this particular spot, appears to have been known as Creigiau Castle, as Leyland in his itinerary refers to it in the following terms :—

“ There is a place 2 miles from Llantrissant caullid Crege Castelle on the top of an hille wher some tokens of buildings remayne.”

We also find in the Genealogies of Glamorgan two parties referred to as—

Rees Price of Crigau and Henry Powell of Crigau.

Until the opening up of the railways the Vale of Glamorgan, and particularly the district of Creigiau, had been comparatively unknown, yet few places can have more interest for tourists and antiquarians than this. It is one of the healthiest localities in the county, and the mean temperature is quite equal to any spot in the South of England. There is a considerably less rainfall, and therefore a drier atmosphere than the average in other parts of Glamorgan.

In a long article, published July, 1901, in the "South Wales Echo," the Editor stated :—"There is a fashion of holiday resorts, and just as Penmaenmawr came into prominence after Mr. Gladstone stayed there, and Llandudno after Mr. John Bright had sung its praises, so CREIGIAU, on the Barry Railway, is unanimously rising into high favour. Everyone who goes to those beautiful slopes below Pentyrch comes away singing its praises."

The number of parties, picnics, outings and schools who visit the district during the summer are increasing every year, as the Barry Railway offer special facilities

and reduced fares for parties over ten, by any train either from Porth, Pontypridd, or Cardiff. Visitors interested in exploring the neighbourhood will find that the whole of the Creigiau district contains numerous evidences of its close connection with Druidical associations, as well as Monasteries. The well-marked Cromlech, near Caeryrfa, standing upon two upright slabs of stone, as well as the Druidical mound or temple near Tyr-Ysgol, and the site of the circular Druidical houses at Caertwr may especially be named. Another ancient monastery may be traced, called Galti-Cawdraf or Llangawdraf, about a mile south of Llantrissant, known in ecclesiastical records as St. Cawdray or St. Cawdraf, who was the son of Caradoc Ffraichfas, about the sixth century. The neighbourhood of Rhiwsaeson will also be found very pretty and interesting. Those requiring mountain scenery will be well repaid by a climb up the Garth Mountain, *via* Pentyrch, where the finest view of the Bristol Channel may be enjoyed, and a delightful sea breeze from across The Vale may be obtained. An excellent train service is given on the Barry Railway,

enabling visitors to spend a pleasant afternoon, if only a few hours can be spared.

The Waterworks for the district have now been completed, and there is a plentiful supply of good water available for baths and domestic purposes and every facility for new building operations.



NOTE.—Since the foregoing was written the winding staircase at Castell-y-Mynach has been removed, and other internal arrangements altered and modern fittings substituted.

There is, however, sufficient remaining to make the visit an interesting one.

LOCAL INFORMATION.

Creigiau is in the Llandaff and Dinas Powis District Council area, and within the Parish of Pentyrch, "Cardiff Union."

All Postal arrangements are under the Cardiff Head Office, and worked from the Pentyrch Post Office.

Postal delivery at Creigiau 8 a.m. daily.

Postal collections from Wall-box near the Creigiau Hotel at 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. daily.

There are no deliveries or collections of letters on Sundays.

Letters should be addressed, Creigiau, Pentyrch.

Telegrams also should be " "

All Railway deliveries should be addressed, Creigiau Station, Barry Railway.

E. JENKINS,

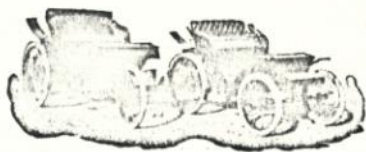
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