

BRETHYN CARTRE
(with thanks to the BBC)
(Translated from the Welsh by Don Llewellyn)

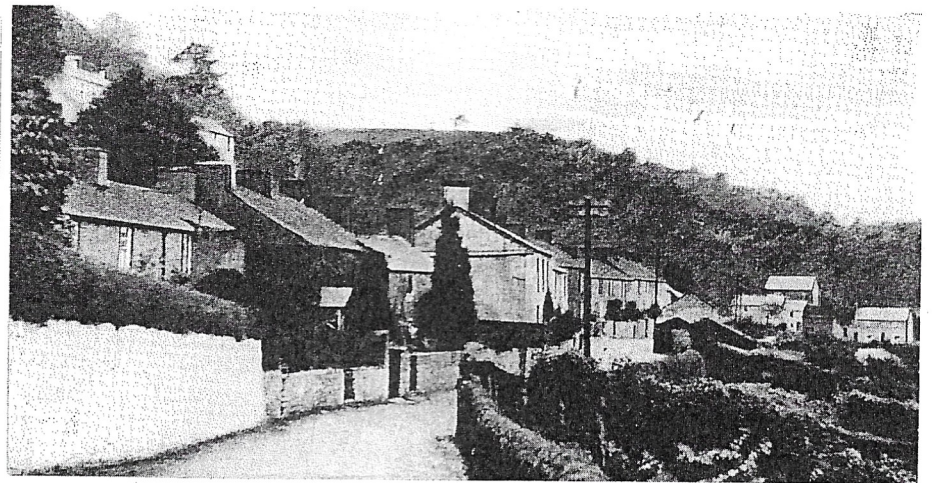
On Friday, April 27 1951, a half-hour Welsh language programme (from which the following has been extracted), was broadcast on the BBC radio service, featuring some Gwaelod y Garth inhabitants talking about their village.

The contributors: John Phillips of Tynewydd,
Phil Phillips (John's solicitor son, an established actor on the wireless)
Ben Rees, one of the 'pillars' of the community (deacon, sportsman, singer)
Ben Howell, a colourful Gwaelod character.
T.W. Thomas, deacon and Eisteddfod official.
T.J. Morgan, Professor of History and literature
Y Parch Gwilym Morris, the Minister of Bethlehem and an Eisteddfod winning poet
John Davies (Shoni Caerwal) of Pentyrch (unrecorded contribution)

Announcer: This is the Welsh Home Service presenting to you tonight, a programme of 'Brethyn Cartref' (*home-spun material*).

The company sing:

Ar yr aelwyd mae'r alawon,
Ar yr aelwyd mae cyfeillion
Wedi gwaith y dydd i orffen
Tan y lwfer wrth y fanwen
Hwyllog lan, awen lon
Awen lon, hwyllog lan
Fe gawn nyddu Brethyn Cartref
Yma'n gwmni wrth y tan.



(The verse defines the purpose of a 'Brethyn Cartref' as an opportunity for friends to gather around the hearth once the day's work is over, to celebrate the muse with eloquence, merriment and companionship ... Ed.)

Announcer Some of the bards and story-tellers of Gwaelod y Garth in Glamorgan have come together tonight, people who can talk about the Mari Lwyd in the area, about the dramatist R.G. Berry, and a host of other things. But there, it is for them to weave the cloth, not me; and now, to keep some sort of order on the proceedings, is someone very well-known to listeners to the radio, - a native of Gwaelod y Garth too, - Phil Phillips.

Phil Phillips We have an opportunity tonight to talk a little about the old days and the old characters. I'm sure Thomas William Thomas, you would have enough stories to keep us here through the night if it were needed - and so have you Benny Rees. You were the district's 'Levi' weren't you, that is, the Rates Collector - you have amusing stories I'm sure.

Ben Rees Phil, *machan i* ('my boy'). I could keep you going through two nights ... I remember about one character who lived on the side of the mountain here when ...

Phil Phillips Half a minute now Ben Rees. You will get your chance later. I wanted to say that the majority of us here were born-and-bred in Gwaelod y Garth - but we have one or two who are 'Dynion Dwad' (*men who have come here from elsewhere - 'immigrants' for the want of a better word - except that these had come only from Aberdare and Swansea! ... Ed.*) Let's hear what they have to say about the place.

The company Hear, hear!

Phil Phillips Now then Gwilym Morris, Minister of Bethlehem Chapel. It's some four years since you came here. What is your opinion? Tell us the truth.

T.W. Thomas What else could he say but that it is a little paradise here!

Gwilym Morris I must agree with you. When I go away on some Sundays (*audible taunts from company*) I am sure to have a question to answer, that is, "Where is Gwaelod y Garth? and what is Gwaelod y Garth like?" Then I tend to think that locating the village is more difficult than describing it. What I say is this: "as you proceed along the main road from Cardiff to Pontypridd, you come to Taff's Well. When you are in the middle of that village, look to your left across the river Taff which flows nearby and in the distance you will see the mountain rising about a thousand feet. That is the Garth. You will see that whereas the top of the ridge is smooth above its verdant slopes, the base of the hill is completely covered by a thick growth of trees. Mostly hidden behind those woods is the little village it would be a sin to call anything else but Gwaelod y Garth. It has its back on a mountain, and its feet in a river!"

Phil Phillips What about you T.J. Morgan, what do you think of it? You have been living here long enough now to be called 'one of us'! Have you also been charmed by the beauty of the area?

T.J. Morgan Oh yes, indeed. But I would like to hear a little of the history of the village. Is there much of a history - that is, ancient history?

Phil Phillips

Ben Howell, you are the one to enlighten us with regard to Gwaelod's history.

Ben Howell Well, of course, Gwaelod y Garth itself was an industrial village, therefore its history doesn't go back much further than a hundred and fifty years or so, but the district it lies in is rich in ancient history. For instance we have traces of early man in the cave at Garth Fach (Lesser Garth) and items have been discovered throughout the area belonging to all the ages of history. Pentyrch itself of course, with its ancient origins came into real prominence during the Norman period, when it was a manor of one of the Lords of Glamorgan. Lying as it did on the border between the Vale (held by the invader) and the uplands (in the hands of the native lords), it had a very strategic position between the two factions. It was a very turbulent period around here.

T. J. Morgan That is why there are so many castles of course

Ben Howell Indeed. That is the significance of the castles of Cardiff and Caerphilly. They were major fortresses built by the Normans to guard their flatlands against incursions from the Welsh hill-men. Prince Llywelyn rose up against the Norman Lords and caused great damage to them in these parts. One thing he did was to burn the Pentyrch Water Mill (*I wonder where that was ... Ed.*)

T.W. Thomas What about industry in the area Ben?

Ben Howell Well there's the Ironworks. Did you know that it commenced in the time of Elizabeth the First? It was at that time that the owner of the works (of the Mathew family) had to be prevented by a Privy Council order to refrain from making cannons to sell to the Spanish. By the time of the Industrial Revolution there was a great variety of work going on here, with several coal levels and a major iron-ore mine.

John Phillips The Industrial revolution, you say. Willie Charles Thomas should be here now (*chorus of yes, yes from the company*). He is the authority on that subject.

Ben Howell You are right. It's important to remember, that when those workings started here, that is when the village as we know it came into being. Before that it was a wooded area with just a few scattered cottages. The first villagers were country folk who had come to work in the coal levels.

Phil Phillips And English people came here too didn't they?

Company Oh yes, yes.

Ben Howell Yes, Englishmen from Somerset mostly. And do you know what happened? - it was necessary for them to learn Welsh.

Gwilym Morris That was one of the things which surprised me when I came here four years ago. Talking to the late Tom Castle for instance. A thorough Englishman, and speaking Welsh completely naturally and without any fuss.

T.W. Thomas But the industry didn't last all that long here did it Ben?

Ben Howell No. After the levels finished the workers had to travel from here to the Rhondda pits to earn their living. And at the start there was no early morning train so they had to go away for a week, leaving on Sunday night and returning the following Saturday afternoon. They would take enough food with them to last the week.

T.J. Morgan But things improved?

Ben Howell Oh yes, the 'Mail' train started and that got them there early enough every day to start the shift on time.

Phil Phillips You travelled yourself on that train Benny Rees.

Ben Rees Oh yes, for years. Leaving the house at five in the morning and arriving home at half past six in the evening.

John Phillips Well, that's how it was. Arriving home with just enough time to bath and have a meal before going to the Prayer Meeting on Mondays and the Fellowship on Thursday. Then on Friday night it was 'Penny Readings. They were all colliers here at that time - up until the Great Depression about twenty years ago. Today of course there are only two or three colliers living here and their children work in a factory, or at an office, or have other callings.

T.W. Thomas Yes, but mind you, in those old days Gwaelod y Garth was a proud community. Do you remember one custom they had here? Before the Big Meetings on Whitsun Sunday and the Good Friday Cymanfa the old people would whitewash the walls in front of their houses until the village was white from one end to the other.

Phil Phillips But there's another custom which remains today isn't there?

T.W. Thomas What's that Phil?

Phil Phillips Well Gwaelod y Garth men still take umbrellas with them everywhere!

T.W. Thomas Oh, yes. But one old custom which was very popular in these parts has completely disappeared - the Gwylnos. I am not saying I yearn for its return mind, but I remember being in three of them. You have a story about one of them don't you Benny Rees?

Ben Rees Oh yes - old Ropart y Crydd (cobbler). An extremely tall man - about six feet six. One of the members at Penuel Pentyrch had died and as he was the senior deacon he was present at the Cwrdd Gwylnos. The cottage was very low and when Ropart rose to sing, his head and shoulders were sticking up through a hole in the ceiling - so he was singing upstairs and the congregation were singing downstairs!

Gwilym Morris But what about the Mari Lwyd. John Davies of Pentyrch, give us some of the history of it. You have been going around with it yourself of course.

At this point in the broadcast, John Davies (Shoni Caerwal), after answering questions about the origins of the custom and relating some of his own experiences, sings a series of verses to the old haunting Mari Lwyd tune. ... Ed.

Gwilym Morris Thank you John. Now then Tomos William Tomos, you know a lot about the local farms and cottages.

T.W. Thomas Well did you know this. Although the Lan farm, Ynysgau, Tynydarren, Ty Isha and the Getrys are actually in the parish of Llantwit Faerdre, they have always been considered locally to belong to Gwaelod y Garth village.

T. J. Morgan Is there a story about any of the inhabitants of those places?

T.W. Thomas Oh yes, take the Lan farm for instance. It was there that old Sion Philip the ancestor of the local 'Philipiaid' lived with his wife Deborah after farming at Ystradyfodwg, Rhondda. Sion was the father of the 'Iforiaeth' movement (The Ivorites) in the district and great was the praise he received at the Eisteddfod held by that society at the Colliers Arms in 1858. Another character was Tomos Tomos of the Ffigys. A former member of the Militia, he was a bachelor who lived alone. I used to carry his dinner to him every Sunday for years and although he never attended chapel, he read his bible every Sunday morning regularly. I heard hm many times cursing the soldiers whilst reading the account of the Crucifixion.

John Phillips You have a good story about a funeral of some time ago Twm don't you?

T.W. Thomas Oh yes. To our Parish Church up in Pentyrch we go for most funerals. I like the story of old Mari Lavendar who had a pauper's funeral, but through the kindness of a neighbour, her coffin was varnished the night before the burial. As the varnish had not fully dried overnight you can imagine what effect this had on the 'best clothes' of the four men chosen to bear the coffin. When Gwilym turned up from Lan farm with his horse and cart half way up Heol Goch (the long hill) it was decided to relieve the four men of their burden by transporting it the rest of the way by means of the cart. Gwilym also became tired so he ascended to the cart and sat on a corner of the coffin. By the time they arrived at the churchyard, Gwilym was stuck soundly to the coffin and it was necessary for old Giti Griffith the sexton to bring a pair of scissors to cut away a portion of his trousers in order to release him. So one large chunk of Gwilym's trousers went into the grave with Mari!

T.J. Morgan What about the poets and musicians of yesteryear. Were there many here?

T.W. Thomas Well there were many, but the ones I used to like hearing about were the eccentric ones - such as the one known as 'Ehedydd y Mynydd' (The Skylark). He used to think that he was better at composing verses when he was drunk. He was wrong of course. This is what he wrote when Shenad and Sion lost a sheep:

Ehedydd y Mynydd a 'hedodd i'r Lan
I whilio am ddafad i Shenad a John.
Ehedydd y Mynydd a 'hedodd yn uwch
A ffindiodd y ddafad yn pori ar gaeau'r Garth Fach

(The Skylark flew to the Lan to search for John and Jane's sheep and then went higher still and found the sheep grazing on the fields of Garth Fach)
(Echoes of Mcgonagil? ... Ed)

Another!

Mynydd y Garth a'i wallt yn wyn
A'i gyfoeth sy o retyn
A hwnnw'n dda am bob dyn tlawd
I ddoti dan y mochyn

(The Garth Mountain with its hair of white has a richness of bracken which is a blessing for every poor man to put under his pig.)

Phil Phillips What about another story Tomos?

T.W.Thomas Alright. Sian and Mari lived next door to each other. Mari was not noted for keeping her house or herself very clean. Sian went in one morning and saw Mari with dirty arms kneading bread dough. "Well well Mari" said Sian "Why don't you wash before doing that?" "Twt twt" answered Mari "it's alright - brown bread it is".

T.J. Morgan Then what about the music side. You Benny Rees have been with the choir in the village here throughout your life. Can you remember who conducted you first at Salem?

Ben Rees Well John Jones 'Satan Bach' was the first that I remember.

T.J. Morgan Why was he called Little Devil?

Ben Rees Well 'Big Devil' he should have been called! I never saw anyone more mischievous than him. He was doing some barbering in the village on week nights and Saturday evening. If there was a funeral and the Colliers wanted to finish early, Satan Bach would go with his shaving tools up there with mischief in mind. Sometimes he would shave only one side of a man's face and refuse to do the other side!

T.W. Thomas But there were other musicians in the village weren't there.

Ben Rees. Oh yes, take Thomas Treharne - now he was with you at Bethlehem. He was a man with a wild temper. I recall my uncle Sam saying how Tom would try to beak into English to make a point. Once when the choir was failing to please him he shouted loudly: "Ichi'n sgrechan fel lot o gatha! (you are screeching like cats). Fe fydd rhaid ichi gel single practis altogether!"

T.W. Thomas Who else do you remember from far back?

Ben Rees Well what about William o'r Bryn? He was quite a musician. Also Jacob Davies lived here - and Clara Novello's father and her sister Dora. Dora was a member with us at Salem

John Phillips About twenty five years ago our village was well-known throughout South Wales for two very good reasons: firstly, the brilliant preacher and literary man the Rev R.G. Berry and secondly the Dramatic Society.

Ben Howell You, uncle John Phillips, were part of that group weren't you.

John Phillips Yes and of course it was a Welsh Drama company. We were proud to have won almost every competition we entered.

Gwilym Morris Did you compete in the National Eisteddfod?

John Phillips Oh yes. We took part in the first ever Drama Competition at the National. It was at Bangor. The Caernarfon Company were there performing "Beddau'r Proffwyd" by Professor W.J. Gruffydd and we were doing R.G. Berry's "Asgre Lan". It was an unforgettable battle in a packed theatre in front of an enthusiastic audience. We came second but it was a huge achievement for a company from a tiny community like Gwaelod y Garth to have reached the final stage.

Gwilym Morris How was the Drama movement accepted in Gwaelod y Garth in those days?

John Phillips Oh there was tremendous opposition at the beginning to plays being performed in the chapel vestry. I remember one night, my uncle, Joseph Millward, senior deacon at the time, coming to the vestry and seeing the curtains across the staging. "Theatre!" he said, scornfully. "No, no," said Evan Watkins (who was a bit of a wag), there's a big difference between what we are doing here and a 'theatre'. For a start, in a theatre, when the drama begins, the curtains rise from the bottom to the top. Here, they open to the right and to the left! Oh yes, a BIG difference!" That's an example of the old prejudice that used to be .. mind you, not entirely without reason.

Company: We agree, we agree.

Phil Phillips Well it's been a pleasure talking about the old times and the characters. Of course Dr Thomas is still going strong here after caring for the community for over fifty years.

T.W. Thomas And a Welshman through and through. Welsh was his language and Welsh were his remedies! It's good to see him in such health after his retirement.

Ben Howell Well I hope the characters will keep being produced here. There are several movements here which are going from success to success, especially Urdd Gobaith Cymru and Undeb Cymru Fydd. We've had Mr Morris's monthly meetings where we have learned a lot about Welsh history and every Thursday he helps those who want to learn our language.

Gwilym Morris. You'll be pleased to know that a number of English people recently arrived have shown a great interest in Welsh. Also attending is a German lady who already speaks four languages and is eager to add Welsh to the list.

Phil Phillips Well I'm afraid its time to think about going home

Ben Rees Hold on half a minute. Don't get up, I'll be back in a tick

T.W. Thomas Where's he going now I wonder

Ben Rees (from a distance) Do you all take sugar and milk?

T.J. Morgan Well that's at least one old custom that hasn't disappeared. We all take sugar and milk!

Announcer: You have been listening to a programme of Brethyn Cartre with the story-tellers of Gwaelod y Garth Glamorganshire. You heard the voices of:

Philip Phillips, John Phillips, The Rev Gwilym Morris, Prof. T.J. Morgan, Ben Rees, Thomas William Thomas, Ben Howell, and John Davies.

The programme was prepared by Gwilym Morris and directed by John Griffiths

Some of those mentioned above



Ben Howell



TWT Thomas



Ben Rees



WC Thomas



Rev Gwilym Morris



Rev RG Berry



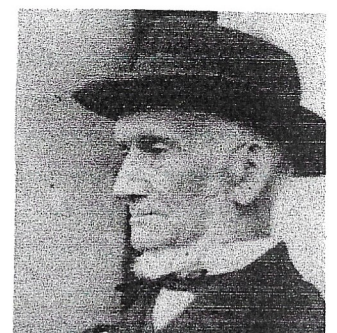
John Phillips



John Davies



Phil Phillips



Joseph Millar