

**P-04-607 Call for the Welsh Government to Purchase Garth Celyn –
Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 02.12.14.**

We ask that the property be acquired without delay by the National Assembly for Wales, and then placed in the hands of independent, respected Trustees, to safeguard its future, with a Management Committee and Friends of the Trust, who will then be enabled to use it as a bilingual Welsh Cultural Centre as a permanent living Memorial to the memory of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the Prince of Wales, and his ancestors.

For the information of the Committee, it should be known that the open market sale of the house 'Pen y Bryn', together with land that includes the promontory Garth Kelyn / Garth Celyn, is the result of an Order by a Judge in the Final Financial Hearing in the Divorce Court between Kathryn Pritchard Gibson and her former husband Brian Gibson.

The suggested selling price of £750,000, was the figure provided to the Court by the appointed Official Valuers Geoffrey Butterworth & Co.

The house is, as the advisors to Ken Skates AM, Minister for Culture, Sports and Tourism, have informed him, Grade II* Listed and the double bank and ditch enclosure has been Scheduled by the Ancient Monuments Board'.

It can be confirmed however that he has been misinformed in that the house has NOT recently been renamed Garth Celyn. (The name of the house Pen y Bryn can be traced back over 300 years to the time of Bulkeley ownership of the Manor of Aber.

Garth Celyn is the ancient, well established name of the promontory itself.)

It is NOT the request of this Petition that the property be taken into 'Guardianship' by CADW.

Over the past 50 years highly respected scholars have examined various documentary sources relating to the settlement that was prior to the Edwardian conquest known as Aber Garth Celyn (now Aber Gwyn Gregyn or Aber), and the promontory Garth Celyn on the opposite side of the river; they have concluded that the evidence points beyond all reasonable doubt to Garth Celyn being the site of the main home of the Princes in the thirteenth century.

T. Jones Pierce

Colin Gresham

Saunders Lewis

A. H. Dodd

David Austin

J. E. Caerwyn Williams

Gweneth Lilly

Gwynfor Evans

John C. Davies

Nick Barrett

Jonathan Foyle

Paul Martin Remfry

Professor David Austin, Head of Archaeology at Lampeter, examined the structure of the house. He dated the tower and parts of the walls of the house to “c. 1200 or earlier.”

Howard Thomas, then with the RCAHM Wales, agreed. He also dated the double bank and ditch enclosure on top of the promontory to “Roman to early medieval in origin.” Artefacts found on the site include a Roman oil lamp, a coin of the Emperor Carausius (c. 290), a coin of Edward I (c. 1290).

Historian / medieval building specialist Paul Martin Remfry dated parts of the structure of the house to 12th century. He has transcribed and translated many of the documents specifically relating to the area.

Historian / medieval building specialist Jonathan Foyle dated parts of the structure of the house to 12th century. He also examined the elaborately carved sandstone that has been found within the Scheduled enclosure, and dated it to late 12th / early 13th century.

The list goes on.

In 2012 /13 independent archaeologists from the Caer Alun Research Group and Wirral Archaeology, working outside the Scheduled area in Cae Celyn, uncovered a substantial section of Roman road and the remains of a Roman bridge abutment below the promontory. Geophysical survey using a magnetometer revealed signs of large circular anomalies in Cae Celyn and what might possibly be a Shrine alongside a spring near the road in the field just to the east. Substantial stone walls and enclosures are clearly visible alongside the river. Others can be traced as rises in the soil. These archaeologists agree that the medieval palace was “substantial” and that it sits on a much earlier site. (A Neolithic burial was discovered when a driveway to the house was being constructed in 1824.) Only time and patience can prove the full extent and purpose of the buildings.

Professor J. E. Caerwyn Williams, then Head of Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, Aberystwyth, studied the documentary evidence. Together with Dr Gweneth Lilly, in 1998, he published 'Tystiolaeth Garth Celyn' ('Garth Celyn Evidence). ISSN 0969 893 0 07

Gwynfor Evans, in 2001, 'Abergwyngregyn' in 'Cymru o Hud'. ISBN 0-86243-545-5

Ieuan Wyn in 2005, 'Aber Garth Celyn a Llyrhyrau 1282' ISBN 0-86381-999-0

Paul Martin Remfry, 'Astudiaeth Castell Ymchwil A Cyhoeddi' in 2012 published 'A Brief Report on Pen y Bryn and Aber, Gwynedd.' (118 pages) ISBN 1-899376-87-9

Dr Elizabeth Peterson, Senior Lecturer, University of Helsinki, in 2013 'Llywelyn's Last Battle? A Real-Life Story of the Consequences of the *Wikipedia*System.' ISBN 978-951-9040-46-2

BBC have featured the site in several documentaries including:- "One Foot in the Past", 'History Mysteries', 'House Detectives', 'The Story of Wales', 'The Making of the Story of Wales'.

Within Wales, additional interest in the site has come from students studying the play 'Siwan' by Saunders Lewis and 'Llywelyn Fawr' by Thomas Parry.

People interested in the Mabinogion story 'Culhwch ac Olwen', the earliest Welsh folk tale that features Celyn ap Caw and his family. (Celyn's brother Gildas ap Caw wrote 'De Excedio Britonum'. He is recorded as having died in 570

From further afield, interest in the story of the Llywelyns has been generated by the best selling novels that feature the 13th century royal home including:-

'The Brothers of Gwynedd' Edith Pargeter

'The Green Branch' Edith Pargeter

'Here Be Dragons' Sharon Penman

'The Reckoning' Sharon Penman

'Child of the Phoenix' Barbara Erskine

'Tre Lywelyn' Myrddin ap Dafydd (1991) ISBN 0-86381-203-1

'Ar ben tomen, mae un tŵr

Yn g adarn, a hwn geidw'r

Wrogaeth yng Ngwynyngregyn;

Creu caer y mae'r cerrig hyn

Rhag rwydd roi'r gorau iddi,

Rhag ildio i'n hildio ni.'

From the numerous letters of support from many parts of the world that have been received supporting this Petition, we ask that the following letters, together with photographs, be put in full before Members of the Petitions Committee for their attention:-

Dr. Elizabeth Peterson

Tudur Dylan Jones

Dafydd Bullock

THE PROMONTORY OF GARTH CELYN

GENERAL BACKGROUND.

In Spring 1282 Edward 'Longshanks', the king of England, led a massive, well equipped army into Wales, moving to attack Gwynedd on several fronts. On the 16th June, at Llandeilo Fawr in the Towy valley, the Welsh won a decisive victory

over Edward's southern army. On 6th November there was another great Welsh victory on the shore of the Menai Strait, near Bangor.

As winter was drawing in, and with the Welsh royal home on the promontory of Garth Celyn surrounded, John Peckham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, intervened. Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the Prince of Wales, and his Ministers responded. The correspondence, now preserved in a Register in Lambeth Palace Archives, London, written from 'Garth Kelyn', has been described as '**the most sublime compositions of the Welsh Nation**'. ('A History of Wales' John Davies.)

At this time, Prince Llywelyn was offered and firmly rejected a bribe of £1000 a year and a baronial estate in England on the condition that he would surrender independent Wales into the hands of the King of England. The leading men of Snowdonia, responded on behalf of the Walenses (the Welsh people). 'The Prince should not, they stated, **throw aside his inheritance and that of his ancestors in Wales and accept land in England, a country with whose language, way of life, laws and customs he is unfamiliar....Let this be clearly understood: his Council will not permit him so to yield.... and even if the Prince wishes to transfer [his people] into the hands of the king, they will not do homage to any stranger as they are wholly unacquainted with his language, his way of life and his laws. ...**'

Documentary evidence can now attest to the fact that on the evening of Thursday 10th December 1282, Prince Llywelyn, lured into a carefully planned trap, was seized by men under the command of Roger l'Estrange, and killed; early the next morning, some 3,000 or so Welsh foot soldiers, with their arms laid down under truce, were massacred. In June 1283, Llywelyn's brother Prince Dafydd ap Gruffudd and his family were captured at Bera, a secluded hideout in the uplands above Aber Garth Celyn. Prince Dafydd 'seriously wounded' in the struggle, was taken to King Edward who was waiting at Rhuddlan castle. On 3rd October 1283 Prince Dafydd was dragged through the streets of Shrewsbury at the tail of a horse, then hanged, drawn and quartered. The royal children were locked away, never to be set free. With thousands of men, women and children killed, Welsh resistance to the invasion virtually came to an end.

In March 1284 King Edward issued a Statute from his base at Rhuddlan castle. The ancient kingdom of Gwynedd, now annexed to England and in effect its first colony, was carved into the new counties of Anglesey, Caernarfonshire and Meirionethshire, to be overseen by a Justiciar of North Wales with a provisional exchequer based at Caernarfon, run by the office of the Chamberlain of North Wales who accounted for the revenues collected directly to Westminster. The English officials, sheriffs, coroners and bailiffs, appointed by the Crown collected taxes and administered

justice. That justice was administered through the medium of English, a language the majority of people could not speak or understand.

On 1st February 1301, in Lincoln, King Edward created his son Edward, Prince of Wales.

Following the capture of Prince Dafydd, the Welsh royal home on Garth Celyn was seized by King Edward. The king and his entourage stayed in the palace for brief periods in 1283 and 1284. The Palace and its farmland were to remain in Crown of England ownership from that time until 1553.

In 1303 and again in 1306 extensive repair works were carried out to the royal building complex. A total of 12,640 gallons of lime and 37,920 gallons of sand were used to make mortar and plaster; the walls and windows were repaired; doors were rehung; new wooden chests made for the solar and garderobe; the garden was cleared. Priests were paid to continue to say masses in the Court Chapel. The documentary evidence shows that repairs to the buildings continued until the reign of Henry VI but then gradually they were left to fall into disrepair.

In 1537, John Leland, Henry VIII's Antiquary noted that in the parish of Aber, Llywelyn '**...had a castel or palace on a hille by the Chirch, wherof yet parte stondesth.**'

In 1553 Rhys Thomas of Aberglasney, and his wife Jane acquired the property. They restored the medieval palace buildings on the promontory of Garth Celyn, turning them into an Elizabethan manor house complex.

From 1553 to date those buildings, standing in a site that has been reused for at least 4000 years have undergone many transformations.

Broadcaster and historian Huw Edward's in the BBC documentary production 'The Story of Wales' described Garth Celyn as 'probably the most important site in the history of Wales.'

The present owner of the property, Kathryn Pritchard Gibson, has since 1988 opened the house freely and willingly to groups interested in the local history, archaeology, literature, music, poetry, drama, art, traditional building skills and ecology. With the enforced sale of the property that open door approach will come to an end if the Welsh Assembly Government stands back and does nothing to prevent it.

We have this opportunity to make a bilingual Welsh Cultural Centre a thriving reality.

Garth Celyn lies at the Gateway to the ancient kingdom of Gwynedd. With goodwill and enthusiasm, we can keep that Gateway open, and turn this into an international project of the greatest benefit and merit.



1 December 2014

Dear Mr. Powell and other members of the Assembly,

I am writing to express to my deep concern that the Welsh nation is at a risk of losing a vital part of its history and identity as a nation. I am not Welsh, nor do I have any ties to Wales, but I am a scholar who investigates the vestiges of the British Empire, mostly from a linguistic point of view. I point this out to make it clear that I have no hidden agenda and nothing personal to gain: my concern about Garth Celyn comes only from the perspective of knowing full well what a physical place like this means for the self-worth and identity of a people.

During the December 9 hearing and the days leading up to it, I am certain that many powerful and persuasive people have and will come forward stating that Garth Celyn is not what Kathryn Gibson and others say it is, stating, in essence, that is nothing more than Elizabethan manor house and that there is no “proof” that a royal *llys* ever stood there. As I am sure you are aware, this debate is all part of a vehement struggle that has been going on for many years. I have documented the effects of the negative discourse about Garth Celyn, as well as calling into question the strategies used by the adversaries of Garth Celyn, in an academic article that was published last year. In the article, I trace the main strategies that the adversaries of Garth Celyn have used in order to elevate their own position and denigrate that of Garth Celyn, in some instances using official documents, manipulation of public opinion, and especially by using Wikipedia as a tool—and a very effective tool, at that, as, unfortunately, many people look no further than Wikipedia as their source of information.

By now this mess of opposition between two factions has run its course, and we find ourselves in a position where something must be done to put these arguments to rest. A few clear facts remain.

- 1) At this exact moment in time, the Government of Wales has the opportunity to invest in a site that, despite all of the negative discourse surrounding it in recent years, continues to hold a vital interest and sense of connection to the history and identity of Wales as a nation—as evidenced by the public outpouring of interest concerning the future of the site. With this in mind, any claims for or against the “authenticity” of Garth Celyn by a select few are irrelevant: this exact place, no other, embodies a sense of identity and the past and future of Wales for the Welsh people. Despite any claims to the contrary (on Wikipedia and elsewhere) the love and honour for Garth Celyn comes through in myriad large and small ways every day—from the school groups who visit there, to the fresh flowers that are without fail affixed by strangers to the lower fence perimeter of the property, to the visits from elderly Welsh patriots who want to touch the walls of Llewelyn’s Tower before they die. To ignore or belittle the value of these connections would be callous indeed. Who better to have ownership of such an important site for the Welsh people than the government of Wales?
- 2) Despite claims to the contrary (as demonstrated in the article I wrote), there is evidence provided by scholars who confirm that Garth Celyn is a site of great importance to Wales. Further, thorough, non-biased investigations carried out by professional teams of archaeologists and historians is of tantamount importance at this point, so that we can be

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sure of what is or is not there. Such investigations have yet to take place. The sale of this property to developers or even unsympathetic private owners could lead to irreparable damage – and furthermore, would take Garth Celyn out of the hands of the Welsh people, where it firmly belongs.

- 3) From a strictly practical point, this location already contains the buildings and other infrastructure that make it possible for Welsh people and those interested in Welsh history to visit, think about their past, and, in a best-case scenario, make art, music and poetry relating to the past and future of Wales. In other words, this is a good investment: the visitors and interested parties are guaranteed—they already come, and, once in the hands of the Welsh government, this flow of invested visitors would only increase.

This exact sense of circumstances – the great pride and interest of the Welsh people in Garth Celyn, coupled with the opportunity to properly investigate its past—create an opportunity for the Nation of Wales that may never repeat itself. I fervently hope that the Assembly will not pass up this unique and vital opportunity to invest in an endeavor that has so much meaning to the people of Wales, and, indeed, to those from throughout the world.

Most sincerely yours,

Elizabeth Peterson

Elizabeth Peterson, PhD
University Lecturer, University of Helsinki
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Sir Dafydd Bullock

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William Powell AM
Chair Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales

Dear Sir

I write to you as a member of the Gorsedd, and as a patriotic Welshman now living in Luxembourg. I am a composer and have written many works based upon Welsh history and legend, which have been performed and listened to throughout the world.

I am greatly worried about the future of Garth Celyn, in Gwynedd. I am sure you have been made aware of the political, archeological and historical dimensions of this case, and I will not repeat them here.

I simply wish to ask that the Welsh Assembly Government take the opportunity of the enforced sale of Garth Celyn to provide the funding for the acquisition of this historically significant site by the Welsh Government for the Welsh Nation, and to ensure that Garth Celyn should then be placed in the hands of an independent Trust to manage and run it as a Welsh Cultural Centre as a permanent living Memorial to the Welsh Princes and their achievements.

I have been to Garth Celyn on many occasions and I have seen the selfless work of Kathryn Gibson, in the face of highly organised, academically unsubstantiated and at times vindictive opposition which surely must count as a disgrace to public life. Many prominent commentators have attested to the value and significance of Garth Celyn to the Welsh nation. Its survival, always a matter of some fragility, is now directly threatened.

Living away from Wales, I see the vast resources given to culturally and historically significant sites, many of infinitely lesser significance than Garth Celyn. Surely it is not too much to expect that the devolved Government of our country now do something to preserve such an important part of our heritage.

Yours faithfully,

(Dafydd Dolbadarn)

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