

Resources and Texts

Penrhys, on the ridge between the Rhondda Fach and the Rhondda Fawr in Glamorgan, was one of the holiest shrines in South Wales. Pilgrims went there to pray at the statue of the Virgin Mary and to bathe in a holy well.

What can you deduce from the poems about the appearance of the statue?

Morwyn wry, Mair wineurudd ... Llun y wry a'i llaw'n euraid Lle mae braich llaw Mab a roed. (Gwilym Tew: © A. E. Williams)	The virgin maiden, Mary with her rosy cheeks ... The image of the virgin with her golden colour, Where her arm is her son's hand is placed.
Miragl waith ym mrig y lan magu Iesu am gusan ... yn dy fraich mae'r un Duw fry. (Rhisiart ap Rhys: © UWP)	There is a miraculous work at the top of the bank nursing Jesus for a kiss ... in your arms is the one God above.
Y ferch wry, Fair, â choron (Lewys Morgannwg: © CAWCS)	The virgin maid, Mary, with a crown

What else was there?

Ynys yw Pen-rhys yn nhrwyn y fforest, Bara 'fferen a dŵr swyn. (Gwilym Tew)	Penrhys is a meadow on the edge of the forest, Mass bread and holy water.
Ym mrig craig y mae eirw crych, yn iach anaf a'i chwennych: gwin gwyn drwy'r rhewyn a red, gŵyr lladd gwaewyr a lludded. (Rhisiart ap Rhys: © UWP)	At the top of the rock there are foaming waters. healing the wounds of those that desire them: white wine runs through the stream, that can kill pain and weariness.

What can we tell about the history of the statue?

<p>Y cad gwyrth yn y coed gynt. Fry o'i chuddygl, ferch addwyn, O fôn dêr ni fynnai'i dwyn ... Yna daethost, fendithfawr, I'r lle hwn o'r nef i'r llawr. Dy ddelw bob dydd a welynt Yn fyw a gad o nef gynt. (Lewys Morgannwg)</p>	<p>A miracle was once found in the woods. Gentle maid, from her hiding place of oak trunk she could not be taken ... You came here, a great blessing, to this place, from heaven to earth. Your image, which they see every day, was once received alive from heaven.</p>
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What kind of people went on pilgrimage to Penrhys? Why did they go there?

<p>Llawer un i'r llawr a aeth a dynnaist o'i fudaniaeth. Haind y werin yn d'aros o'r wylo'n iach yr ail nos ... O gyr pwys y gwayw o'r pen, iacháu eraill o'r chwarran. (Rhisiart ap Rhys: © UWP)</p>	<p>Many a one bowed to the ground have you cured of his blindness. The diseases of the folk who wait on you after their weeping are cured on the second night ... It drives the weight of headache from the head and heals others of the carbuncle.</p>
<p>Mewn llaw Fair mae'n lleferydd. Lleferydd y llafuriaid, Llu'm Mhen-rhys lle maen' erioed. (Gwilym Tew)</p>	<p>In Mary's hand is our own speech. The speech of the labourers Where they are always at Penrhys</p>
<p>Ewch i lefain â chleifion I fwrw'ch haint at y ferch hon ... Cair, Morwyn Fair, y meirw'n fyw. Cawson' ynfydion fedydd; Coelied dall câi weled dydd.</p>	<p>Go to weep with the sick ones To cast your disease on this maid. ... With the Virgin Mary the dead can have life. The mentally ill have had a baptism; Let the blind believe they will see day.</p>

<p>Crypliaid dôn' i'r côr, plaid deg, Caen' eu traed lle caent redeg. Clywant o byddant byddair ... Morwyr pell a gymhellir; Mair a'u dwg o'r môr i dir. Ym mhob ing, ym mhob angau, Mair oedd eu help i ymrydd. (Lewys Morgannwg)</p>	<p>Let the cripples come into the choir, a fair party, They will find their feet where they will run. They will hear if they are deaf ... Sailors who are driven far off, Mary will bring them from sea to land. In every anguish, in every death, Mary was [with] her help to relieve me.</p>
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How did they travel? What did they take with them?

<p>Af i Ben-rhys yn fy un crys, rhag ofn y cryd, Ac ar fy nglin, oed pererin, dapr o wrhyd; (Gwilym Tew)</p>	<p>I will go to Penrhys in my one shirt, for fear of ague On my knee, at the accustomed time for a pilgrim, a taper the height of a man* *is he saying he will go on his knees, or that he will carry the candle on his knee – and what does that suggest about how he travelled?</p>
<p>I'm llaw iawn yn cau mae llun cwyr, I'm llaw asau mae llaswyr ... Af â cherdd i ofwy'ch urddas A chwyr ywch lle archa' ras (Lewys Morgannwg)</p>	<p>My right hand encloses a wax carving, In my left hand is a rosary* ... I will go with song to visit your dignity and with wax to your place to beg for grace. *or possibly a psalter</p>
<p>Parlwr gan fŵr niferoedd i fêls draw fal ostri oedd. Pen-rhys o'i llys a'i llaswyr, pwys dau gant mewn pyst o gŵyr. Diffwyth oedd weled ofrwm diethr ei haur da a thrwm. Ei mawr fraint gyda Mair fry, y mae'i henaid am hynny.</p>	<p>Her parlour was to a number of invalids like a hostel. Pen-rhys [had] because of her mansion and her psalter, the weight of two hundred in posts of wax. In vain was it seeing any offering except her good and heavy gold. Her great privilege with Mary on high,</p>

(From Rhisiart ap Rhys's elegy for
Elspeth Mathew of Radyr: © UWP)

is her soul because of that.

Can we work out any specific miracle stories from these lines by Lewys Morgannwg?

Llawer dyn lle'r wyd unair
farw âi'n fyw 'n dy fron, Fair.
Fe ddaw atoch yn llawen
Y marw a'i wisg ywch, Mair wen.
Ni ddaw mud i'th weddi, Mair,
Na ddywaid cyn pen ddeuair.
O daw llef y dall ufydd,
E wyl y dall olau dydd.
O daw angall a'i dynged,
E ddaw gras iddo o'i gred.
O daw byddar at arall,
Fe glyw llef o glwyf y llall.
Fai glaf ar faglau ofwy,
gôr Mair ni ddygir mwy.

In a word, many a man where you are
went from death to life in your breast, Mary.
A dead man will come to you joyfully
and his clothing above, holy Mary.
A dumb man would not come to your prayer, Mary,
but he would say two words before the end.
If the cry of the humble blind comes to you,
the blind will see the light of day.
If a foolish person came in his fate
grace would come to him by his faith.
If a deaf man came with another
he would hear a cry from the other's wound.
If a sick man visited on crutches
he would not be carried in the same way from Mary's
choir.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of using this kind of poetry as evidence? What do we need to know about the poets, their reasons for writing and the circumstances of performance to evaluate the poetry as a source?

The destruction of the shrine.

The reformers worried that pilgrimages and the veneration of shrines, relics and statues were leading people astray. In June 1538, Hugh Latimer, bishop of Worcester, wrote to Thomas Cromwell:

I trust your Lordship will bestow our great Sibyl to some great purpose, ut pereat memoria cum sonitu [that the memory may perish with the sound]. She hath been the Devil's instrument to bring many (I fear) to eternal fire. Now she herself with her old sister of Walsingham, her younger sister of Ipswich, with her other two sisters of Doncaster and Penrhys, would make a jolly muster in Smithfield. They would not be all day in burning.

Latimer was referring to a statue of the Virgin Mary in his own cathedral, and to a list of other famous statues which were priorities for destruction. What does this suggest about the importance of the statue at Penrhys? Why was Latimer so concerned about them? How does he show this concern?

Cromwell instructed a local landowner, Sir William Herbert of St Julians near Newport, to see to the destruction of the shrine at Penrhys. This is his report.

My special good lord, in my humblest wise I recommend me unto you. Pleaseth it your Lordship to be advertised that I received your Lordship's letter the xxiiiird of August dated at the Castle of Arundel the xvi day of August, declaring to me the King's pleasure and yours, that I should with the Chancellor of the diocese of Llandaff repair, upon the sight thereof, to Penrhys and there to assist the said Chancellor to take down the Image of Our Lady with quietness and secret manner as might be. And after the respect of the King's pleasure and yours, perceiving the said Chancellor not being in the country now nigh, whereby the King's pleasure and yours might be performed with diligence, I perceiving his pleasure and yours to be so, not only commanded one Sir Thomas Bacon, Commissary of the diocese of Llandaff to do the act but also [ad]monished others whom your lordship appointed to be with the said Chancellor in like manner to be there also. As I with the said Commissary went thither the xxvith day of August and not only took down the said Image but also declared to the audience the King's pleasure and yours touching the idolatry that was done there, for the minishment that it caused of the honour of God. Which official will bring the said Image and her apparel to your Lordship with as convenient speed as he may. Any other service that it pleaseth you to command me shall be done to the utmost of my power as knoweth God who preserve your Lordship. From Newport in Wales the xiiiith day of this September.

W. Herbert

Draw up a timeline for the letters and events. What is William Herbert asked to do, and how? Is there anything to suggest that he is unhappy with what he is doing? What problems does he have, and why? Why do you suppose he has these problems? What do they tell you about the popularity of the shrine? And, finally, given the extreme political sensitivity of the statue, why does he delay so long in sending it to London?

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