

# A NEW / OLD WELL FOR LLANGRANNOG



Ffynnon fechan, 'r wyt yn loew,  
'R wyt yn groew ac yn llon,  
Fel pe byddai gwir dangnefedd  
Ar yr orsedd yn dy fron

*("Little well, fresh and bright, / Happy eye of living water,  
Your life is a flowing out, / Freely serving humanity")*

**Cranogwen**  
[1839-1916]

**Phil Cope**  
for Pwyllgor Lles Llangrannog /  
Llangrannog Welfare Committee

21 September 2022

## foreword

The popular seaside village of Llangrannog in Ceredigion is situated up and down the steep and narrow Hawen river valley (at the mouth of both the Hawen and the Nant Eisteddfa), between New Quay in the north and Aberporth in the south, and now also a welcome stop on the Wales Coast Path. Although there is evidence of Stone (Upper Palaeolithic), Bronze and Iron Age presences within the wider area (including most notably at Pen-dinas Lochryn hillfort, c.500BC), the upper 'Church Village / Y Pentre' – well-hidden from those with bad intentions passing by on the sea – was most likely first seriously settled in the early sixth century as a religious community around its original church. Thought to have been established by the "*sea travelling Celtic saint*" Carannog (or Crannog, Carantoc, Ceirnech, Karanteg, Carnath, Carantus, or Carantacus, amongst other versions of his name), this holy man from Ceredigion also built churches and gave his name, like at Llangrannog, to towns in Cornwall (Crantock), Somerset (Carhampton, near to which he pacified a "*formidable serpent, huge and terrible*"), and in Brittany (Carantec), as well as throughout Ireland (where he is said to have died). The present church – at what became known as Llangrannog only in the sixteenth century – dates from 1884/5, and is thought to have been built upon the first settlement's ancient foundations, though, sadly, nothing of the original remains.

The tale told of the origins of St Carannog's first wattle-and-daub church at Llangrannog is a fascinating one, the wood for a fire the saint was laying said to have been carried away by a dove ("*an angel of the Lord*"), and dropped at the spot intended for its construction. And above the site, the cave where he first lived and where, after his church was built, he often withdrew from the worries of the world, can still be visited. (It's significant in this respect that the earliest names for this area – *Speluncam* in the early twelfth century, and *Gogof*, *Gogoffe* or *Gogeve* from the late thirteenth to mid sixteenth century – all suggest 'cave'.)

The lower 'Beach (or 'Shore') Village / Y Traeth' wasn't developed until the mid eighteenth century, as a fishing port (mainly for *sgadan* / herring). Much later, a small though significant shipbuilding industry was established, constructing as many as two dozen ships on its beaches between 1787 and 1859. With an estimated 90% of the village population directly or indirectly engaged, seafaring flourished up until the early twentieth century when Llangrannog was transformed once again, this time into an important centre for tourism. A recent feature in the *Telegraph* newspaper placed Llangrannog (alongside Portmeirion in Gwynedd, the only other from Wales) in a listing of the UK's best coastal towns. It has much to offer visitors and locals alike in search of prehistory, history, geological oddities, spiritual renewal, education, poetry, adventure and/or relaxation.

Rising prominently from the sea on Llangrannog's fine sandy 'Blue Flag' beach, you can't miss '**Carreg Bica**', a weathered stack of Ordovician rock which, according to legend, was a molar spat out by the local giant Bica after suffering from a painful toothache!

There's a fine, cascading **waterfall** (known as *Y Gerw'n*) on the river Hawen which once drove a **woollen mill** (now in ruins and on private land, though fine examples of its cloth-making can be seen at the National Woollen Museum at Drefach Velindre, near Newcastle Emlyn). And there's a **lime kiln** – the only remaining one of an original five in the area – which once produced the fertilizer essential for local farmers to neutralise their acidic soil.

And in the graveyard of St Carannog's Church, you'll find the last resting place of and memorial to **Sarah Jane Rees** [1839-1916], her bardic name, *Cranogwen*, reflecting that of the village saint. She was a pioneering local female 'Master' Mariner, equal rights and temperance campaigner, journalist, teacher, preacher, and crowned bard (the first woman to win the chair at the National Eisteddfod in Aberystwyth). Part of one of her poems, inspired perhaps by 'Ffynnon Fair', is quoted at the start of this paper; and the full poem, with an English translation, is to be found in the [APPENDIX](#).

Up the road, there's the **Urdd Gobaith Cymru Centre**, celebrating its centenary this year, and now the leading national youth organisation providing cultural opportunities for children and young people throughout Wales. Its aim is "*to bring the Welsh language alive*", and to motivate young people "*to make positive contributions to their communities through the medium of Welsh*". It's appropriately placed, perhaps, as Mervyn Davies reminds us in his *The Story of Llangrannog* (1973) "*the language spoken in Llangrannog today has a direct pedigree going back over 2,500 years, making it one of the oldest living languages in Europe*".



And not least of the more recent developments in what Llangrannog has on offer is the ongoing and inspiring work of **Pwyllgor Lles Llangrannog / Llangrannog Welfare Committee [LWC]**. It was they who were responsible for the imposing St Carannog sculpture (the creation of local sculptor, Sebastien Boyesen) which



overlooks Llangrannog beach and lower town; and their latest project renovating the Village Garden, complete with *Cranogwen's* poetry set into the stone floor, in readiness for the erection of a new statue of the poet (in liaison with the Cranogwen Community Monument team, Monumental Welsh Women, and, once again, Sebastien Boyesen, this time supported by mentee, Keziah Ferguson from Coleg Sir Gâr). And LWC is also discussing taking on ownership of additional elements of Llangrannog's physical infrastructure, *"to improve the welfare of the people and of the village"*, considerably extending its 'estate' in the process.

Most importantly for this Paper, however, LWC has recently had the foresight to secure ownership of the land upon which **'Ffynnon Fair'** ('St Mary's Well', SN 316 540) currently emerges, and also wisely erected a wooden fence around the area. Rarely visited and least well-known of all of Llangrannog's once-significant places – at least until very recently – this ancient site, one of national significance in my view, is the main subject of this Paper which will explore the possibility of setting this neglected wellspring jewel (and maybe even more than this one) firmly into Llangrannog's already-impressive crown.

This Paper will provide a blueprint for how to move forward, based upon the important work already achieved by LWC. As the new well keepers, the question **A NEW / OLD WELL FOR LLANGRANNOG** seeks to provide the principal, next-step answers to is how best to ensure the well's long-term place within the local, regional and national community.

## A NEW / OLD TIMETABLE

The latest chapter in the long history of 'Ffynnon Fair' began with James Stewart [JS], whose mother grew up in Llangrannog. She had a life-long interest in the well. JS writes:

*"The background to my interest is that my mother lived in Llangrannog when she was a child (my grandfather was the rector in the '30s) and she – and the wider family – visited and stayed in the village often for the rest of her life. She was particularly interested in the well and concerned that it was being neglected. Some time in the early 2000s, she made several attempts to interest people in authority without success.*

*Now that I have a bit more time to follow things up, I have been trying to find out what's become of the well.*

*I would be willing (in my mother's memory) to make a contribution to the cost of getting Phil Cope [PC] to write a Report on the state of the well, the options for its conservation, the possible involvement of schools, interpretation, etc."*

This idea was pitched to LWC, who invited JS and myself to a Committee meeting on 14 October 2021. The response was positive and a programme of work was agreed, commencing with the illustrated talk I delivered at an open evening at The Beach Hut, on 7 April 2022. I introduced the history and the various meanings of wellspring sites, including those at Llangrannog – confirming the



importance traditionally, and still today, of these now often-abandoned and neglected places – as well suggesting how a **NEW / OLD WELL FOR LLANGRANNOG Project** might be developed and proceed.

Following a positive response to this event and these proposals, a first well excavation working party session was arranged, with PC and JS in attendance, on 15 May 2022, with a second a week later, as well as the establishment of a Llangrannog Well Project *WhatsApp* group.



It did not surprise me that many of the participants experienced a range of strong feelings while first engaging with the well, a combination, perhaps, of the physical exertion and working together with other people from the community on a common task in an exploration into something of historically-significant, spiritual (metaphysical, even?) depth, untouched for decades or more. Carola Beresford-Cooke, one of the group on the first dig, wrote passionately of her experience:

*"I've been reflecting on the powerful reaction I felt when digging over the pipe. It was very similar, though stronger and more visceral, to the feelings I used to get as an acupuncture practitioner when palpating for a point, when I would get a distinct feeling of a depth and a response in a particular spot. This feeling was much more powerful and I can't figure out whether it was conveying 'Do not approach further', because there was a certain sense of rawness and need for covering and protection, a bit more like 'Don't dare come near my wound'.*

*It's hard to express really what it felt like, there was an element of pain there but also tremendous strength. But there we go, a gut feeling doesn't easily come up to the voicebox."*

I responded: *"The earth – and in particular, for me, wellsprings – often has a way of communicating with us (if we are tuned in to the right frequency)."*



The delivery of this Paper marks the end of the first phase of the **Llangrannog NEW / OLD WELL Project**. It's really over to you, now. With the purchase of the land around 'Ffynnon Fair', our early explorations into the site, and the interest generated, the members of LWC and local Llangrannog people have now become its 'well guardians'.

What follows, then, alongside the fruits of my research, are some tentative suggestions on how you could / should move forward ... all offered with affection and respect.



## MEMORIES OF 'FFYNNON FAIR'

'Ffynnon Fair', as well as supplying local domestic need, was once it seems a popular destination for pilgrims from far and wide, who would come to drink the water here for its health-giving properties ... though few memories of its usage remain. J Geraint Jenkins (in his *Llangrannog, exploring the heritage of a coastal village*) writes that the "holy well ... supplied medicinal water that could cure all ills". And Mervyn Davies (*The Story of Llangrannog*, 1973) tells us that "pilgrims came from great distances to drink of the waters of St. Mary's fountain".

As well as JS's late mother's recollections and concerns, his aunt, Mary Kingsbury Green (his mother's sister, aged 92 in 2021) recalled that, even in the 1930s, it was overgrown. She didn't remember ever drinking from it, or hearing about

anyone so doing. She added that there was no piped water in the village in those days; everyone got water from the wells on the way down the valley. In the Rectory, where they lived, there was a pump in the kitchen that was used every morning to get water for the household, presumably from their own spring.

The well which emerges here before flowing into the Hawen (part of its journey made underground before emerging at the waterfall on its way to the sea and Cardigan Bay) would certainly have been used by St Carannog (maybe even magically-emerging, as is often claimed to be the case, on his instruction, though no such tales survive ... although I have heard from two elderly locals that it was once known as 'Carannog's Well'). Others have reported an awareness of steps and some sort of stonework down to its waters, as our early work confirmed.

**Ian ap Dewi** remembers being taken after Sunday School to drink the water, there. His aunt used to live in Ffynnon Fair, the house across the lane from 'Ffynnon Fair', and he told me that he had visited it regularly, recalling even today its "*fresh flowing water*". He distinguished between the 'spring', situated in the field above, and the 'well', the built structure which we have begun to excavate, just above the Hawen. He remembers the metal pipe leading from the spring to the well, the waters then channelled to fall to the river below. In later years, Ian (when a member of the local community and county councils) was concerned about its deteriorating state, recognising the on-going importance of the site for Llangrannog and for Wales, and set about buying and fencing off the land, an act of great foresight for which he needs to be thanked and praised. (Ian also remembered a "*pilgrimage to the well from a lady from Mold, in North Wales*".)

**Jon Meirion Jones**, whose grandmother used to live near 'Ffynnon Fair', felt that the well always had dual purposes, as both a communal/domestic as well as a 'holy' well, its proximity to the church being no coincidence. Its location, he believed, was determined not by a magical bird from heaven but rather simply by the propinquity of an unfailing source of pure clean water. He believed that the priests would have regularly blessed its waters.

He also remembered the desirability of finding frogs or toads within local wells, thought to offer the gifts of health and good luck for its users, partly based, perhaps, upon a belief that they acted as the wellsprings' unpaid cleaners. (At other wellspring sites, the movements of such creatures, as well as of enchanted fish or eels, were regularly read as omens.) In addition, Jon's grandfather, Evan Davies, was famed for finding and building wells for houses, beautifully-lining them, or if a well had ceased supplying water, re-liberating its flow.

I have found no evidence of 'Ffynnon Fair' being used as a baptismal font for the church, or its waters in its services (the only vague connection being Ian ap Dewi's report of his own post-Sunday School thirst-quenching at the site). This is unusual given the proximity of both, and its current Christian designation. I have also failed to find any photographs or drawings of Ffynnon Fair. This search should continue as the Project develops; they must be out there, alongside



recollections, tales and possibly even more poetry. And if they can't be found, the Project should set about creating them [see [7. Creating A Tradition](#), below].

## WHAT'S IN A NAME ?

Most of our wellspring sites have had a series of names over time, originating (in Wales) with a Welsh name suggesting location and/or usage (divinational, medicinal, ceremonial, etc.). Later, these were usually Christianised to that of a local saint. (It has been confirmed that Llangrannog's 'Ffynnon Fair' was known as 'Carannog's Well' within living memory.)

The names of these sites were often homogenised into the Mary's Well, Our Lady's Well, or Ffynnon Fair titling given to a very large percentage of British wellspring sites ... then, very occasionally, later still, changed again to a modern appellation.

I believe a discussion around the naming of 'Ffynnon Fair' would be valuable, not just in recognising and publicising the many levels of meaning through which it might have travelled, but also with a view, perhaps, to finding a new name ... one which reflects its deeper history, or even suggests our contemporary responses to a spring of pure, clear water emerging from the ground within a tense and troubled world, and at a time of severe climate change.

Examples of names in Wales based on tales, geography, or usages include Ffynnon Dyffryn Tawel (*The Well of the Silent Grove*) and Ffynnon Hafod Newydd (*The Well of the New Summer Pastures*), both at Strata Florida; so-called Stinking Wells (not recommended); a Black Lion Well; and the wonderfully-titled Grotto of Hygrea! There's a Ffynnon Goch (*The Red Spring*), Ffynnon Gwrachod (*Witches Well*), Ffynnon Cegin Arthur (*Well of Arthur's Kitchen*), Ffynnon Arian (*Money, or Silver, Well*), Ffynnon yn Ddragau (*The Well of Tears*), and Ffynnon Tarren Deusant (*The Well of the Knoll of Two Saints*), to name but a tiny few.

And there are, of course, very many sites dedicated to local (often-obscure) saints ... like your Carannog. A simple solution might be to return to a Carannog titling. Or the well could be named after Cranogwen, using perhaps a word, phrase or line from one of her poems (especially given the renewed interest generated in her life and writings with the LWC-led design and erection of her forthcoming statue). Ideas (from her writings) could include:

- Llygad y Dyfroedd Byw / *The Eye of Living Waters*
- Merch Ffynnon y Môr / *Daughter of the Sea Well*
- Y Ffynnon Sisialaidd Byrlymog / *The Gurgling Whispering Well*

The dentally-challenged giant Bica looms large here, both mythologically and geographically. Might he have once used the well's medicinal waters to try to soothe his painful tooth-ache, and could he today be doubly-remembered by his name at Llangrannog's well? Or maybe the well should bare a completely new title, chosen by local children perhaps, to reflect their own hopes and fears about the world's waters and the future of our planet.

## BEYOND 'FFYNNON FAIR'

In the Llangrannog area, alongwith 'Ffynnon Fair', there is a plethora of other springs and wells of cultural and historic significance. In particular, there's an impressive 'beehive' well on Adrian Brice's Penrallt farm – on the original road, I'm told, to the church and to Ffynnon Fair (and a place with a connection with *Cranogwen*, too). It is a site, in my view, worthy of a major research and renovation project in its own right:



And there's also an unnamed, though impressive well beside the road down to the sea, across appropriately from 'Bywell House' and 'Penffynnon':



In addition, *Coflein* (the online catalogue of archaeological sites, historic buildings, industrial and maritime heritage in Wales), in a posting on St Carannog's Church (<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/105265/>) reports that *"In 1840 a well known as Ffynnon y Groes was noted a short distance from the churchyard. Whether the two [this and our 'Ffynnon Fair'] are, in fact, the same is unclear"*. Mervyn Davies, however, claims that *"Near its source [he's writing about Nant Eisteddfa] is yet another spring having religious significance. Here is a spring which was called Ffynnon Groes (the Holy Cross Well). At this well, pilgrims to Llangranog were wont to rest, having made the sign of the Cross, and feed and refresh themselves"*. And he adds: *"The stream proceeds down through Cwm Steddfa and takes in the waters of Ffynnon-y-merched (Well of the Women), until it gets to the sea near the Boating Club's premises"*, adding another possible lost wellspring site to our list.

Within the relatively-small area covered by the 1887 Cardiganshire map (Sheet XXXI.NW, published in 1889: <https://maps.nls.uk/view/101608435>), our well is marked as 'Ffynnon Fair', and the fine well at Penrallt farm is simply marked with an 'S', for spring. And, while there are no other sites noted within the village of Llangrannog itself, there are lots of other 'springs' and 'wells' within the wider area, plus named sites like Ffynnon-Fadog, Ffynnon-wen near Cnwc-eithinog, and the afore-mentioned (or perhaps another) Ffynnon-groes.

And on the NE Cardiganshire Sheet of the same year (<https://maps.nls.uk/view/101608444>), there are further recordings of unnamed wellspring sites, in addition to the named wells of Ffynnon-berw below Allt Hoffnant, another Ffynnon-wen or '*Bright Well*' (and Ffynnon-lâs or '*Blue Well*') near Cnwc-eithinog, and Ffynnon-lefrith-fawr and Ffynnon-lefrith-fach at Cnwc-gwyn.

In addition, Sue Passmore in her comprehensive *Llangrannog, land and sea* (2014) reports the claim of Iwan Wmffre that a Ffynnon Llefrith existed in Blaenllefrith in the sixteenth century as "*a cream-well, a stone edifice built to keep butter and cream cool over a well*"; as well as noting Ffynnonwerful ('*Well of the Spring Meadow*') at Cwmffynnon, Ffynnonddewi ('*David's Spring*' or '*Well*') or Ffynnonddwy ('*God's Well*') near the woodland of Tir Ffynnonddewi, Ffynnonwhil ('*Beetle Well?*') and Pwll-y-whil in Yscaron hamlet, and the well which once supplied Ivy House in Pontgarreg.

There is a major new project waiting to be developed to discover, to record and to renovate (if possible and appropriate) these new / old Llangrannog fresh-waterly places, with the potential for an exciting new walking tour of Llangrannog and district's ancient wellspring sites (see [8. Walking On Water](#), below).





## SO, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT ?

What follows is a non-exhaustive list of the main considerations, activities and works needed to guarantee that the 'Ffynnon Fair' story and site plays the part it deserves to play within the life of Llangrannog and beyond ... under the following headings:

- **Back To The Source:** exploring what essential work needs to be done next at the site
- **New Wells For Old:** physical and ecological responses to 'Ffynnon Fair'
- **Open / Designs:** resolving the apparent contradictions between the full access of the site and its safeguarding, thrown up by archeological and 'health & safety' concerns
- **Blowing Our Own Trumpets:** interpretation and publicity
- **Being There:** wellspring education
- **Finding New Guardians:** the long-term care and development of the site
- **Creating A Tradition:** celebrating old and new responses to 'Ffynnon Fair' and your other important Llangrannog wellspring sites
- **Walking On Water:** devising a new Llangrannog wellspring walking trail
- **Tapping Sources:** costs and potential sources of support for the work

All that follows will, I hope, provide LWC with what will be needed to both fully develop the site, as well as the knowledge and the arguments to successfully secure the funds, if required, to undertake the ambitious schemes of work proposed.

### 1. Back To The Source

During our first physical exploration of 'Ffynnon Fair', on Sunday 15 May 2022, I collected a sample of its then very muddy waters for chemical testing. This was a fairly basic first test, but gave an interesting (and mostly positive) analysis of its water ... as follows:

Total Hardness	50mg per litre (low)
Free Chlorine	0mg per litre
Iron	0mg per litre
Copper	0mg per litre
Lead	0mg per litre (good news)
Nitrate	10mg per litre
Nitrite	0mg per litre
Bromide	6mg per litre
Total Chlorine	0mg per litre
Fluoride	0mg per litre
Cyanuric Acid	0mg per litre
Carbonate	80mg per litre
Total Alkalinity	80mg per litre
pH	6.4 (7-8.4 is good)

Other more-sophisticated tests will need to be conducted (to find, amongst other things, the possible presences of any pollutants or bacteria in the water), and though I'm not suggesting that the bottling and wide distribution of 'Llangrannog Spring Water' should commence just yet, these initial results do show some early grounds for optimism.



And now that we have begun to reveal 'Ffynnon Fair's' nascent riches, re-evaluated (as far as has been possible) its past, and started to imagine its future significance for the community, I would strongly suggest the involvement of **Dyfed Archaeological Trust [DAT]** ([www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk](http://www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk)). I have spoken with its director (Ken Murphy / [k.murphy@dyfedarchaeology.org.uk](mailto:k.murphy@dyfedarchaeology.org.uk) / 01558 825 991) on your behalf, and he and his team of skilled and enthusiastic professionals are excited by the prospects of working alongside LWC and the people of Llangrannog.

Their work would include locating the original source of the spring in the field above the present well structure, the probable replacing of the pipe from the field to the well, and guidance and assistance with the renovation (re-, or even new, construction, perhaps) of the well building itself, including securing the steps, collection pool and the channel down to the Hawen.

The DAT-led involvement would produce a written Scheme of Investigation, setting out the work that will be done, including training members of the community in basic archaeological techniques (physical excavation, producing written records, site scale drawings, site photography, etc.); plus the production of a Report on the work and an archive of material for deposition in an approved repository, including once again the training of members of the community in all of these tasks. DAT would provide all the necessary tools and equipment, and all of the agreed work would be carried out under DAT's insurance.

Regarding costings, Ken Murphy writes: *"It's a bit difficult to give an exact estimate of costs and an idea of time required. Our day rate for staff for such work is £270 plus VAT. There would be travel and subsistence on top of that. Just one member of staff would be required for such a site."*

Estimating one-day to set up and five days for the excavation and four days for reporting and archiving, the overall estimated DAT cost might, therefore, be as follows: Staff: £2,700 / Travel and Subsistence: £500, plus VAT, with materials

used for the possible reconstruction of the well and its surroundings, for the interpretation panels, seating, etc. being extra. Two periods of the involvement of DAT might be deemed necessary. Having worked on wellspring projects like yours before, a budget for everything of somewhere in the region of £50,000 might be considered reasonable to achieve all of your physical objectives. (see [9. Tapping The Sources](#), below)

## 2. New Wells For Old

Paralleling the discussions around a possible new/old name for 'Ffynnon Fair' (see [WHAT'S IN A NAME?](#), above), consideration of a new / renewed well build is strongly recommended.

The designs and fabric of our holy well and sacred spring sites have changed regularly over time as new beliefs and new needs have discovered new ways to explain the unexplainable, to contain and utilize the riches of these polymorphic waters, often building layer upon layer of masonry and of meaning. It's strange, then, that the current prevailing attitude towards the care of our wellsprings (on the rare occasions when they are noticed and cared for at all) seems to be to stop history at the latest modification (usually some date in late Victorian times), a strategy in danger, in my view, of signing the death certificates for these sites as places of consequence and vitality in our lives.

There are exceptions to this rule, of course, where people are continuing and extending the dialogue: Ffynnon Gwenffrewi or St Winifride's Well [SJ 185 763] in Holywell, Flintshire, still welcomes some 30,000 pilgrims annually to bath in and drink its waters, after more than 1,300 years of continuously-recorded Christian usage; queues still regularly form at Hay Slad Spout [SO 766 448] in the Malvern Hills in Worcestershire, to fill their bottles and buckets with pure and free spring water. And 'cloutie' or 'rag' wells, like St Boniface's [NH 641 537] at Munlochy, on the Black Isle in Scotland, and Ffynnon Rhinweddol or the Virtuous Well [SO 503 051] in Trelleck, Monmouthshire, still attract the soiled offerings of the sick and the unhappy in a tradition that goes back way well before the birth of Christianity:



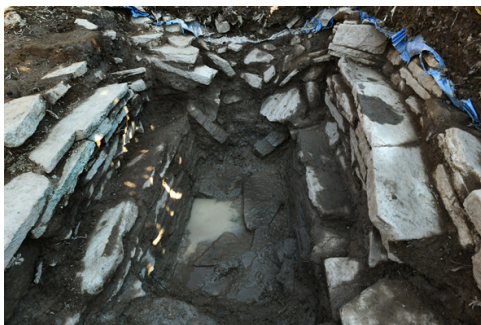
In the town of Great Malvern, two new sculptures have been created on Belle Vue Island, the main square, both led by the artist Rose Garrard: one, the Enigma Fountain [SO 775 460] celebrates the life of local composer, Edward Elgar; while the other, the Malvhina Fountain [SO 775 460] reflects the spiral markings on



Celtic standing stones, medieval religious statuary and the Victorian Pre-Raphaelite Movement, three elements in the town's history ... and both utilise spring waters flowing down from the hills:



And I am currently involved in developing important new projects exploring new and imaginative ways to bring neglected wellspring sites back to life at Margam Park, as part of the I DIG MARGAM initiative [see [5. Being There](#), below], and in Laleston, near Bridgend):



But these, sadly, are exceptions to the rule. Most people are unaware of the significance of the sites on their doorsteps, often resulting in their neglect. Today, many are used as rubbish bins for discarded cans and crisp packets; some are polluted by the seepage of farm chemicals; some destroyed by forestry, or road and housing 'developments'.

And while I fully recognise the archaeological imperative to retain and secure historic remains for future generations (alongside the importance of the development of our transport infrastructure, the need to be building new houses, and the growing of trees and the harvesting of their timber), I want to question why we aren't, in most cases at least, continuing today to make our own physical, spiritual and community responses to these once-important sites.

In addition, there is the issue – of increasing importance nowadays with the proliferation of polluting disposable plastic water bottles, as well as the necessity for us all to properly hydrate – of using wells as wells once again, using fountains as fountains. (Oni elli di ddiogelu'r ffynnon, ni elli ddiogelu'r deyrnas. / *Unless you can defend the well, you cannot defend your kingdom.* [from 'The Mabinigion' trans. Sioned Davies, 2007])

I Christmassed some years ago in Portugal where every fountain, in even the smallest of villages, offered refreshing clean water to the traveller. Can you think of more than a tiny handful (one even?) that are in working order today in Wales, where our supply of water is always of a far greater quantity than that of countries like Portugal? It has always surprised me when travelling abroad in countries, often much drier, and poorer, than ours, that drinking fountains offering cool pure water are on every corner. Why is this something beyond our 'health and safety' obsessed abilities here in Wales, today?

Perhaps in Llangrannog, then, we should be taking the opportunities on offer from sites like 'Ffynnon Fair' (and also 'Bywell', and the well on Penrallt farm?) to make our own, very new, very twenty-first century responses to these once-important places, while, at the same time, paying due respect to their histories and tradition. Let's find ways to make these ancient locations attractive places to visit (with comfortable seating and imaginative interpretations), places to both relax and even to receive inspiration ... as well as, perhaps, to get a drink of cool refreshing water without the need to purchase a disposable plastic container.

### 3. Open / Designs

The essential considerations of protection (for both the site and for the people visiting it) need to be seriously considered. There are some who claim that the needs of safeguarding always mitigates against any real notion of accessibility. Wells, like many other archaeological sites, are regularly revealed, then buried again, denying our knowledge of and participation in what are essential parts of our history. Finding resolutions to this supposed contradiction needs to be part of the **OLD / NEW** ongoing brief.

This has been one of the main questions I regularly pose to young people for their solutions when considering the exploration and renovation of a neglected wellspring (or other) site. Their designs – ways to both protect and to permanently reveal the site – have been inspiring, clearly illustrating the fact that this apparent dichotomy can be satisfactorily resolved. (see [5. Being There](#), below)

### 4. Blowing Our Own Trumpets

Communicating the findings of this Report and the proposals it contains with local people of all ages, as well as the appropriate organisations, will ensure the strongest sense of community understanding, engagement, support and ownership. This will be essential to the longevity of the project.

Currently, the only public information on 'Ffynnon Fair' within Llangrannog is a one line mention on the interpretative panel at the entrance to the church graveyard: *"Ffynnon Fair (St Mary's Well) is conveniently placed where his followers and pilgrims in later years could drink the holy water"*.

Designing and erecting attractive interpretative panels (and possibly directional signs to this well, along with some of the others) should be seriously considered. There are some excellent examples, created in particular by school children (rather than written and designed in the 'adult speak' of most current examples), which work for people of all ages (see [5. Being There](#), below). Their placement also needs careful consideration, so often in the past obscuring views of the actual site. Also, the fabric of these purveyors of information and inspiration should be considered, utilizing large boulders perhaps instead of the ubiquitous plastic and metal standing boards.

A leaflet on all of the Llanrannog well sites (see [BEYOND 'FFYNNON FAIR'](#), above) and an online presence should be created, once the renovation / rebuilding of the 'Ffynnon Fair' site is completed.

When fully revealed in whatever form and with whatever name the people of Llangrannog deem most suitable – alongside the new events you might devise (see [7. Creating A Tradition](#), below) – yours will be a story that press, radio and television will certainly be interested in.

## 5. Being There

***"The best place to learn about history is where it happened."***

Katherine Armstrong, senior learning manager, *English Heritage*

**Education** isn't just about facts and about knowledge. Especially if connected to our local and national places of importance and the stories they can still tell, it's also about belonging, about feeling part of where we live and work and study, particularly within the atomised, consumer-driven world in which we often currently find ourselves. 'Being there' makes all of the difference. What might be beneath our feet and the tales the sites are ready to tell us becomes of the much greater interest, demonstrating the importance of experiential learning, especially with pupils for whom such cultural experiences may not be commonplace.

Central to all of these **NEW / OLD** plans – including the revealing, renewal, protection, interpretation and celebration of this once-important site – needs to be the participation of young people, including the engagement of the local primary and comprehensive schools (although we have failed to date in this regard). The URDD, which I have recently made contact with (Sian Lewis, its CEO, and Dyfrig Davies, its chairperson), have now expressed strong interests in being part of the Llangrannog Wells Project.





Children love to explore **the fascinating, often-controversial, sometimes-concerning worlds of water**, from the stories of its origins and life cycle, and its human use and abuse over the centuries, through to its essential role in our existence, and the threats to our survival when it is rationed or removed. Cross-generational interviews can be profitably conducted with older locals as well as those from other countries now making their homes here who will all have very different relationships with and memories of water at times and places where its supply is critically endangered, offering rich sources for study and for action. The many wellsprings leading down to the sea within the Llangrannog area, and the apparently-unbreakable connection between these and the great ocean into which they all fall offer a perfect focus for the exploration of all things watery, especially with young people whose passion for our planet is crystal clear (and often shaming of their elders). Visits to and explorations of wellspring sites, their places within our lives and the tales they once told offer a powerful focus for young people towards an understanding of the climate crisis, of ecology and of the politics of water, and on how we are choosing to exploit our precious though limited resources within a dangerous and volatile world.

Examinations of the natural cycles of the whole site – its tree, plant, soil, insect and animal life, as well as the water in the well – should be undertaken, research ideally also being conducted cross-generationally, an exercise which will again link the work at ‘Ffynnon Fair’ to a wider understanding of global climate change.

And exploring questions like *What is our contemporary relationship with the earth?* and *What are we leaving behind for the next generation?* will increase our understandings of our world and of our own priorities, and the increasingly-significant realities of consumerism, packaging, pollution and the principles of conservation. Such activities force us to imagine what will come next as new technologies replace the old. And as sea levels once again rise worldwide, other questions: *What kind of world do we want to live in?* and *What actions will we need to undertake to ensure its survival?* are also posed. *Homo sapiens sapiens* is the name of the species that every human on earth originates from. The name means ‘wise man’. Exploring the histories and usages and abuses of sites like ‘Ffynnon Fair’ and the other wells in the Llangrannog area, will force us all to wonder how ‘wise’ we are currently being ... and how we might become wiser.

We all complain bitterly on the very rare occasions when there is not enough water to feed our lawns or wash our cars. It nearly always flows easily at the turn

of a tap for us, while worldwide nearly a billion people lack a regular and safe supply, and two and a half billion – a staggering two fifths of the world's population – don't have access to adequate sanitation. According to the charity *WaterAid*, 800 children will die today – and every day – because they are forced to drink dirty water. This desperate necessity, alongside water's growing scarcity, is becoming an ever-greater attraction for big business, seeking to make big profits from people's thirst, both in this country as well as throughout the world. Each year in Britain more than half a billion pounds is spent on bottled water and some seven million just on its advertising ... while, in the so-called 'developing' world, water privatisation is often being imposed by the more affluent West as a condition of its debt relief, through World Bank and IMF loans. This new/old struggle for water rights – set beside the pressing issues of catastrophic climate change – will in the very near future, in the view of many commentators, eclipse our wars for oil, as a pure water source becomes the new global battleground. Dozens of nations are already suffering from severe water shortages, and in the near future, many cities that have existed for centuries will simply dry up. This is Peter Swanson writing in 2001: *"Six billion people now inhabit Earth [more like seven, now]. By the year 2050, that figure may double. Yet, the planet's available water supply will remain the same."*

Many wells encourage their visitors to **make a wish** by throwing a small piece of metal (often, traditionally, a pin), a coin or paper, or even bread into the waters and counting the number of bubbles that arise. If there were lots of bubbles they believed that your wish would be granted, and quickly; if there were few, you'd have to wait a long time; ... and if there were no bubbles at all, your wish had been denied. Children, in particular, are fascinated by this idea, and I have run workshops on what they would wish for, what they would want to change in themselves, in their families, in other people, their village or town, in Wales, and the wider world. And sometimes, when they had made their wishes or asked their questions, they would hang these on trees next to wells, or throw them into their waters. In Scotland, these are called '*cloutie*' (or rag) wells:

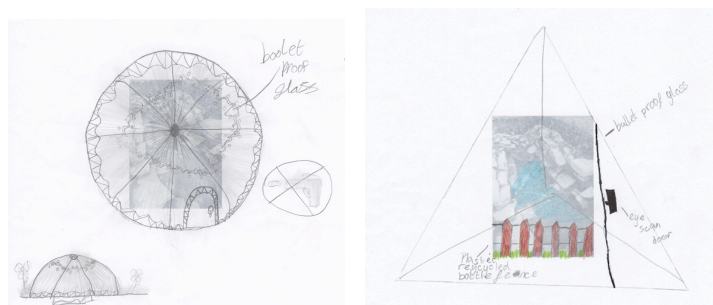


Perhaps 'Ffynnon Fair' could include these elements within its renewed design and programmes of work?

Much of **the work of archaeologists** is engaged in uncovering what has been discarded or hidden, objects and buildings that have passed their sell-by dates or have been buried through neglect or for some other special reason. The involvement of Dyfed Archaeological Trust (see [1. Back To The Source](#), above) will introduce young and older people to the science of archaeology and to some of its techniques, further encouraging a continued expanded physical relationship with the site.



In my work around the discovery of an ancient (Iron Age) wellspring site above Margam Park (also lazily named 'Ffynnon Fair' [SN 799 867]), local children have worked on producing imaginative new designs in response to what archaeology has revealed for its permanent display and safeguarding. Something similar could be developed at Llangrannog. In the past, my engagement with schools has involved a minimum of three (full or half-day) sessions, starting with an illustrated history of the sacred springs and holy wells of Wales (including some of the magical tales associated with them, and their often-parlous current states), as well as a brief introduction to the local sites (all in the classroom); followed by a visit to the wellspring(s); and then a 'creative responses' workshop back in the classroom. In most cases where the well had been abandoned, neglected or overgrown, this third session featured design ideas for its renovation, protection and interpretation. The **designs for new well coverings, even new well builds**, as well as the designing of interpretation panels and direction signs have regularly been undertaken by school children (see [2. New Wells For Old](#), above).



Following these sessions, the children would be encouraged to participate in practical hands-on activities, including well clean-up days, the further development of their ideas for access and safeguarding, as well as becoming permanent well guardians (see [6. Finding New Guardians](#), below).



In addition, wellspring sites and stories also offer great **stimuli for creativity**: for writing, for visual art, design, photography, film, music, theatre and dance, and the studies of geography, geology, history and biology, amongst others ... as well, of course, ecology. At the 2008 Pererinion Penrhys / Penrhys Pilgrims Festival based around Penrhys' own 'Ffynnon Fair' [ST 004 944], children from the local primary school wrote and designed a book (its cover is pictured below), made a film, and helped create a touring exhibition about their well and their village, as well as taking part in a community play:



Such a publication on the origins and history of the Llangrannog well(s), its possible connection to Carannog, and the work the community, including its young people, had engaged in to bring it back to life, would add greatly to the Project.

## 6. Finding New Guardians

Ambitious projects like this one pop up regularly ... and often fail. Initial excitement and energy is overwhelmed by the waning of enthusiasm, the drying-up of funds and sometimes the aging of its leaders and participants, in parallel with the inevitable growth of new weeds and brambles, the choking of water flows, and the gradual tumbling of walls.



In the past, there were well guardians, usually women – often seen as having very special powers – who controlled access to our wells, arranged divination services, organised special events often on saints' or other auspicious days, providing food and drink, and sometimes even accommodation.

You will need something similar (though much less elaborate) for 'Ffynnon Fair', to protect both what you reveal, what you imagine and what you create, people willing to regularly visit the site, and to support the many activities and events that might be planned. This time, however, I think they can be males as well as

females who offer their services, and they will not need any 'special powers' except those of love and care, and perhaps sometimes a measure of hard graft to help preserve and develop the significance of these once very special places for the future, for local people and visitors alike.

These new guardians can be individuals, community groups, local organisations or businesses ... and, of course, schools, all working together to ensure the longevity of the site(s).

## 7. Creating A Tradition

*"There is nothing so easy to invent as a tradition."*

Sir Walter Scott, who invented new explanations and myths for much of what we now consider to be Scotland's 'history' and culture, including for wellspring sites like St Ronan's Well at Innerleithen, Peebles-shire

All tales started somewhere ... and were not always based upon the 'facts' of a 'real' event. Some have been invented, or at least embellished, often well after the time of the supposed 'happening'. It is impossible to ever really know just how much of what we think we know about our wellsprings tales is based in actuality. Did a bird from heaven really determine the site of Carannog's first church, or was it the more-practical proximity of a spring of pure water and a convenient cave? Did Bica really have a toothache resulting in a rock/tooth cast into the bay? Did pilgrims really visit Llangrannog's 'Ffynnon Fair' to sample its waters? And what cures and miracles resulted from their journeys?

While we should, of course, continue to try to find the 'facts' hidden within all of our wellspring (as all other historic) sites with as much intellectual rigour as is possible, we should not be discouraged from celebrating our earliest ancestors' explanations for these places which tell us much about their hopes and fears, their beliefs and understandings of the world .... and we should not be discouraged from creating new traditions, appropriate to our own age and needs. There certainly was a 'Crannog Fair' in Llangrannog, in the space, once-empty, between Carannog's church and the river, held annually on 16 May, the saint's day. An old / new Carannog Festival or maybe a 'Festival of the Waters', could be re-established to commence at the time of the re-launch of the renovated Llangrannog well, to be followed each year (or biannually, perhaps), thereafter.

And, although there is no record of which I am aware of 'well dressing' locally, the 'tradition' could be borrowed (mainly nowadays from Cornwall and The Malverns), and introduced at the surviving Llangrannog wells, and even at the sites where nothing much today remains, all perhaps linked with a colourful, musical procession from well to well.

And, in addition to the 'Wells Walk' proposed below (see [8. Walking On Water](#)), a **Carannog Trail** visiting the renovated 'his' well, his church, his cave and statue would make an excellent detour for those walking the Wales Coast path, encouraging people to venture further into the village beyond the beach. (I am aware of the 'history trail' planned as part of the LWC Cranogwen statue





## 9. Tapping Sources

Without knowing what your final plans for the renewal / renovation of the 'Ffynnon Fair' site and beyond will be after the next stages of your explorations, it is difficult to calculate accurately the scale of the project's funding needs. Having said that, other well projects around Wales (and elsewhere) have accessed substantial financial support for projects similar to yours (including from the National Lottery Heritage and Arts Funds, the Arts Council of Wales, the Welsh Government, local councils, churches' funds, and sundry trusts. The Project currently links well with the many Welsh Government, and other, initiatives concerned with the importance of sites of pilgrimage, walking for physical and mental health, faith tourism, education and ecology.

I am also aware that LWC has knowledge and previous experience of attracted significant sums from a variety of funding bodies, so would be optimistic of your success in this regard, especially given the self and JS-funded work already achieved.



## afterword

These proposals are based upon the important work already achieved by the Llangrannog Welfare Committee in recognising the community, historic and spiritual significance of the 'Ffynnon Fair' site, and in taking the essential steps to protect the well by re-purchasing and fencing off the land on which it currently emerges. Our early, tentative explorations into the site, and the interest generated, has clearly laid a firm foundation for future developments.

The presentation of this Report marks the end of my own 'official' involvement with the **NEW / OLD WELL(S?) FOR LLANGRANNOG Project**. I would, however, value being part of what is to happen next (and I know JS feels the same), at the very least to be kept informed of your progress, or, if felt appropriate and needed, playing some small part in the educational elements of your future plans (see [5. Being There](#), above).

It's really over to you, now, though. As the new custodians, the well guardians of 'Ffynnon Fair', the questions LWC need to be asking include: ***How should we be renovating and developing the site in order to ensure the well's long-term significance within the community? And what part can the site play within Llangrannog – for people of all ages – as well as for its visitors?***

I wish you all the very best in your work in what is an important (though seemingly-small) initiative within the history of our nation, its renaissance offering, in contrast, a strong metaphor for how we will need to interact with the natural world in order to guarantee a healthier, more active and more responsible future.

**Phil Cope**

21 September 2022

## Appendix:

### Y FFYNON

gan '*Cranogwen*' (Sarah Jane Rees)

Ffynon fechan, groew, loew,  
 Llygad llon y dyfroedd byw,  
 Llifo allan yw dy fywyd,  
 Gweini'n rhad i ddynol ryw;  
 Gwenu'n wastad mewn serchawgrwydd  
 Mae dy ddyfroedd pur ac iach;  
 Gloewi beunydd mewn sirioldeb  
 Mae dy lygad, ffynon fach.

O ba le y daw dy ddyfroedd?  
 O ba bellder mae eu taith?  
 Heinif y bwrlymant allan;  
 Ddeuant hwy o ddyfnder maith?  
 Gwelaf dy dymunit siarad,  
 Gwenu, murmur, mae dy li';  
 O nad allwn, heb betruso,  
 Ddeall beth ddywedi di!

Ffynon fechan, 'r wyt yn loew.  
 'R wyt yn groew ac yn llon,  
 Fel pe byddai gwir dangnefedd  
 Ar yr orsedd yn dy fron;  
 Mae'th drysorau yn ddiderfyn,  
 Mae dy gyfoeth yn ddidrai,  
 Er cyfranu 'rioed o hono,  
 Nid yw eto ronyn llai!

Wnei di adael imi wybod  
 Y dirgelwch am dy 'stôr, -  
 Am dy gyfoeth, - am dy heddwch?  
 Ah! Mi welaf, - ie, 'r Môr!  
 Merch y Môr wyt ti, fy mechan,  
 Merch y Cefnfôr mawr didrai;  
 Felly nid oes achos ofni  
 'R â dy gyfoeth byth yn llai.

O na roddai'r Nef i minau  
 Fod yn debyg – fod yr un,  
 Mewn cymundeb cywir, cyson  
 A'r "Cyflawnder" mawr ei hun –  
 Fod yn blentyn i'r Goruchaf!  
 Yna, fel dy ddyfroedd di,  
 Fy ngrasusau darddent allan,  
 Heb un prinder yn eu lli'.



Ffynon fach, mae swyn dy wyneb,  
 Swyn dy lygad gloew, llon,  
 Wedi hudo'r sêr i waered,  
 I addurno 'th dyner fron,  
 A bwrlymol si dy ddyfroedd  
 Wedi swyno 'r blodau blydd  
 I ymgasglu o dy gwmpas,  
 I roi cusan ar dy rudd.

O na roddai'r Nef i minau  
 Fod, fel ti, yn loew iawn!  
 O nad allwn feddu beunydd,  
 Yn fy mron, dangnefedd llawn,  
 Enill serch y Nef a'r ddaear,  
 Denu pawb i'm caru i'  
 Gwenu heddwch i bob wyneb,  
 Fel y gwna dy lygad di!

Ffynon fechan, teimlaf finau,  
 Wrth dy ganfod, beth o'r swyn;  
 Ac mi hoffwn, mewn ad-daliad,  
 Ganu iti benill mwyn:  
 Aros wna i syllu arnat,  
 Ac i adolygu 'th fri;  
 A cyn imi fyned ymaith,  
 Yfaf o dy loew li'.

### THE WELL

by 'Cranogwen' (trans. James Stewart)

Little well, fresh and bright,  
 Happy eye of living water,  
 Your life is a flowing out,  
 Freely serving humanity;  
 Your waters, pure and wholesome  
 Always smile in loving kindness;  
 Little well, your eye – your source –  
 Shines daily in happiness.

Whence do your waters come?  
 How long is their journey?  
 They bubble up so full of life;  
 Do they come from great depths?  
 I see that you wish to speak,  
 A smiling murmur is your flow;  
 O if only we could clearly  
 Understand what you would say!

Little well, you are bright,  
 You are fresh and happy,  
 As if true peace  
 Were enthroned in your breast;  
 Your treasures are unending,  
 Your wealth is unfailing,  
 Though you always give your water,  
 Still there is not a drop less.

Will you let me know  
 The secret of your treasure –  
 Of your wealth – of your peace?  
 Ah, I see it – yes, the Sea!  
 You are the daughter of the *Sea*, my little one,  
 Daughter of the great and endless ocean;  
 So there is no need to fear  
 That your wealth will ever be less.

O that Heaven would let me  
 Be like you – be as one  
 In true communion, true agreement  
 With the great 'Fulness' itself –  
 To be a child of the Almighty!  
 Then, like your water,  
 My grace would spring forth  
 Without any scarcity in its flow.

Little well, the charm of your face,  
 The charm of your bright, happy eye  
 Has enchanted the stars to descend,  
 To adorn your tender breast,  
 And the gurgling whisper of your waters  
 Has enchanted the tender flowers  
 To gather around you,  
 And to kiss your cheek.

O that Heaven would let me  
 Be like you, so truly bright!  
 O that I could possess every day,  
 In my breast, true peace,  
 And bring the love of Heaven to the earth,  
 Draw all to love me,  
 Give a smile of peace to every face,  
 As does your eye!

Little well, when I look at you  
 I feel something of your healing charm;  
 And I wish, as my repayment,

To sing to you this gentle verse:  
I will wait to gaze at you,  
And to request your favour;  
And before I leave,  
I will drink of your bright flow.



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author of

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