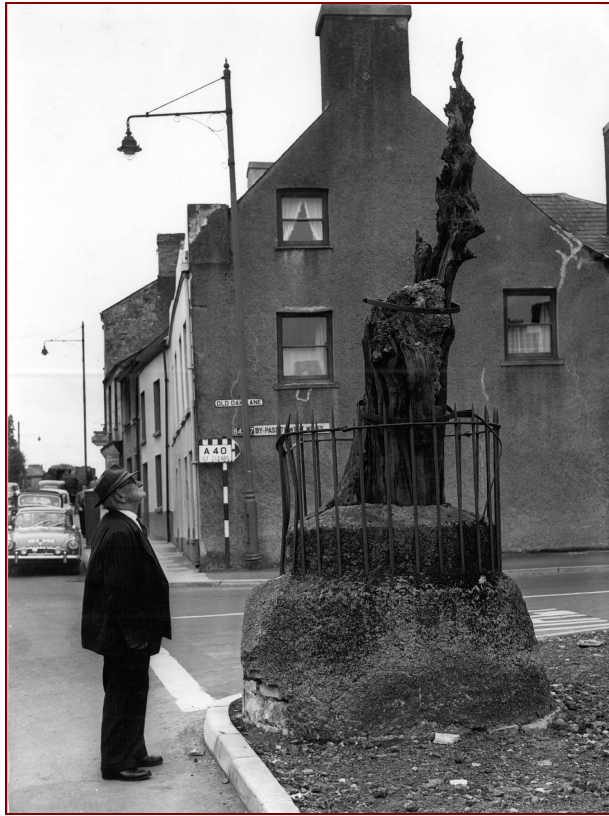


History of the Old Oak



Photograph courtesy Mr Ken Davies

The case in the foyer of St Peter's Civic Hall contains fragments of the Old Oak, also known as Priory Oak and Merlin's Oak. This famous Carmarthen landmark stood at the junction of Priory Street and Old Oak Lane until 1978. Another fragment of the Old Oak is on display at the County Museum in the Bishop's Palace, Abergwili. An oak had stood at this site for several centuries and was associated with Merlin's prophecy that:

*'When Priory's Oak shall tumble down
Then shall fall Carmarthen Town'*

For most of the 20th century the surviving sections of the Old Oak were supported by a stone and concrete plinth, enclosed by iron railings. In 1978 the Oak was dismantled and removed in order to facilitate the flow of traffic at a busy junction. Shortly before its removal, the Carmarthen Journal published the following account of the Oak's history:

'The oak is now but a withered stump and, for sentimental reasons, is allowed to remain embedded in concrete and surrounded by a railing . . . There are few people nowadays who believe the prophecy, but there is no gainsaying the fact that the Old Oak is a tourist attraction. Books and guides on Carmarthen invariably make mention of the legend which has grown up around the old oak tree.

The old oak tree is said to have sprung from an acorn planted on May 19th 1659 by a master at the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School named Adams, who is also supposed to have been an ancestor of the American President of that name. It was planted, it was thought, to commemorate the accession of Charles II to the throne.

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century it was intentionally 'killed' by a nearby tradesman who disapproved of the age-old practice of people congregating under its spreading branches at all hours of the day and night . . .

Mr J. F. Jones, Curator of the Carmarthen County Museum, has a theory that the importance of the Old Oak in Priory Street goes back to Roman days. He watched the site of the work of road widening to see if anything would be found that would support or disprove his theory. During the operation workmen cleared away a layer of earth that had not been disturbed for "very many centuries" and among the material Mr Jones picked up several pieces of the de-luxe Roman red glaze pottery known as Samian Ware.

Some of the bits had belonged to decorated hemispherical bowls, while others were fragments of plain platters and shallow dishes. They could be roughly dated back to the period of the late first to early second century of the Christian era and Mr Jones is satisfied that they indicate that the ground immediately round the Old Oak was within the area of intensive Roman occupation.

A few hundred yards east of this spot, the earthen-banked amphitheatre discovered by the late Mr George L. Ovens, former borough engineer and surveyor, can still be seen. It was customary for the Romans to place these structures near the bounds of their more important settlements.

What of Merlin himself? Born 900 years ago, he became famous during the time when the Knights Templars were powerful and had a centre in Slebech, in Pembrokeshire, from which they were supposed to exercise control of all the churches in the southern part of Carmarthenshire as well as the Gower peninsula, which at one time formed a part of Sir Gâr. The Knights Templars had elaborate burial rites, including tree planting on burial sites.

Apparently the practice of tree-planting had been in vogue long before the Knights Templars were ever thought of and proof of this theory is that in old camps discovered by archaeologists a thorn tree was often planted on the cairn-marked grave of a chieftain.

Quite naturally, with such persons as Merlin, a number of legends have been woven, and one of these is that Vivienne was so enchanted with him, and at the same time afraid of the possibility that she might lose his love for her, that she used her enchantments on him and caused him to be securely embraced by an all-encircling oak tree. After his burial, says the legend, his spirit rose and entered into the stem and branches of the oak tree planted on his grave . . .'



Source - Carmarthen Journal; Research - Lyn Davies
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Hanes yr Hen Dderwen



Llun drwy caredigrwydd Mr Ken Davies

Mae'r cas gwydr yng nghyntedd Neuadd Ddinesig San Pedr yn dal darnau o'r Hen Dderwen, a elwir hefyd yn Dderwen y Priorddy a Derwen Myrddin. Tan 1978 gwelwyd y goeden erwog hon yn sefyll ar gyffordd Stryd y Prior a Lôn yr Hen Dderwen. Arddangosir darn arall o'r Hen Dderwen yn Amgueddfa'r Sir ym Mhlas yr Esgob, Abergwili. Bu derwen yn sefyll ar y safle hwn am ganrifoedd ac fe'i cysylltir gyda phroffwydoliaeth Myrddin:

*'When Priory's Oak shall tumble down
Then shall fall Carmarthen Town'*

Am fwyafrif o'r 20fed ganrif cynhaltwyd gweddillion Yr Hen Dderwen gan garreg a phlith concriad, wedi ei amgylchynu gan reiliau haearn. Tynnwyd y Dderwen lawr yn 1978 er mwyn hwyluso llif y traffig ar y gyffordd brysur. Ychydig cyn ei symud fe gyhoeddodd y "Carmarthen Journal" hanes y Dderwen:

'Bellach dim ond stwmpyn wedi gwywo yw'r Dderwen, ac am resymau sentimental, fe'i cadwyd mewn concriad ai amgylchynu gan reiliau . . . Nifer fach o bobol sydd, y dyddiau yma, yn credu'r broffwydoliaeth, ond does dim gwadu'r ffaith fod yr Hen Dderwen yn atyniad i dwristiaid. Heb eithriad mae llyfrau ac arweinyfrau ar Gaerfyrddin yn sôn am y chwedl sydd wedi tyfu o amgylch yr hen dderwen.

Dywedir fod yr hen dderwen wedi tyfu o fesen a blannwyd ar Fai 19eg 1659 gan athro, o'r enw Adams, yn Ysgol Ramadeg y Frenhines Elizabeth, sydd hefyd i fod yn un o hynafiaid Arlywydd America o'r un enw. Fe gredwyd, ei bod wedi ei phlannu i nodi dyfodiad Siarl yr Ail i'r orsedd. Tua dechrau'r bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg fe'i "lladdwyd" yn fwriadol gan fasnachwr a anghymeradwyodd y traddodiad o bobol yn ymgynnull o dan y canghennau bob awr o'r dydd a'r nos . . .

Mae gan Mr J. F. Jones, Curadur Amgueddfa Sir Gaerfyrddin, ddamcaniaeth fod pwysigrwydd yr Hen Dderwen yn Stryd y Prior yn mynd nôl i ddyddiau Rhufeinig. Bu'n goruchwyllo gwaith o ledur'r ffordd ar y safle i weld a oedd unrhyw beth i gefnogi neu anghymeradwyo ei ddamcaniaeth. Yn ystod y gwaith fe gliriodd y gweithwyr truch o bridd nad oedd wedi ei gyffwrdd am ganrifoedd, ac yn y pridd fe gododd Mr Jones ddarnau o grochenwaith sglein coch Rhufeinig moethus sy'n adnabyddus fel 'Samian Ware'.

Yr oedd rhai o'r darnau yn perthyn i ddysglau addurnedig hemisfferig, tra bod eraill yn ddarnau o blatiau plaen a dysglau bas. Gellir eu dyddio nôl tua'r ganrif gyntaf neu ddechrau'r ail ganrif o'r cyfnod Cristnogol ac mae Mr Jones yn hapus ei fod wedi nodi fod y tir sydd o amgylch yr Hen Dderwen yn ardal o bwysigrwydd Rhufeinig.

O fewn rhai llathenni i'r dwyrain o'r fan yma, gellir gweld o hyd yr amffitheatr banc-pridd, a ddarganfuwyd gan y diweddar Mr George L. Ovens, cyn peiriannwr ac arolygwr burdeistref.

Roedd yn arferiad gan y Rhufeiniaid i sefydlu eu hadeiladau ar ffiniau eu hanheddau pwysicaf.

Beth am Myrddin ei hun? Ganwyd 900 mlynedd yn ôl, fe ddaeth yn erwog yn ystod y cyfnod pan fu Marchogion y Temlyddion mewn awdurdod a chanddynt ganolfan yn Slebech, yn Sir Benfro, o le yr oeddent fod i arfer rheolaeth ar yr holl eglwysi yn ne Sir Gaerfyrddin ynghyd â phenrhyn Gŵyr, a oedd unrwaith yn rhan o Sir Gâr. Yr oedd gan Farchogion y Temlyddion ddododau claddu rhwysgfawr iawn gan gynnwys plannu coed ar safleoedd claddu.

Yn ôl pob golwg bu'r ymarferiad o blannu coed yn ffasiynol ym mhell cyn amser Marchogion y Temlyddion a phrawf o'r ddamcaniaeth hon yw bod yr hen wersylloedd a ddarganfuwyd gan archeolegwyr yn cynnwys coeden ddrain a blannwyd ar fedd pennaeth ac wedi ei charnedd farcio.

Yn naturiol, gyda phobl fel Myrddin, mae sawl chwedl wedi eu gwau, ac un o rain yw bod Vivienne wedi ei swyno gymaint ganddo, ac ar yr un pryd yn ofni ei bod yn mynd i gollu ei gariad tuag ati, ei bod wedi defnyddio ei swyn arno gan achosi iddo glymu ei hun i dderwen holl-amgylchol. Ar ôl ei gladdu, yn ôl y chwedl, fe gododd ei ysbryd ac aeth i mewn i fonion a brigau'r dderwen a blannwyd ar ei fedd . . .'



Ffynhonnell - 'Carmarthen Journal'; Ymchwil - Lyn Davies
Cyfieithydd - Eleri James
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