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Dublin Core

Title

The Village that lost its Church | Y Pentref a gollodd ei Eglwys

Subject

Storm

Cwm-yr-Eglwys

Royal Charter (ship)

Creator

Natasha de Chroustchhoff

Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

Date

2023

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Relation

<https://perma.cc/HW2A-QP3J>

Format

Curatescape story

Language

English

Welsh

Coverage

52.023629487630984, -4.895561843971731

Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

Lede

The villagers of Cwm-yr-Eglwys lost their church in the same devastating 1859 storm that sank the Royal Charter.

Lede (Welsh)

Collodd pentrefwyr Cwmyreglwys eu heglwys yn yr un storm ddinistriol ym 1859 ag a suddodd y Royal Charter.

Story

Between 25 and 26 October 1859, one of the strongest storms of the 19th century hit the Irish sea. Known as the ‘Royal Charter’ storm, the tempest was named after the ship *Royal Charter* which was caught on its way from Australia to Britain, carrying five hundred passengers and a huge amount of precious gold bullions. Following a brief stop in Queenstown (now Cobh) in Cork, the *Royal Charter* departed on 25 October 1859 for its final destination Liverpool. As the winds worsened, the ship anchored off the north coast of Anglesey to ride out the storm. But on the morning of 26 October 1859, the ship was smashed to pieces as strong winds pushed it onto the cliffs of Moelfre, a village on Anglesey's north-eastern coast. Around 450 persons on the Royal Charter died and the total loss of lives of the storm was around 800.

The villagers of Cwm-yr-Eglwys, a tiny fishing hamlet a few miles east of Fishguard, were ignorant of this impending nautical disaster when they gathered in their mediaeval church for the early evening service on October 25th 1859. They knew that stormy weather was building from the west that a high spring tide was lapping towards the top of the beach. Where once there had been two fields below the church and its surrounding graveyard, there was now only a short stretch of grass and it was not unknown for the lower part of the cemetery to be flooded. On two earlier occasions, the sea had actually broken into the church and in 1850 it had washed away the chancel – which had not been rebuilt.

In the late afternoon of this particular day the gale all of a sudden veered from westerly to nor’nor’easterly, with the high tide expected at 6.41pm. The village was now exposed to the full force of the gale. Three ships that had been sheltering in the lee of the nearby promontory were driven on the rocks; there was no possibility of rescuing their crews. The congregation in the church, many of belonging to sea going families, were doubtless praying for deliverance but at the height of the storm the tide, driven by the wind, surged through the east door and across the nave, bringing down the north and east walls of the building.

Miraculously, no one was lost or injured in the confusion and all the worshippers managed to escape via the west door. The graveyard however sustained the full force of the waves and was half washed away. Coffins were exposed or broken apart and some were seen bobbing on the water, with the corpses of the recent dead visible to their kinsfolk.

The storm did not abate until 6am next morning. One young mariner, who happened to be home from sea, took his grandfather’s boat out at first light and managed to retrieve several of the floating coffins, dragging them ashore by a rope tied to the handles. The drowned

sailors' bodies were washed in next day and the seven dead men were laid out in the ruined, roofless church.

All around the coast of North Pembrokeshire there was death and devastation following The Great Charter Storm. But nowhere was there such a disaster as at Cwm-yr-Eglwys. The church was beyond repair and a replacement was built on higher ground. Many of the traumatised inhabitants moved uphill and eventually created a new settlement closer to the turnpike road. Following repeated batterings that exposed more coffins, bodies and bones, the graveyard was provided with a stout retaining wall in 1882 and all the skeletal remains were interred in a communal grave behind it. This wall has had to be reinforced and repaired several times following storm damage, as recently in 1979 and 2007.

Today, the holiday makers who flock Cwm-yr-Eglwys (Valley of the Church) can see a model coastal vessel, made by a local blacksmith, beside the gate.

The remains of the ancient church (originally founded by the Irish Saint Brynach) still stands above the beach. On it turns a weathervane in the shape of a fish. Nowadays, we don't need that to know which way the wind blows. The Royal Charter Storm brought into being weather forecasting as we know it. The following year, 1860, saw the beginning of a system of storm warnings relayed by telegraph around the coast and in 1861 weather forecasts began to be printed in newspapers. But the villagers voted with their feet and never returned to Cwm-yr-Eglwys.

In 2009 a poet, Emyr Lewis, who knew the place from childhood holidays, wrote a short epitaph:

*Gwylan haerllug a glaw yn arllwys,
cŵn, tai haf ac acenion Tafwys,
tonnau a beddau ar bwys, a chreigle;
mae rhyw wagle yng Nghwm-yr-Eglwys.*

*Impudent seagull and pouring rain,
Dogs, summer homes and Thames accents,
Waves and graves nearby and rocks,
There is an emptiness in Cwm-yr-Eglwys.*

(Trans. Morys Rhys)

Story (Welsh)

Rhwng 25 a 26 Hydref 1859, cafodd Môr Iwerddon ei daro gan un o stormydd cryfaf y 19eg ganrif. Mae'r storm yn cael ei hadnabod fel storm y 'Royal Charter' ar ôl y llong "Royal Charter" a gafodd ei dal ar ei ffordd o Awstralia i Brydain, yn cario pum cant o deithwyr a swm anferth o fwliwn aur gwerthfawr. Yn dilyn arhosiad byr yn Queenstown (Cobh erbyn hyn) yng Nghorc, ymadawodd y "Royal Charter" ar 25 Hydref 1859 i fynd i'w chyrchfan derfynol yn Lerpwl. Wrth i'r gwyntoedd waethygu, angorodd y llong oddi ar lannau gogledd Ynys Môn i aros i'r storm gilio. Ond ar fore 26 Hydref 1859, cafodd y llong ei chwilfriwio wrth i wyntoedd cryf ei gwthio i glogwyni Moelfre, ar arfordir gogledd-ddwyreiniol yr ynys. Bu farw tua 450 o bobl ar y Royal Charter a chafodd cyfanswm o ryw 800 o fywydau eu colli yn y storm.

Ym mhentref pysgota bach Cwmyreglwys, ychydig filltiroedd i'r dwyrain o Abergwaun, wyddai'r trigolion ddim byd am y drychineb forol oedd yn yr arfaeth pan ymgasglodd pawb

yn eu heglwys ganoloesol ar gyfer y gwasanaeth yn gynnar ar noson 25 Hydref 1859. Fe wyddai pawb fod tywydd stormus yn codi o'r gorllewin a bod llanw mawr yn nesáu at ben uchaf y traeth. Roedd dau gae wedi bod islaw'r eglwys a'r fynwent ar un adeg, ond dim ond rhimyn o laswellt oedd yno bellach ac nid oedd yn gwbl anghyffredin i ran isaf y fynwent gael ei gorlifo. Ddwy waith o'r blaen roedd y môr wedi torri i mewn i'r eglwys ac ym 1850 roedd wedi golchi'r gangell i ffwrdd.

Ar ddiwedd y prynhawn arbennig hwn, yn ddisymwth dyma'r gwynt mawr yn gwyro o'r gorllewin i'r gogledd-ogledd-ddwyrain, a disgwyliid y llanw uchel am 6.41pm. Roedd y pentref bellach yn agored i rym llawn y gwynt. Gyrrwyd tair llong a fu'n cysgodi o dan y trwyn gerllaw i'r creigiau; doedd dim modd achub y criwiau. Mae'n siŵr bod y gynulleidfa yn yr eglwys, lawer ohonyn nhw'n perthyn i deuluoedd morwrol, yn gweddïo am achubiaeth ond ar anterth y storm dyma ymchwydd y llanw, a yrrwyd gan y gwynt, yn chwalu drws y dwyrain ac ar draws corff yr eglwys, gan ddymchwel waliau gogleddol a dwyreiniol yr adeilad. Yn wyrthiol, chafodd neb ei golli na'i anafu yn y dryswch a llwyddodd yr addolwyr i gyd i ddianc drwy ddrws y gorllewin. Serch hynny, y fynwent a ddiodeffodd rym llawn y tonnau a chafodd ei hanner ei olchi i ffwrdd. Cafodd eirch eu codi neu eu torri a gwelwyd rhai ar frig y dŵr, gyda chyrrff rhai oedd wedi marw'n ddiweddar yn weladwy i'w teuluoedd.

Wnaeth y storm ddim gostegu tan 6 o'r gloch fore trannoeth. Aeth un morwr ifanc, oedd yn digwydd bod gartref o'r môr, â chwch ei dad-cu allan yn y golau cyntaf ac achub nifer o'r eirch, gan eu llusgo i'r lan â rhaff wedi'i chlymu wrth y dolenni. Cafodd cyrrff y morwyr a foddwyd eu golchi i'r lan y diwrnod wedyn a gosodwyd y saith dyn marw i orwedd yn yr eglwys adfeiliedig ddi-do.

Daeth storm y Royal Charter â marwolaeth a dinistr ar hyd glannau Gogledd Sir Benfro. Ond ni welodd unman fwy o drychineb na Chwmyreglwys. Doedd dim modd trwsio'r eglwys ac adeiladwyd un newydd ar dir uwch. Symudodd llawer o'r trigolion sigledig i fyny'r bryn ac yn y pen draw crëwyd anheddiad newydd yn nes at y ffordd dyrpeg. Ar ôl cael ei tharo'n aml gan donnau a gododd ragor o eirch, cyrrff ac esgryn, cafodd y fynwent wal gynnal gadarn ym 1882 a chafodd gweddillion pob ysgerbwd eu claddu mewn bedd cymunedol y tu ôl iddi. Bu'n rhaid atgyfnerthu a thrwsio'r wal hon sawl gwaith yn sgil difrod stormydd, fel yn ddiweddar yn 1979 a 2007.

Heddiw, mae'r torfeydd sy'n dod ar eu gwyliau i Gwmyreglwys yn gallu gweld model o gwch bach, o waith gof lleol, gerllaw'r glwyd.

Mae olion yr eglwys hynafol (a sefydlwyd yn wreiddiol gan Brynach Sant o Iwerddon) yn dal i sefyll uwchben y traeth. Ar y brig mae ceiliog gwynt ar ffurf pysgodyn. Heddiw, does dim angen inni wybod pa ffordd mae'r gwynt yn chwythu. Yn sgil storm y Royal Charter y dechreuodd rhagolygon tywydd fel rydyn ni'n eu hadnabod. Y flwyddyn wedyn, 1860, a welodd ddechrau system o rybuddion stormydd a gâi eu mynegi gan y telegraff o amgylch y glannau ac ym 1861 dechreuodd rhagolygon tywydd gael eu hargraffu mewn papurau newydd. Serch hynny, penderfynu ymadael wnaeth y pentrefwyr ac ni ddychwelodd neb erioed i Gwmyreglwys.

Yn 2009, lluniodd Emyr Lewis, oedd yn gyfarwydd â'r lle ar ôl cael gwyliau yno yn ei blentyndod, y llinellau hyn:

*Gwylan haerllug a glaw yn arllwys,
cŵn, tai haf ac acenion Tafwys,
tonnau a beddau ar bwys, a chreigle;
mae rhyw wagle yng Nghwm-yr-Eglwys.*

Factoid

Related Resources

Alexander McKee, *The Golden Wreck: The Tragedy of the "Royal Charter"* (Avid Publications, 2000)

Tom Russell, Isaac Lewis, Folk Song Recording, <https://youtu.be/7ALfs81CFdE>

Anglesey History, "Sinking of the Royal Charter", archived at <https://perma.cc/7NFQ-K2XX>

L. Villiger, M. Schwander, L. Schürch, L. Stanisc, and S. Brönnimann (2017), The "Royal Charter" Storm of 1859. In: Brönnimann, S. (Ed.) Historical Weather Extremes in Reanalyses. *Geographica Bernensia* G92, p. 35-45, archived at <https://perma.cc/X2HJ-ZNXV>

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