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Dublin Core

Title

The Worst Spot in Wales | Y Lle Gwaethaf yng Nghymru

Subject

Holyhead

Caergybi

Jonathan Swift

Waiting

Aros

Creator

Claire Connolly

Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

Date

2023

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Relation

<https://perma.cc/3UGM-9LHB>

Format

Curatescape story

Language

English

Welsh

Coverage

53.30972872480529, -4.633926845889407

Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

Lede

Remembered by many as a brilliant writer and satirist, Jonathan Swift spent a lot of time on the Irish Sea, travelling between London and his Dublin home. In the autumn of 1727, he spent a memorable few days in Holyhead when, travelling back to Ireland following the success of *Gulliver's Travels*, he found himself at the mercy of the weather.

Lede (Welsh)

Treuliodd yr awdur a'r dychanwr enwog Jonathan Swift lawer o amser ar Fôr Iwerddon wrth iddo deithio'n ôl a blaen rhwng Llundain a'i gartref yn Nulyn. Yn ystod hydref 1727 fe dreuliodd ychydig ddyddiau cofiadwy yng Nghaergybi ar y ffordd yn ôl i Iwerddon yn dilyn llwyddiant *Gulliver's Travels*, pan gafodd ei hun ar drugaredd y tywydd.

Story

In September of 1727, Jonathan Swift embarked on a return trip to Ireland from London. Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, Swift was riding high on the success of his recently published *Gulliver's Travels*. He was also though anxious for news of his friend and lover Esther Johnson (known as 'Stella' in his poems) who lay dangerously ill in Dublin. So keen was Swift to get home to Dublin that, on encountering delays at Chester, he turned northwards and pursued a risky mountainous overland route to Holyhead, hoping to boarding a packet there. In Holyhead, though, there were more delays and Swift did not get to Dublin in early October: Stella died four months later.

The two poems that Swift wrote in Holyhead, along with the journal he composed there over his seven day stay, express memorable and eloquent rage at being trapped 'in the worst spot in Wales under the very worst circumstances', as he put it in the 'Holyhead Journal'.

A frustrated Swift tried to write his way out of his circumstances and his poem 'Holyhead. Sept. 25. 1727' gives free rein to his rage:

*Lo here I sit at Holy Head
With muddy ale and mouldy bread
All Christian vittals stink of fish,
I'm where my enemies would wish.
Convict of lies is every Sign,
The inn has not a drop of wine
I'm fastened both by wind and tide,
I see the ship at anchor ride.
The Captain swears the sea's too rough,
He has not passengers enough.
And thus the Dean is forc'd to stay
Till others come to help the pay.*

Famously cantankerous, Swift railed only at his own predicament but also at the wider predicament of Anglo-Irish elites, at once reliant upon the Irish sea for communication with Britain and victims to its changing conditions. Prevailing south-westerly winds mean that ships are to this day more commonly stuck in Welsh rather than Irish ports and readers may well have composed their own Holyhead social media posts, text messages or tweets.

Holyhead was linked to London via a network of road and rail with a layered history: the Holyhead road, now the A5, follows an old Roman Road that runs from North Wales through Shrewsbury and the marches, right into Marble Arch via Cricklewood and Kilburn. That route was modernised from the early 1800s when Thomas Telford built his suspension bridge over the Menai Straits and improved the road.

In Swift's day, though, the journey was a treacherous one. He left Chester at 11am on Friday the 22nd September. From there he travelled seven miles further and stopped at an ale-house, before going a further fifteen miles to Rhuddlan, where he spent the night, dining on 'bad meat, and tolerable wine'. He left 'a quarter after 4 morn. on Saturday' and overnights again at Conway, before travelling on to Bangor. Swift and his servant then crossed the Menai Straits a few miles from Bangor and stayed at an inn 22 miles from Holyhead, 'which if it be well kept, will break Bangor'.

Departing for Holyhead at 4 in the morning, Swift hoped to be in Holyhead in time for church on Sunday morning. Progress was slow, though, and with only 7 miles still to go, they had to stop at Llangefni for a 2 hour rest. Both Swift and his servant had problems with their horses and they walked the remaining few miles 'on the rocky ways' before finally meeting a blacksmith. With three miles to go to Holyhead, they left their horses to be shod 'and walked to a hedge Inn 3 miles from Holyhead; There I stayd an hour, with no ale to be drunk. a Boat offered, and I went by Sea and Sayl in it to Holyhead.' That Sunday evening, he slept in Holyhead.

Swift remained in Holyhead for four days, all the while anxious for letters and news from Dublin. 'I confine my self to my narrow chambr in all the unwalkable hours.', he wrote, complaining that 'The Master of the packet boat, one Jones, hath not treated me with the least civility, altho Watt gave him my name. In short: I come from being used like an Emperor to be used worse than a Dog on Holyhead.' Still, he walked on Caer Gybi and sought in vain for a glimpse of the Irish coast or a shift in the weather. Despite (or maybe because of) his unhappiness, Swift's Holyhead Journal remains one of the great pieces of occasional port literature.

Story (Welsh)

Ym mis Medi 1727 cychwynnodd Jonathan Swift ar daith yn ôl i Iwerddon o Lundain. Ac yntau'n Ddeon yng Nghadeirlan Sant Padrig yn Nulyn, roedd wrthi'n mwynhau llwyddiant mawr gyda *Gulliver's Travels* a oedd newydd ei gyhoeddi. Ond roedd hefyd ar bigau'r drain yn aros i glywed rhywbeth am ei ffrind a'i gariad Esther Johnson ('Stella' ei farddoniaeth) a oedd yn ddifrifol wael yn Nulyn. Roedd Swift ar gymaint o frys i gyrraedd adref nes i rwystrau yng Nghaer beri iddo droi i'r gogledd a dilyn llwybr mynyddig peryglus am Gaer gybi, yn y gobaith o gael lle ar long bost. Ond wedi cyrraedd Caer gybi roedd rhagor o rwystrau'n ei aros, a methodd gyrraedd Dulyn cyn dechrau mis Hydref. Bu farw Stella bedwar mis yn ddiweddarach.

Mae'r ddwy gerdd a gyfansoddodd yng Nghaer gybi, ynghyd â'r hyn a gofnododd mewn dyddiadur yn ystod y saith niwrnod a dreuliodd yno, yn fynegiant huawdl a chofiadwy o'i ddieter am gael ei ddal 'in the worst spot in Wales, under the very worst circumstances', fel y nododd yn ei 'Holyhead Journal'.

Ac yntau mor rhwystredig, ceisiodd Swift ysgrifennu ei ffordd allan o'i amgylchiadau, ac yn y gerdd 'Holyhead. Sept. 25. 1727' mae'n rhoi tragwyddol heol i'w gynddaredd:

*Lo here I sit at Holy Head
With muddy ale and mouldy bread
All Christian vittals stink of fish,
I'm where my enemies would wish.
Convict of lies is every Sign,
The inn has not a drop of wine
I'm fastened both by wind and tide,
I see the ship at anchor ride.
The Captain swears the sea's too rough,
He has not passengers enough.
And thus the Dean is forc'd to stay
Till others come to help the pay.*

Ac yntau'n enwog am ei dymer ddrwg, rhefrodd a rhuodd nid yn unig am ei anffawd ei hun ond hefyd am drafferthion mwy cyffredinol yr elite Eingl-Wyddelig a oedd mor ddibynnol ar y môr i gadw mewn cysylltiad â Phrydain ond a oedd felly ar drugaredd ei natur anwadal. Mae gwyntoedd y de-orllewin yn golygu ei bod yn fwy cyffredin hyd heddiw i longau fod yn gaeth i borthladdoedd ar ochr Cymru nag Iwerddon ac mae'n ddigon posibl fod llawer iawn o Wyddelod yn dal i orfod ysgrifennu negeseuon digon tebyg o Gaergybi, boed hynny ar y cyfryngau cymdeithasol neu mewn negeseuon testun.

Cysylltid Caergybi a Llundain gan rwydwaith o lonydd a rheilffyrdd a chanddynt hanes amlhaenog: mae ffordd Caergybi ('Yr Holihed'), neu'r A5 erbyn heddiw, yn dilyn hen ffordd Rufeinig a redai o ogledd Cymru, drwy Amwythig a'r gororau, yr holl ffordd i'r Marble Arch heibio i Cricklewood a Kilburn. Dechreuwyd ar y gwaith o foderneiddio'r ffordd yn gynnar yn y 1800au pan adeiladodd Thomas Telford ei bont grog dros y Fenai a gwella'r lôn.

Yng nghyfnod Swift, serch hynny, roedd y daith yn un enbyd. Gadawodd Gaer am un ar ddeg fore Gwener, 22 Medi. Teithiodd saith milltir ymhellach ac aros mewn tafarn cyn mynd rhagddo am bymtheg milltir arall cyn belled â Rhuddlan, lle treuliodd y noson, gan wledda ar 'bad meat, and tolerable wine'. Gadawodd 'a quarter after 4 morn. on Saturday' ac yna aros noson arall yng Nghonwy cyn teithio ymlaen i Fangor. Yna fe groesodd ef a'i was y Fenai ychydig y tu hwnt i'r ddinas ac aros wedyn mewn tafarn ddwy filltir ar hugain o Gaergybi, 'which if it be well kept, will break Bangor'.

Cychwyn eto am bedwar y bore, yn y gobaith o gael bod yng Nghaergybi mewn da bryd ar gyfer gwasanaeth yn yr eglwys. Araf oedd y daith, fodd bynnag, ac a hwythau o fewn saith milltir i Gaergybi, bu'n rhaid iddynt aros yn Llangefni i orffwys am ddwyawr. Cafodd Swift a'r gwas ill dau drafferth efo'u ceffylau, a doedd dim amdani ond cerdded y milltiroedd diwethaf 'on rocky ways' cyn iddynt o'r diwedd ddod o hyd i of. Erbyn hyn, roeddent o fewn tair milltir i Gaergybi. Gadawsant y ceffylau i gael eu pedoli 'and walked to a hedge Inn 3 miles from Holyhead; There I stayd an hour, with no ale to be drunk. a Boat offered, and I went by Sea and Sayl in it to Holyhead.' Y nos Sul honno, fe gysgodd yng Nghaergybi.

Arhosodd Swift yn y dref am bedwar diwrnod, ar bigau'r drain gydol yr amser wrth iddo aros am lythyr neu ryw newydd o Ddulyn. 'I confine my self to my narrow chambr in all the unwalkable hours', meddai, gan gwyno nad oedd 'The Master of the pacquet boat, one Jones, hath not treated me with the least civility, altho Watt gave him my name. In short: I come from being used like an Emperor to be used worse than a Dog on Holyhead.' Bu'n crwydro'r ardal dan graffu'n ofer am ryw olwg o arfordir Iwerddon ar y gorwel neu am argoel o newid

yn y tywydd. Er gwaethaf (neu efallai oherwydd) ei ddigalondid, mae 'Holyhead Journal' Swift yn dal i gael ei ystyried yn un o'r darnau gorau erioed o lenyddiaeth porthladd.

Factoid

Despite Swift's many complaints, Holyhead became a kind of last recourse in his imagination: on the 21st of October, 1735, he wrote to Alexander Pope 'as one going very fast out of the world', saying that 'my flesh and bones are to be carried to Holy-head, for I will not lie in a country of slaves'.

Er gwaethaf holl gwynion Swift, daeth Caergybi i fod yn rhyw fath o ddinas noddfa yn ei ddychymyg. Ar 21 Hydref 1735, ysgrifennodd at Alexander Pope, 'as one going very fast out of the world', gan ddatgan bod 'my flesh and bones are to be carried to Holy-head, for I will not lie in a country of slaves'.

Related Resources

Jonathan Swift, 'Holyhead Journal, 1727' in Herbert Davis (ed.), *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davis, 14 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939-1968)

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David Crystal, 'Jonathan Swift at Holyhead – "muddy ale and mouldy bread"', *Holyhead: Stories of a Port*, <https://holyheadstoriesofaport.com/2019/02/09/jonathan-swift-at-holyhead-muddy-ale-and-mouldy-bread/>

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