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| CLASS 26 | | BEDD TALIESIN NAME | | SN | 69 | SE | Eccl. PARISH | Ceulan-a-maesmor | |
| CO | | Inv. No. | | NGR | | Quarter sheet of OS MAP | 6-Inch or 1:10000 | OS Ref. | RCAM |
| SD | Old | New | | 67 | 13 | 91 | 20 | County series | 4 NW 1 |

NATIONAL MONUMENTS RECORD FOR WALES

From Arch. Camb. 1873 p 292

BEDD TALIESIN

(TALIESIN'S GRAVE)



Bedd Taliesin is an ancient monument in the civil parish of Ceulan-a-Maesmor, Grid No. 22/6791. It is situated a good mile due east of Tre Taliesin between the Cletwr and Ceulan valleys alongside the rough track from Pen-sarn-ddu to Cae'rarglwyddes and Moel y Llyn.

It can be approached from two directions and along four different routes. On foot and by car from Pen-lôn (-las) at the northern end of the village of Tal-y-bont, turn right past the church and then keep to the left and follow your road-map until you come to Cwm-sglaig and then to Capel Soar, Pen-sarn. The large stone slab of the grave is visible on the right about 200 yards further on towards Cae'rarglwyddes. The grave can also be reached on foot from Tre Taliesin. A rough tract at the rear of the Royal Oak Hotel and a footpath from the space opposite the kiosk in the centre of the village converge at Fuches-goch cottage to ascend the steep slope of Bryn yr Arian through Coed-y-Dafarn-fach, now the Forestry Commission's plantation, on to the barren wind-swept plateau beyond. From here onwards the farms of Gwar-cwm-isaf (Mr. Lloyd) and Pen-sarn (Mr. Williams) are soon in sight. There is also another footpath from the village of Tre'r-ddôl alongside Soar Methodist Chapel and Cletwr Hall on the right side of the Cletwr ravine past Gwar-cwm-isaf onwards to Pen-sarn. Cars can easily tackle the route from the Commercial Hotel

(Tre'r-ddôl) side of the old bridge past Capel-uchaf and Lletylwydyn and Gwar-cwm-bach above the left side of the Cletwr ravine, and onwards over the bridge, called Pontypandy, to Gwar-cwm-uchaf, with many a stiff climb and several gates to open and close on the way.

Surprisingly enough, this prehistoric burial-

mound has never been properly excavated by archaeologists, though many a keen amateur has from time to time pottered about the site, not to mention the occasional farmer in search of gate-posts, etc., an act which was often interrupted by the proverbial thunder-clap ! Indeed, it does scant credit to those learned institutions and societies at whose very threshold this ancient monument lies that it has been left neglected and unprotected for so long.

The first known mention of the grave is made by Edward Lhuyd in 1695 in the additions to Edmund Gibson's edition of *Camden's Britannia*, p. 647 : 'Gwely Taliesin, in the parish of Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn . . . ought to be the grave of the celebrated Poet Taliesin ben beirdd, who flourished about the year 540. This grave or bed . . . seems also to be a sort of Cistfaen, 4 feet long, and 3 in breadth, composed of 4 stones, 1 at each end and 2 side-stones ; whereof the highest is about a foot above ground. I am far from believing that ever Taliesin was interred here.' The next reference is by Lewis Morris in 1745 in his *Celtic Remains* where he states : 'Ceulan, a valley near Tal y Bont in Cardiganshire. Here I was shown the grave of Taliesin, in an open field, encompassed with flat stones, but without any inscriptions in sight. L.M., 1745'.

More interesting and penetrating are the observations of Henry Penruddocke Wyndham in 1774 in his *Gentleman's Tour through Wales*. He notes that 'the spurious sepulchre of the bard Taliesin . . . which stood near the highway, about four miles from Aberystwyth, has, within these five years, been entirely plundered, and the broken stones are now converted to gate-posts. It is certainly much to be lamented, that the antiquities in these and some

other parts of the Principality are not better preserved. How can the inhabitants be so negligent of their real interests and why will they destroy the almost only inducement for strangers to visit this miserable coast ?' To which is added this caustic footnote : 'This rage for the destruction of pagan remains is attributed by some to the zeal of the modern Methodists who abound in these parts. Perhaps this conjecture, ridiculous as it at first appears, may not be totally without foundation. For to what absurd and contemptible lengths has not fanaticism been carried in all ages !'

A later and fuller account of the lay-out of Bedd Taliesin is given in *Nicholson's Cambrian Traveller's Guide* in 1840. 'A large heap of earth', he says, 'is surrounded by two circles of stones, the innermost of which is 27 feet in diameter, and the outer about 31 feet. In the centre is the gwely, or couch, composed of 6 stones, 5 making an oblong chest ; another forms a cover, now thrown on one side. Many years ago a human skull was found in the sarcophagus'. Further, in September 1847, the Cambrian Archaeological Association during its first annual meeting at Aberystwyth, decided to pay a visit to Bedd Taliesin. A party set off in three carriages on an excursion to the grave and other remains of antiquity in the district. Some of the party took the dimensions of the 'carn', which was found to be about one hundred and thirty five feet in circumference. The cistvaen or grave, in the centre, consists of several massive slabs of stones, forming a grave about eight feet long by two feet six inches wide ; one of the

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| CLASS 25 | | NAME BEDD TALIESIN | | SD | 69 | SE | Ecd. PARISH |
| Inv. No. | | NGR | | Quarter sheet of OS MAP | | Civil Gulany mazzmawr | |
| New | | 67[13]91[20] | | 4-inch or 1:10000 County series | | OS Ref. RCAH | |
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slabs, which once covered the grave, is five feet nine inches.' They found the remains in a very disturbed state. Afterwards, the party proceeded on foot two or three miles up the mountains and discovered two

so-called druidic circles, one of which consisted of about seventy-six upright stones on the mountain above Nant-y-nod. By 1873 a considerable number of these stones seem to have been removed. While visiting Bedd Taliesin a most amusing incident occurred. The Dean of Hereford, standing at the slippery brink of the grave, fell in and lay therein at full length. Thereupon the Dean of Bangor, sympathising with him, said he should not remain there alone, and immediately leaped in and took his station by the side of his brother dean to the intense delight of the spectators.

One is probably right in asserting that Bedd Taliesin has no connection with the early Welsh bard of that name, who flourished in the sixth century. The late Sir Ifor Williams, our greatest authority on early Welsh poetry, in his article on Taliesin in the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* has this to say, 'A prehistoric grave mound in north Cardiganshire is called Bedd Taliesin; this would probably be the Taliesin of the medieval tale, not the Taliesin of history'. The Taliesin of the medieval *Hanes Taliesin* was the reborn child of Ceridwen who, so the story goes, was sewn up in a skin bag or coracle and thrown into the sea. This bag was found at Cored Wyddno (Gwyddno's Weir) near Caer Wyddno, not far from Porth Wyddno (probably the Borth of today) on the shore between the river Dyfi and Aberystwyth. It was picked up by the young prince Elphin, son of Gwyddno, who carried the babe home gently on horseback, and marvelling at his lovely forehead (tâl) he called him Taliesin 'beautiful brow'. This was but the beginning of a series of remarkable youthful exploits, which in the course of centuries culminated in the popular romantic *Hanes Taliesin*, a tale with which the Welsh

story-tellers regaled the nobles in their halls as well as the common folk wherever they forgathered.

So much for the Taliesin of legend and folklore. It is now generally held that the Taliesin of history was a native of the adjoining Powys, extending at that time far beyond its present boundaries, where he served as a family poet in the court of the then lord of Powys, Cynan Garwyn. From Powys, Taliesin took his journey north to the nearby kingdoms where again as a court poet he eulogised the princelings Urien and Gwallog as well as Maelgwn Gwynedd in North Wales. Is it perhaps no more than a strange coincidence that Gwallog survives as a place-name in nearby Wallog, (not forgetting that there is also a Hendre Wallog in Llanfihangel-y-pennant in Merioneth), and Maelgwn in Traeth Maelgwn in the Dyfi estuary? For it is worthy of note that there are instances of the same place-names occurring in Wales and also in the Old North (of Britain). Here lies a field for fruitful comparative study for students in years to come.

Bedd Taliesin has throughout the ages attracted pilgrims, one of whom E. H. Palmer of Aberystwyth, in the course of a day's computation there with a German friend in 1877, composed the following verses:—

O'er Pensarn Ddu have ages rolled
Since Taliesin died,
And empty stands the Cist-vaen old,
Where erst they laid the poet bold
Upon the mountain-side.

But o'er that lonely hallowed ground
His spirit roameth free,
Where verdant mountains swell around

And through the firths below there bound
Two rivers towards the sea.

And whoso'er his slumber takes
In that sepulchral niche,
A poet or a madman wakes :—
I slept there for my readers' sakes
And woke—they best know which.

But Taliesin inspired this song,
For where his ashes lie,
We drank his health the whole day long
In cwrw da superbly strong,
Hans Breitemann and I.

The personal name Taliesin has always appealed to Welshmen everywhere. During the last century at least four Welsh bards incorporated the name in their pseudonyms. Sometime in the 1820's Tre Taliesin was adopted as the new name of the village nearest to Bedd Taliesin in place of the former Comins-y-Dafarn-fach, a change made, one might suggest, in deference to supersensitive religious susceptibilities. In the grimy valleys of South Wales many a Taliesin (Morgan, Griffiths, Richards, as the case might be) sweated and groaned at the coal-face. Even in America, the world-famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright, chose to call his three consecutive hill-top homes 'Taliesin' in honour of the poet Taliesin and as a tribute of respect to his Welsh ancestry and his stout Llandysul forbears.

R.J.T.

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