

# WELL KEPT SECRETS



celebrating the hidden riches of  
the wellsprings of the Brecon Beacons

PHIL COPE  
March 2017



cadw keep  
gym i'r wales  
dad is tidy



Cronfa Datblygu  
Cynaliadwy  
Sustainable  
Development Fund



Ariennir gan  
Lywodraeth Cymru  
Funded by  
Welsh Government

## contents

1.	<b>towards well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
2.	<b>why wellsprings?</b>	<b>6</b>
3.	<b>sites to be celebrated</b>	<b>8</b>
4.	<b>stories to be told</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1	St Elenud's Wells and the Celtic Cult of the Head	11
4.2	St Issui and the Battle of Beliefs	16
4.3	The Physicians of Myddfai and the Best of Health	19
4.4	The Skirrid Mountain and the Devil's Table	23
4.5	St Anne and the Mother Goddess	24
4.6	St Maelog and the Giantess' Pebble	26
5.	<b>a site for sore eyes</b>	<b>29</b>
6.	<b>the next steps</b>	<b>31</b>
6.1	community engagement	31
6.2	stakeholder workshop	32
6.3	renovation / restoration / renewal	32
6.4	wellspring walking trails	38
6.5	access, signage and interpretation	44
6.6	water testing	45
6.7	education	45
6.8	special events	47
6.9	exhibition / conference / seminars / workshops	48
7.	<b>finding new guardians</b>	<b>48</b>
8.	<b>working the land</b>	<b>49</b>
9.	<b>beyond retention</b>	<b>51</b>
	<b>bibliography</b>	<b>56</b>
	<b>appendices</b>	<b>57</b>
a -	Gazeteer of Brecon Beacons Wellspring Sites (seperate sheet)	57
b -	notes on the Physicians of Myddfai's Well	57
c -	Situation Report on the Wellsprings of Hay-on-Wye	58
d -	Maendu Well Group Report to Brecon Town Council	64
e -	correspondence with Llanover Estate regarding access to Ffynnon Gofer	66

## 1. towards well-being

Although the relatively small area of the Brecon Beacons can boast of more than its fair share of sacred springs and holy wells, few people know of their locations and the stories they once told. **Keep Wales Tidy (KWT)** recognised that we were missing a trick here for the development of a range of unique community, creative, health, spiritual, ecological and educational activities, based upon this rich heritage.

Ffynnon Angaeron / Aeron's (Pin) Well, Goytre



The **WELL-BEING Project** is KWT's response to these wide-ranging opportunities.

The WELL-BEING Project has chosen to launch its Wales-wide wellspring project within three areas: Pembrokeshire, Pen Llŷn, and the Brecon Beacons, working in partnership with Dyfed Archaeological Trust (linking with the other three Trusts in Wales); *Sanctaid* (formerly the Church Tourism Network Wales); *Artstation*; and myself at *culture & democracy*; and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and (in the Brecon Beacons) by the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) via the Welsh Government-sponsored Sustainable Development Fund.



**WELL KEPT SECRETS** begins our work of researching, recording, sympathetically-renovating and celebrating our local wellsprings. In addition to highlighting the historical, cultural and educational value of these important aspects of our heritage, WELL-BEING also aims to have a profound effect on the way groups and individuals consider water and the vital ecological role it plays in our survival and development.

Part of our work during the Delivery Stage of WELL-BEING will also be the establishment of an independent group to lead the Project into a future beyond the period of HLF funding, and wider than the three initial regions chosen to involve the whole of Wales. While local working committees will be established in the three areas, the new all-Wales body will need to encourage and support new initiatives in other areas, as well as continuing to support the original areas and sites. (In the short term, a new 'shadow body' could be established which would develop – during the period of the Delivery Stage – into the new organisation, with its all-Wales brief and its new title.)

Since adopting our 'punny' Project title, it has become clear that WELL-BEING has a very large (and growing, it would seem) number of other potentially-confusing (for us) social, economic, environmental and cultural usages, relating to mental and physical health issues, suitable living conditions, creative employment opportunities, the quality of our relationships, etc., etc. In addition, it shares its title with that of the recent *Welsh Government Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*. (And, the recent *Mid Wales, My Way* brochure from Powys Tourism and the Welsh Government – including the Beacons, though with no mention of wellsprings – has a section entitled *Mental Wellbeing* which includes 'parks & gardens', 'railways & waterways', 'retail therapy' and 'spas'.)

It's clear, then, that we will need to find another name for this initiative – and one which, ideally, works in both of our nation's languages – which can be revealed simultaneously with the launch of the new independent organisation.

The WELL-BEING Project links with *Visit Wales' Faith Tourism Action Plan*, the 2017 (and ongoing) *Year of Legends*, the 2018 *Year of the Sea* (and water), as well as *Cadw's Historic Environment Strategy and its Strategic Action Plan for Religious Sites*. The Project will, therefore, be an important contributor to the priorities and actions of the *Historic Environments (Wales) Act 2016*.

In each of the three chosen areas and in each of the chosen sites within these areas, a variety of different reclamation and renovation approaches will be explored and proposed to help regain many of the places' aesthetic, historical and spiritual importances, and in some sad cases to save them from further decay. The rich levels of meaning that each place offered over time through belief and myth are being researched and revealed; links made between the sites and their hinterlands and histories; ideas for new/old events (and even wells) developed; paths between sites to create new walks and inspiring tours suggested; and contacts made with the local individuals, groups and organisations that will make the final decisions and lead on doing the necessary work. In addition, ideas for permanent informative hubs for local and visiting wellspring hunters are being explored, alongside temporary touring displays, publications, an annual (?) conference, and an interactive web presence.

This study was conducted between 21 February and 26 March 2017. It builds upon my work studying the wellsprings of Wales and beyond for the past three decades, and should be read in conjunction with Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trusts' *Historic Settlements in the former Brecknock Borough* (CPAT Report No.1056) and *Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Monastic and Ecclesiastical Sites in East and North-East Wales* (CPAT Report No.1090). WELL KEPT SECRETS supersedes the previous KWT Report (*Well Springs of the Brecon Beacons – a Feasibility Report*, June 2016) while incorporating the parts of it that remain relevant, in order to provide one single authoritative working document. And in addition, my extensive photographic records of all of the wellsprings visited are included, to better illustrate the locations and their current states.

As well as revisiting and updating our knowledge of the sites, the main intention of WELL KEPT SECRETS – alongside the two other Reports being prepared for Pen Llŷn and Pembrokeshire – is to select a total of 25 wellsprings on which initial work will be conducted. These will be chosen through a combination of factors, including historical and religious importance, condition, location, knowledge of stories of potential appeal especially to children, and community interest and support.

A range of different levels of engagement with the sites will be offered, from simple accessing, signage, publicity and interpretation to major re-construction, depending upon the specific need. These interventions are intended to provide an inspirational base for an ongoing and wide-ranging programme of work on the many other wellspring sites needing attention and deserving celebration throughout Wales.

Historically, the main authority on the sacred springs, holy wells and spas of Wales was Francis Jones (*The Holy Wells of Wales*, University of Wales Press, 1954). His knowledge has been added to by many other individuals and groups since his seminal publication (including by Janet and Colin Bord, Tristan Gray-Hulse, Jane Beckerman, Maddy Gray, Ian Taylor 'the Wellhopper', Elfed Gruffydd, the Wellspring Fellowship and Cymdeithas Ffynhonnau Cymru) and, hopefully, also through my own work on wellspring cultures throughout Wales, England, Cornwall and, most lately, Scotland.

Jones listed just 22 locations in the whole of 'Brecknockshire', though he recognised, even then, that his research in no way told the whole story. My current work has uncovered 78 potential sites, 61 of the most significant of which I have visited and recorded.



the path to  
Ffynnon  
Angaeron

## 2. why wellsprings?

What follows for those new to the wellspring world is a very brief introduction to their history, taken from my publication, *Borderlands: new photographs and old tales of sacred springs, holy wells and spas of the Wales – England borders* (Seren, 2013):

*“In pre-Christian times, water appearing naturally, unaided and unbidden from the hard rock or the dry soil of the earth’s belly, would have had a magical significance for our ancestors, not only as an element essential to all life but, just as importantly, as a place where the most powerful of nature spirits resided and where a dialogue with other realities was possible.*

Ffynnon Enddwyn,  
nr Duffryn Ardudwy,  
Gwynedd



*These potential portals to another reality grew into centres for elaborate ceremonies and ritual, for story-telling and the presenting of gifts, in return for which the waters could offer the favours of good health, love and fertility. Some wells predicted and sometimes even influenced the future, while others could even be used to lay curses.*

*When the Romans arrived on these shores, they brought with them a new bathhouse culture, and a range of alternative water deities and spirits that were often ‘married’ with their local equivalents.*

the Roman Baths  
at Isca Augusta  
(Caerleon),  
Monmouthshire





*Later, Christian missionaries initially recognised the powers of these sites to sustain and to inspire, ‘re-christening’ them with new names and allying them to new legends while essentially retaining their original meanings for ordinary people.*

St Winefride’s Well,  
Holywell,  
Flintshire



St Winifride’s Well,  
Woolston,  
nr Oswestry,  
Shropshire



*It was clear from the start that incorporation rather than destruction of these pagan truths was the only viable option. It was not until the Protestant Reformation of the second half of the sixteenth century that the dominant church decided to undertake a wholesale obliteration of the water cult sites and their beliefs ... although, thankfully, this was never fully achieved.*

*Then, in the eighteenth century, the invasion of science offered a further layer of explanation, with the development of the lucrative spa movement in Britain.”*



the remains of a  
broken bath tub at  
Llangammarch Spa,  
nr Builth Wells,  
Powys

**This is where any research and intervention into wellspring culture must begin: with a recognition of the complex, often-contradictory levels of meaning and usage exposed, and a respect, ultimately, for the ‘divinity’ of water.**

### 3. sites to be celebrated

Currently – despite a history of amnesia, neglect and sometimes even the willful destruction of our sacred spring and holy well sites and cultures throughout the whole of Wales and beyond – there is still much to be celebrated within the Brecon Beacons area. Some special places that have been in continuous usage for millennia still offer the possibility of hearing the faint echoes of the voices of the people who drank and bathed here, who gave their offerings and asked for their assistances. These include:

**Ffynnon Angaeron**, near Goytre [site no.37 / SO 298 051] is one of the Beacons' 'crown jewels', well-kept and on an existing walking trail (Brecon Beacons Park Circular Walk). This stunningly-situated pin well commemorates Angaeron, Aeron or Aaron, "*a mythical figure lost in the mists of time*".



Ffynnon  
Angaeron,  
nr Goytre

In the fourteenth century, it was called *Ffynnon Rhufeinig* ('the Roman Well') and *Ffynnon Ofuned* ('the Wishing Well'), adding more intrigue to its origins and purpose. In 1890, when it was cleaned out, many pins and an expensive brooch were found.

**Maendu Well**, Brecon [site no.1 / SO 038 297] is a natural spring in the north of Brecon, covered by a Grade II Listed well house. Its waters rise up from the well, running the course of a leat and feeding a pond that flows (under and over ground) to the well at the Cathedral. The well has an ancient history and was once thought a place of magic where "*maidens offered pins and wished earnestly for love*".





Maendu  
Holy Well,  
Brecon

**Ffynnon Dyfan** at Llandyfan [site no.17 / SN 642 171] is a well-kept church site, which was once a major pilgrimage destination, known in its day as 'The Welsh Bath'.



Ffynnon Dyfan, Llandyfan

**Holy Well**, Abergavenny [site no.35 / SN 627 224] is a pleasant house well, easily-accessed from the roadside.



Holy Well,  
Abergavenny

**St Teilo's Well** at Llandeilo [site no.15 / SN 627 224], set into the walls of Llandeilo Church graveyard, is another site with evidence of continuing community care.

St Teilo's  
Well,  
Llandeilo



I also love the well, located deep below **Cerreg Cennen Castle** [site no.10 / SN 665 192], one of the main determinants, no doubt – alongside its elevated position – of its construction here.

Cerreg  
Cennen  
Castle  
well





## 4. stories to be told

Wales' varied landscapes are often the best witnesses to our history and to the many stories we have invented to explain our lives, struggles and beliefs.

Knowledge of the tales the land tells – in these cases of the waters that spring unbidden from the earth's surface throughout the Beacons area – offers one of the best means to understand this small though significant part of our world.

These special places still attract pilgrims of various denominations and none, as well as poets and writers inspired by their locations and by their ancient stories, linking us to the past ... but with lessons for the present:

### 4.1 St Elenud's Wells and the Celtic Cult of the Head

There are at least two holy wells dedicated to St Elenud (or Eilwedd, Lludd, Alud, Tayled, Elevetha or Almedha) within the Brecon Beacons: one at **Llechfaen** [site no. 5 / SO 080 285] and one on the **Slwch Tump**, also known as **Penginger Well** [site no. 4 / SO 056 284]. Both are located near to the town of Brecon.



left to right:  
St Elenud's  
Well,  
Llechfaen,  
nr Brecon;  
St Elenud's  
Well,  
Slwch Tump,  
nr Brecon

In addition, some writers believe that the elaborate two-sided '**Bishop Gower's**' Well [site no. 6 / SO 054 308] at Llanddew, a little to the north-east of Brecon, was also once associated with Eluned.



Bishop  
Gower's  
Well,,  
Llanddew,  
nr Brecon



Elenud, one of the many daughters of King Brychan of Brycheiniog, was thought to have been a fifth century Christian convert who sought refuge in the area after previously being persecuted for her religious beliefs at Llanddew, Llanfilo, and at Llechfaen, where, it is said, she was *"ousted by the locals"* (some say for her beliefs, others for her disheveled appearance, some even for her thievery!).

She finally found protection – albeit temporarily – through the kindness of a local lord, at Slwch Tump, a hilltop enclosure of Iron Age origins. (It is thought that her small chapel and holy well here were both destroyed during the English Reformation.)

In his 1698 essay, Welsh historian Hugh Thomas speaks of the chapel as:

*"standing, though unroofed and useless; the people thereabouts call it St. Tayled. It was situated on an eminence, about a mile to the eastward of Brecknock, and about half a mile from a farm-house ... Some small vestiges of this building may still be traced, and an aged yew tree, with a well at its foot, marks the site near which the chapel formerly stood."*

Today, Elenud's 'Penginger Well' is a rarely-visited, deep, dark hole, unattractively-covered by railway sleepers and wire. In contrast, the elaborate site of her Llechfaen well and trough was reconstructed and renovated in 1997 by the village community, with the financial assistance of The Princes Trust, Welsh Water, the Coop, and others (although today, it once again needs some remedial work).

This is one telling of her tale from 'Ffynhonnau Cymru' by Eirlys Gruffydd:

*"The saint's cell is thought to have been near Pencefngaer, a mile to the east of Brecon near Slwch farmhouse. The story goes that Lludd was trying to escape from a Saxon prince but was caught and killed. Her head tumbled down the hill and came to rest near a big rock, from which a spring burst forth."*

rock  
nr St Elenud's  
Well,  
Slwch Tump,  
nr Brecon



*People would come to recite the Lord's Prayer and then, miraculously, a strand of female hair would appear on the nearby rock. This was a major destination at the end of the 17th century, especially in early August before harvest time. At one time this was a significant curing well too. By the beginning of the 20th century it was full of mud and stones, but could be seen easily because of a large yew tree growing nearby."*

from 'Llyfrau Llafar Gwlad', vol. 36: first published August 1997

And here is a longer version written in the late seventeenth century by Hugh Thomas:

*"S. Lhud, that is anger; she is commonly called S. Alud or Aled, but Giraldus Cambrensis calls her Almedha ... It seems that having from her infancy dedicated herself solely to the service of God, in her riper years, being violently pressed by a young prince to marriage, to free herself from his solicitations and those of her family, she secretly stole away from her father's house in a disguise, resolving for a time to conceal herself in the neighbouring villages ... The first she retired to was the village of Llandew, where she was so ill-treated that, fleeing from hence she retired to a village called Llanfilo, three miles further, to live in greater obscurity, which, joined with her poverty, beauty in rags, was the cause she was treated as a common thief. From thence, fleeing back again to another village called Llechfaen, within a mile of Brecknock, where she was treated with such scorn and contempt that nobody would receive her, but forced her to lie in the street and the high road, which ever since is called of her name in Welsh, Heol S. Alud. After which she resolved to retire to some solitude, never more to converse with mortals; and such a solitude she found upon a hill called the Slwch ... near the town of Brecknock, which was then overgrown with wood. Here, that she might receive no further insults, she desired the Lord of the Manor to give her leave to dwell, which was very courteously granted, with a promise of other charity, upon which she there built her a little cell or oratory and was used often to go down to the Castle of the Slwch to beg for bread, where she was very hospitably received.*

*When her thoughts were settled in a little tranquility after all these storms, by way of prophecy she said: That by the secret judgment of God a chastisement would rest on the village of Llandew for the injuries done to her; that the village of Llanfilo would be plagued with thieves, as they are to this day above all others, and the village of Llechfaen with envy, as indeed they are almost continually in contention and law with one another.*

*But this sweetness did not last long; her importunate lover went to her retirement where, finding her alone at prayers, a violent fear surprised her soul, so that she sought to flee down to the Lord's house at the bottom [of the hill], which the young Prince perceiving, mad with rage and despair, pursues her, cuts off her head which, rolling a little down the hill, a clear spring of water issued out of the rock where it rested. This being presently known, she was taken up and buried in her own little cottage, which was thereupon turned into a chapel."*

Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis), who was the archdeacon of Brecon in the twelfth / thirteenth century, testified to the great devotion St Eluned aroused and the many conversions she caused at Slwch Tump. These are his words:

*"In her honour a solemn feast is annually held here [in her chapel] in the beginning of August, and attended by a large concourse of people from a considerable distance, when those persons who labour under various diseases, through the merits of this blessed virgin, receive their wished-for health. The circumstances which occur at every anniversary appear to me remarkable. You may see men or girls, now in the church, now in the churchyard, now in a dance, which is led round the churchyard with a song, on a sudden falling on the ground as in a trance, then jumping up as in a frenzy, and representing with their hands and feet, before the people, whatever work they have unlawfully done on feast days; you may see one man put his hand to the plough, and another, as it were, goad on the oxen, mitigating their sense of labour by the usual rude song; one man imitating the profession of a shoemaker; another that of a tanner. You may see a girl with a distaff, drawing out the thread, and winding it*

*again on the spindle; another walking and arranging the threads for the web; another, as it were, throwing the shuttle and seeming to weave. On being brought into the church, and led up to the altar with their oblations, you will be astonished to see them suddenly awakened and coming to themselves. Thus, by the divine mercy, which rejoices in the conversion – not in the death – of sinners, many persons, from the conviction of their senses, are at these feast days corrected and amended.”*

St Winifride's  
Well,  
Holywell,  
Flintshire



There are many other stories told of virgin martyred saints who lost their heads creating new sacred wells in the process, the most significant in Britain being that of **St Winifride** (or **Gwenfrewi**) [SI 185 763] in Holywell, North Wales.



The Celts valued the head above all other parts of the body, believing it to be the seat of the soul and the power-centre of human action, and – along with the tree and the well – a powerful medium for communication with the ‘OtherWorld’. There are regular examples of places that closely combined well worship with this recognition of a belief in the Celtic Cult of the Head. And, as we can see with the tale of St Eluned and others, these convictions did not end with the introduction of Christianity.



top to bottom:  
St Peter's Well,  
Peterchurch,  
Herefordshire;  
Ffynnon Beuno,  
Tremeirchion,  
Denbighshire

In very many ‘christianised’ sites, there are tales told of saints’ heads being struck off (and sometimes, like in the case of St Winifride, being stuck back on again) or, as in **St Peter's Well** [SO 353 388] at Peterchurch in Herefordshire and **Ffynnon Beuno** [SJ 083 723] at Tremeirchion, near St Asaph in Denbighshire, of water gushing from the mouths of a saint.

Many Christian shrines still contain skulls, often elaborately-encased in silver or gold, and there is a powerful tradition of the representation of holy men and women in portraits and sculptures cradling their own decapitated heads.

St Aluned's feast day on 1 August is also, significantly, on the same date as the pagan harvest festival of *Lughnasadh* or *Lammas*.

#### 4.2 St Issui and the Battle of Beliefs

St Issui was a hermit who established his cell at Partrishow in the Vale of Ewyas, near Abergavenny, in the Dark Ages. But **Issui's Well** [site no.13 / SO 282 225] – sitting peacefully on the riverbank of Nant Mair (Mary's Brook) in the beautiful Gwyrne Valley – hides a powerful and violent secret.



Ffynnon Issui,  
Partrishow,  
nr Abergavenny

The well only became curative, it seems, after the saint was murdered here by an ungrateful traveller for whom he had provided food and rest, and who subsequently dumped his body into its waters. (The name Partricio is thought to come from the Welsh (m)'*erthyr*' [meaning 'martyr'] and Ishow.) From that day on, the site became a magnet for pilgrims seeking nourishment for both body and soul.

In the eleventh century, it was recorded that a French visitor successful washed away his leprosy here and, in gratitude, was happy to pay "*a hat-full of gold*" for the first church to be built above the well. Today, the fine medieval church of St Issui the Martyr contains a skeletal 'doom' figure armed with spade and hourglass (only uncovered after its Reformation white-washing had been removed), and outside, an elaborately-carved twelfth century Preacher's Cross.





St Issui's Church  
Preacher's Cross  
and 'doom' figure,  
Partrishow,  
nr Abergavenny

Today, votive coins are still offered, though in less abundance, now hammered into trees as a new form of contract with the spirit world, a payment in lieu of a hoped-for gift of healing or insight.



Ffynnon Issui,  
Partrishow,  
nr Abergavenny

On my very first visit to Ffynnon Issui (some ten years ago), the site was festooned with crudely-constructed crosses of all shapes and sizes (including a Maltese Cross carved in stone, at the spot believed to be where new recruits for the Crusades were enlisted), something that inspired the following fine poem, entitled *Patricio 2001*, by Ruth Bidgood:

*They have been bringing offerings  
to the dark well, tying  
rags to twigs in supplication, leaving  
flowers to wilt in that chipped glass  
uneasily perched on a dank ledge,  
making crosses from bits of stick.*



*There seem so many of them, despite  
the hiddenness of the place; as if  
in a time of fear and shattering  
these humble shapes are once more  
valid – raw letters spelling out  
helplessness, not yet  
reshuffled into words of power.*

Intriguingly, today, there seems to be a battle of beliefs being fought out at Ffynnon Issui, as the once-ubiquitous crosses are being challenged by new offerings, a profusion of 'clouties' with their pre-Christian roots.

Ffynnon Issui,  
Partrishow,  
nr Abergavenny



A 'clout' was traditionally a piece of cloth which, soaked in the sacred spring's waters and applied to the part of the body needing attention, is then tied to one of the trees beside the well. The belief is that, as the fabric disintegrates over time, so the ailment will disappear and the patient be cured. Here is Ruth and Frank Morris' warning, however, to those thinking of removing clouts from well sites (from their 1982 book, *Scottish Healing Wells*):

*"The gifts become sacred to the well, or the tree. Probably the least that can happen to the thief is that he takes with the article the disease or trouble which was left in the care of the well."*

entrance to  
St Issui's  
Churchyard,  
Partrishow,  
nr Abergavenny



### 4.3 The Physicians of Myddfai and the Best of Health

Though not easy to find, and with a location contested between a number of sites, the **Physicians of Myddfai's Well(s)** [site no.28 / SN 806 287] offers us a complex and inspiring story of ancient Celtic magic, domestic violence and alternative medicine ... as well as a good walk.



The  
Physicians  
of Myddfai  
Well



The legend tells of an impoverished, young Carmarthenshire farmer, at the end of the twelfth century, out grazing his flock of sheep in the shadow of the wild Black Mountain escarpment. He sees a beautiful woman emerging from the inky black waters of Llyn y Fan Fach ... and he resolves to have her as his wife.

Llyn y Fan  
Fach



His unusual wooing technique relied upon the offering of baked goods (Mary Berry would have been pleased!), rejected by the Lady on two occasions because they were first over-, then under-cooked:

*"Hard baked is thy bread!  
'Tis not easy to catch me."*

*"Unbaked is they bread!  
I will not have thee."*

He finally gets it right, however, with the help of his mother, and the Lady agrees to be his bride ... but only on two conditions.

In some accounts, her identical sister, as well as her father, emerges from the waters at that point (reinforcing the 'three strikes and you're out' rule) and offering as the Lady's dowry all the animals she could name in one breath. But before all of these riches could be his, he would have to tell which of the sisters was the woman with whom he had fallen head over heels in love. Helped by a slight movement of her leg, and the more proper tying of her sandal, he chose correctly.

The second, and much more important condition, however, was that he must treat her with respect ... and never strike her, the consequence of this happening three times being her immediate return to the lake, along with her animal dowry, never to be seen again.



They went on from that day to live happily at a farm called Esgair Llaethdy, about a mile from Myddfai, and, after nine months, the Lady gave birth to the first of their three sons, who they named Rhiwallon. At his christening, however, the lady cried, knowing her new family's fate. Her husband, annoyed by her unexplainable behavior on this most special of days, struck her. She reminded him of his promise and the condition of their marriage, and he swiftly begged her forgiveness.

Later still, however, she cried again, this time at a wedding (because she knew that the bridegroom would soon die), and the farmer struck her again. Finally, she laughed at the bridegroom's funeral (because she knew that his suffering was now over) ... and the farmer hit her for the third time.

The Lady turned and immediately began to walk back towards Llyn y Fan Fach, taking with her all of the animals her father had granted the couple. As she crossed their land, every sheep, lamb, cow, calf, hen, chick, duck, goose, pig and horse followed her. And her husband never saw her, again.

There is some disagreement – as is usual in the re-telling of all ancient tales – concerning the severity of the husband's blows. In some accounts, they were mere touches, taps on the shoulder to remind the Lady that her behavior was unacceptable; some have even seen her actions as fully warranting her husband's actions; others that the touches were accidental. And Gillian Clarke – who translated T Llew Jones' *One Moonlit Night* in which this tale is again retold – adds a further level of explanation ... that the forbidden touch was with metal: *"My father told me this proved the story was very old, marking a time when the Celts, or Iron age people, first came to Britain, and the people of the Stone Age were afraid of their metal swords, shields and jewelry"*.

Whatever the 'truth', the farmer was heartbroken, destined now to bring up their three boys alone. But, as the sons grew, they missed their mother terribly, and often went to the lake to try to catch a glimpse of her. It is said that she eventually appeared to Rhiwallon and told him that he should study medicine. On each occasion thereafter, she offered parts of her knowledge to her sons, instructing the boys where to find the most powerful of herbs, and the medicines and poultices to create with them.

Using the natural products they gathered from the surrounding area, mixed with the spring water from their famous well, the Physicians of Myddfai created cures and remedies for all ailments and diseases, arguably making the small Carmarthenshire village of Myddfai the birthplace of modern medicine, and laying the foundations for the best health care available between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, far in advance of much on offer in Europe at the time.

The Physicians used over 200 plants, many of which can still be found in the area, today. And, luckily for future generations, Rhiwallon – the personal doctor to Rhys Gryg, Lord of Dinefwr and Llandovery castles, who ruled this part of Wales eight hundred years ago – wrote down more than 500 of their remedies, often revealing their very contemporary holistic approach to medicine and healing. And these were later copied, along with the legend of the Lady of the Lake – itself also recorded in the *Mabinogion*, a medieval collection of Welsh folktales – in the fourteenth century *Red Book of Hergest*, from which most of our knowledge comes.

Rhiwallon, his brothers, his three sons, Cadwgan, Gruffydd and Einon, and their many other descendants, believed, it seems, in treating the whole body rather than just the symptoms of sickness. For good health, they advised moderation in food, work and sleep; keeping well wrapped-up in winter; not eating too much meat or alcohol; and drinking plenty of water.

Physicians of Myddfai gravestone, St Michael's Church, Myddfai



Here are a few of their recommendations:

*"Whosoever shall have lost his reason or speech,  
let him drink the juice of the primrose."  
"If you would at all times be merry, eat saffron."  
"Whoever is over fat, let him drink of the juice of fennel  
and it will reduce him."  
"To prevent dreaming, take the leaves of betony  
and hang around your neck."*

And here are a few of their medical maxims:

*"The qualities of water: it will produce no sickness, no debt,  
and no widowhood"  
"The three medicines of the Physicians of Myddfai: water,  
honey and labour"  
"The three victuals of sickness: flesh meat, ale and vinegar"  
"If thou desirest to die, eat cabbage in August."  
"A dry cough is the trumpet of death."  
"Take not thy coat off before Ascension Day."  
"God will send food to washed hands."*

In the porch of the church of St Michael at Myddfai, you can still see the gravestone of the last two Physicians of Myddfai. And at the Myddfai Community Hall and Visitor Centre is an extensive display on the Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach and her medical descendants, as well as a gift shop and a fine café / restaurant.

And at the National Botanic Gardens of Wales at Middleton Hall in Llanarthne, a 'Physic Garden' has been planted incorporating herbs once used by the Physicians (a smaller version of which is being developed in the village of Myddfai, itself).

As science catches up with folk lore and folk medicine, the original ingredients of nature – so valued in our past – are once again being re-discovered, explored and tested, at a time when the efficacy of antibiotics is being questioned and the consumption of synthetic, addictive medicines is rising.

So, there's a huge potential here (and one which the people of Myddfai are already beginning to exploit).

#### 4.4 The Skirrid Mountain and the Devil's Table

This simple, charming well [site no.19 / SO 333 184] sits on one of the narrow footpaths up to the top of the Old Red Sandstone outcrop that is the **Skirrid Mountain** (1,594 ft), near Abergavenny. The site's name comes from 'Ysgyryd Fawr', the Welsh for great 'shattered' or 'shivered' hill, describing the cavernous split to the north of the mount. It is also known as 'The Sacred Hill' or 'Holy Mountain'.



left to right:  
Molly at Skirrid  
Mountain Well;  
view of Sugar  
Loaf Mountain  
from Skirrid

According to legend, part of the hill was broken off at the moment of Jesus' crucifixion. As a result, earth from Skirrid was thought to be especially fertile, even holy, and taken to be scattered on fields, in coffins, and in the foundations of houses and churches. Pilgrimages were regularly made to the summit, especially on Michaelmas Eve.

The ruins of an Iron Age hill fort and a medieval Roman Catholic church, dedicated to St Michael, lie at its summit. The latter suggests another explanation for the deformation of the hill, the often-told battle between the saint and the devil, between light and dark, between good and evil. St Michael is viewed in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions as the commander of the Army of God, an angelic warrior fighting, and defeating, Satan.

It is significant in this context to recognise that the location of many of the wells and chapels dedicated to St Michael are to be found on high places, sites that had once been the residences of pagan sun and water gods and goddesses (examples including St Michael's Mount and its **Giant's Well** [SW 515 298] and **Roughtor Holy Well** [SX 147 810] on Bodmin Moor, both in Cornwall; St Michael's Chapel on Glastonbury Tor; and St Michael's Chapel, near Faslane Castle, Argyll and Bute; amongst many others).

There are numerous rock tables on the Skirrid, some of which were formed by the landslide. One such is known as 'The Devil's Table'.



It has also been reported that Rudolf Hess, the Nazi war criminal (and another kind of 'devil'), used to walk here when he was held prisoner at nearby **Maindiff Court** during the early 1940s. (Maindiff is now a hospital with its own well [site no. 36 / SO 316 154], lately dedicated to *"being kind"!*)

Maindiff Court 'Beast' Well, nr Abergavenny



There is also an old public house to the north of the mountain, which claims to be the oldest in Wales, and haunted, and is called The Skirrid Inn. It is infamous for its use, in the early seventeenth century, as a courtroom at which as many as 180 convicted criminals were sentenced and swiftly hanged from an oak beam over its stairwell. The rope marks can still be seen in the wood. Perhaps it is the spirits of these unfortunates, often dispatched for as little as the theft of a sheep or even a loaf of bread, which supply the steady stream of ghosts at the Inn.

(Links could be made between the Skirrid Mountain site and **St Maelog** or **Meilig's Well** [site no. 20 / SO 193 417] at Llowes, near Hay-on-Wye: see [4.6 St Maelog and the Giantess' Pebble](#), below.)

#### 4.5 St Anne and the Mother Goddess

*"... the traditional pagan worship of mother Goddesses at holy wells, the natural interpretation of the well as a secret entrance into the body of the Earth Mother or even as her womb, the belief in the life-giving or procreative powers of water – all combine to instill in people the certainty that the holy well was the source of fertility."*

Janet and Colin Bord

(from *Earth Rites: Fertility Practices in Pre-Industrial Britain*, 1982)

Holy wells dedicated to Anne are numerous throughout the world, due to both the important saint's status as the apocryphal mother of the Virgin Mary, as well as her connections back in time to the earliest of all childbearers, Mother Earth, herself.

Many pagan gods and goddesses were co-opted by the early Christian church as saints for their new faith: Demeter, the Greek goddess of festivals became the male warrior saint, Demetrios; Aphrodite became the 'repentant whore', St Aphrodite; the Roman god Mars was transformed into St Martin; and the protector of sailors, the Roman Gemini blended seamlessly into St James, the patron saint of travellers.

Failing in its initial objective to destroy all pagan holy well sites, the early Christian church soon realised that a more effective strategy would be to rewrite their histories, and re-populate them with a new cast of super-humans.

New churches were built upon the foundations of pagan temples by the disciples of Christianity, often at sacred crossroads or over sacred springs, and sometimes retaining the original pagan circles of stone for their new boundary walls. Phallic carvings were re-chiselled into Christian crosses (like that near **Merther Euny Holy Well** [SW 704 295], near Helston in Cornwall; or Llowes in the Beacons, mentioned above. And many old pagan festivals, dates and ceremonies continued in the ecclesiastical calendar, little altered. (see [4.1 St Elenud's Wells and the Celtic Cult of the Head](#), above)

A belief in a mother goddess with responsibilities for birth and fertility is at the centre of the pantheon of all early civilisations. Wells, today dedicated to St Ann, the mother of the mother of god, are thought to have originally been attributed to the variously-named Danu, Annis, Anu, Britannia, Andraste, Modron or Matrona, the Celtic mother goddess of rivers, springs, magic, wisdom, and new beginnings.

The simple example here at **Trefecca** [site no. 11 / SO 144 321] is set within the outer walls of its present college gardens. Little is currently known of its history. Situated looking out from the house built by Howell Harris (1714-73) as an "*ideal community*", it seems likely that in its last usage at least, it was to serve the needs of the people of the village. Harris was one of the great leaders of the Methodist Revival in Wales, and the house – currently used as a multi-denominational retreat, training and conference centre – is today the site of a museum dedicated to him and to Methodism. The origins of its well, however, are currently lost.



St Anne's  
Well,  
Trefecca

Most of St Anne's wells (like that at **Aconbury**, near Hereford [SO 512 334]; or **The Virtuous Well** in Trellech, near Monmouth [SO 503 051]) were famous for curing eye troubles. The most effective remedies were offered by the first water drawn from the well after midnight on 'Twelfth Night'. This was known as '*the cream of the well*', said sometimes to bubble out of the ground amidst a shroud of blue smoke.

The Virtuous Well, Trellech, Monmouthshire



The greatest speciality of wells dedicated to St Anne, however, was '*complaints peculiar to women*', including, not surprisingly, those connected with childbirth and mothering. These were also often places at which to make wishes. The petitioner would be required to throw a small metal object into the waters and count the number of bubbles that resulted, their rapidity or otherwise determining how quickly the wish would be granted ... and, no bubbles at all signifying that your wish had been denied. Young girls, anxious to know how long they would have to wait until their wedding day, would drop a pebble into the water, each bubble, it was said, counting as one month.

Once likely to have been an important site where local women made their wishes, received relief from aches and pains, or competed for the first healing bucketful, today the well at Trefecca is overgrown and entirely-neglected, as our priorities it would seem have shifted, here as elsewhere, far away from those of greatest importance in the lives of our ancestors.

#### 4.6 St Maelog and the Giantess' Pebble

Although **St Maelog's Well** [site no.20 / SO 193 417] above Llowes, two miles west of Hay, is a simple site, it is worthy of a visit for the pleasant forest walk it affords, as well as for the intriguing tale its nearby church tells.



St Maelog (or Meilig) was, perhaps, a sixth century Scottish soldier who decided to reject violence and warfare, and, after receiving religious instruction from the monks of Angelsey, came to Wales to train under St Cadoc at his monastic college at Llancarvan. At Llowes, Maelog established his own small monastery, using a seven foot high and three foot wide prehistoric stone, it is said, in his 'christianisation' of the area.



St Maelog's Well, Llowes, nr Hay-on-Wye

While the dates and the geography of each part of the story don't exactly add up, local legend claimed that the stone had been hurled by the giantess, Malwalbee (or Maud de Braose, Maude de St Valerie or Moll Walbee), from Glasbury (with its own well, **Ffynnon Gynidr** [site no. 18 / SO 164 413]). Malwalbee is an historic figure, the wife of William de Breos, Lord of Brecknock, and thought by many to have practiced witchcraft.



Ffynnon Gynidr, Glasbury, nr Hay-on-Wye



While, it is said, she was building Hay Castle, the offending article fell into her shoe. Catching the stone – or pebble, as it must have seemed to her – in her apron, she threw it across the river Wye to Llowes. Initially, it was said to have landed in the hills at Croes Faelog, above the village, but was moved to the church graveyard in the twelfth century, then inside the church for safe keeping in 1956 (after scheduling as an Ancient Monument four years earlier).

ancient carved cross, St Meilug's Church, Llowes, nr Hay-on-Wye



Although the belief is that Maelog carved the first simple Christian symbol upon one side of what would then have been an ancient standing stone – thus challenging its pagan worshippers' beliefs – the more-impressive, ornamental wheel-cross carved upon the other side of this three-ton block is now thought to have been the work of an eleventh or twelfth century artist, possibly even Moll herself!

## 5. a site for sore eyes

Alongside these, and other riches, however, there is, sadly, much that we cannot celebrate, sites which have been damaged, sometimes even entirely destroyed, by a variety of actions ranging from simple neglect to the vandalism of so-called 'progress'.

Some recent casualties include:

**The Physicians' Well** [site no. 28 / SN 806 287], to be celebrated for the work of its local groups and businesses and for its tale (as told above: see [4.3 The Physicians of Myddfai's Well and the Best of Health](#)) but recently near-'ruined' by insensitive logging and overgrown with brambles.



The  
Physicians'  
Well,  
nr Myddfai

**Ffynnon Gofer / Nine Wells**, on the Llanover Estate [site no.32 / SO 313 087] is an historically-important and apparently-impressive site (with pre-Christian roots, and an association with the enigmatic sixth century St Gofer, Mofor or Myfor). Regrettably, access is currently being denied by the Estate (see their responses to our request to visit in [appendix e](#)).

If this site could be opened up (and it should be, and would be if we had laws like those in Scotland), it would make an interesting Lady Llanover Walk, with interpretation along the way celebrating her [Augusta Hall, 1802-1896] role as a great patron of all things Welsh, a champion of Celtic studies, including the Welsh language, national costume and the eisteddfod tradition, as well as her passion for the temperance movement. I am convinced that, with the addition of the **Roadside Trough** [site no.33 / SO 310 084], with its runic-styled lettering including a reference to her bardic name, Gwenynen Gwent [or '*the bee of Llanover*'], and the **Llanover Fountain** [site no.34 / SO 314 080], Lady Llanover would have fully approved of our Project's pleas for a continuance of care for and interest in this element of Welsh heritage. In this case, we shouldn't be taking no for an answer!



Roadside Trough, Llanover



Llanover Fountain

**Llangattock Village pump** [site no.39 / SO 211 178] is neglected, despite an apparently-vibrant community.

Llangattock  
Village  
Pump



The already-mentioned **St Anne's Well**, Trefecca [site no.11 / SO 144 321] (see [4.5 St Anne's Well and the Mother Goddess](#), above), is in poor shape, but with interest in its exploration and renovation expressed by Coleg Trefecca, in whose grounds' walls it sits.

The **Monk's Well**, in Clyro [site no.47 / SO 225 432], is a prime example of inappropriate modernisation.

The Monk's  
Well,  
Clyro



And, as we have already seen, **St Elenud's 'Penginger' Well** [site no. 4 / SO 056 284], below Slwch Tump, is now rarely-visited, uncaringly-boarded by railway sleepers and covered with wire.

And where is **St Eigon's Well** [site no.14 / SO 211 398], Llanigon; and **St Matthew or St Maelog's Well** [site no.21 / SO 107 355], Llandefalle; or **Ffynnon Beilo / Filo** [site no.50 / SO 119 226], Llanfilo?

Regarding this last site, Daisy Price (1898-1983), in her 1972 leaflet, *Tales of Llanvillo, an account of life at Llanvillo in the early years of the twentieth century*, writing about the 'new' (1912) piped water supply to the village, illustrates the social and community importance of these sites, beyond the mere provision of water: "Although it was such a blessing to have water in the house, the innovation was not appreciated all that much by the local women, who missed their daily chat at the well".

## 6. the next steps

The following is a summary of what could potentially be achieved in the Beacons area during the next (though initial) Delivery Stage of the WELL-BEING Project, although it may be the case that, due to the limitations of our funding, not all of the ideas explored here can actually be delivered. These are the results of my examinations of what I saw as being the most important wellspring sites throughout the Brecon Beacons needing work or deserving attention, supplemented by desk research, and meetings with a large number of organisations, groups and individuals in the area.

### 6.1 community engagement

The project has started to make links with a number of community organisations and groups within the Brecon Beacons National Park to engage them in the Project development, and for involvement in conservation and research activities when delivery starts. These have included:

*Brecon Mind*  
*Brecon Family and Local Historical Society*  
*Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations*  
*Brecon Volunteer Bureau*  
*Crickhowell Volunteer Bureau*  
*New Inn Village Alive Trust*  
*Llanddew Well Group*  
*Hay History Group*  
*Brecknock Historical Society*  
*Brecknock Museum*  
*Brecknock Historical Forum*  
*Ysgol y Bannau, Brecon*  
*South East Wales Regionally Important Geodiversity Sites Group*  
*Llechfaen Community Council*  
*representatives of the Myddfai Community*  
*Myddfai Tŷ Talcen Charity*  
*Maendu Well Conservation Group*  
*The Wellsprings Fellowship*

*Menter Brycheiniog & Maesyfed  
Brecon Cathedral  
Upper Usk Alliance, and  
Natural Resources Wales.*

## 6.2 stakeholder workshop

A partners, stakeholders and public meeting was held at the Heritage Centre at Brecon Cathedral on Monday 6 March 2017 to outline the aims of the project and to listen to the ideas of those present on where the work should be focused. The workshop was attended by fourteen people from a range of local organisations, including Brecon Local and Family History Society, Hay Historical Society, the Maendu Well Conservation Group, as well as officers of the Brecon Beacons National Park, and some members of the public.

There was widespread agreement on the wells that were proposed, and great enthusiasm for the Project, with some people expressing that it was “*desperately needed*”, and that we should “*shout about what we have*”. Ideas for walks and interpretation, including an ‘augmented reality’ project for Llyn y Fan Fach to tie into the Physicians of Myddfai legend were proposed, as were plans for a St Eluned Festival on her Saint’s Day on 1 August at her well near Slwch Tump, involving local schools ... an idea it is hoped this Project can support this year and help to develop into the future. A number of groups and conservation activities that are focusing on wells were also highlighted: the Maendu Well Conservation Group expressed their willingness to offer advice and learning from their community-centred conservation work; and we also learned that St Eluned’s Well at Llechfaen is due to be cleared by a group of volunteers supported by Llechfaen Parish Council. All of these initiatives strongly supported the need for the wider WELL-BEING Project to bring all these disparate groups together to harness this enthusiasm within a co-ordinated national body to help protect and celebrate the well cultures of Wales.

In addition, we have received detailed written papers on the specific needs of three of our main proposed sites: those in Hay from Dr Peter Ford, the Secretary of the Hay History Group and a Volunteer Guide of HayTours; on the Physicians of Myddfai’s Well by Robin Barlow, the Chairman of Trustees of Myddfai Tŷ Talcen Charity; as well as a copy of the Maendu Well Group’s 2017 Report to Brecon Town Council Environment Committee. (see [appendices c, b and d](#))

My own research has concentrated on eight main Action Areas, as follows: **Physical Renovations, Restorations and Renewals; Walking Trails; Access, Signage and Interpretation; Water Testing; Education; Special Events; Exhibitions, Conferences, Seminars and Workshops; and Sustainability.**

## 6.3 renovation / restoration / renewal

A range of different levels of engagement with the selected sites will need to be offered, from simple accessing, signage, publicity and interpretation ... to major re-construction, depending upon the specific needs:



- **ST ELENUD'S WELLS:** though the one at **Llechfaen** [site no. 5 / SO 080 285] needs some work (which is being undertaken locally), it is the other below the **Slwch Tump** [site no. 4 / SO 056 284], which offers the greatest challenge. It is a candidate, perhaps, for a completely 'new' well structure to be designed and built (assuming the blessing of the landowner). More on this idea a little later (see [9. beyond retention](#), below).

St Elenud's Well,  
Llechfaen,  
nr Brecon



St Elenud's Well,  
Llechfaen'  
nr Brecon

- **ST ISSUI'S WELL:** Partrishow, nr Abergavenny [site no.13 / SO 282 225] needs some simple tidying, signage and interpretation (linking it to its historically-significant church, above).



St Issui's Well,  
Partrishow

- In **BRECON:** the **Priory Well** [site no. 2 / SO 045 291], **Sir Charles Morgan Well** [site no.3 / SO 043 288], and **Maendu** [site no. 1 / SO 038 297] present a complex range of challenges.



Sir Charles Morgan Well,  
Brecon

These include an exploration of the water course, and appropriate signage and interpretation at the **Priory Well**; and safe access to and interpretation at **Sir Charles Morgan**. In addition, further efforts to locate the **Eye Well** [site no.76 / ?] should be undertaken. (Located “*a few yards higher up the Groves [from the Priory Well] in the side of the bank*”, it was damaged in a thunderstorm during WWI, “*sending the stones tumbling down to the reservoir leat below*”, according to Elsie Pritchard in her 1977 booklet, *Brecon, From the Struet*).

Priory Well,  
Brecon



Regarding **Maendu**, there is much to be done. The Maendu Well Group have been caring for and running annual events at the site since 2009, including litter picks, hedge laying, pond clearance, community arts projects and mosaic interpretation. Their recent Report (January 2007: see [appendix d](#)) has been presented to Brecon Town Council Environment Committee.

Their analysis of the needs included:

- repair of the leat, which takes the water from the well house to the pool
- repair, replacement or removal of the plinth and its (recently-destroyed) sculpture
- work on the often-waterlogged path
- pond and stream clearance, and
- tree management.

Maendu Well, Brecon









**THE PHYSICIANS' WELL**, nr Myddfai [site no. 28 / SN 806 287]: After the recent tree-cutting left the site around the Physicians' Well resembling the Somme, post-battle, new tree planting (in liaison with Natural Resources Wales) is recommended – a semi-circular protection, perhaps – along with work on access, signage and interpretation, working in conjunction with the energetic community organisations based at the Myddfai Community Hall & Visitor Centre.

The Physicians' Well, nr Myddfai



(Theirs is also, of course, already a fine base for walking tours, seminars, workshops, conferences, etc.)

**THE WALK (or WHARF?) WELL** [site no. 73 / SO 225 422], The Warren, Hay-on-Wye: Set, today, into the riverbank of the Wye, on a large stone quay, well-hidden down a dangerously-slippery and uneven path to the river Wye, the so-called Walk (or Wharf?) Well is one of seven wells in Hay-on-Wye visited.

The Walk (Wharf?) Well, Hay-on-wye



The age of the quay is uncertain, though it has been suggested that it played its part in the building of the town's twelfth century church, stone for its construction arriving here by barge. It's possible that the quay (and its well) were both constructed for exactly this purpose at that time.

It is known that the town had two medieval ferries crossing the Wye. Old OS maps show a footpath in the field on the other side of the river at this point, down from the Clyro road, terminating directly opposite this quay.

The current site – probably part of the landscaping built by Sir Joseph Bailey in the 1870s – would have been, in its day, a busy part of the town. Today, at this tranquil spot, one can only imagine the hustle and bustle of the past as people and objects came and went from this place, and the stories of comings and goings they would be able to tell ... an ideal place, perhaps, when access is secured, for the creation and telling of new/old tales. A fairly-major build is needed here to provide safe access, plus signage and interpretation, working in conjunction with the Hay History Group and local schools.

In addition, urgent restoration work is needed at **Ffynnon Keyna** or **Black Lion Green Well** [site no.67 / SO 232 424] in Hay, where the stream is eroding its bank, as well as at the **Eye Well** [site no. 68 / SO 225 422], just above the **Walk / Wharf Well**.



Ffynnon Keyna,  
Hay-on-Wye

(My knowledge of these sites, and all others in Hay, comes mainly from the insightful research and generosity of Dr Peter Ford of the Hay History Group. See his detailed notes on the wells and the works proposed in [appendix c: Situation Report on the Wellsprings of Hay-on-Wye](#))

It should be noted that restoration work on some of these, and other sites may sometimes need to be restricted by breeding seasons, for example that of the newt population at Maendu.

In addition, considerations should always be given to such things as parking provision, the carrying capacity and the state of paths, etc. when upgrading and popularising sites. (The National Park Authority is currently not encouraging more people to visit Llyn y Fan Fach, for example, due to the state of its access road and the size of its parking area.)

## 6.4 wellspring walking trails

There are, of course, very many walking trails already in existence throughout the Beacons, although few of these fully exploit the riches that the area's wellspring culture have to offer, most not even mentioning the sites which they often pass very nearby. These include:

path to  
The Physicians'  
Well,  
nr Myddfai



- '*Church Trails on The Border*', including one (no.14, *A Cleric's Trail*, following the life of Francis Kilvert) exploring **St Eigen's** [site no.14 / SO 211 398] at Llanigon; and another (no.13) St Mary's Church in Hay-on-Wye, but with no mention of **St Mary's** (or any other) **Well** in the town [site no.70 / SO 225 421]

- '*A Walk around Historical Hay*' by the Hay Tourist Information Bureau (passing most of Hay's well sites but only mentioning the **Swan Well** [site no.71 / 226 420], and the site of the **Town Well** [site no.72 / SO 230 426]

- Hay's '*Railway Walk*' by Hay Tours, Hay History Group and the Brecon Beacons National Park passes many of the town's wells, but only mentions the dilapidated **Eye Well** [site no.68 / SO 225 422] and the "*not accessible at present*" *Walk / Wharf Well* [site no.73 / SO 225 422]

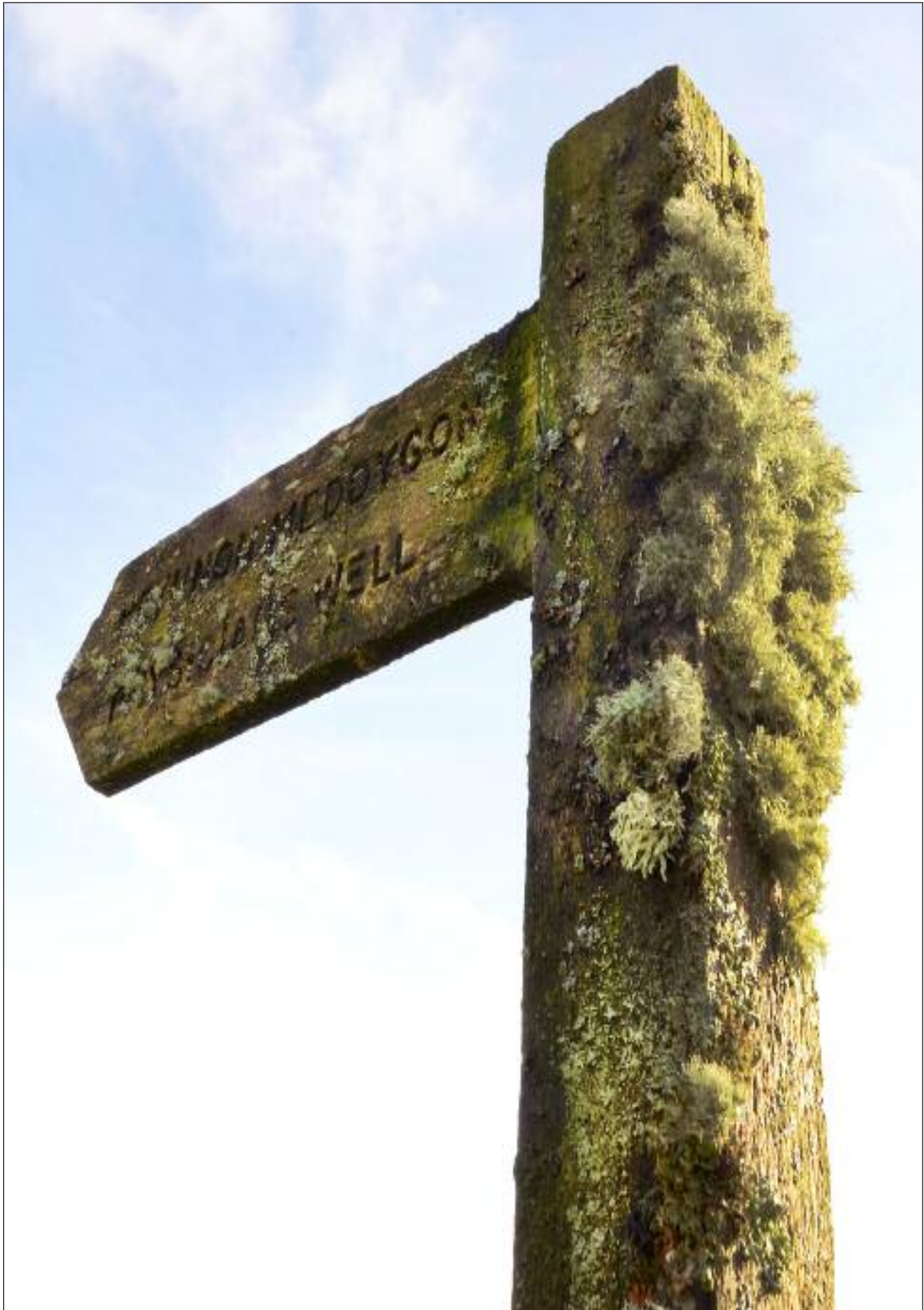
- '*Walks in Carmarthenshire*' leaflets include one to **Llyn y Fan Fach** (with its own small spring [site no.74]), as well as its connection to the **Physicians of Myddfai Well** [site no.28/ SN 806 287]; and another to **Carreg Cennen** [site no.10 / SN 665 192] which also passes by **the source of the river Loughor** [site no.30 / SN 669 178] ([www.discovercarmarthenshire.com](http://www.discovercarmarthenshire.com))

source of the  
River Loughor





signpost to The Physicians' Well, nr Myddfai



- In addition, there are longer trails publicised by the Brecon Beacons Park Society, including the Beacons Way, the Epynt Way, Usk Valley Walk, and Offa's Dyke Path.

Other tourist publications like *Wales View* (from *Visit Wales*), while including sections on faith tourism and pilgrimages, and suggesting trips to places like St Issui's Church in Partishow, fail to make any mention at all of their adjacent sacred springs and holy wells. (Examples of better practice, however, are to be found within Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham Councils' *North Wales Borderlands' Sacred Places* booklet; and Denbighshire County Council's *A View of Denbighshire*, both of which include impressive, dedicated sections on their holy wells.)

**The new/old walks being proposed as part of the WELL-BEING Project currently include:**

- a. A walk between the two **ST ELENUD WELLS (ST ELENUD'S WAY?)**: **Llechfaen** [site no. 5 / SO 080 285] and **Slwch Tump** [site no. 4 / SO 056 284], possibly linked with the Brecon Wells, below

St Elenud's Well, Llechfaen, nr Brecon



St Elenud's Well, Slwch Tump, nr Brecon

- b. A walk connecting the four **BRECON WELLS** with **Bishop Gower's Well** [site no.6 / SO 054 308] at Llanddew Bishops Palace, starting and ending at Brecon Cathedral: **Priory Well** [site no. 2 / SO 045 291]; the **Eye Well** in The Groves [site no.77 or 76 / SO 225 422]; **Sir Charles Morgan Well** [site no.3 / SO 043 288]; and **Maendu** [site no. 1 / SO 038 297] (This walk could be combined with that to Elenud's sites, making a fine seven site trip.)

left: Brecon Cathedral  
middle: Bishop Gower's Well, Llanddew



St Cadoc window, Brecon Cathedral



c. **HAY-ON-WYE TOWN WELLS WALK:** There are seven wells in a variety of states of repair here: the **Town Well** [site no.72 / SO 230 426]; **St Keyna's** or **Black Lion Green Well** [site no.67 / SO 232 424]; **St John's** or **Castle Well** [site no.69 / SO 229 423]; the **Swan Well** [site no.71 / SO 226 420]; **St Mary's Well** [site no.70 / SO 225 421] (on private property in the garden of 2 Sackville Cottages, though visible from the church graveyard); the **Eye Well** [site no.68 / SO 225 422]; and **Walk / Wharf Well** [site no.73 / SO 225 422]



left to right:  
Eye Well;  
Town Well  
(site of);  
Swan Well,  
Hay-on-Wye



Walk / Wharf Well,  
Hay-on-Wye



St Mary's Well,  
Hay-on-Wye

Given the current dangerous state of some of these sites, the Hay History Group is unwilling to commence these walks until the work proposed, particularly that on the Walk / Wharf Well, has been completed.



d. A fourth potential trail should be to **THE PHYSICIANS' WELL** from the Myddfai Community Centre and/or the Usk reservoir (though the latter is discouraged by Welsh Water); with another going to **LLYN Y FAN FACH** [site no.74] ... to make the full narrative connections. BBNP has published its '*Great Walks around Llandovery*' which includes Walk 5 to **Ffynnon Meddygon** or the **Physicians Well** [site no.28 / SN 806 287] from Myddfai Village Hall. And the Myddfai Centre, itself, has published both a large-scale leaflet entitled '*The Physicians Trail*' and a smaller booklet, *Six Myddfai Walks*, which includes '*Walk 3: The Ffynnon Meddygon (Physicians' Well)*'.

Llyn y Fan Fach



Monica & Robin nr The Physicians' Well

(I was guided to the Physicians' Well site by Monica and Robin Barlow from the Myddfai Centre. Guided tours from Myddfai for up to twelve people in a minibus to the starting point of the then three hour walk would take in two wells, two burial chambers and some splendid views, although it is unlikely that this could be regularly offered. Alternatively, a longer walk could start from the Myddfai Centre, itself.)

Currently, the site's three existing / deteriorating finger posts are less than useful, their directions running out soon into the walk, making the site difficult to find for those not already familiar with its location.

e. **Ffynnon Angaeron** [site no.37 / SO 298 051], near Goytre, is on a Goytre Wharf to Myndd Garn Wen 5.5 mile BBNP circular walk, ending at St Illtyd's church in Mamilhad. (It could certainly benefit from leaflets at the Horseshoes Inn at the start of the walk and signs along the way. I got lost twice before eventually succeeding.)

Ffynnon Angaeron, nr Goytre



Other potential well walks could include:

f. one **above CWMYOY**, north-east of Abergavenny, where a climb up to nine primitive though evocative sites also offers fine views in all directions. These wellspring sites include the **Castle Well** [site no.9 / SO 317 237]; the **Box Tree Well** [site no.22 / SO 313 233]; the **Three Wells Trough** [site no.23 / SO 316 234] running down to the new **Three Wells Farm Well** [site no.24 / SO 315 235]; **Molly's Well** [site no.26 / SO 319 236]; **Ness' Well** [site no.76], and the **Quarry Well** [site no.27 / SO 313 241]; plus two un-named capped wells [site no.25 / SO 311 239].

Box Tree Well,  
nr Cwmyou



below,  
left to right:  
Molly at the  
Quarry Well;  
Ness' Well;  
and Molly's  
Well,  
nr Cwmyoy



g. and, finally, the already-mentioned historically-important **LADY LLANOVER WALK** (see [5. a site for sore eyes](#), above).

These walks to important and inspiring sacred spring and holy well sites could be included (launched?) within existing Walking Festivals, including the annual walk organised by Brecon Mind.

In addition, the Cistercian Way goes through Hay-on-Wye and would benefit from the added riches of the proposed Hay Wells Walk.



## 6.5 access, signage and interpretation

While we would always wish to make it as easy as possible for people to discover and visit our sacred spring and holy well sites, we should not allow obtrusive signage to obscure either the wider countryside or the specific sites. We should, therefore, wherever possible, explore offering both hi- and low-tech guiding and interpretation solutions, including iBeacons / ‘sound stones’, with information accessed by mobile phones located along the trails and at the wellspring sites themselves to direct and to inform. In addition, printed leaflets should be made available for the low-tech amongst us (copies of which would also be available online).

There are good examples we can learn from in this field, including Digital Bridgend’s *Dare to Discover* interactive trails and Cadw’s online *Wales History Map*, as well as many companies now in the marketplace designing and supplying innovative systems. And some of the content for these listening stations could be created through ‘living memory’ cross-generational workshops (see [6.7 education](#), below).

We should also consider digitally-generated, ‘enhanced reality experiences’ at places like Llyn y Fan Fach to make the stories come alive via smartphone apps and other emerging technology (an idea suggested at our Brecon Workshop session).

left: the obtrusive signage surrounding Ffynnon Ddrewlyd, Cwmtwrch-Isaf



interpretative panels at the Priory Well, Brecon and Llandyfian

The placement of existing, more traditional well signs could, in many cases, be re-sighted to be more noticeable for locating but less intrusive of the well site itself. Ideally, if we must have them, they should be moved a little way from the site, placed at the side, not interfering with sight lines and visitor experience.

In addition, ideas for permanent information hubs for local and visiting wellspring hunters are being explored, alongside temporary touring displays, publications, and an interactive web presence. Three main regional centres should be considered: in the west, the Myddfai Community Centre (which already has a fine exhibition, alongside a great café and shop); Abergavenny or Hay-on-Wye in the east; and Brecon Cathedral in the centre.

left to right: sign to St Angaeron Well; post early on Physicians’ Well walk; and path to St Mealog’s Well, nr Llowes





## 6.6 water testing

An ongoing scheme to test local wellspring waters needs to be undertaken to both see which wells we can conveniently tell people they can drink from (and which not), as well as to find out what the actual compositions of their waters include. The minerals which are brought to the surface from deep underground by wellsprings often go some way to explain why certain wells had certain medicinal claims.

In parallel with these studies, analyses of the natural ecology of each site – its plant, insect and animal life – should be undertaken, all research ideally being conducted in conjunction with local school children.

## 6.7 education

*'People will forget what you said; they will forget what you did.  
But they will never forget how you made them feel.'*

Maya Angelou

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority already offers an impressively-wide range of education courses (including residential) for children from Foundation Phase to Key Stage 3 and above, including sessions on 'natural art', 'woodland caretaking', 'tall trees, habitats and food chains', 'mini beasts', 'fantasy, fairy and folklore', 'quarries and caves', survival, navigation skills, sustainable tourism, Celts and Romans, and geocaching, amongst others. WELL-BEING's education proposals should link closely with this existing provision, and with the Brecon Beacons National Park Young Archaeologists' Club, as well as with schools both within the area and beyond.

### **What follows are some of the initial ideas for education we have explored:**

a. The wellsprings of the Brecon Beacons offer a kaleidoscopic array of historical accounts and fascinating tales (some of which I have already shared above, see [4. stories to be told](#)). Children love to explore the fascinating worlds of water, from these tales to those of water's origins and life cycle, and its essential role in our existence.

I've seen first-hand how wellspring sites and stories can offer great stimuli for creative writing, visual arts, design, photography, film, music, theatre and dance, as well as in the studies of geography, geology, history, science and biology, amongst others. (At the 2008 **Pererinion Penrhys / Penrhys Pilgrims Festival** based around **Ffynnon Fair** [ST 004 944] in Penrhys in the South Wales Valleys, children from the local primary school wrote and designed a book, made a film, and helped create a touring exhibition about their well, as well as taking major parts in a mammoth community play [all of which are available to view on request].)

b. The history of wellsprings culture also offers inspiring opportunities for cross-generational projects, where young people are encouraged to interview older locals about their history of accessing water. (An excellent exemplar of this approach is the *Arran Project*, in Scotland, and its Arran Theatre & Arts Trust initiative, *They Sang the Same Song*.)



c. Through site visits, wellsprings can provide inspiring ecological platforms for the study of biodiversity and wildlife habitat, promoting in the process a wide range of environmental concerns.

d. Involvement in wellspring activities can also stimulate healthier lifestyles, both through a better understanding of the role water and food plays in our lives, as well as the walks to sites and the labour that conservation work often requires. Many recent studies point to the importance of time spent out of doors, particularly within green spaces in our physical and mental 'wellbeing' (in contrast to indoors in one's bedroom, video gaming and the like), particularly in the lowering of anxiety and stress and as an alternative to anti-depressant medication:

*'Access to good quality green space is associated with a range of positive health outcomes including better self-rated health; lower body mass index scores, overweight and obesity levels; improved mental health and wellbeing and increased longevity in older people.'*

from *Reconomics Plus: the economic, health and social value of outdoor recreation*, February 2017, by the Sport & Recreation Alliance / Manchester Metropolitan University

Perhaps, then, the healing qualities that our wellsprings offered our ancestors for millennia are, in this sense, still very much available to us today.

e. Concern has been expressed about 'health & safety' by those worried that, as work is done on making our sites more attractive to the public, and in particular to children, that new restrictions could be applied. The Maendu Well Group had already experienced this during their attempts to tidy, repair and renew their site. It is a sad reflection of the times in which we live – in this part of the world at least – that asking for permission to do something innovative often results in a negative answer from the relevant powers, as the easiest and safest, line-of-least-resistance response. Part of our work needs to be in raising both understanding of and participation in these sites, in order to short-circuit such small thinking. It was also pointed out that measures would always be taken by schools visiting sacred spring and holy well (like any other) sites, to conduct risk assessments before their trips, and to take with them all necessary protective clothing and materials.

A programme which successfully educates the public in water safety at wellspring sites needs to be developed (like that we already have for the sea), in preference to obtrusive signs and the fencing off of areas – used, in many cases, unhindered for hundreds of years by the public – seen now to be potentially dangerous.

## 6.8 special events

Many of the areas around sacred spring and holy well sites were once the focus of community activity, often at special times of the year (like at St Elenud's Slwch Tump Well).

Local histories, myths and legends associated with Beacons' wellsprings could be used once again to bring communities together (like the Maendu Well Group have already been doing).

A common tale, told in many areas throughout Britain (including here in Wales), concerns a traditional arrangement to determine which one of a newly-married couple would, in future life, 'wear the trousers': as, at the end of their marriage service, the one that drinks first from the holy well would dominate.

The story goes that, after the preacher's final words and the last hymn, the groom races out of the church and sprints to the well, a mile or so away. Meanwhile, the bride, sitting unperturbed in her pew, reaches down into her bag, brings out a bottle of water she had filled from the well earlier in the day, and takes the first swig!

Perhaps this tale could be resurrected for an annual church to well / male vs female race. Francis Jones suggested that this practice was carried out at **Ffynnon Geneu** (or **Genau**) [site no.16 / SO 241 181] at Llangenny, at which *"a farmer found a very ancient iron bell of curious form"* in 1790 when the oratory of the saint was demolished. Today, the still-impressive wellspring site sits within the grounds of Pendarren House which is run, appropriately perhaps, as an Outdoor Education Centre by and for Haringey Council.



Ffynnon Geneu,  
Llangenny

In Cornwall, however, the tale was associated with one of the **St Keyne Wells** [SX 241 579], near Liskeard. Keyne was probably a fifth century virgin who was said to perform miracles, and there is a well associated with her at **Llangadog** [site no.31], as well as a **St Keyna's Well** [site no.67 / SO 232 424] in Hay which has its own claim to a connection with the legend. In a 1908 account, an old inhabitant, whenever hearing of a domestic squabble, was reported to proclaim:

*'Tom or Nell?  
First to the well.'*

Perhaps this should be the place where this tradition is revived. To my knowledge, nowhere else has yet made such an obvious connection.



## 6.9 exhibition / conference / seminars / workshops

Although I have already mentioned the idea of ‘permanent information hubs’, to the best of my knowledge there is no centre anywhere in Britain (or anywhere else for that matter) that offers a focus for wellspring devotees, of which there are a growing number.

Given our rich sacred spring and holy well history, why shouldn’t such a resource be here in Wales? And if in Wales, why should we not pursue the vision of the Brecon Beacons as the centre for the exploration of wellspring culture for Wales and beyond?

I know that currently Brecon Cathedral is exploring the future uses of its Heritage Centre area. Perhaps this space would be an ideal base for this idea for Wales?

And, as well as the connections which will inevitably be made through this Project with the two other chosen areas in Wales (Pen Llŷn and Pembrokeshire), links should be pursued with the remaining parts of our nation, along with more adventurous plans for reciprocal partnerships with other existing committed groups in the other Celtic areas of Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall, Galicia, Brittany, etc.

In addition, a digital presence needs to be provided, with website(s) from which to research and download information on walks and individual sites, as well as more general articles on wellspring culture and practical assistance on improving and celebrating your individual or community well.

(See also proposals in [9. beyond retention](#), below.)

## 7. finding new guardians

And a few brief words of warning ... ambitious projects like WELL-BEING seem to pop up regularly in the histories of our wellsprings. They often fail. Initial excitement and energy is overcome by the waning of enthusiasm, the drying-up of funds and/or the aging of its participants, often in parallel with the growth of new weeds and brambles, the choking of water flows, and the gradual tumbling of walls.

In the past, holy wells had ‘well guardians’ – usually women, and often with very special powers – who controlled access to the wells, kept them in good repair, arranged divination services, organised special events often on saints’ and other special days, provided food and drink, and sometimes even accommodation.

**If the WELL-BEING Project is to be a real success, it will need to be sustainable beyond the period of its HLF (and other) funding.** It is one of the main ideas of the WELL-BEING Project, therefore, to re-instate the idea of ‘well guardianship’, in order to preserve and develop the significance of these once-important places for the future. These new well guardians could be individuals, community groups, local organisations, businesses, and/or schools, whose job it would be to both ensure the physical integrity of their site, as well as to continue its significance as a focus for community activity.

## 8. working the land

During the spring of 2017, we have identified and contacted most of the landowners of the wells that the Project will focus on, to discuss the work that needs to be carried out, and to confirm approval for these activities to go ahead. This is a long process, and issues such as the upcoming elections for local councillors which will inevitably affect those wells owned by the Town Council has delayed confirming some of these details. This will be continued during the summer of 2017.

Below is a summary of where we are:

Well	Location	Protected	Work involved	Landowner	Permissions Granted
<b>Priory Well</b>	Brecon	Listed Grade II	Reinstatement of masonry and work to link up the spring with the spout. Clearance of the well bowl. Interpretation.	Brecon Cathedral	The Cathedral is behind the Project and very supportive of work being carried out. Permission will be discussed in more detail and Listed Building consent sought as part of the Development Phase. The Cathedral is currently checking if they do own the well or not.
<b>Maedu Well</b>	Brecon	No	Major work planned by Maendu Well Group (see <a href="#">appendix b</a> ), plus interpretation. Linking the site to other wells to form a Well Trail around Brecon.	Brecon Town Council	Permission has previously been granted for work to conserve the site and the owners are very supportive of the Group and the Project. Town Council has been contacted to discuss works and permissions, but due to elections taking place in May, it was advised that we wait until then to conclude discussions.
<b>Physicians' Well</b>	Myddfai	No	Clearance. Interpretation. Signage to create a trail to link the well with the Myddfai Centre.	Natural Resources Wales / Welsh Water	NRW are tenants of the site from Welsh Water. Meeting held with NRW to discuss proposed works and access to the site.

Well	Location	Protected	Work involved	Landowner	Permissions Granted
<b>St Eluned's Well</b>	Slwch Tump, Brecon	Scheduled Ancient Monument.	Interpretation, clearance, creation of sympathetic well cap	Private	Permission will be discussed further with the owner as part of the Development Phase. Cadw Permission is also being discussed, for SAM consent.
<b>Sir Charles Morgan's Well</b>	Brecon	No	Replace steps, install signage and interpretation	Brecon Town Council	Landowners are the Town Council (same issue as with Maendu Well).
<b>St Anne's Well</b>	Trefecha	No	Clear well and restore structure	Methodist Revival Wales	Discussions had with landowner who is keen to promote access. Further discussion to be had as part of Development Phase.
<b>St Issui's Well</b>	Partr-ishow	Listed Grade II	Clearance of site and interpretation	Church in Wales	Discussions ongoing.
<b>St Meilog's Well</b>	Llowes		Interpretation and signage	Church in Wales	Discussions ongoing.
<b>Llyn y Fan Fach</b>	West Beacons		Interpretation and link with Myddfai and Physicians' Well	National Trust	Idea developed by BBNP Tourism to digitally interpret the Lady of the Lake legend to tie in to the Physicians of Myddfai story. No physical works at site, so owner permission not required.
<b>The Walk Well</b>	Hay-on-Wye		Access improvements and interpretation	Hay-on-Wye Town Council	Major work required to ensure safe access to the site.



## 9. beyond retention

I want to float one last notion into our well pool before I conclude:

I mentioned before (with regard to St Elenud's Well below Slwch Tump) the idea of a 'new' well structure.



St Elenud's  
Well,  
Slwch Tump,  
nr Brecon

The designs and fabric of our holy well and sacred spring sites have changed regularly over time, as beliefs and faiths have discovered new ways to explain the unexplainable, building layer upon layer of masonry and of meaning. It's strange, then, that the current prevailing attitude towards the care of our wellsprings seems to be to stop history at the latest modification (usually some date in Victorian times), a strategy in danger of signing the death certificates for these sites as places of consequence and vitality in our lives.

There are exceptions to the 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' wells, like **St Boniface's** [NH 641 537] at Munloch, 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 before the birth of Christianity. (And I have already mentioned the Penrhys Pilgrims / Pererinion Penrhys Project based around **Ffynnon Fair** [ST 004 944], in Penrhys.)

St Winifride's  
Well,  
Holywell



Hay Slad  
Spout, Malvern  
Hills

**New Inn Well House**, at Cross Ash, in Monmouthshire [site no.49 / SO 406 197] is an excellent example of a community working together imaginatively to save and rebuild an important wellspring site, complete with a newly-commissioned statuette of St Christopher, the patron saint of travellers. The Village Arts Building Preservation Trust was established in 2004, and – working from photographs of when the building was standing – they restored the site to its original design, using traditional methods and materials. The project was completed by August 2005.



New Inn  
Well House,  
Cross Ash

And, the activities of the **Maendu Well Group** are also, of course, certainly part of this positive trend.

But these, sadly, are the 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; and some are even destroyed by forestry, or road and housing ‘developments’.

While I fully recognise the archaeological imperative to retain and secure historic remains for future generations (and the importance of the development of transport infrastructure, the building of 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.

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 that in countries, often much poorer than ours, drinking fountains offer cool pure water at every corner. Why is this something beyond our ‘health and safety’ abilities here in Wales, today?

While I can list very many once-functioning drinking fountains now disconnected, broken and currently functioning only as litter bins, I only know of one which still offers refreshment here, that in the centre of Lampeter. There may well be others ... but they will, I am convinced, be very much the exceptions to the rule.



Malvhina  
Fountain,  
Great Malvern

The initial and positive responses to these WELL-BEING proposals in the Beacons area reflect other ideas being developed throughout Britain and beyond. 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, with financial support from Malvern Hills District Council and public subscription: 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. Both utilise spring waters flowing down from the hills.



And at **St Anne's Well** [SO 772 458], above Great Malvern, they celebrate annually the role donkeys played in transporting rich visitors up to its healing waters in a new multi-faith festival.

the 2016 Donkey Festival,  
Great Malvern



And at **Gumfreston Wells** [SN 109 011] behind St Laurence's church in Gumfreston, near Tenby, Pembrokeshire, the three nails of Christ's crucifixion are thrown into its three wells each Easter Sunday morning in a moving reflection of both Jesus' sacrifice, as well as of the crooked pins and other metal objects offered to pagan spirits in much earlier times.

the  
'ceremony of  
the nails',  
Gumfreston  
Wells,  
Easter  
Sunday  
2006



I've already shown, I hope, how the consequence of people's lack of awareness of the significance of many of our wellspring sites has often resulted in their neglect and sometimes their destruction. I want to question, then, why we aren't continuing today to add to the stories of these once-important sites.

Perhaps, here in the Beacons, we should be taking the opportunities on offer from sites like the currently less-than-appealing **Ffynnon Elenud** below Slwch Tump to make our own, very new, very twenty-first century responses, while, at the same time, paying due respect to history and tradition.



## PHIL COPE

culture & democracy

March 2017

author of

*Holy Wells Wales, a photographic journey* (2008)

*Holy Wells Cornwall, a photographic journey* (2010)

*The Dancing Pilgrimage of Water: writings on the rivers, lakes  
and reservoirs of Wales* (with Dewi Roberts, 2010)

*Borderlands, new photographs and old tales of the sacred springs,  
holy wells and spas of the Wales - England borders* (2013)

*Holy Wells Scotland: new photographs and old tales of the sacred springs,  
holy wells and medicinal spas of Scotland* (2015)

*Sacred North* (with Fr John Musther, due October 2017)



01656 870 180

07966 251 756

[cope@copephil9.orangehome.co.uk](mailto:cope@copephil9.orangehome.co.uk)

Flickr: Phil Cope



cadw keep  
cymru in wales  
dact is tidy



Cronicl Ddiwyg  
Cynaliadwy  
Sustainable  
Development Fund



## bibliography

*The Holy Wells of Wales*, Francis Jones (University of Wales Press, 1954)

*Brecon 'From the Struet'*, Elsie Pritchard  
(Brecon & Radnor Express / Powys County Times, 1977)

*Earth Rites: Fertility Practices in Pre-Industrial Britain*, Janet and Colin Bord,  
(Harper Collins, 1982)

*The Secret and the Sacred Beacons*, Brian S Griffiths (Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2001)

*The Physicians of Myddfai: cures and remedies of the mediaeval world*,  
Terry Breverton (Cambria Books, 2012)

*Magic and Medicine: the story of the Physicians of Myddfai*,  
Arblaster, Swan & Bernays (Dinefwr Press, 2002)

*Myddfai: Its Land and Peoples*, David B. James (1991)

*Welsh Herbal Medicine*, David Hoffman (Abercastle Publications, 1978)

*The Black Book of Carmarthen* (Llanerch Enterprises, 1989)

*Portrait of the Brecon Beacons*, Edmund J Mason (Robert Hale, 1975)

*Exploring The Brecon Beacons, Black Mountains and Waterfall Country:  
a walker's guide*, Chris Barber (Regional Publications, 1980)

*Circular Walks in the Brecon Beacons National Park*, Tom Hutton  
(Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 1998)

*Atlas Brycheiniog* (Gwasg Gomer, 1960)

*A History of the Hay, the story of Hay-on-Wye*, GL Fairs (Phillimore, 1972)

*A History of the County of Brecknock*, TJ Jones (W&G North, 1809)

*One Moonlit Night*, T Llew Jones [trans. Gillian Clarke] (Gomer, 1991)

*Welsh Folk Tales*, Peter Stevenson (The History Press, 2017)

*A Guide to Hay* [quoted in *Haywire*, 1992], Grant (1890)

*The Sacred Stones, Sacred Trees, and Holy Wells of Hay, and the neighbourhood*,  
CG Portman (Grant, Hay., 1907)



## appendices

### a: Gazetteer of Brecon Beacons Wellspring Sites

see separate sheet (detailing 78 wellspring sites in the Beacons)  
In addition, WELL KEPT SECRETS includes 62 files of photographs.

### b: notes on the Physicians of Myddfai's Well

Robin Barlow, Chairman of Trustees of Myddfai Tŷ Talcen Charity

Myddfai Hall, shop and cafe is a community initiative which seeks to maintain the long-term social and economic sustainability of the area. A key element of this is to attract visitors (and those local to the area) to the facilities that the Hall has to offer. Currently the shop and cafe are open for five days a week in the winter and six days a week in summer. In addition, there are regular classes held on a weekly basis such as yoga, pilates and floral art. Special events such as concerts and plays are also held regularly. The Hall is becoming increasingly popular as a wedding venue.

A key element of the success of the project has been to constantly intertwine activities with the history of the area and especially the Physicians of Myddfai. There are excellent information boards in the cafe outlining the history of the Physicians and detailing some of their recipes/cures. There are also various leaflets giving information about the Physicians, local walks and a history of the village. The Physicians of Myddfai Society has recently been formed and a day conference is organised in June each year. This attracts over 100 attendees and is always fully booked showing the depth of interest in the Physicians.

The Physicians' Well (Meddygon Myddfai) is mentioned in many books and leaflets but visited successfully by few. The route from Myddfai village Hall involves a steep climb up a metalled road in a south-westerly direction to Sarnau, then following a bridleway on to open moorland via Pant Meddygon and so to the Well just inside some forestry land managed by Natural Resources Wales. There is nothing to show the location of the Well except for a bench nearby. There are two finger post on open land, both of which are now so weathered that the information on them is illegible. They offer little help in finding the Physicians' Well; the Well is not marked on OS maps.

Given the interest in the Physicians of Myddfai and the Well, the facility of the Myddfai shop and cafe (with adequate car-parking) and the aim of attracting more visitors, the following are proposed:

- To provide new finger-posts or other waymarks to indicate the route from Sarnau across open ground to the Well (approx 2.5 kms)
- To tidy up the area around the Well and perhaps initiate some planting of native species of shrubs/trees. Recent felling in the area has left it looking rather bare
- To site an information board at the Well
- To produce a booklet detailing the route to the Well, plus background history on the Physicians and the village
- To organise a programme of led walks from the village to the Well.

## **c: Situation Report on the Wellsprings of Hay-on-Wye**

Dr Peter Ford , Secretary Hay History Group / Volunteer Guide HayTours

As a volunteer guide with HayTours I have developed a 'Wells Walk' around Hay. It is ready to use but at the moment due to neglect some of the wellsprings are difficult / dangerous to access. To safeguard the public the tour has not yet been actioned.

The wellsprings are in various states of repair and accessibility. There are 7 historic 'community' wellsprings, some are virtually lost, some are dry, others are in urgent need of repair, and one is on private land. Most have either a legend attached, a Holy connection, or are reputed to have healing properties.

Circling the edge of town from the east they are:

Town Well  
Black Lion Well  
St John's Well  
Swan Well  
St Mary's Well  
Eye Well  
Walk Well.

A tour would take about 1 hour and pass around the perimeter of the historic 'core' of the town, already explored on the Heritage and Medieval Tours. ([www.haytours.org](http://www.haytours.org))

To do justice to the wellsprings, and allow safe public access, this report identifies their current state, and outlines work needed to safeguard them for the future:

### **TOWN WELL**

#### **LOCATION SO 230 426**

This is located at the site of the old Nyegate or Watergate, one of the 3 medieval gates into Hay. From Broad Street leave Hay traveling towards England going past The Globe Centre for Arts. Fifty metres down at the bottom of Ship Pitch opposite Lamb House and at the junction with Wyeford Road there is a square panel set in the wall on the right hand side. It is adjacent to the steps leading around the old town walls. This marks the site of the Town Well.

#### **CURRENT STATE**

A square of stone is firmly set into the boundary wall between the road and the field behind marking the site. A 'Blue Plaque' identifies the site but the writing is so small it is illegible from the footpath across the road. It is necessary to cross the road and stand in the traffic lane to read it. Within living memory water was been drawn from this wellspring before it was 'capped off'.

#### **LOCAL LEGEND**

None known about this site.

#### **ACTION REQUIRED.**

1. The original 'Blue Plaque' recording the well is set adjacent to it on the wall but is difficult to read from a distance. More prominent sign is needed. This needs to be either legible from the pavement on the other side of the road, or recorded on the pavement side.
2. 'Fingerpost' direction signage pointing south along the path on the line of the old town walls is needed from here to direct to the second wellspring on Black Lion Green.

## BLACK LION WELL

### LOCATION SO 232424

Black Lion Green is on the eastern edge of town behind the Old Black Lion public house in Lion Street. The wellspring lies in the bank of the Dulas Brook at the north corner of the green. To reach it cross the green towards the last house on the left above the brook. The wellspring lies in the corner down steps put in by the owner of the last house who strengthened this part of the bank to protect the foundations to his house.

### CURRENT STATE

Over the last 50 years the brook has been eroding the banks of the green. This has been partially repaired and strengthened with gabions. Unfortunately there is a gap of approximately 1.5 metres just behind the wellspring. The bank here is gradually washing away threatening the integrity of the wellspring.

### LOCAL LEGEND

Legend has it that after getting married which ever of the couple first drinks from the wellspring will wear the trousers. This is said to stem from St Keyne the 25th daughter of King Brychan of Brycheiniog, who never married.

There is a tale of a groom dashing off after the ceremony to the wellspring only for his bride to open her purse and take out a small bottle of spring water she collected the night before and drink it. Portman reported in 1907 that when an old inhabitant heard a domestic squabble she was fond of the saying:

*"Tom or Nell?  
First to the well."*

This wellspring was also said to be a site where troublesome spirits were laid.

### ACTION REQUIRED.

1. Gabions are required to strengthen the bank to prevent further erosion and save the well from being swept away and destroyed.
2. Direction signage is required from Lion Street indicating Black Lion Well and Black Lion Green.

## ST JOHN'S WELL

### LOCATION SO 229 423

The exact site of this wellspring has been lost. There is reference to its location *"the well in Oxford Road, in part of the Castle wall, and which faced what is now the Caemwr pathway to Cusop, which was called St John's Well"* (Portman C 1907 p.22). One elderly inhabitant remembers his father telling him that it was lost when the Castle wall here was rebuilt.

### CURRENT STATE

Careful examination of the wall shows that there is one section which has been repaired/rebuilt. Here there is an angle in the wall, and there is loss of alignment compared to the rest of the wall. It is opposite the path consistent with the Portman description. The supposition that it is above a short galvanised pipe projecting from the pavement against the castle garden wall just opposite the entrance to the Oxford Road car park is incorrect.

### LOCAL LEGEND

It was known as St John's Well because it was the source of Holy Water to St Johns Chapel of Ease in Lion Street. The chapel was built within the town walls as a place of worship because the parish



church of St Mary's lies outside the walls. Sometimes this wellspring is incorrectly called Castle Well. Within the castle walls there is a medieval reference to a well but it has not yet been identified. They may have shared a common source but so far ground penetrating radar has failed to locate it due to overfill of 2 metres of soil within the castle grounds.

#### **ACTION REQUIRED**

1. Ideally this section of the Castle wall needs demolishing to see what is behind it and confirm the wellsprings existence and whether reinstatement is possible. Unfortunately the time and expense involved does not justify this action.
2. A 'Blue Plaque' on the wall is needed to identify the site.
3. A carved stone 'phantom fountainhead' would enhance the location.

#### **SWAN WELL**

LOCATION SO 226420

In Swan Bank, the road beside the Swan Hotel, a fingerpost direction sign near the church gates indicates the well through a kissing gate. The wellspring is 10 metres down the path.

Alternatively follow a narrow path runs between the Harley Almshouses and Loggin Cottage on the right hand side of the lower part of Church Street past the Swan Hotel. Pass over the bridge and the wellspring is a few metres down on the left.

#### **CURRENT STATE**

Water flows out of the side of the elevated bank into a channel parallel to it for about 50 cms before turning out at a right angle and cascading off the end of an elegant carved spout. It has a steady flow and there is space to place a bucket beneath the spout. This has never been known to stop flowing, even in the severest of winters or driest of summers. Although not up to modern environmental standards locals have been known to collect the water, and it provided a ready water source during the severe winter of 1962/3.

#### **LOCAL LEGEND**

It has reputed medicinal properties for the treatment of sprained wrists and ankles.

#### **ACTION REQUIRED**

1. A 'Blue Plaque' to identify the wellspring and its medicinal tradition.

#### **ST MARYS WELL**

LOCATION SO 225 421

On entering St Mary's churchyard follow the path towards the church porch. Continue round the side of the church behind the tower and go down the bank, taking care underfoot. Over the hedge in the garden of no 2 Sackville Cottages is an attractive curved flower bed with an opening in the centre facing the churchyard. A stone arch at the bottom of this is the wellspring.

#### **CURRENT STATE**

The outlet for the wellspring lies approximately 1.8 metres down a steep slope with coarse rubble retaining walls either side. The front face is of dressed stone with an arched niche approximately 1 metre high. At the base there is a runnel out for approximately 40 cms where it stops at the edge of the earth slope at the front of the wellspring. A hole in the stonework, approximately the size of a house brick, above the runnel shows a brick built tank inside approximately 0.5 metre square with a similar sized space above it. Two stone beams above the tank supporting the roof are cracked and it is slowly subsiding into the tank.

The wellspring is dry now, possibly ceasing to flow (according to Ordinance Survey maps) between 1906 and 1929. Water seen more recently is probably from groundwater seepage. Maps show there was a structure with an arm at right angles, possibly steps and a tank, in front of the wellspring. Currently a man hole cover to a sewer pipe is set into the ground at the top of the slope where this structure was shown.

The owner believes that originally the gardens of the cottages were at a lower level than the graveyard. The wall between the cottage gardens and the church graveyard is now only a few cms high. It is thought that when the church was rebuilt in 1833 spoil from the rebuild was thrown over into the garden. This increased the height of the cottage gardens so they became level with the graveyard, effectively lowering the well outlet.

A footpath ran from St Mary's Road down the bottom of the gardens of Sackville Cottages parallel to the churchyard boundary wall. Ordinance survey maps show it terminated before reaching the wellspring but it was used as access to this area 50 years ago.

The footpath has been formally extinguished. A gate between the garden and churchyard, near the wellspring, is of unknown date.

#### LOCAL LEGEND

The wellspring was used as a source of holy water in St Mary's Church. Reputedly a fountain of water spurted from the wellspring on an occasion when the church tower caught fire during the rebuild. It dowsed the fire so saving the church, but no record of a fire has yet been found!

#### ACTION REQUIRED

1. Archaeological Assessment. While not listed the St Mary's Well needs expert assessment from specialists such as CADW before any action to preserve it can be attempted.
2. The cracked beams supporting the roof need strengthening / replacing before the roof caves in and the wellspring housing ultimately collapses.
3. Currently there is a 'Blue Plaque' on a nearby tree but direction signage is needed to indicate the wellsprings existence and location.

Note : This well is on private property. For many years the site of the well was lost under rubble, elder bushes, a compost heap and a bonfire. This was cleared by the current owners who have also explored its history. They are keen that it is preserved but do not have the necessary finance to undertake repairs to stop the roof falling in.

While they are not averse to public access they are very concerned about the insurance implications should a member of the public hurt themselves around what is a steep, deep hole in the ground. Subject to further discussion the owners have indicated that they are prepared to consider controlled access, possibly as part of an organised guided tour eg Hay Tours. The adjacent gate from the churchyard could allow controlled public access subject to church approval.

On this basis they would agree to archaeological investigation to identify the extent, shape and size of the structure shown at the front of the well.

#### EYE WELL

##### LOCATION SO 225 422

To the right of Mary's churchyard gate in Swan Bank there is a footpath. A fingerpost sign indicates the Riverside Walk and Warren down this path. At the end of the graveyard wall the path passes under the arch of the old railway line. Turning left a short way along the path there is a 0.5 square metre block of stone on the right hand side, set in the bank above the River Wye. This has a hole in it from which the wellspring runs down the bank into the river.

It arises on the bank to the left of the path. In the past work has been done to insert a plastic pipe from this bank down under the riverside path to connect to the outlet.

#### CURRENT STATE

The outlet is through a stone block 2 metres down the bank on the right just below the level of the path 'now almost hidden by bramble and rough herbage covering the slope' (Grant 1890). There are less brambles now but these have been replaced by bushes and trees and the wellspring is easily missed.

#### LOCAL LEGEND

Reputedly the Eye Well '*in olden time was famed for its virtues in curing diseases of the eye*' (Grant 1890). Such properties were traditionally thought to only be effective if collected at dawn. It is said that within living memory people have collected water from this wellspring for just such a purpose.

#### ACTION NEEDED

This wellspring is very inconspicuous and easily overlooked so it needs to be more prominently displayed.

1. 'Blue Plaque' signage is needed.
2. Work on the Walk Well (details in the next section) could open a vista enabling the wellspring outlet to be seen.
3. Ideally placement of a stone with a carving depicting a weeping eye would identify its existence and could be used as an information point.

#### WALK WELL

##### LOCATION SO 225 422

This wellspring lies at the river level below the Eye Well. It was originally accessed down a path a few yards back along the riverbank which would have been part of the landscaping and walks built by Sir Joseph Bailey in the 1870's. Unfortunately the path has fallen into an extremely bad state of repair and is currently UNSAFE. It is NOT RECOMMENDED that anyone should descend this path as EXTREME CARE IS NEEDED AT ALL TIMES. It is very slippery in wet weather, and even in dry weather the path crumbles away and is only for the most agile.

#### CURRENT STATE

The wellspring emerges as 'a perennial fountain of the purest spring water; flowing from a lichen clothed rock upon the river bank; a source from whence many inhabitants are provided with water for the table' (Grant 1890). It flows into a stone trough which sits on a large masonry stone quay set into the river bank.

The quay is overgrown. Trees, bushes and heavy vegetation are growing between the stones on the top and into the side down to the river level. The vegetation is damaging the stonework, prising the stones apart, and some of the stones on the surface of the quay platform are missing. At times of high river flood this area can be submerged. All along this section of riverbank there is seepage of water, some possibly from the Eye Well, giving a most attractive mass of moss and lichens, tree roots and lush vegetation.

Currently the quay appears basically sound but at the point when irreparable damage could easily occur when the river is in spate.

#### LOCAL LEGEND

The age of this quay is uncertain but the quality of its build, and general mass, lends support to the theory that it may relate to the building of St Mary's church. Large quantities of stone would have been required. Some of this could have been from Hay Bluff but local stone is often of poor



quality so it was possibly brought in by barge. Whether this relates to the original 12th century erection or the rebuilding in 1843 is for surveyors to decide.

There is a strong possibility that the quay was the site of one of the two medieval ferries known to have plied across the Wye at Hay.

Old Ordinance Survey maps show a footpath crossing the fields on the other, Radnorshire, side of the river at this point. The path came down across the fields from the Hay to Clyro road and terminated on the river bank opposite the quay. The Radnorshire side of the river bank has been subject to erosion but possibly there was a matching quay which has been swept away. Steeple Pool, the deepest part of the river, is along this stretch and it would have been a logical point for a ferry crossing which could operate all year round.

This was a site where troublesome spirits were said to have been laid.

#### **ACTION REQUIRED**

1. The steps down from the Bailey Walk, with a handrail, giving access to the quay need reinstating to provide safe access to the wellspring.
2. Part of the path is over bedrock. This is uneven and constantly wet from seepage from the bank above. New properly defined steps need cutting into it where it descends to allow safe passage.
3. The 'cobbles' (each approx. 30cm x 30cm x 15cm) inserted upright into the top of the quay need reinstating in places to fill the holes. Concrete used as a temporary repair to the surface a few years ago has been scoured out by the river.
4. The quay needs the trees and vegetation growing into the stonework prising stones apart removing before further harm is done.
5. Clearance of the vegetation from the bank above the steps/ path would provide a view of the Eye Well which is approximately 3 metres above it on the edge of the riverside path.
6. 'Blue Plaque' signage is needed.
7. Fingerpost direction signage for the Eye Well and Walk Well is needed from the Riverwalk path.

#### **SUMMARY**

URGENT ACTION is needed to safeguard three wellsprings:

##### **1. The Walk Well**

- a) A new safe path, with handrail, to allow access.
  - b) Repair to the stone quay it sits on; removal of vegetation.
- Estimate: £30,000?

##### **2. The Black Lion Well**

Strengthening of the bank behind the well outlet.  
Estimate: £2,000

##### **3. St Mary's Well**

- a) Archaeological exploration.
  - b) Internal rebuild to prevent its implosion and loss.
- Estimate: unknown

**SIGNAGE** is needed for all wellsprings.

1. 'Blue Plaques' at the Black Lion Well, St John's Well, Swan Well, Eye Well and Walk Well.  
Footnote: These have just been purchased by the Warren Club.

2. Cast iron fingerposts and direction signs (to match existing)
  - a) from the Town Well to Black Lion Well.

b) from Lion Street to the Black Lion Well  
c) to the Eye and Walk Wells.  
Estimate: £4,000

3. Information boards to give character and tell their stories.  
4. Information leaflets about the wellsprings for the Tourist Information Bureau.  
Footnote: These have been purchased by the Warren Club.

5. QR codes?

A carved stone at the Eye Well could enhance the wellspring and also provide a platform to record the funding of the wellsprings restoration by the Keep Wales Tidy Project.

#### **LANDOWNER**

The Hay Town Council own the land on which the Walk and Black Lion Wells sit. They have been consulted and have indicated support for the proposed work.

#### **WARREN CLUB**

The Warren Club is a Hay organisation that conserves local facilities for the enjoyment of the people of Hay and visitors. They have funded a number of initiatives including purchase of the 'Blue Plaques' erected around Hay to identify historic sites in the town.

The club supports the initiative to promote / protect the wells and to show their commitment have funded the additional 'Blue Plaques' and information leaflets identified in this report.

#### **WELLSPRING WALK**

HayTours have a walk prepared around all seven wellsprings which it will promote once remedial work has been completed. It has not been run due to the dangerous state of the Walk Well.

#### **COMMUNITY WOODLAND GROUP**

This group of volunteers are working to clear vegetation, cut down trees and tidy up the walk along the riverside and old railway line. They have installed steps at one point and have offered to become involved in repair of the footpath down to the Walk Well.

#### **BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

The bedrock steps and repairs to the stone quay require consultation with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority to agree the work and provide specialized advice / authorisation as this area is within the park and an SSI.

### **d: Maendu Well Group Report to Brecon Town Council Environment Committee (January 2017)**

Maendu Well is a natural spring in the north of Brecon, it is covered by a Grade II listed well house. The spring is one of many in the area which rises up from the well, runs the course of a leat and feeds a pond which then flows (under and over ground) to the well at the Cathedral. The well has an ancient history and was once thought a place of magic where 'maidens offered pins and wished earnestly for love'. It is believed to have been an important water source for Brecon Castle. The age of the well itself is not known although an inscription on the building entrance reads '1754'. It was repointed by the Ghurka's sometime in the 1980's. The well house itself is in good structural condition and is not in need of repair or repointing.

The Maendu Well group was established in 2009 and has carried out yearly events, management and improvement in the site including litter picks, events, habitat and pond creation, hedge laying, pond clearance, community arts projects and mosaic interpretation. We have had support from the Town Council, local councillors, TGV, BBNPA, KWT, CADW and CPAT. Due to other commitments, the group has been inactive for the past year although are still keen to keep the group running and see the site maintained.

The pond is believed to be home to Greater Crested Newts although a survey has not been undertaken in recent years. All work in and around the well has taken this into consideration, for example; when the new bus route was developed, PCC arranged their work in a way which assumed their presence.

## **STRUCTURAL REPARATIONS**

### **Leat**

Repair of the leat is needed to allow the water to flow from the well to the pond. The many holes in the leat mean that the water currently flows underground. Restoring the flow will make it more visually pleasing but will also provide oxygenation of the water, improving the health of the pond and its inhabitants and reducing the frequency that the pond needs to be cleared of vegetation.

Repairs using puddling clay have been used twice before but have only been temporarily successful. The Maendu Well group have had discussions with Ty Mawr Lime and quotes for the materials required were reasonable although they suggested that there may be complications as generators may need to be left there overnight and would require security.

We have had advice from CADW and the Heritage officer at the BBNPA who have said that the leat is not part of the CADW listing (so permission would not be required) but materials must be in keeping with the surroundings.

### **Plinth**

The stone plinth was replaced by a mosaic interpretation of the folklore of the well as part of a community arts project. It has since been weather damaged and has now come off completely. Mosaic interpretation was chosen over other materials for sustainability reasons and the reduced possibility for vandalism which was considered a high risk.

The group believe that there are 3 options for the plinth:

1. Repair – reparation to restore the mosaic would not be the most cost effective option although the existing mosaic could be considered for repair, given the amount of community involvement that developed it.
2. Replace – replacement of the interpretation with something entirely different would be a community project and would be the most long term option. Due to the high risk of vandalism, opportunities for interpretation / information / signage are limited.
3. Remove – removal of the plinth entirely could be an option, a stone flagstone, inscribed with information on the well could be laid in it's place and is likely to be the most cost effective option.

Similarly to the leat, the plinth is not included in the CADW listing but any amendments would need to be in keeping with the natural surroundings.

### **Pathway**

An NPA warden supplied some gravel for the path around the well in 2009 which has helped to reduce waterlogging. More gravel is needed at the entrance area to the site, (near the plinth) as it is overgrown and not clear. Two apple trees were planted on either side of the entrance when the hedges were laid.



## **ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT**

### **Pond**

The Maendu Well group have undertaken bi-annual clearances of the pond each February (the timing of this is important due to the greater crested newts). Volunteers have cleared from a third to a half of the vegetation in the pond which has improved the oxygen and light in the water. Pond clearance should be undertaken bi-annually although repairing the leat may reduce the need to undertake this.

### **Hedgerow**

The hedgerow along the well boundary was planted by the Maendu Well group as the pilot for the Long Forest project (Keep Wales Tidy / Sustainable Development Fund). Willows were also planted in some of the more boggy areas to reduce water logging. The hedge plants and trees are growing well although will need some management in the next year.

### **Tree management**

The group have had the ecologist from TGV to undertake yearly site visits to assess and manage the trees on the site. Overhanging and damaged branches have been removed regularly and no urgent work is needed. However, trees need to be checked after high winds or stormy weather as many of them are old and branches can break easily. One of the trees is an ancient, protected oak. Bat and bird boxes have previously been installed around the site but will need to be replaced soon.

### **Stream**

The stream from the pond leading to the Cathedral requires clearance of debris and some litter. Further downstream (possibly outside of the Town Council boundary) needs to be cleared of fly tipping. This area has not been part of the Community groups' work although it was cleared in February 2007. Any workers in this area need to be aware of used sharps.

## **e: correspondence with the Llanover Estate regarding access to Ffynnon Gofer**

To The Trustees  
Coldbrook and Llanover Estate  
Estate Office  
Court Farm  
Llanover  
Abergavenny  
Monmouthshire  
NP7 9HY

26th November 2015

Dear Trustees  
Re Well Being Project and Visit to 9 Wells on Llanover Estate

Keep Wales Tidy have been awarded funding from the Brecon Beacons Trust to carry out a study on the wells and springs of Wales with a view to developing a larger all Wales application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The study is identifying the key well sites across the Brecon Beacons National Park and assessing their condition so that we can have a clear picture of the preservation and need of each site, as well as any issues that might affect the project and which wells are included. We are working with Phil Cope, author and artist, who has written a number of books on wells across the UK, who is visiting and recording the well sites as part of the project.

We would like to ask if it would be possible for Phil to visit the site 9 Wells, or Ffynnon Gover, on

Llanover Estate to take some pictures so that we can build up a catalogue of all the sites in the project area. If public access is an issue for the estate we will ensure that the well is only included in the project for informational purposes and not as part of the community engagement element.

I look forward to hearing back from you at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions in the meantime please don't hesitate to contact me on 02920 726977 or [Richard.phipps@keep-walestidy.org](mailto:Richard.phipps@keep-walestidy.org).

Yours sincerely,

Richard Phipps  
Projects Coordinator

From: Tom Jones [<mailto:TJones@llanover.com>]  
Sent: 30 November 2015 15:40  
To: Richard Phipps  
Subject: Llanover Estate

Dear Mr Phipps

Thank you for your attached letter which I forwarded onto the Trustees for consideration. Unfortunately, I am not able to grant consent for your visit on this occasion. As discussed, we often receive requests for site visits and due to Health & Safety concerns, we have a policy which has to remain consistent.

Kind regards

Tom Jones

Tom Jones BSc (Hons) MRICS FAAV  
Resident Agent, Llanover & Coldbrook Estate  
Court Farm, Llanover, Abergavenny, Gwent NP7 9HY  
(01873) 859 200 (07791) 001 231

pencil  
drawing of  
Ffynnon Gofer,  
Llanover

