

The Taff by the Rev Gwilym Morris



Gwilym Morris was minister of Bethlehem, Gwaelod y Garth from 1947 until 1968 during which time he left his mark in several respects on the local community. As well as being a socially caring pastor, this much admired man of letters was at the forefront of Welsh culture. In addition to winning numerous prizes in the National Eisteddfod, he was also the owner of 13 'local' eisteddfod chairs! During the 1950s and 60s he was a script writer for the radio and was responsible for 'Teulu Ty Coch', 'Teulu'r Mans' and many other series. The following poem is one of the handful he wrote in English. It is a powerfully graphic lamentation for a river which appeared to be dying from the scourges of industrial waste and neglect.

There is no doubt that the Rev Morris would have been greatly heartened to see the phenomenal recovery of the river in recent times.

Ed.

The crystal days are gone.
The rainbows in thy heart are dead,
The mirrors tarnished;
The lyric songs are dirges now.
Elegies to thy departed friends,
And to thyself.

Yet, there were crystal days – at Faenor and Llan Daf.
Songs before the bridges came,
An elf-like dance –
Before the wheels began to turn,
A silver gliding through the glades
Before they built the weirs.

And they were halcyon days.
Thou a blade of stainless steel
Splitting the greensward,
Or a leisured elbowing
Here and there,
In vales of riotous hues,
And a contented whispering among the reeds.

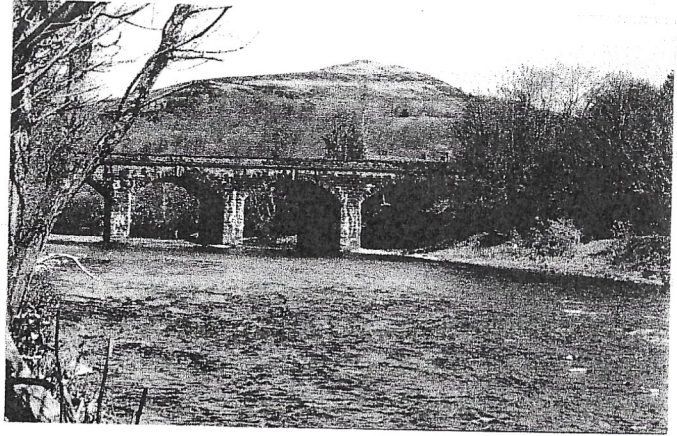
The hills that gave thee birth
Poured into thee their milky streams
To swell thy bosom.
The curtsying dipper
On his beat from stone to stone
Found his domain
Among thy murmuring shallows,
Trees made obeisance to thee,
And from an overhanging bough
Waited the feathered angler with his rainbow tints.

And there was Silver Birch
Along the banks at Rhydyrhelyg.
And at Pontsarn –
A blue deep pool sheltering beneath the rocks
With knife cold waters.

Then beyond the bend
At Ynys Farm,
A fanlike sweep
And the stillness of a lake,
Where coot with white barred wings
And bobbing moorhens
Furrowed thy silken surface,
And foraged amongst the reeds



And there were Summer days
 When truants trapped the darting minnows,
 Or forked the flashing trout
 Beneath the sunblenched stones
 At Ynysgau,
 And on star-studded nights
 The otter's silent plunge
 Into thy placid pools.



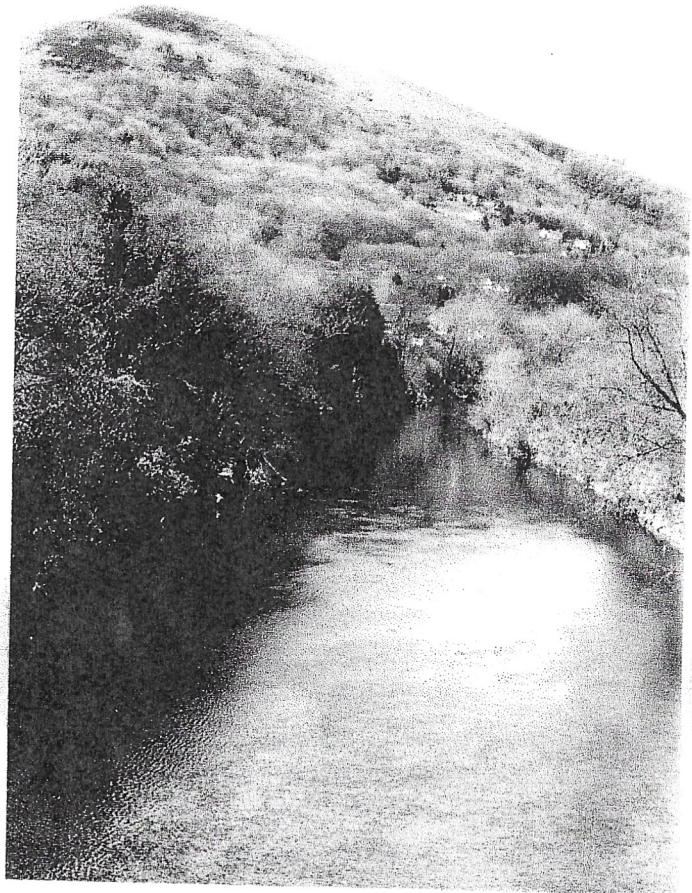
Those crystal days are gone,
 And the queen-like meandering
 Through Arcadian vales.
 The Philistines have staked their claims
 Upon thy silver banks,
 With sinewy pylons
 And spire-less temples,
 And altars stenchd with sweat.
 Now,
 Metallic corrugations
 Where once the undulated grasses
 Caught the dappling dew.

The throbbing turbines
 Sought thee like a newborn child
 Its mother's willing breasts,
 And then they spat at thee their oily phlegm.

Thou art dying now
 In a vale of many deaths.
 Crawling,
 Grovelling
 Like a diseased serpent
 In the Primeval slime

No songs now.
 No dancing at the shallows
 At Rhydfelen,
 And below the farm.
 At Pont Shon Philip
 A sullen loitering,
 A moaning in the reeds at Radyr,
 And at Llan Daf
 A turgid cauldron of scum.

Thy pools are blind,
 And the stars have turned their eyes away.
 But down at Canton Bridge
 The sea will meet thee
 Like a sexton a cortege,
 And take thee to thyself
 And to a merciful oblivion.



Gwilym Morris was a prolific writer and during the last years of his life, after he had moved to Caerphilly, he published a collection of short stories entitled Yr Enfys (The Rainbow). His large output of work is being collated by his daughter Mair Thomas, at the request of the National Library of Wales. Mair presently lives in Essex with her educationalist husband Brian, (a former Taff's Well rugby player) who was born and raised in Tongwynlais. Brian and Mair who will be well-known to many in the Garth area are members of our History Society and are avid readers of this publication. It will be recalled with sadness that Gwilym Morris's son Geraint, a highly successful BBC producer (credited with such programmes as 'The Onedin Line' and 'Casualty'), passed away a few years ago.

It is important that we make every effort to record the kind of contribution made by people of substance who have graced this area so positively with their presence. It is known that Gwilym Morris found much to admire about Gwaelod y Garth, a place he described as having 'a thousand-foot mountain on its back - and its feet in a river'. Oh that the Rev Gwilym were here now to revel in the rejuvenation of the river and to sing its praises for us in verse.