Robert Griffiths

Glog Ddu
(1845-1909)

Ganwyd Robert Griffiths yng Nghlog Ddu yn 1845, gan fyw yno am chwe blynedd hyd at y cyfnod y cafodd ei deulu eu gorfodi i symud i dref Llanrwst, wedi'r tirfeddiannwr roddi tir cyfagos i Glog Ddu i Dyddyn Uchaf. Fel bachgen, yr oedd Robert yn mwynhau gwrando ar delynorion yn Llanrwst, ac yr oedd yn eu hystyried yn arwyr mawr gan eu bod yn medru canu'r delyn, gan nodi y byddai'n well ganddo fod yn un ohonynt na bod yn berchennog tref Llanrwst. Byth ers hynny, bu i Robert gymryd diddordeb mewn canu gyda'r tannau.

Wedi iddo adael yr ysgol, daeth yn ôl i Langernyw gan weithio fel llafurwr i Robert Hughes yn Nhyddyn Uchaf. Saer oedd Robert Griffiths wrth ei grefft, gan atgyweirio troliau a chyfarpar eraill ar ffermydd yr ardal, yn ogystal â thelynor a chanwr penillion yn ei oriau hamdden. Chwiliodd ym mhob llyfr a oedd ar gael iddo am hanes hen offerynwyr y wlad a'u hofferynnau cerdd, ond ni welodd yn unlle ond llinell yn cofio amdanynt. O ganlyniad, symudodd i Fanceinion yn ystod haf 1872, er mwyn defnyddio llyfrgelloedd y ddinas. Cafodd swydd fel saer i Gwmni Rheilffordd Manceinion, gan dreulio y rhan fwyaf o'i oriau hamdden yn y brif lyfrgell. Yno gwelodd am y tro cyntaf llyfrau Bardd y Brenin, Bardd Alaw, Syr John Hawkins, Carl Engel a llu eraill oedd yn cynnwys y cofion gorau am hen gerddorion ac offerynnau cerdd y wlad.

Roedd ganddo hiraeth mawr, ond aeth heibio, a gadawodd yr hiraeth fwy o awydd ynddo i ymchwilio yn fanylach. 'Roedd cofio bywyd y wlad yn llawenydd beunydd iddo ym Manceinion. Cyfrannodd at sefydlu'r Gymdeithas Gymreig yn y ddinas, ac felly roedd Cymru yn bwysig iawn iddo o hyd, gan y nodai mai ond wedi i ddyn adael y wlad y mae'n dechrau dod i wybod yn brofiadol beth ydyw gwladgarwch. Roedd Llangernyw hefyd yn agos iawn i'w galon, gan iddo drafod y syniad o langarwch, gan gredu na fu pobl erioed yn fwy llangarol na phobl Llangernyw a gellir meddwl mai llwyth o'r un teulu oedd yn byw yn yr holl blwyf.

Glog Ddu yn y 1960au cynnar.
Glog Ddu in the early 1960s.

Yn ei ddyddiau olaf, cyflogwyd ef gan Gwmni Ship Canal, a bu farw ym Manceinion yn 1909. Caiff Robert Griffiths ei gofio yn bennaf fel awdur 'Llyfr Cerdd Dannau' sef astudiaeth wreiddiol i ganu penillion. Yr oedd yn ganlyniad i flynyddoedd o waith ymchwil diwyd, a wnaeth achub nifer o ganeuon gwerin a oedd mewn peryg o gael eu hanghofio, felly, mae ei waith yn gyhoeddiad o bwysigrwydd diwylliannol enfawr i'r genedl Gymreig.

Cyhoeddwyd ei lyfr wedi ei farwolaeth gan ei weddw a'i gyfeillion. Gwell oedd ganddynt godi ei hoff waith yn deyrnged iddo, yn hytrach na chofgolofn o garreg.

Robert Griffiths was born at Glog Ddu in 1845, and lived there until the age of six when his family were forced to move to Llanrwst when land adjoining Glog Ddu was given to Tyddyn Uchaf by the landowners. As a boy, Robert enjoyed listening to harpists at Llanrwst, and he considered them as heroes as they could play the harp, stating that he would prefer to be one of them rather than own the whole of Llanrwst. Ever since those days, Robert took a keen interest in singing to the accompaniment of the harp.

When he left school he came back to Llangernyw and worked as a farm hand for Robert Hughes at Tyddyn Uchaf. He became a joiner and repaired carts and other equipment at various farms in the area as well as being a notable harpist and penillion singer in his spare time. Robert explored the books within his reach for the history of old Welsh instrumentalists and their instruments, but struggled to find much material on them. Consequently he moved to Manchester during the summer of 1872 in order to use the city's libraries. He became a joiner for the Manchester Railway Company, spending most of his spare time at the main library. It was there that he came across books by Bardd y Brenin, Bardd Alaw, Syr John Hawkins, Carl Engel and many more that contained recollections of old musicians and their instruments.

He missed his home greatly but he felt the longing made him research more thoroughly. Remembering the life in the countryside was a source of great joy to him in Manchester. Robert contributed to the establishment of The Welsh Society in the city. Wales remained important to him throughout his life, noting that only when a man leaves his country does he really understand what it is to be patriotic. Llangernyw was also close to his heart as he discussed the notion of 'village patriotism'. He believed that nowhere could be said to have greater 'village patriotism' than Llangernyw, and that one could consider all the residents of the parish as one family.

In his later years he was employed by the Ship Canal Company and died in Manchester in 1909. Robert Griffiths is remembered mainly as the author of 'Llyfr Cerdd Dannau', an original study of penillion singing. It was the result of years of diligent research which saved for posterity many of the Welsh folk songs once in common use that were in danger of being forgotten, hence his work was an achievement of enormous cultural importance for the Welsh nation.

His book was published posthumously by his widow and his associates, who preferred to present his life's work as a tribute to him, rather than raise a stone of remembrance.