

The Gentle Good – Elan – Track by Track

Written in an off-grid cottage during a year-long artistic fellowship in the Cambrian Mountains, **The Gentle Good's** new album '**Elan**' is a psychedelic portrait of Cwm Elan, the Elan Valley in Powys, Wales. Featuring songs in both Welsh and English, '**Elan**' explores the landscape, history and politics of the valley, which was flooded at the end of the Victorian era to create a series of reservoirs for drinking water.

Pronunciation guide

Cwm – Kuum

Elan: EL-AN

'EL' as in ELf and 'AN' as in Ant

Not 'EEL-ANNE'



Tracks

1. Ten Thousand Acres

Before Cwm Elan was flooded by the Birmingham Water Corporation at the start of the 20th century. There were two large country houses or manors: *Cwm Elan House* and *Nantgwyllt*. The aristocrat Thomas Grove bought Cwm Elan House in 1792 as a summer residence for the Grove family away from their seat in Wiltshire. The English scholar Benjamin Malkin visited the Elan estate in 1803 and later published a history of South Wales*.

Describing his host, Malkin stated that

"Mr Groves is a Wiltshire gentleman, who purchased ten thousand of these almost worthless acres a few years since, and is making a paradise of the wilderness..."



Cwm Elan House before the flooding

Thomas Grove was a relative of the famous poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who fell in love with the area when he visited aged 19. He returned to live there with his wife Harriet Westbrook and described the beauty of the area.

"Rocks piled on each other to tremendous heights, rivers formed into cataracts by their projections, and valleys clothed with woods, present an appearance of enchantment. This country is highly romantic; here are rocks of uncommon height and picturesque waterfalls. I am more astonished at the grandeur of the scenery than I expected...I am not wholly uninfluenced by its magic on my lonely walks."

Shelley and Harriet Westbrook stayed at Nantgwyllt and wanted to buy the mansion, but the owners, the Lewis-Lloyd family wouldn't sell. The earliest writings on Cwm Elan are by outsiders who describe the landscape as worthless, wild, terrible, poor, miserable and gloomy. With the birth of the romantic movement of which Shelley was a part, the land became enchanting, beautiful and grand, yet remained stripped of identity beyond the aesthetic.

The track was recorded live at Tŷ Drwg studios with me on Guitar and Andy Fung on Drums, before we added distorted guitars and Bass with Frank Naughton.

Lyrics:

*Ten thousand acres
Worthless, nameless
Ten thousand empty pages
Turn into a paradise*

* Malkin, B.H., 1804. The Scenery, Antiquities, and Biography, of South Wales: From Materials Collected During Two Excursions in the Year 1803. TN Longman and O. Rees



Cwm Elan House shortly after flooding had begun

2. Crugyn Ci (feat. Laura J Martin)

At 533m Crugyn Ci is amongst the highest peaks of the Elenydd range and is close to Penygarn Cottage where I would stay for extended periods as part of my fellowship. I would walk up Crugyn Ci most days and never tired of doing so. The weather on the peak constantly changes, often driven by the winds that roar over the vast expanse of upland to the west. It's a transient environment, where a mist can descend quickly and cover the peak in a grey shroud.

During my time in Cwm Elan, I was eager to write about the relationship between language and landscape learning the names of the hills, slopes, rivers and streams became particularly important to me. Cwm Elan was one of the last strongholds of the Welsh language in Radnorshire, but by now the area has one of the lowest percentages of Welsh speakers in the country. Nevertheless, this landscape speaks almost exclusively in Cymraeg, the Welsh tongue and I want to draw attention to this. I hope it'll encourage visitors and residents alike to connect to the language that surrounds you when you're in Cwm Elan. The first verse is a song-map that guides the listener to the peak of Crugyn Ci from the valley floor near Penygarn dam.



Laura J Martin

The fantastic songwriter and flautist Laura J Martin (pictured above) added her magical layers of Flute to the track after I'd recorded the Guitars, Vocals and Cello at Tŷ Drwg with Frank.



Crugyn Ci in all seasons

Lyrics:

Crugyn Ci

Esgair Penygarreg, lan at y ffridd
Heibio'r hen chwareli'n tasgu o'r pridd
Mwydro dros *Molinia* at y copa yw'r hynt
A'r crugyn sy'n cyfarth yn nannedd y gwynt

Elan wrth fy nghefen, Gwy o 'mlaen
Cyfaill a chydymaith ar ddoldrymau'r waun
Weithie'n gwisgo cwmwl rhag golwg y byd
A weithie mewn heulwen yn ddedwydd i gyd

Cymer ofal gyda'r llwybrau'n croesi ar y rhos
Ceith dywys at yr afon a'th golli yn y nos

Wela rai anialwch ac erwau diwerth
Tiroedd trwm yn pwyso ar lethrau mor serth
Cymraf unai gysyr ac ysytyr o'r tir
Wrth syllu drwy'r oesoedd o ben Crugyn Ci

Crugyn Ci (Dog Peak)

*Take the slope at the head of the rock up to the sheep-walk
Past the old quarries spilling from the earth
Struggle through *Molinia*, your goal's within reach
To the peak that barks in the teeth of the wind*

*Elan behind and Wye ahead
A friend and companion on the doldrums of the moor
Sometimes wears a cloud to hide from the world
And sometimes in sunshine a sight to behold*

*Take care with the paths that wind across the moor
You'll be led to the river and lost to the night*

*Some see a desert and worthless acres
Heavy lands that press on slopes so steep
I take comfort and meaning from the land
and gaze through ages from the top of Crugyn Ci*

3. Pan own y gwanwyn (Dychweliad Bychan)

A Welsh folk song from Glamorganshire that appears in the Maria Jane Williams collection; *Ancient National Airs of Gwent and Morgannwg* (1842). Only the first verse is noted in this collection, which might indicate that subsequent verses were improvised by the singer or group of singers. The first verse places a young shepherd on a hilltop watching the sheep with the lambs in springtime. He hears his love's voice singing nearby and goes to investigate. Many of my neighbours in the valley were farmers and shepherds, so it felt natural to adapt the song and relocate the tale in Cwm Elan. I've added two verses, with the shepherd searching for the elusive voice until he realises that it is the voice of the Elan River, distantly singing from below the waters of Garreg Ddu reservoir. One effect of language loss is the loss of folk songs that describe your homeland, or *cynefin* as we say in Welsh. I wanted to give the valley a new connection to an old song from the Welsh tradition.



View from Esgair Penygareg

We recorded the Guitar and Drums live at Tŷ Drwg with Andy Fung and Frank Naughton and then the fantastic composer Seb Goldfinch wrote striking parts for string quartet, Flute and French Horn. Laura J Martin once again provided the flute and Fiona Bassett played the French Horn. The song is labelled slight return as a more traditional version appears on my previous record *Galargan*.

Pan O'wn y Gwanwyn (Dychweliad Bychan)

Pan o'wn y gwanwyn ar uchelfryn
Yn gwylio'r defaid gyda'r ŵyn
Clywn lais fy nghariad, ber ei chaniad
Yn seinio'n llawen yn y llwyn
Roedd gwawr llawenydd ar ei deu rudd
O mor hardd ei lliw a'i llun
A minnau'n syllu ac ymhyfrydu
Gan hardded hwyl fy annwyl fu'n

Pan o'wn yn fachgen ieuanc llawen
Yn gwylio'r barcud fry uwchben
Clywn lais fy nghariad, pell ei chaniad
Ar freichiau'r awel lawr o'r nen
Ac fe ddilynais hi dros y Llethr Du
I lan y mynydd at galon y rhos
Yn digalonni wrth iddi nosi
A'i llais yn atsain gydol nos

Pan o'wn ar lannau teg Dolfolau
A'r nant yn llifo tua'r glyn
Clywn lais fy nghariad, gwan ei chaniad
Yn dawel sisial dros y llyn
O dan y dŵr yn gudd, Oedd f'annwyl un
O mae 'nghalon mor drymed â'r plwm
Fy annwyl Elan a'i halaw druan
Sy'n llenwi dyfroedd oer y cwm

As I Was in Springtime (Slight Return)

As I was in springtime on a high hill
Watching the sheep with the lambs
I heard the voice of my love, pure of song
Sounding brightly from the hedges
The dawn of joy was on both her cheeks
Oh how fair her looks and her manner
And I gazed and was enraptured
By the beauty of my dearest one

When I was a boy, young and happy
Watching the kite high above
I heard the voice of my love, distantly carried
On the arms of a breeze from above
And I followed her over the Black Slope
Up the mountain to the heart of the moor
And despondent as darkness fell
Her voice echoed throughout the night

When on the fair shores of Dolfolau
And the stream ruling towards the glen
I heard the voice of my love, faintly singing
Whispering over the lake
Under the water my love was hidden
Oh, my heart is as hard as lead
My dear Elan and her poor melody
Fills the cold depths of the valley

4. Desert of Wales (feat. SAZ)

The Cambrian mountains to which the Elenydd range belongs is sometimes described as ‘the desert of Wales’. Early writing about the area refer to ‘hovels’, ‘joyless beings’, ‘extreme wilderness without majesty’, ‘gloomy hollows’, ‘barren and unpleasing’. The high uplands are extensive and largely composed of just a few species of grasses, often a monoculture of Purple Moor Grass, *Molinia sp.* Debate rages between conservationists and farming groups about the impact thousands of years of upland grazing has had on the ecosystem, and whether we have a duty to rewild these lands.



Rajasthani folk musicians SAZ

During the pandemic I was working remotely with three artists from another desert, in the West of Rajasthan, India. SAZ are Saddiq Khan, Asin Khan Langa and Zakir Khan, musicians rooted in the traditional music of Rajasthan that also write and sing their own compositions. In the autumn of 2022, I briefly left Cwm Elan to perform with SAZ at Jodhpur Rajasthan International Folk Festival (Jodhpur RIFF), so it was a natural step upon my return to ask them to collaborate on this track. I adapted a riff that Asin had taught me and jammed the music out with Andy Fung on drums and Frank Naughton on bass. SAZ worked on the track at a studio in Mumbai and I added a few phrases describing Cwm Elan from the writings of the English traveller Henry Skrine (1755-1803), and a poem called ‘The Peasant’ by R.S.Thomas;

The Peasant

Iago Prytherch his name, though, be it allowed,
Just an ordinary man of the bald Welsh hills,
Who pens a few sheep in a gap of cloud.
Docking mangels, chipping the green skin
From the yellow bones with a half-witted grin
Of satisfaction, or churning the crude earth
To a stiff sea of clods that glint in the wind—
So are his days spent, his spittled mirth
Rarer than the sun that cracks the cheeks
Of the gaunt sky perhaps once in a week.
And then at night see him fixed in his chair
Motionless, except when he leans to gob in the fire.
There is something frightening in the vacancy of his mind.
His clothes, sour with years of sweat
And animal contact, shock the refined,
But affected, sense with their stark naturalness.
Yet this is your prototype, who, season by season
Against siege of rain and the wind's attrition,
Preserves his stock, an impregnable fortress
Not to be stormed, even in death's confusion.
Remember him, then, for he, too, is a winner of wars,
Enduring like a tree under the curious stars.

Lyrics:

*Wild lands and gloomy hollows
Penned in a gap in the cloud*

Asin:

*Maula (repeated phrase meaning
Lord/Almighty)
O Earth you are so blessed,
You have a heavenly home
that bursts with abundance
When it rains
O lord the Earth is happy
Keep it green*

Zakir:

Dhola (meaning Prince/Man/Lover)



Briddell Felen

5. To Be in Summer

The title for this song comes from the Welsh word for homes built on the high summer pastures; 'Hafod', which literally translates as 'to be in summer'. The tradition of moving livestock and living between winter and summer residences, known as Hafod and Hendre (old town), was practiced for centuries in Cwm Elan. The song is chiefly about the romanticisation of rural life and the challenges posed by tourism and second homes in rural areas today. The beauty that draws us in to pursue the fantasy of a summer that lasts forever. This was partly inspired by the story of Harriet and Percy Shelley and their desire to live at Nantgwyllt manor. Shelley didn't stay long at Nantgwyllt, but his poem 'Written on a beautiful day in Spring' is thought to be inspired by his time there. I imagine Shelley had wished he could also be in the valley in summer. Being prone to composing melancholic tunes, I wanted to write something a bit more upbeat and joyful that gave a nod to some of my favourite Welsh psychedelic bands, Super Furry Animals and Gorky's Zygotic Mynci.



Ruins of Nantgwyllt, Summer 2022

The track was recorded live at Tŷ Drwg studios with myself and Andy Fung jamming on Guitar and Drums. Frank then added Bass and we recorded Seb's shimmering strings at a later session with the Mavron Quartet. The excellent songwriter Ivan Moulton added the icing on the cake with his beautiful vocal harmonies.

Lyrics:

*O, I'd like to be in summer
Let me lie in those golden rays
Wash my worries down the river
Bread and honey all my days*

*And I'd leave behind my anger
Leave behind my woe and despair
In the city set in concrete
Find a place with no-one there*

*O! In summer
O to be in summer*

*I heard the lark up on the mountain
But I know it's only a song
That I want to last forever
Just like summer, then it's gone*

O! In summer



Musician and artist Andy Fung visiting Cwm Elan

6. Cofiwch Gwm Elan

Recent years have seen a proliferation of graffiti inspired by the famous 'Cofiwch Dryweryn' mural on the road near Llanrhystud. The loss of the community at Tryweryn was a rallying cry for a generation of Welsh language activists and nationalists, kick starting the long road to equal status for the Welsh language in Wales. The drowning of Tryweryn demonstrated Wales' weak status within the United Kingdom, when Welsh MPs voting almost unanimously against the act were easily outvoted by the much greater number of their colleagues in England. Infrastructure projects such as Tryweryn were primarily for the benefit of English towns and cities and often included compulsory purchase orders issued from



Graffiti near Garreg Ddu dam

Westminster to seize land for reservoirs or the MoD. The landowners were paid for their losses, but the residents themselves were tenant farmers and often received no compensation for being uprooted from their homes. The fact that many of these communities were almost entirely Welsh speaking added an extra level of animosity to the process, with the perception that politicians in England did not care about the fate of the Welsh language and rural Welsh communities. With growing support for Welsh independence, the Cofiwch... graffiti has spread all over the country, documenting past tragedies in our mining communities and land grabs by the UK government. Cwm Elan has its own graffiti on the T-junction by the dam at Garreg Ddu. When Cwm Elan was flooded at the start of the 20th century the two main landowning families were compensated but the tenant farmers were evicted without any form of payment. Eighteen farms were lost as well as a school, a church, a chapel and both manor houses.

The construction of the dams also brought in large numbers of workers from England and Europe, which further diluted the Welsh language in the area as English became the lingua franca of the works. The neighbouring Claerwen valley was also flooded after the second world war. Ownership and control of natural resources is an important issue, often raised by those that support further devolution of power or independence from Westminster. For obvious reasons, water is a particularly emotive and controversial topic in Wales. The Welsh

regulator, Dŵr Cymru is a not-for-profit organisation, but water companies in England are private bodies, allowing them to buy Welsh water at a very cheap rate, sell it on at a markup and make large profits for their shareholders. These profits are not reinvested in Wales or the industry infrastructure, leaving ordinary customers in both Wales and England with high water bills and a creaking service.

Wales is littered with past examples of this type of extraction, leaving behind damaged landscapes and fractured communities that saw little to none of the wealth that was removed. It's fitting to remember that despite appearances, Cwm Elan is as much a post-industrial landscape as the mining towns and villages of Southeast Wales or the slate quarries of the North. With demand for water increasing due to climate change it is likely that more reservoirs will be created soon. I hope the mistakes of the past are not repeated and affected communities are fairly consulted and compensated and the impact on culture and identity is thoroughly considered.

The Guitar and Vocal was recorded at Tŷ Drwg studios and the strings at the later session with the Mavron Quartet.

Lyrics:

Cofiwch Gwm Elan

Cofiwch Gwm Elan
Medd y paent ar graig y groesfan
Dan y dŵr a rhwng y cerrig
Rhed yr atgof trwy'r dychymyg

Cofiwch Gwm Claerwen
Cofiwch groeso'r hen binwydden
Oedd yn gysur cain i'r galon
Ar y ffordd o Geredigion

Ni wela' lygad barcud
Mo'r hendre' 'dan y llyn
Ond mae'n gwyllo'r haul yn machlud
Dros yr hafod ar y bryn

Ysgol ac Eglwys
Deng mil erw a pharadwys
Deunaw fferm a'u tynged greulon
Geiriau gwag am eu colledion

Cofiwch Gwm Elan
Wel, does neb yn cofio'r cyfan
Ar y lan rwyf innau'n estron
Wrthi'n pigo trwy'r gweddillion

Ni wela' lygad barcud
Mo'r hendre 'dan y llyn
Ond mae'n gwyllo'r haul yn machlud
Dros yr adfail ar y bryn

Cofiwch Elenydd
Enwau'r brynau teg a'r nentydd
Cofiwch ofer ydy hawlio
Pob diferyn man sy'n glanio

Remember the Elan Valley

*Remember the Elan Valley
Says the paint on the rock by the crossing
Under the water and between the stones
The memory runs through the imagination*

*Remember the Claerwen Valley
remember the welcome of the old pine
That was a fine comfort for the heart
On the way from Ceredigion*

*The Red Kite doesn't see
The winter home under the lake
But watches the sun set
Over the summer home on the hill*

*A school and church
Ten thousand acres and paradise
Eighteen farms, their cruel fate
Empty words for all their losses*

*Remember the Elan Valley
Well, nobody remembers it all
On the shore I am a foreigner
Picking through the remains*

*The Red Kite doesn't see
The winter home under the lake
But watches the sun set
Over the ruin up on the hill*

*Remember Elenydd
The names of the fair hills and streams
Remember it is futile to claim
Every drop that lands*

7. Drygarn

Topped by two large stone cairns that date to the bronze age, Drygarn Fawr is the highest peak in the Elenydd range and stands at 645 meters. The journey to this remote peak is steep and can be difficult. As you arrive at the moorland the paths disappear and you can easily end up wading knee-deep in the bog, aiming for the cairns that seems to take forever to get closer. The peak is surrounded by a wide plateau, and the views from the top are primarily of the marshland below and the sky above.

On a clear day you can see Bannau Brycheiniog and Pumlumon, but the immediate surroundings are of the wide-open uplands of the Cambrian mountains.

This gives the peak a strangely anti-climactic, eerie feel but impressive, nonetheless. Sitting at the album's midpoint seemed fitting for a song dedicated to Elenydd's highest peak, this instrumental belongs to a series of pieces I wrote about the landscape of Elenydd.



Cairn on Drygarn



View from Drygarn

We recorded the song at Tŷ Drwg. Frank set up an old tape machine and we ran a guitar through it to create the eerie atmospheric sounds on the track. We used an old electric organ for the sci-fi solo at the end.

8. Brwcsod

I came across a recording of Mary Thomas (1905-83), in St Fagans National Museum of History archive where she tells the story of the Brooks family of Ffair Rhos*. According to Mary, the terms *Brwcsyn* (sing.) or *Brwcsod* (pl.) were used in Ceredigion (Cardiganshire) to mean something like 'rascal' or 'rogue'. The Brooks family would rob and murder drovers traveling home from the markets of England as they cut through the Claerwen valley on the way to Ceredigion, burying their victims on the mountaintop near a stream appropriately called Nantybeddau (stream of graves). Mary says that they had to move the livestock market from Ffair Rhos to



The drovers route through the Claerwen Valley, now flooded

Pontrhydfendigaid to avoid the activities of the Brwcsod. I walked the drovers'

route from the Elan Valley to Tregaron in the summer of 2022, which took me right past Esgair Nantybeddau (the slope of graves). The song tells the story of the Brooks family but goes on to lament all the 'Brwcsod' in positions of power the world over. It's a rebuke to those that use their influence to further enrich and glorify themselves, making life more dangerous and less joyful for millions in the process.

The track was recorded live at Tŷ Drwg with me on Guitar and Andy Fung on Drums. Frank added the Bass parts, and I later layered cellos, vocals, more guitars and the honky-tonk piano finale.

*<https://museum.wales/collections/folktales/?story=16>

Brwcsod

Ar Esgair Nantybeddau
Triga angau yn y gwair
I foddio chwant y Brwcsod
Am ddifrod ac am aur
Yn disgwyl ar y mynydd
Yn gelfydd ac yn gudd
I ddwyn wrth deithiwr druan
A'u gadael 'dan y pridd

Mae Brwcsod ar y mynydd
Mae Brwcsod yn y dre
Mewn inc papurau newydd
A golau glas y we
Mae Brwcsod yn San Steffan
Ac uchel fannau'r Byd
O! Na bawn yn sownd wrth drallod
Y Brwcsod 'ma i gyd

Trallod, Brwcsod

Brwcsod

*On the slope of the stream of graves
Death lives in the grass
To quench the greed of the Brookses
For havoc and for gold
Waiting on the mountain
Crafty and hidden
To steal from a poor traveller
And leave them under the soil*

*There's Brookses on the mountain
There's Brookses in town
In newspaper ink
And the blue light of the web
There's Brookses in Westminster
And the high places of the World
Oh! May I not be stuck with the misery
Of all these Brookses*

Tribulation, Brookses

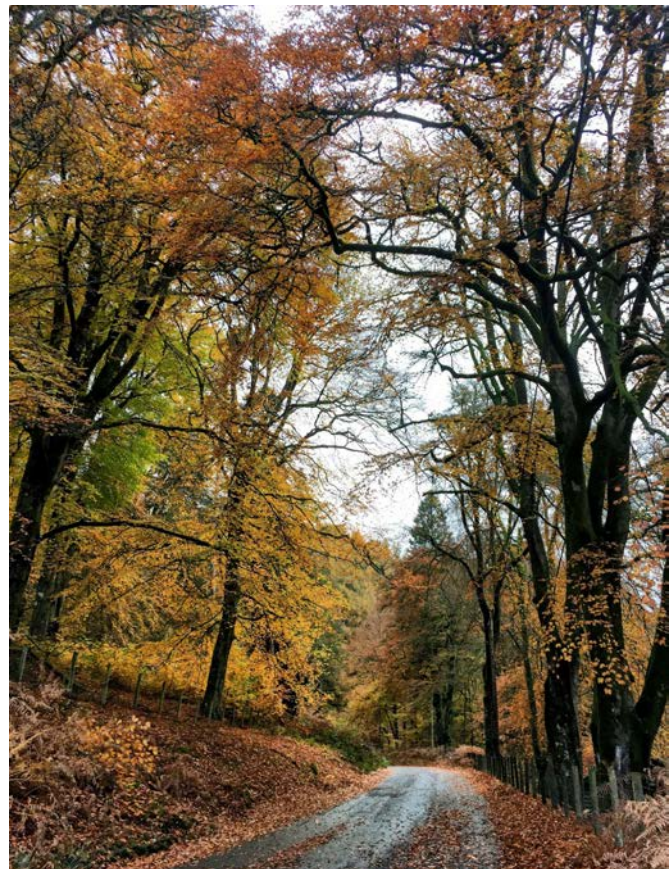


Nantybeddau Farm sits on the 'stream of graves'

9. Tachwedd

Tachwedd is an old word meaning 'slaughter' in Welsh and is also the name for the month of November, when people would traditionally slaughter livestock to secure a supply of meat for the winter. Autumn in Cwm Elan is a spectacular time, with the golden light filtering through yellow leaves and a riot of fungi covering the ground like brightly coloured sweets. It is also a time of death, when thoughts turn to the coming darkness of winter. This song is about the passage of time and a warning for the need to be prepared for the darkness ahead.

The Guitar and Drums were recorded live at Tŷ Drwg with Andy Fung and Frank Naughton, before I added the vocals and the layered Cellos to create a string section effect. Frank then added the *piece de resistance*, the fabulous theremin-esque synth solo in the middle section.



Tachwedd/November in Cwm Elan

Lyrics:

Tachwedd

Darfod y flwyddyn fyw
Breichiau hen goedydd gwyw
Ffenestri gwydr lliw o goch a melyn

Dyfod y machlud hir
cyfnos fel euren pur
Tywallt y dail i'r tir
a lludw'r flwyddyn

Cân, cana glychau'r waun
A chrecian cryg y brain
O ben y mynydd fry
Tân, o'r ddeilen euraidd hon
Fe gynnaf dan fy mron
Rhag trwmgwsg gaeaf du

Coelcerth y flwydd a fu
Fflamau hen ddail yn llu
Gwylia, mae'r dyddiau du yn siŵr o ddilyn

Tachwedd ar hyd y Cwm
Trymder cymyle llwm
Gofid fel pwyse plwm
Ar ddiwedd cortyn

Cân, cana glychau'r waun
A chrecian cryg y brain
O ben y mynydd fry
Tân, o'r ddeilen euraidd hon
Fe gynnaf dan fy mron
Rhag trwmgwsg gaeaf du

November

*The living year expires
The arms of wizened trees
Red and yellow stained-glass windows*

*Come the long sunset
Twilight like pure gold
Leaves pour to the ground and the years'
ashes*

*Sing, sing the bells of the moor
And the hoarse cackling of crows
From high on the mountain
Fire, from this golden leaf
I'll keep beneath my breast
Against the heavy sleep of a black winter*

*Bonfire of the year that's passed
Flames of old leaves abound
Watch, dark days are sure to follow*

*November throughout the valley
The heaviness of bleak clouds
Sorrow like a lead weight
On the end of a string*

*Sing, sing the bells of the moor
And the hoarse cawing of the crows
From the top of the high mountain
Fire, from this golden leaf
I will keep it under my breast
From the deep sleep of a black winter*

10. Stunning Location

A personal summary of some of my thinking on Cwm Elan, inspired by the return of the river during a drought in the summer of 2022. With the waters at a record low, it was possible to see the river, follow her course and find the remains of farmhouses and manors dotted throughout the valley. I could visualise the valley as it would have been without those vast sheets of water that cut the hills and streams all around to an abrupt and premature end. I saw the river as a symbol of Welsh culture and language, which can sometimes be so hidden it can seem like it isn't there.

This can lead some to believe that it's gone for good and any support or



Drought 2022

investment in Welsh is a waste of money. These attitudes are rooted in an age-old prejudice and ignorance that exists both within Wales as well as beyond. To me, it doesn't matter where you are in Wales, the language is there and learning about it will increase your understanding of the land and your place in it. There is no doubt that Cwm Elan is a beautiful place to visit, but a part of me worries what it means for Welsh culture and identity when so much of the country is marketed as a tourist destination. I don't want people's only connection to Welsh to be the cute phrases that adorn tourist tat; the 'gift-shop quotations' referenced in the song. It is up to us in Wales to make the language accessible, to encourage learners and to fight for its inclusion in every aspect of daily life.

We recorded Seb's gorgeous string arrangement with the Mavron Quartet at Tŷ Drwg and Ivan Moulton added his distinctive backing vocals to my main vocal.

Lyrics:

Stunning Location

*I saw the water
Set free by a drought
The valley unflooded
The lakes all dried out
And there like a memory
Held safe by the land
Sunlit in silver
The old river ran*

*Sometimes the stillness
Makes it feel silent
Sometimes the hidden
Is taken for lost
What is a nation
Of gift shop quotations?
Stunning location
What does it cost?*

*I saw the manor
Laid low in the mud
with the animal bone
How long can a river
Be held under water
Bound by the stone?*

*I've heard the voices
Full of disdain
Give us a playground
give us the rain
Give us no worry
Tie up your tongue
Forget the rivers
their courses are run*

*Sometimes the stillness
Makes it seem silent
Sometimes the hidden
Is taken for lost
What is a nation
Of gift shop quotations
Stunning location
What does it cost?*



Ivan Moulton during recording



The Elan river returns during the drought of 2022

11. Fleet

For generations, sheepdogs have been vital companions and workers for those farming the hillsides of Cwm Elan. The story of the sheepdog Fleet and his owner Hughie Roberts is briefly recounted in Erwyd Howell's book *Good Men and True: The lives and tales of the shepherds of mid Wales*. In the late 1930s Hughie was farming at Pen-garreg, the farm neighbouring the cottage where my residency was based. During this time Hughie walked to Ty'n Cwm in Pontrhydfendigaid to attend a funeral, but on his return the next morning got caught in a snowstorm in the Claerwen valley. He walked on until he came upon some footprints, but unfortunately, they were his own and he was truly lost in one of the more remote parts of the Cambrian mountains. His sheepdog Fleet had been walking at his heels but realising his owner was lost, took the lead and led Hughie through the snow until they reached Hirnant Farm, back in the Elan valley on the opposite side from Pen-Garreg. This song is an instrumental re-telling of the tale, and features the Radnorshire guitarist Toby Hay, a resident of Rhaeadr Gwy, who grew up in nearby Harmon. Toby and I would go for regular walks in the valley with his sheepdog, Bear throughout my residency.



Toby Hay's Collie, Bear

We recorded the track live at Tŷ Drwg with just the two of us sat playing together.

12. Dark Skies

Cwm Elan is a Dark Skies reserve, and the lack of light pollution makes it a spectacular place to stargaze and consider life, death and eternity. I adapted some lines from some old Welsh verses (Hen Benillion) I found in the National Library of Wales, from Man-adnau by James James (Orpheus), which I also translated into English.

Lyrics:

Gwyn ac oer yw marwor mynydd
Gwyn ac oer yw Ewyn nentydd
Gwyn ac oer yw eira Moelfryn
Gwynnach oerach, dim diderfyn

*Bright and cold the dormant mountain
Bright and cold the rivers foaming
Bright and cold the snows on Moelfryn
Brighter, colder endless nothing*

I took a Synth loop I'd made to Frank at Tŷ Drwg and we built the track around it, adding Guitars, Bass and more synths to evoke the vastness of the universe.



Frank Naughton at his studio, Tŷ Drwg

13. Elan

The Elan appears, disappears and reappears at different points in the valley, but mostly flows beyond sight under the waters of the large reservoirs. Elan is an old Welsh word for ‘hind’ or ‘fawn’, and it is thought the river may have been named because of the way the water leaped over the rocks through the steep gorges of her course. This song is a tribute to the elusive river and expression of gratitude and thanks to the people and landscape of Cwm Elan, that have given me so much.

We recorded the piano parts at Frank’s studio and recorded the amazing Mavron Quartet playing Seb Goldfinch’s fabulous string arrangement at a later session.



The Elan flows into Craig Goch reservoir, upper Elan Valley