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Y Drindod Dewi Sant
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The Travellers Rest Inn and surrounding architecture; Historical Welsh architecture that should be preserved, or a site for future development?

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Figure 1: Visit Caerphilly, n.d.

Caerphilly, an area of South Wales renowned for its Welsh traditions and historical context, still regularly attracts tourists from around the world. It hosts some of Wales' most impressive preservations of architecture, fortification of ruins and orthodox constructions which have been repurposed for social use.

Its architectural centrepiece however, remains the "Grade 1 listed" [1] construction of Caerphilly Castle, originally commissioned by "Gilbert de Clare in 1268-72" [2]. This was in aid of fortifying the base of the Welsh Valleys ensuring his security of power within the town from Llywelyn ap Gruffudd; the Lord of Senghenydd during the 13th Century.



Figure 2: Jens Graikowski, 2016.

The medieval castle displays a delicate mix of Norman and Gothic architectural advances, as found within Wales during this period. This style of architecture helped revolutionise the manner of castle construction: large, solid fill stone walls that allude to the castles defence mechanisms and Romanesque style gatehouses with rounded towers. Additionally, the use of a large, deep moat with a single point entry access across the wooden bridge ensured that the inhabitants and de-

fendants of the castle were significantly advantaged; a characteristic of Norman architecture brought to the United Kingdom during its conquering.

These features played a significant role within the defence of the castle by the Norman conquerors against the local land owners; the lords of Senghenydd [3]. The Celtic Welsh Lord of Senghenydd, Llewelyn ap Gruffudd, was forced to retreat resulting in the land being taken by the Norman settlers; This being one of the last battles of a Welsh lord within the area of Caerphilly.

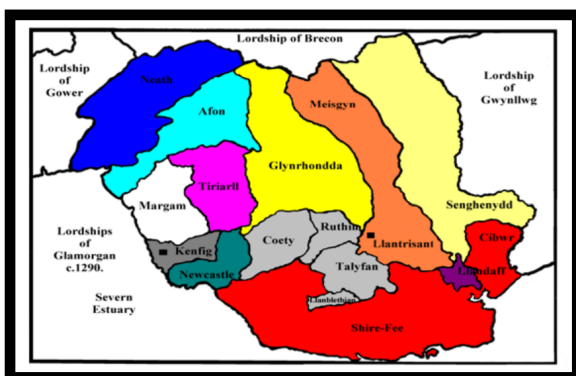


Figure 3: J.Beverley Smith, 1998.

Following the conquest of Senghenydd, an orthodox region of Wales containing Caerphilly, the Norman inhabitants developed the area significantly, expanding roads for travellers around the castle and constructing surrounding villages to solidify their stature as rulers [4]. This drove interest to the area at the base of the valleys from surrounding towns such as Cardiff, providing a network of trades locally resulting in Caerphilly being viewed as a revolutionary settlement.

After the "death of Gilbert De Clare in 1282 and with no heirs within their family" [4], the ownership of Caerphilly Castle and its owned land adjacent was under royal administration from Edward I following the conquering of Wales. All construction within Caerphilly forbid future, independent development and led to the downfall of orthodox architecture by the Welsh inhabitants, especially the construction of Morgraig Castle which was commissioned by Llewelyn ap Gruffudd before his death.

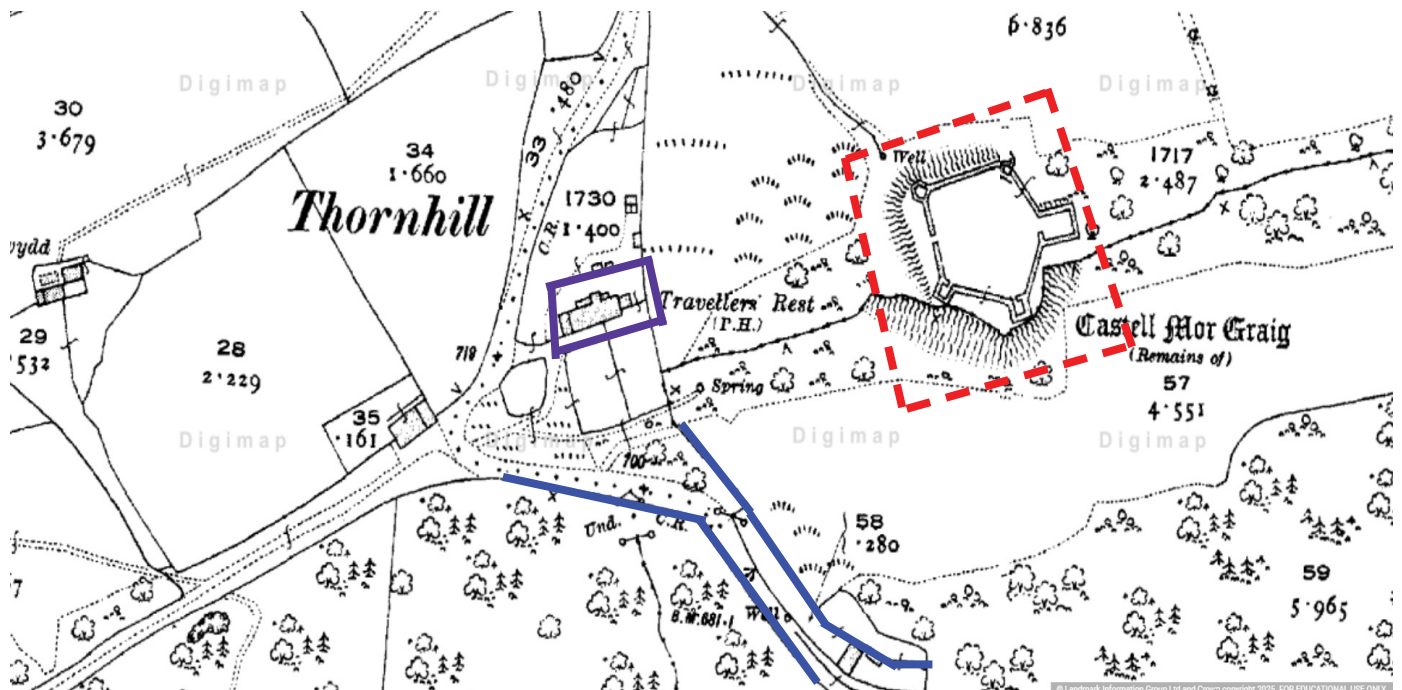


Figure 4: Edina maps, 1900.

Outlined in red is the site of Morgraig Castle, commissioned by the Lords of Senghenydd within the late 13th Century to help fortify the perimeter of their land. The construction of Morgraig castle was initially composed of “a rectangular/oval curtain wall outline” consisting of “1.5 to 2m” [5] of coarse stone shaped into a perimeter for the castle to sit within. Llewelyn ap Gruffudd sought “5 projecting towers” [5], facing all directions within the covered forest, taking inspiration from positions of the round towers of Caerphilly castle and their defence mechanisms.

As stated previously, the final Lord of Senghenydd was slain by Edward I during his invasion of Wales and therefore the production of Morgraig castle came to a halt within the end of the 13th Century. The proposed plans listed above were incomplete due to Gruffudd’s “death in combat in 1282” [6], rather the foundations and outline of the project was apparent, but no walls or structures were conceived. This resulted in the desertion of the castle, with the surrounding landscape beginning to engulf the foundations of what could’ve been the final, authentic, Welsh castle in the whole of South Wales; the trees within the historic map, taken from 1870, display the connection of the foundations to the landscape.

Following upon to the 16th Century, the land of which Morgraig castle lies upon was becoming increasingly utilised by travellers and farmers due to the economic advancements stemming from Caerphilly castle towards Cardiff. Thornhill Road, outlined in blue on the map, was the only access road from one town to the other which helped interlink Wales’ trade routes. The landowners, now being “the Lewis family of Van” [7], decided to utilise the flat landscape to the West of Morgraig castle, creating a series of farmhouses to outline the edge of their ownership. These vernacular constructions can still be viewed today due to their preservation and renovation, particularly within the South of Caerphilly.



Figure 5: Owain Glyndwr Society, n.d.

It was particularly fascinating to witness the building depicted in purple, titled The Travellers Rest Inn due to its local heritage within Caerphilly and preservation of materiality among decades. The house and byre were constructed around 1575 to 1600 [8], consisting of a combined dwelling and cowshed under one roof; common, vernacular, architecture within Wales during this period.

The image above helps depict what the original construction consisted of, this being a long and straight vernacular, “cross passage” [8], a house and byre utilised for both living and working uses. The walls consist of irregularly placed stone rubble, spanning almost two storeys, with a straw, thatched, roof being placed upon the load bearing walls. The use of irregularly placed windows demonstrates the lack of structural understanding during this period; however, the wooden lined viewpoints face towards the south to help provide light and warmth into the living areas. Additionally, the original chimney, the central, depicted which was embedded into the shared wall between the two spaces and where the original passage would have run from front to the back of the property.



Figure 6: The Cardiff Menu, 2023.



Figure 7: Morgan (2025a)



Figure 8: Morgan (2025b)



Figure 9: Morgan (2025c)

The images above depict the retrofitting of modern structure concepts with the original walls utilised within the property.

The first image displays the irregular solid rubble stone wall construction, the thickness of this wall was something that initially stood out as it was around a metre in thickness; insulation concepts were not regulated until the “20th Century” [9] however, the consideration of how to retain heat within a house is still prevalent during the late 1500’s. Additionally, the location of the wall is important as it would’ve been housing the central passage through the building and therefore retaining heat from the living space to the walkway would’ve been considered; a sign of modern architectural considerations in its earliest forms.

The central image displays an example of the oak beams passing overhead which would have been utilised for absorbing the main structural loads of the upper floors and part of thatched roof. As can be seen, these beams have deteriorated over five centuries, and are now utilised mainly for aesthetic purposes, yet provide an insight into the structural knowledge of Anglo-Norman architecture. This appeared fascinating, and it highlighted another aspect of the centuries differences, with the differentiation between the original inhabitants and modern averages. The beams were positioned around 190-200cm above internal finished floor level which would mean modern individuals would be near the ceiling, compared to the average height of an inhabitant during the 16th Century being between “173-175cm” [10].

The final image depicts the slate flagstone flooring embedded onto the ground, a feature that has been preserved within the entrance of the building to this date; providing protection from the bare earth internally, a process since developed and utilised in modern architecture.

The house and byre were extended somewhere between the “early to mid-17th century” [8], with a stable being added to the East façade to house horses utilised for travelling between Caerphilly and Cardiff. The increase of travellers from the two villages during this period resulted in frequent visitors who were in seek of shelter and rest, therefore the demand for an Inn became apparent. In the late 17th century, the house was re purposed and served as a focal point for travellers commuting, changing the property from private living use to domestic housing [8]. The owners continued to extend the property into the 18th century where it then became a public inn, the adaptation of this building is part of its history as it was converted once again into a social area and pub alongside an inn in the 19th century [8]. Conveniently, the adaptation also depicts the ever-changing economic and social aspects of Cardiff and Caerphilly and how architecture has developed to accommodate the needs of the orthodox travellers and modern visitors.

The public records for the Travellers Rest Inn displaying two counts of “internal and external alterations”, “replaced timber beams on the first floor”, “alterations to existing retaining walls”, “erected single storey side extension” and a “rethatched roof” [8]. Evidently, this was crucial in preserving the authenticity of the Inn however, the way they have conducted this does not amplify the architecture created in the 16th Century.

Depicted is an image of the extension to the East façade, constructed in the late 20th Century. It may look like the extension fits cohesively into the design, the materiality of the walls is utilised to mimic the original rubble stone along with external paint to represent the traditional lime wash. The use of slate tiles embedded behind the thatched roof is so the focal material of straw isn’t hindered with the more modern slates and is barely visible unless you stand directly close to the extension. The design is lacklustre, now a feature for further accommodation and cost cutting rather than delicate architecture.



Figure 10: Morgan (2025d).



This image of the extensions constructed from the 20th Century displays modern architecture coherently. A beautiful, but small, house and byre has now been engulfed in flat roof extensions with incoherent mechanical services. The water pooling highlighted in the red also conveys poor structural considerations and clearly will result in water ingress damage to the property. Therefore, the restoration cost is unjustifiable even though the vernacular architecture on the original construction has been preserved delicately.

Figure 11: Morgan (2025e)

Considering the surrounding architecture of this construction, it is also imperative to discuss the recent developments of Caerphilly Castle. On the “17th June 2021” [12], CADW announced a phase plan for the reconstruction of the castle with a “£5 million” [11] investment into helping restore the Great Hall and visitor centres; their aim was to make the castle a “world class heritage attraction” [12]. The regard for preserving 13th century architecture was at the forefront of projects from the Welsh Government and the final figure of “£10 million” [11] was depicted to the public when it was reopened on the “16th of July 2025” [12].

This fluctuation of funding led me to the consideration of Morgraig Castle being established as a landmark within the base of the valleys. The cost of construction would be inferior to Caerphilly Castle and would help rekindle appreciation for Celtic Welsh architecture. The Lords of Senghennydd are prevalent figures within the history of Wales, being honoured and represented in numerous manners within local architecture, such as the music venue Clwb Ifor Bach, yet one of their most prominent constructions, Morgraig Castle, is completely overlooked due to its incompleteness.

The re purposing of Morgraig Castle for social use would help generate local interest from the public, conveying Welsh culture before Norman or Anglo invasion. The Welsh public are extremely patriotic over their culture, yet their history remains embedded into the environment, engulfed by nature for over 750 years with no intent of restoration.

Furthermore, the development and funding of Morgraig Castle would generate larger interest to the Travellers Rest Inn due to it being located nearby. This would not only increase the revenue of the pub, it would also attract local historians and architects to study the history of vernacular Welsh architecture during the 16th Century, just as I have embarked upon during research for this essay. The poorer quality finishes the Inn’s extensions would be addressed during this, potentially hindering into reconstruction of the building utilising traditional methods and using similar building materials in aid of representing the building as a preservation rather than an extension.

Evidently, my judgement of the title question proposed at the beginning of this essay favours the preservation of local architecture, however the reality is vastly different to my view. The listing of Morgraig Castle is “grade II with a scheduled monument” [5] and the Travellers Rest Inn also being “grade II” [8], suggest that these constructions are not considered critical enough for CADW funding considerations. Therefore, my opinion suggests that the site of which they lay upon may be revisited and repurposed for an indifferent use; the LDP for Cardiff displaying that it is just above the “Green Wedge Zone” [13], suggesting that the backdrop may eventually become domestic housing or other large scale use.

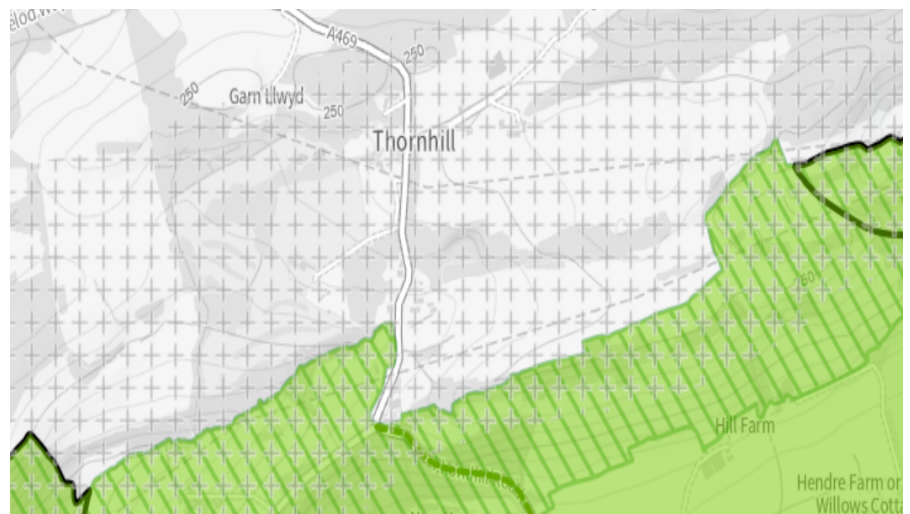


Figure 12: Cardiff Council, 2016.

The consideration for these two projects might also be rejected due to the funding required for excavation of Morgraig Castle, the environment has consumed the foundations almost entirely and would require significant quarrying to fully unveil the ruins constructed seven and a half centuries ago.

Will nature completely swallow our history, or will there be future emphasis into preserving our cultural heritage?

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Figures:

Figure 1: Visit Caerphilly (2025) *Caerphilly Castle*. [online] Available at: <https://www.visitcaerphilly.com/en/listings/caerphilly-castle/> (Accessed: 7 December 2025)

Figure 2: Google Earth (2025) *Caerphilly Castle, 51°34'34.2"N, 3°13'06.2"W, elevation ~86 m*. [online] Available at: <https://earth.google.com/web/search/caerphilly+castle/@51.57616799,-3.2184047> (Accessed: 7 December 2025).

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Figure 4: Ordnance Survey (1900) *Thornhill Road, Cardiff, CF83 1LY, Scale at 1:50*. Using: EDINA Historic Digimap Service [online] Available at <https://digimap.edina.ac.uk/roam/map/historic> [Accessed: 7 December 2025].

Figure 5: Owain Glyndŵr Society (no date) *Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, Owain-Glyndŵr.wales*. [online] Available at: https://owain-glyndwr.wales/age_of_the_princes/gruffudd_ap_llywelyn.html (Accessed: 7 December 2025).

Figure 6: The Cardiff Menu (2022) *"The Traveller's Rest Cardiff & Caerphilly", The Cardiff Menu* [online] Available at: <https://thecardiffmenu.wordpress.com/2022/09/23/the-travellers-rest-cardiff-caerphilly/> (Accessed: 7 December 2025).

Figure 7: Morgan, J. (2025a), *"Retrofitted stone wall"* [photograph]

Figure 8: Morgan, J (2025b), *"Interior oak beam"* [photograph]

Figure 9: Morgan, J (2025c), *"Flagstone flooring"* [photograph]

Figure 10: Morgan, J (2025d), *"South elevation extension"* [photograph]

Figure 11: Morgan, J (2025e), *"Roof and services of the constructions extensions"* [photograph]

Figure 12: Cardiff Council (2016) *Cardiff strategic LDP site map viewer*. [online] Available at: https://ishare.cardiff.gov.uk/?ms=mapsources/ldp_en&layers=strategicsite,futureexpansion,centralbaybusinessarea,centralshoppingcentre,nonstrategichousing,nonstrategicemployment,housingcommitment500,districtshoppingcentre,localshoppingcentre,existingemploymentland,rivercorridor,speciallandscapes,minerallimestoneres,mineralsbuffer,mineralresclosure,coalnotacceptable,limestonesafeguarding,minerallimestonepreferred,sandgravelsafeguarding,sandwharfprotection,settlement,greenwedge,coalsafeguarding,strategicroute,shopfronts,strategicbuscorridor&starteastng=317802&startnorthng=176436.7&startzoom=11832 (Accessed: 7 December 2025).