

Introduction - The Otherside

After Gwyn has revealed His identity to Gwyddno He speaks the next four verses:

The white horse calls this talk to an end
His bridle leads us away
Hurrying to battles in Tawe and Nedd.

Not the Tawe here in this land
But the one far away in a distant land
Where the tide ebbs fiercely on the shore.

I have a carved ring, a white horse gold-adorned
And to my sorrow
I saw battle at Caer Fanddwy.

At Caer Fanddwy I saw a host
Shields shattered, spears broken,
Violence inflicted by the honoured and fair.

We see here the conversation between Gwyn and Gwyddno called to an end. Intriguingly this is not by Gwyn Himself, but by His horse, 'the white horse', Carngrwn 'Round Hoofed'. In turn it is 'his bridle' that leads them away.

There is a strong sense here that Gwyn's horse and duties as a gatherer of the dead are beyond His control - governed by the battles He must attend. The bridle here is suggestive of constraint by attending the necessities of war.

To add to this sense of intrigue Gwyn and His horse are hurried away to battles 'in Tawe and Nedd / Not the Tawe here in this land / But the one far away in a distant land / Where the tide ebbs fiercely on the shore.'

Tawe and Nedd are rivers in south Wales. The Tawe flows into the sea through Swansea and the Nedd passes through the town of Neath. The latter is likely to be named after Gwyn's father, Nudd, or possibly Gwyn Himself.

There are other Tawes in more distant lands in this world where Gwyn might have attended battles. There is a Tawe in Scotland. Here in Lancashire there is the river Tawd and this flows close to the Douglas. Nennius refers to Arthur fighting three battles on the Dubglas in the Region Linuis 'Lake Region'. Here he is likely referring to Martin Mere, once England's largest lake, where there

is an island called Battle Holme and another island called Netholme (from Nudd?).

The notion of an 'other Tawe' is possibly suggestive of the existence of a part of the Otherworld mirroring this world. In my personal experience the land has an 'otherside', which it is possible to visit in journeywork, to speak more directly with its powers and spirits. This is different to Annwn 'the Deep'. It may be analogous to the concept of a 'middle world' in core shamanism, which differs from the 'upper world' and 'lower world' or 'underworld'. I have found it possible to journey to 'the other Ribble' in my local area.

The calling to attend a battle on another Tawe evokes memories for Gwyn. He tells Gwyddno 'I have a carved ring, a white horse gold-adorned'. Here it seems He is looking back at Himself at an event of the past.

There have been many interpretations of the significance of Gwyn's ring. Angelika Rudiger links it to His 'mastery of time' and to the 'eternal return'. I see it as having two carved serpents upon it biting each other's tails, like the ouroboros, representing Gwyn's battle against Gwythyr. It has also been connected to a curse tablet dedicated to Nodens at Lydney asking him to curse the thief of a ring and to the ring from *The Lord of the Rings* (!).

Gwyn then speaks of His sorrow at witnessing a battle at Caer Fanddwy. He says He saw 'a host / Shields shattered, spears broken, / Violence inflicted by the honoured and fair.'

Caer Fanddwy is one of the otherworld fortresses in the medieval Welsh poem 'The Spoils of Annwn'. The Welsh is *Caer Vandwy*. It has been translated by Sarah Higley as 'the Fortress of God's Peak'. This suggests it is connected with an otherworld mountain that is sacred to a God, likely Gwyn as Lord of Annwn, and the fortress is at the top, the bottom, or maybe above. 'Fanddwy' or 'Manddwy' have also been connected to Manawydan.

Nearby we find 'the Meadows of Defwy' (from a river-name meaning 'black') and there grazing 'the Brindled Ox, with his stout collar, / (and) seven score links in its chain.' 'Brindled' means 'brownish or tawny with streaks of other colours'. The Welsh word translated here as 'collar' is *penrwy* and this translates more directly as 'head ring'. I thought I would mention this as some members have had experiences of Gwyn appearing with or as a bull with a nose ring. The Brindled Ox may be a tamer version of Tarvos Trigaranos, the Bull with Three Cranes, with whom Gwyn may be associated as a 'bull of battle'.

The final lines of the verse in 'the Spoils of Annwn' read: 'And when we went with Arthur, sad journey, none returned from Mand(d)wy fort.' That of the 'three loads' of men who went in Arthur's ship, Prydwen, only seven returned shows the scale of the devastation of the battle and the huge number of deaths. The return of seven is a common motif in medieval Welsh literature. In the Second Branch of *The Mabinogion* only seven return to Britain from an equally devastating battle in Ireland (or the Otherworld) with Bran's head. It seems significant that even Taliesin, who lauds war, speaks of this as a 'sad journey'.

'The honoured and fair' are likely to be *Y Tylwyth Teg*, 'the Fair Family,' the people of Annwn. We find them described in *The Life of St Collen*: 'the best appointed troops, and numbers of minstrels, and every kind of music of voice and string, and steeds with youths upon them the comeliest in the world, and maidens of elegant aspect, sprightly, light of foot, of graceful apparel, and in the bloom of youth.' They are clad in red and blue, colours which Collen associates with freezing and burning and thus with Hell. These contraries may have a deeper significance within the mythos of Annwn.

I believe the battle at *Caer Fanddwy* attended by Gwyn is one and the same with the attack upon His realm, His people, His very fortress by Arthur and his men. We now understand why He speaks of it with such sorrow.

We will be journeying with Gwyn to witness this battle in our meditation.