

P-04-607 Call for the Welsh Government to Purchase Garth Celyn – Correspondence from the Owner of Garth Celyn to the Committee

The Petitions Committee.

I am writing in a last desperate attempt to ask that the National Assembly does everything possible to safeguard the future of Garth Celyn.

The documents and the letters of support submitted by the Petitioner Kevin Bates help to explain the meaning of Garth Celyn, some of the issues involved, but now there is the need for the greatest urgency.

Many schools, groups and organisations, and hundreds of individuals have contacted the Garth Celyn Trust and myself in recent months asking who they can lobby to make their voices heard and highlight the matter. We did not want to turn this into a media circus and have refused all interviews with the press and television as we felt that any intervention in any way would be unhelpful at the present time. Please do not see that silence as apathy. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is overwhelming public support and goodwill.

The late Gwynfor Evans described Garth Celyn as **"a place that holds the Soul of the Nation"**.

Huw Edwards in the BBC production "The Story of Wales" described it as **"in all likelihood the most significant site in the history of Wales"**

The late Dr John Davies described the letters written from Garth Celyn by Prince Llywelyn and his Ministers in November 1282 as **'the most sublime compositions of the Welsh nation'**.

The promontory of Garth Celyn overlooking the Menai Strait is the setting for the play 'Siwan' by Saunders Lewis. Each year A-level students from all parts of Wales and further afield visit the site, as do others interested in Welsh history, language and culture. (John Ogwen and Maureen Rhys come each year to do readings from 'Siwan' to members of Yr Urdd. There have been poetry readings, musical performances, art exhibitions. The list goes on and on.....)

The individuals who signed the Petition (and those who did not know about the Petition until after it was closed) have asked that the property be purchased and then placed in the hands of Trustees and a Management Committee to become a Welsh Cultural Centre, as a permanent, thriving memorial to the Welsh Princes and their families. (Siwan died here in 1237, Prince Dafydd ap Llywelyn died here in 1246, Eleanor de Montfort, Lady of Wales, died here in June 1282 giving birth to

Gwenllian. The last letters that Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd wrote in November 1282 were dated from 'Gardd Kelyn'.....)

The site is situated just off the A55 coastal highway, between Conwy and Bangor, overlooking the Menai Strait. It is highly accessible in an area of natural beauty.

I have owned the property since 1988 and since that time have had a opened the house and grounds willingly and freely to those interested. Thousands of people from Wales and further afield have walked through the doors. No-one has been charged.

I now understand that if the National Assembly does not come forward immediately to find a positive solution, the property will, due to personal circumstances totally beyond my control, be sold by public auction on the open market.

It has been suggested that a future purchaser might have the same open door policy as I have done. Can I say that that is highly unlikely. The individuals who have looked round the house as perspective private purchasers have done so with a view to having it solely for their own personal use, some wanting it simply as a holiday home.

Following acquisition, I am told, there are potential grants available from the Heritage lottery Fund and others to take the project forward in a sustainable way for public benefit.

The house and cottage are Grade II* Listed and stand in a Scheduled enclosure, and as such are protected by law from damage. But that does not give or guarantee public access.

It could be argued that Garth Celyn is not under threat from development and therefore does not need to be owned by an official body. That misses the point entirely. The promontory of Garth Celyn is, as Gwynfor Evans said, "**a place of special meaning to the People of Wales.**" That fact alone surely overrides all else. Though I have been fortunate enough to live here for 26 years, I have always carried the responsibility that it belongs to "us" and not "me".

There are doors that can be opened to make this happen. Please, please do so.

Kathryn Pritchard Gibson