

Cynhaeaf: customs, practices and folklore associated with the traditional harvest in Wales.

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Phillips, Alan Robert (2016) *Cynhaeaf: customs, practices and folklore associated with the traditional* University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore a wide variety of customs and practices associated with the traditional harvest in nineteenth century; with a particular focus on south-west Wales, where the evidence survives most clearly. It examines the practice of harvest migration to destinations both within and outside Wales, the traditions associated with it engendered; with particular attention to the practice of cyflog y groes, or cross wages, in the Vale of Glamorgan. The practice of surrounding the last sheaf, or caseg feddi, are scrutinised in some detail, together with their long-standing traditions. An alternative approach is proposed. An exploration of a range of harvest folklore demonstrates in particular the practice of sheaves as animals or people. The essay concludes by tracing the traditional supper at the end of harvest, its origins, and the reasons for its eventual replacement by the Christian harvest festival. Throughout the study, the ritual tensions accompanying these customs, including tensions in the harvest field, and the contrast between the one hand and aggressive competitiveness on the other; as well as the prevailing context of subsistence agriculture they take place.

Item Type: Thesis (Masters)

Uncontrolled Keywords: Harvest, Wales, Folklore, Customs

Subjects: [H Social Sciences > H Social Sciences \(General\)](#)

Divisions: [Faculties > Faculty of Education and Communities > School of Welsh and](#)

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