

AMONG MY SOUVENIRS

It was mid afternoon in the first week of November. Idwal was sitting in the living room with his box of souvenirs, as he called it. There were all sorts of odd things there that he had picked up over the years.

“November already,” he thought, “y Mis Du – the black month.” He did not like the long dark evenings, not now that he lived alone. He remembered that it would be two years ago tomorrow that Bethan, his wife, had died.

He fingered his souvenirs in a desultory way – there was hurry. He had nothing else to do. He was lucky, he thought to himself, that he had been able to carry on living in the house. He had known many who had had to move into homes. But his neighbours were very good to him; and his son looked in nearly every day.

His fingers felt a small flint flake. Yes, he remembered that one. He was only a boy when he found it up in Wentwood so long ago. He had not known what it was then, but he had felt strangely attracted to it. Years later he learnt that was a Mesolithic microlith, chipped from flint from the Wye Valley.

As Idwal fingered the microlith he gazed ahead and did not seem at all perturbed as the walls of his room faded and he saw in the distance the familiar shape of Twmbarlwm and the ridges of Mynydd Henllys and Mynydd Maen; he had been familiar with these all his life. In the distance on the far right he thought he could see the Bloreng and could just make out the distinctive shape of the Sugarloaf Mountain. Of course these names were not the old names; it would be 7000 years before those names were known.

He could hear his son and daughter-in-law inside the shelter behind him as they talked with his grandchildren. They was not speaking English, nor Welsh; but he understood all that they said. “O bydded i’r hen iaith barhau,” he had so often sang – “O may the old language endure.” Welsh was indeed older here than English; but this was *the* old language – ama!edlan amakestúmalim ‘the oldest language of all’ – and it had not endured. He wondered how many other languages had come and gone, leaving no trace, during all the years between.

The family were having their meal before finishing for the day. He didn’t eat so much now, and he liked being out here by himself. Besides he had to finish shaping his microlith. He would join them before they finished.

He sat there thinking in the late afternoon sunshine. The hunting had been good that year; there had been deer and swine in the forest and aurochs down in the valley. The sea had had been bountiful down on the estuary. The autumn had provided them with a good harvest of fruits and nuts. Yes, the spirits and the ancestors had favoured them this year.

In the Summer they had cleared a glade in the woodland; next Spring the new growth would attract deer and swine. The wood they had cut down had provided charcoal to heat them through the winter. He looked at the shelter behind him. Yes, it was well built, as were the other shelters. The community was well prepared for the winter ahead.

How many winters had he seen? He had lost count many years ago. Two winters had passed since since his wife had died; that he did know. He missed her, particularly during the winter months.

He looked at the small flint he had been shaping. His sight was not so good now for close work; he could not see it properly, but he could feel it. After all the years of knapping flint, he could strike the chips and shape them as required almost without looking. Yes, this one, he could feel, was right. It would replace that lost barb on his spear. He thought he had better leave it to his son to fit the barb.

At that moment, his son came out from the shelter.

"It's getting late, Dad. Are you coming in?" Then, looking at his father, he added: "You're looking tired, Dad. You really should be coming in."

"Yes, A||ubyll, I *am* feeling tired. I have been shaping this chip to make a new barb for my spear. I wonder if you could fit it for me; my eyes are not so good now."

"Sure, Dad. I'll do it tomorrow. The sun is beginning to go down; the light's not so good now, and it'll be dark soon; then neither of us will be able to see it."

Idwal looked up; the sun was just about to dip below Mynedd Henllys. He took a last look across the valley, and went in to join his family.

After they'd finished eating and his daughter-in-law was getting the children ready for bed, Idwal said to his son, "I'm feeling weaker now, A||ubyll. I don't think I shall see the Spring. I feel I shall be joining Mum and the ancestors before long."

"Don't talk like that, Dad. You'll feel a lot better after a good night's sleep, you'll see. Look, it's dark now and the fire's not giving much light. You go to your sleeping place and get a good night's rest."

"Yes, I think I shall.", he said. He called good-night to his family and they all said their good-nights.

Idwal went to his sleeping place in the shelter. His son had built wattle partitions around it to give him privacy, for which he was thankful. He pulled skins around himself and he curled up for the night. As he dropped off to sleep, he thought about past hunts and the different places the community had wintered in over the past few years. Soon he was sleeping soundly.

It was his son who found Idwal next morning looking more peaceful than he had looked for a long time. He had died without pain in his sleep during the night. His son noticed the microlith barb; he looked at it. "This is exquisite," he thought. "I'll keep this to remind me of Dad. Yes, I'll put it among my souvenirs."