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


**Abstract**

This thesis aims to explore a wide variety of customs and practices associated with the traditional harvest in Wales, with a particular focus on south-west Wales, where the evidence survives most strongly. This includes an examination of the practice of harvest migration to destinations both within and outside Wales, the traditions associated with it, and the social stresses which it engendered; with particular attention to the practice of *cyflog y groes*, or cross wages, in the Vale of Clwyd. The customs and symbolism surrounding the last sheaf, or *caseg fedi*, are scrutinised in some detail, together with their long-standing Frazerian interpretation, and an alternative approach is proposed. An exploration of a range of harvest folklore demonstrates in particular the constant personification of sheaves as animals or people. The essay concludes by tracing the traditional supper at the end of harvest, the merrymaking associated with it, and the reasons for its eventual replacement by the Christian harvest festival. Throughout the study, attention will be drawn to the social and ritual tensions accompanying these customs, including tensions in the harvest field, and the contrast between cooperation among farms on the one hand and aggressive competitiveness on the other; as well as the prevailing context of subsistence or borderline deprivation in which they take place.

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