

'CATRIN GLYNDWR' (BWCIBO THEATRE)

The year is 2004. We are in a former chapel in Machynlleth, a few weeks before the celebrations to mark the sexcentenary of Owain Glyndwr's Parliament. A woman in mediaeval costume takes the stage - and holds our attention for 80 minutes, helped by nothing more than simple but dramatic lighting and some arresting sound-effects.

Heledd Bianchi is the actress, interpreting her own script about Glyndwr's daughter Catrin. The powerful English aristocrat Edmund Mortimer was captured by the Welsh in June 1402; five months later he married Catrin.

This was a valuable alliance for Glyndwr and posed a considerable challenge to King Henry IV and his Lancastrian dynasty.

But Catrin paid dearly for being a pawn in this brutal power-struggle.

When Edmund died during the siege of Harlech, his wife and children were taken to the Tower of London where they died in mysterious circumstances in 1413.

From the confines of her cell Catrin looks back over the peaks and troughs of her eventful life. To convey these images and emotions Heledd Bianchi uses literature ranging from the 6th and 7th centuries through to a son of the women on Greenham Common. This helps to give Catrin's experiences a wider reference, symbolizing inter alia the joys of motherhood and the anguish of war.

Huw Garmon's direction has a Brechtian intensity, which means that this monologue is not for the faint-hearted or the couch-potato. The piece conveys the cruelty and discomfort of the Middle Ages, and shows a woman at the very edge of insanity. Especially effective are the moments when Heledd uses mime to suggest that she is craning at the window of her cell, desperate for sights and sounds from the outside world.

'Catrin Glyndwr' is an important story, forcefully told. It

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