

Protein and More: The Surge of Welsh Horror Film

By Nia Edwards-Behi

Horror has enjoyed many revivals in the course of cinema history and its most recent surge in popularity is stronger than ever. With award-season attention for *The Substance* and *Nosferatu*, and box office records for *Terrifier 3*, horror is enjoying both a critical and popular high point.

From wide releases to festival favourites, Welsh films sit comfortably among recent horror filmmaking, with a growing range and diversity of films to be found made in Wales or by Welsh filmmakers.

Among the latest is *Protein*, directed by Tony Burke and Welsh producer Craig Russell (*Canaries*). Filmed in Llanelli, Ammanford and Swansea, *Protein* premiered to acclaim at London's FrightFest last year, and will soon hit cinemas via Bulldog Film Distribution.

In the film, Sion (Russell) returns home suffering from PTSD and struggling to find his place in a small, urban, Valleys community, especially among the drug-fuelled men in the one place he might find sanctuary: the gym. What unfolds is a horror-tinged turf-war, with gangsters led by Dwayne (Kai Owen) mysteriously disappearing...and Sion's protein intake on the up.

Protein offers a gritty twist on a slasher set-up. Here, our lone killer is somehow a hero in a desperate town, starkly sympathetic next to his roster of violent victims. Sion falls prey to his own insecurities and the desire for validation from the very same men he murders. That's the point, here, with toxic masculinity's potential for real (self-)harm laid bare.

It's not the first time Welsh horrors have explored the topic, with toxic masculinity cropping up in various guises over the decades. Even way back in 1981's under-seen *O'r Ddaear Hen*, our central, expert, female protagonist (Valerie Wynne-Williams) is repeatedly dismissed and questioned by her husband (J. O. Roberts), who disbelieves her claims to his own peril.

More recently, in 2022's *Gwledd*, the macho posturing of politician and land developer (Julian Lewis Jones and Rhodri Meilir) is gladly assisted by obliging housewife Glenda (Nia Roberts) – all in contrast to the silent, powerful, feminine rage of the land.

It's not all toxic masculinity in recent Welsh horror, though. In *The Mill Killers* (Alun Owen, 2024) - filmed almost entirely in Carmarthen - a group of old school friends slowly unravels as the secrets between them re-emerge at the scene of past mistakes. These women, initially all excitement and fake smiles at their reunion, soon descend into varying degrees of their own toxicity.

A far cry from the slasher stylings of *Protein* and *The Mill Killers* are two other recent horror films with Welsh connections: *Starve Acre* (Daniel Kokotajlo, 2024) and *Eternal Daughter* (Joanna Hogg, 2023).

Both deal in the ways in which people - for better or worse - cling to the past. In the folk horror of *Starve Acre*, the land itself becomes part of one family's toxic cycles, while in *Eternal Daughter* the stark out-of-season back-drop of Sychdyn's Soughton Hall allows a lonely woman (Tilda Swinton) to ultimately face herself.

There's even horror to be found in Alice Lowe's comedy-sci-fi-romance *Timestalker* (2024). The film's obsessive protagonist Agnes (Lowe) finds herself on a looping journey as she dies her way through an anti-romance for the ages. Each violent death - and obsessive outburst - brings Agnes closer to her freedom.

While access to horror via streaming services is easier than ever, we're fortunate in Wales to have plenty of opportunity to experience home-made horror on the big screen too, at cinemas and film clubs and via specialist film festivals.

Abertoir Horror Festival, based in Aberystwyth, celebrates its 20th anniversary this November and has, over the years, showcased Welsh films alongside their international counterparts. North Wales can now boast two horror festivals, with Rhyller Thriller (30-31 Aug, Rhyl Little Theatre) and Phantasmagoria (3-5 Oct, George Edwards Hall, Cefn Mawr) flying the flag for the genre and local filmmaking.

From slasher to art-house, folk tales to sci-fi, Welsh horror is a varied mode of storytelling that has something for everyone.

[Protein](#) releases in UK cinemas on June 13 2025. Find it on a big screen near you.

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