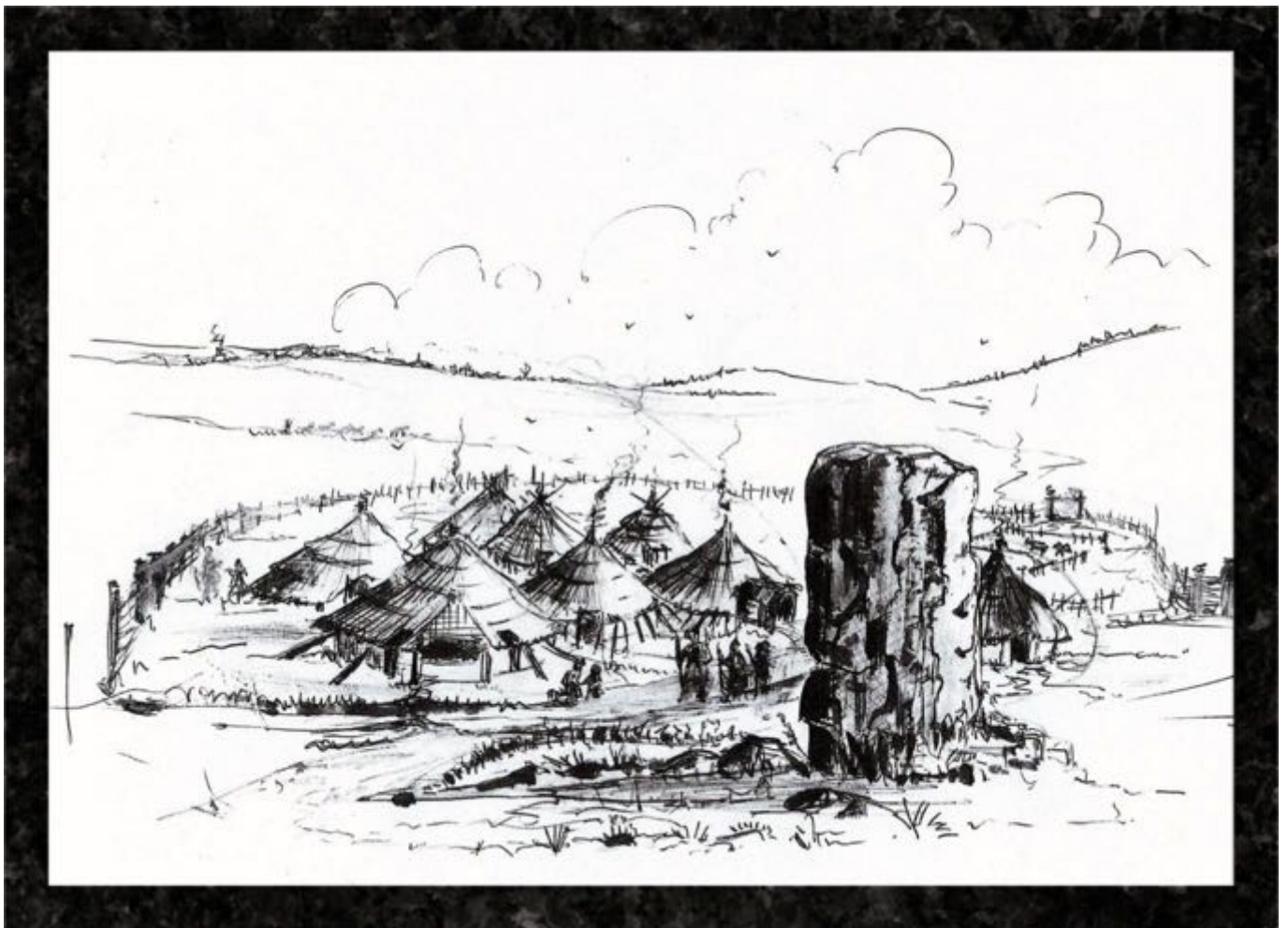


CYMDEITHAS TREFTADAETH
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FIVE ROADS & DISTRICT
HERITAGE SOCIETY

OUR STORY



ORIGINS & HISTORY UP TO THE TUDOR DYNASTY

SPENCER HUGHES

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Our Living Heritage, a publication of the Five Roads & District Heritage Society was devised as a means of capturing and enlivening a collective heritage, one which was shaped by the uniqueness of its people and location, and as a tribute to those local residents who, in turn, helped shape our community. For those who live, or have ever lived, in Cynheidre, Five Roads, Horeb or Sylen, it strikes a chord, reviving memories of life in earlier times. For other readers, it conveys a strong sense of community and pride in our heritage.

Our Story was originally conceived as a chapter entitled 'Early History' in the above publication. Its purpose was to give a 'bite size' history of our community up to and including the Anglo-Norman conquest and the struggle for independence. Even then, it was considered too large for full inclusion in the book and it was decided to limit its time-line up to the Iron Age, with a proviso to install the full text on our then future website. Since that time, it has been extended to include the Wars of the Roses and the Tudors, whose dynasty owed its existence in no small part to the participation of the people of Carmarthenshire.

This electronic publication is now complete and tells the intriguing story of our community from pre-history to the time of the Tudors. Importantly, it places the locality and shows its influence in the context of wider historical and geographical developments over the past twenty millennia.

Spencer Hughes
Five Roads, December 2016

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1 GENESIS

In the beginning was an island – Sylen.

From studies of early geology, we learn that around 300 million years ago Sylen Mountain was an island dominating our present location which was then entirely submerged, and evidence exists to support this fact. In the grounds of Croeslaw (opposite the Stag Inn) a seam of sand was found that runs along Heol Rehoboth. Also, prior to the opening of Cynheidre Colliery, bore holes were drilled when searching for anthracite coal seams. From the extracted bore material, there was found debris of sea bed life (sand, shells and fossils) that existed millions of years ago. This became known as the Five Roads 'marine band'. Clearly, this is irrefutable proof that the Five Roads area was undersea.

Over successive millennia Brondini and Pembrey Mountains appeared. Then, resulting from a thaw during one of the many glaciation periods, the Gwendraeth Fawr Glacier cut its way southwards through Sylen and Brondini to create what is known as the Cynheidre Gap. This enabled the River Lliedi to flow, and forming what is now Horeb.

This then, is the birth of Cynheidre, Horeb, Five Roads and Sylen.



View from Sylen showing Five Roads, Brondini and Pembrey Mountains

2 EARLIEST INHABITANTS

The last ice age terminated between 15,000 and 10,000 BC. Prior to this all life in these islands was extinguished. The eminent scientist, Dr. Jacob Bronowski states, "There has been five million years of human development, but only 10,000 years of cultural evolution on this earth". From this time on, man (and animals) were making their way back to Britain. These peoples are our immediate ancestors, and our heritage and culture starts here.

The first human beings we know of in South Wales were called the Paleolithic people, men and women of the Old Stone Age. These earliest inhabitants lived in the limestone areas of the coastal and inland parts of Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Glamorgan and Monmouth. Their crude homes were deep caves and rough rock shelters which protected them from the icy cold, for in those days it was impossible to live in the open air all the year round, as we do now. These very primitive people found their food by hunting and fishing, and clothed themselves in the skins of animals. Their simple weapons and tools were fashioned from wood, flint, bone and stone which they usually chipped into shape. They lived among creatures, some of which have long disappeared, and they learned how to trap and kill them. These animals included the mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, giant ox, the cave bear and cave lion, hyena, great elk, wolf, reindeer and the wild horse.

The folk of the Old Stone Age were few in number. They represented the lowest scale of civilization, for their lives were brutish, and their existence miserable and insecure. The remains of some of them, together with those of the animals they hunted and the flint implements they used, have been found in Welsh caves. The most notable of these caves are those of Paviland, in the Gower Peninsula, Coygan Rock near Laugharne, and Monkton near Pembroke. Other caves which may have been inhabited by Old Stone Age families in Carmarthenshire are at Craig Derwyddon near Pant-yr-Odyn, Llandybie; and some four miles away in the massive rock upon which Carreg Cennen was built.

By about 8,000 BC many changes had taken place. The intense cold had been followed by mild, moist weather, the arctic animals had died out and forests and vegetation became extensive. The Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age descendants of Paleolithic man lived in the open in small settlements near the sea-coast, harvesting the natural resources of the forest, rivers and sea. Their food was fish and shell-fish, roots, berries, nuts and small game. Their tools and weapons were of flint which they mounted in handles of bone and wood to use as knives, spears, harpoons and borers. These hunter-gatherers lived in relatively small numbers, and may have grouped together to form bands. Most members of bands, especially small ones, sought mates outside their immediate group, in a mating network which we now call a tribe. Such bands and tribes were relatively egalitarian – leaders were occasionally chosen on the basis of experience or charisma to head up war bands or delegations – but most work parties were self-selecting, shared their spoils in common and people held little in the way of possessions or private property. Mesolithic people were the original and genuine communists. These tribes had language, ancestors and culture in common; they occupied relatively stable territories and probably signalled their identity through dress, hairstyle and body decoration.

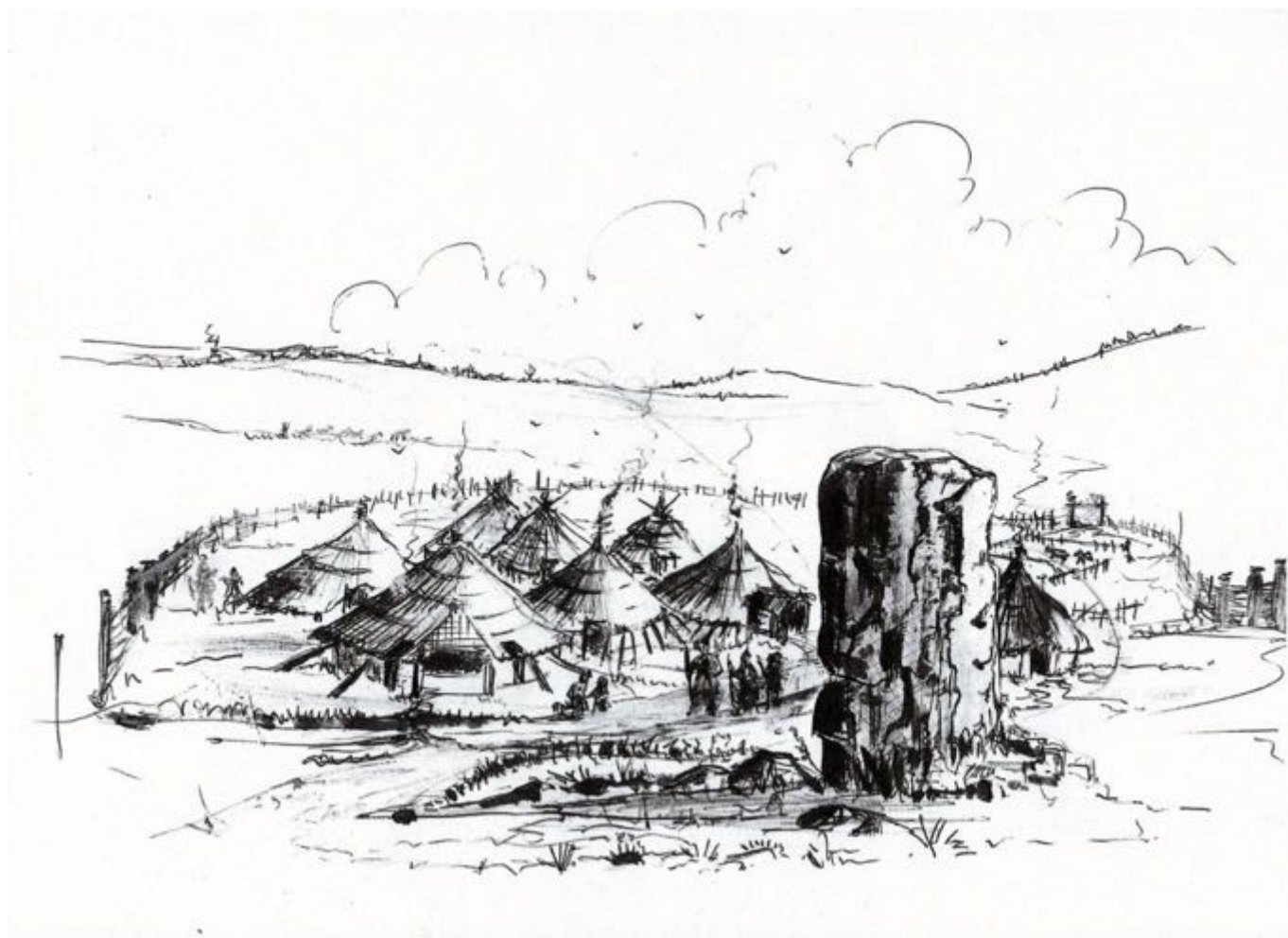
Though the climate was now so much kinder, lives led by these later people was marginally better, and still poor. No traces of their mode of existence have ever been discovered in Carmarthenshire, though some of their flints have been found in south Pembrokeshire, in Gower and among the sand-dunes near Porthcawl. The absence of any evidence about them in Carmarthenshire is perhaps due to the fact that the coastal land on which they lived has lain for a long time beneath the sea.

All this was about to change dramatically, as the new lifestyle of farming, which started in western Asia around 9,000 BC, spread across Europe. Farming – the domestication and control of key plants and animals – first appeared in Britain with the coming of the Neolithic or New Stone Age people, about 2,500 BC. They came from western Europe, across the North Sea, the English Channel, along the Irish Sea and the Bristol Channel. These newcomers were much more advanced in civilization. They had learnt to tame domestic animals, and possessed flocks and herds. They tilled the soil in a primitive way and grew small crops. They knew how to spin and weave and to make rough pottery for cooking and storing grain. Though they had no knowledge of the use of metals, they had developed considerable skill in making flint arrow-heads, chisels and picks, polished stone axes, anvils and hammer-stones, many of which they rubbed into shape.

Several stone axes made by these New Stone Age peoples have been found in Carmarthenshire. Interestingly, stone axes found in various parts of South Wales came from Graig Lwyd, near Penmaenmawr in Caernarvonshire. This was an ancient mine or quarry sitting on an extinct volcano and was the site of a Neolithic Axe Factory. This is evidence that people travelled widely and probably bought and sold these implements on a system of barter.

These peoples also lived, for the most part, along valley flanks of coastal regions, where they could graze their animals, grow small crops and collect flint and stone for their tools, weapons and tombs. Their massive monuments are to be found in the great burial chambers which we call cromlechs, dolmens or long barrows. Other burial places were in rocky clefts in the hillsides. The labour of erecting these cromlechs must have involved the co-operation of many hands. We can assume, therefore, that these peoples were socially organized in large family groups or in small clans and living in settled communities.

There are at least sixteen cromlechs in Carmarthenshire, though most of them are in a ruined condition. In general, they stand on ground which lies some 400 hundred feet above sea level. The nearest to us are situated at Llangynog, Llanstephan, Llangain and Llangyndeyrn. The fact that these New Stone Age peoples built such impressive and enduring tombs for their honoured dead suggests that they developed ideas about the existence of gods and the promise of a future life. This may have been the beginnings of religious and ritualistic ceremonials. There is further evidence which seems to point in this direction. Scattered across Carmarthenshire are over eighty standing stones and two stone circles. One such standing stone was, until recently, situated in Five Roads, below Brondini Hill, off Heol Hen. It was known as Garreg Fawr (Great Stone), and today, having been destroyed by local farmers, lies buried in the field called Cae'r Garreg (Field of the Stone).



Y Garreg Fawr. Megalithic Standing Stone, Five Roads.
(Depiction by Bryan Hitchman)

3 BRONZE AGE

Somewhere between 2,000 and 1500 BC the Neolithic culture merged with a superior civilization known as the Bronze Age, which lasted until 500 BC. These newcomers are called the Beaker people because of the special kind of pottery which they made as drinking vessels. As time went on they gradually learnt how to work in copper and bronze, and to fashion implements from these metals, though they continued to use stone hammers and axes for some considerable time. They buried their dead in stone box-graves called 'cists' which they covered with mounds of earth or cairns of rock. They also placed food-vessels and other things like flint-knives in the graves for the use of the departed in the next life. Later they took to cremating their dead and buried the ashes in urns in the ground. This suggests that there must have been a strong development of religious belief and ceremonial. Also, trading had now grown between various communities, and especially with Ireland.

About 1,000 BC another wave of new people arrived in Wales. These were more skillful in bronze-working and used this metal for making swords, axes, shields, spears, razors and sickles. They also had ornaments of gold, bronze, jet, amber and bone. There was also much greater traffic to and from Ireland, France and Spain. Though very few traces of Bronze Age homes and settlements are to be found in South Wales, the round burial barrows placed on hill-tops or along ridges are very numerous.

Some ninety burial mounds of the Bronze Age are known in Carmarthenshire. A third of these have been opened, revealing broken pieces of pottery, burnt bones, flint-knives and scrapers, and some bronze objects. Many mounds were found destroyed, and a number of others still remain unopened.

These Bronze Age People, like their predecessors, buried their dead fairly near their settlements, and the distribution of these mounds suggest that western Carmarthenshire seemed to have been the most favourable area for living in, especially the southern slopes of the Tywi Valley. Mounds have also been found on the slopes of the Black Mountain and Betws Mountain. In these areas, there were fewer forests and woodlands so that people were able to graze their animals and grow small crops.

Stone axe-hammers perforated with a hole for inserting handles were in regular use before bronze became more general. About a dozen of these have been found along the upper slopes of the rivers Tywi and the Tâf. An early Bronze Age flat axe has been found at Capel Quarry, Gorslas and a kind of spear battle-axe has been unearthed in the parish of Llanarthney. Later Bronze Age relics have been discovered near Kidwelly Castle, and again in the parish of Llanarthney. These include bronze axes, a leaf-shaped sword and a spear-head. A golden arm-bracelet, clearly of Irish origin, belonging to this period has been found in the parish of Llanfynydd. Recently, in June 2011, a Bronze Age hoard, thought to have been buried as an offering to the gods more than 3,000 years ago has been discovered on farmland in St. Ishmaels, near Kidwelly. It consisted of thirteen bronze artefacts, including part of a bracelet, a large spear-head and a complete socketed axe.

Thus, at the time of the coming of the Celts, who were peoples of the Iron Age, the inhabitants of Carmarthenshire were living in settled communities, in tribes, keeping horses, goats, cows and dogs, and owning flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. They also tilled the soil a little, and were able to work in metals. They could also make coracles and build small ships which they used for trading, and they mastered a number of homely crafts. Rough track-ways were made by them to link up with other tribes and with small ports on Carmarthen Bay. These rough roads ran along the hill-crests and high ground so as to avoid the forests and marshes.

The places where relics of the Bronze Age have been found point to the existence of early traffic routes across Carmarthenshire to north-west Pembrokeshire. These routes, which ran from the estuaries of the Tywi and the Tâf, and also from the east, enabled merchants who brought copper, bronze and gold goods from Ireland to avoid sailing around the dangerous rocky coast of south Pembrokeshire.

This early pattern of pastoral civilisation was the precursor to Celtic lifestyle, which was also led by the inhabitants of Carmarthenshire for many centuries thereafter. The ancient Welsh farming custom of pasturing animals on the upper hill-slopes in summer and returning to the lower areas in autumn, may have its roots in this remote period. Sheep are still pastured in this way on Carmarthenshire hills and moorlands.

4 IRON AGE AND THE CELTS

During the later period of the Bronze Age in Britain and about 500 BC, the Celtic tribes of the continent were on the move from their old homelands in southern Germany. Gradually they migrated across the Rhine and entered France, Spain and northern Italy. They also came into south-east Britain from the Rhine estuary and the northern shores of France. Having established themselves in Gaul (France), further migrations came into Britain and Ireland from Spain, Brittany and the French coast. They reached South Wales by various routes; directly along the Bristol Channel, northwards through Devon, Dorset and Somerset, and westwards across the Severn from the Cotswolds. By about 100 BC theirs was the dominant culture of almost the whole of Britain.

There is little doubt that the later Celtic incomers possessed iron weapons and tools, but the general spread of the use of iron was slow, especially in Wales. Up to the time of the Roman occupation of Britain, the inhabitants of Carmarthenshire, like those living in other parts of Wales, still used implements of stone, flint and bronze to which were added a few made of iron and lead.

The chief monuments of the Celts are the hill-forts. From the third century BC, indications show that in various parts of Britain latent aggression was developing into localized warfare. It is most unlikely that conditions of all-out warfare, with standing armies ravaging the countryside, ever existed. Rather, much boasting and occasional border skirmishes involving groups of young men were the norm. The western coast of Britain gives a clear evidence of uneasy times, and settlements take on a far more embattled appearance. In Cornwall and West Wales the farmsteads are more heavily enclosed with walls and ditches. It is an architecture designed to proclaim power and impregnability. This does not, of course, mean that open hostility prevailed, but simply that neighbours could be left in no doubt of one's ability to defend oneself. There has been a tendency in the recent past to downplay the signs of aggression and to present the Iron Age as something of a rural idyll. But the reality was that warfare remained endemic and social competition could quickly flare up anywhere into hostile and bloody confrontation.

The builders erected their forts upon the high flanks of river valleys, on the summits of foothills, and across spurs and promontories, usually at heights of between three hundred and a thousand feet. In our location, they are to be found around the Tywi and its tributaries; Kidwelly to Burry Port area; Cefn Sidan, Cilymaenllwyd and Stradey Wood; and Pembrey Mountain. Situated in a field belonging to Cencoed Uchaf Farm, Cwmbach, is one such hill-fort. It is known as Cencoed Promontory Fort, and was formerly called *Caer Bach* (Small Castle) on older maps. It was defensive in nature and was located on the eastern edge of the Cwm-Mawr River gorge. A model of this Iron Age Farm Enclosure can be seen in the museum at Parc Howard Mansion, Llanelli.



Cencoed Iron Age Hill-fort, Cwmbach.
(Depiction by kind permission of John Wynne Hopkins)

Again, directly opposite Bryngroes Cottages on the B4309 Llanelli-Carmarthen Road is to be found the entrance to a trackway still known to this day as Heol-y-Castell (Castle Road). This led in by-gone days to a structure known as Castell Cadarn (Strong or Mighty Castle), in a field still known to this day as Cae'r Castell (Castle Field) by the local farming community. Although no remains are now visible, this would in all probability, have been a defensive enclosure similar to that at Cencoed. Also, Brondini, meaning 'fort on the breast of the hill', as the name suggests, may have at one time been the location of another hill-fort, although no evidence as yet has been found. Similarly, place name evidence of other possible Iron Age sites is at Bryn Caerau (Parc Howard) and Pen-y-Gaer, Llanerch.



Heol-y-Castell. Ancient trackway leading to Castell Cadarn, Five Roads.

By the time of the Roman occupation of Britain, the population of Wales had become a mixture of Neolithic, Beaker Folk, and Bronze and Iron Age peoples, with the Celtic strains of Goidelic (Irish) and Brythonic (British) being predominant in most areas. They spoke dialects of Celtic which gradually evolved into the Welsh language spoken today.

These people were divided into five principal tribes, with smaller local groups and clans within them. We do not know what they called themselves, but they are known today by the names given by the Romans to the larger tribal divisions. These names are not Latin in origin, but pure Celtic names as pronounced by the Romans. We live in the tribal lands of the Demetae, which encompasses the modern counties of Carmarthenshire, Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire. The origin of the name is uncertain, but some scholars maintain that the Demetae belonged to the Goidelic and not to the Brythonic branch of the Celts. A number of stone slabs discovered in west Wales, bearing Irish *Ogam* characters, lend support to this view.

The Roman geographer Ptolemy, in his *Geographia*, mentions only two towns in the tribal lands of the Demetae, plus a few geographical features:

Moridunum Demetarum – modern day Carmarthen. The capital of the tribe and the centre of Roman administration.

Luentinum – identified as the site of the Dolaucothi gold mines and fort.

Leuca Fluvius – River Loughor. This marked the eastern border of the tribe with their neighbours, the Silures.

Tuvius Fluvius – River Tywi.

Octapitarum Promonturium – St. David's Head. The most easterly point of Wales.

Stuctia Fluvius – River Ystwyth. This marked the northern boundary of the tribe with their neighbours, the Ordovices.

The ordinary activities of the Iron Age inhabitants of Carmarthenshire were carried out within the neighbourhood of their fortress defences. Usually they lived outside the ramparts in small, hutted villages along the moorlands, which they used when moving their animals from the lower pastures to the upper in summer.

These ancestors of ours were a pastoral, pagan and often warlike people. They fought among themselves, as well as against Irish and Roman invaders. Their most valuable possessions were not their homes, which could easily be rebuilt, but their flocks and herds which were driven into the retreats of the forts, or to the heights of the hills in times of danger. They lived in small tribal communities which formed part of larger groups, and were bound together by bonds of kinship within the clan. Their leaders and rulers were the local chieftains. Their staple diet was milk, cheese, butter and meat, though they also grew barley, oats, flax, and a little wheat in favourable areas. They used coracles and small boats for fishing in the rivers and for trading, and kept horses and dogs for hunting, herding and shepherding. This pastoral, tribal pattern of Celtic life persisted under gradually improving conditions into the Middle Ages, and in fact, some characteristics of this early civilization are still to be found in our present farming communities.

There is little definite knowledge of the religious beliefs of these communities. But we know that there existed in Britain, as in Gaul, a powerful priestly class of Druids controlling religion and rituals. Other classes of Druids exercised great influence and authority in many matters, over chieftains and tribesmen alike. These Druids were priests, prophets, bards, lawgivers, statesmen, administrators, healers, teachers and more. They educated the sons of the noblemen, acted as judges in criminal matters and disputes, and were the advisors of tribal rulers. They taught the people the doctrines of their religion, which included the immortality of the soul. As well as performing the magical rituals of tribal worship, including the offering of sacrifices to their gods, they also conducted secular ceremonial duties.



A Gathering of Druids
(valleyoakblog.wordpress.com)

5 ROMAN OCCUPATION

Although there had been small-scale Roman military incursions to the British Isles in 55 and 54BC under Julius Caesar, the Roman invasion began in earnest in 43AD during the reign of Claudius. Within four years, resistance in the lowland areas of the island, as far as the Severn, had been broken. Caratacus (Caradog), the last of the eastern chieftains, fled to the west where he became the leader of our neighbouring tribe, the fierce Silures. This tribe, together with the Ordovices of mid and north Wales were among the most formidable opponents of the Romans. Wales was not easily conquered. It was not until about AD 78, after the Romans had been in Britain for over thirty years that our country was finally subdued.

Deploying their military skill, the Romans enclosed the mountainous interior of Wales within a great quadrilateral that had four fortress bases at each corner. These were Chester (*Deva*), Caernarvon (*Segontium*), Carmarthen (*Moridunum*) and Caerleon (*Isca Silurum*). The largest and most important of these were at Chester and Caerleon, which guarded the gateways into north and south Wales respectively. These two great fortresses were known as legionary fortresses. Each was the headquarters of a legion, composed of a brigade of six thousand highly trained and disciplined Roman infantry with a squadron of a hundred and twenty cavalry. Carmarthen and other smaller forts were garrisoned mainly with auxiliary troops recruited from various parts of Rome's subject territories. Thus, Carmarthen would have been garrisoned with soldiers from Spain, Gaul and Germany; and perhaps even soldiers from north Africa and the Near East.



Roman Conquest of Wales
(en.wikipedia.org)



Roman Roads and Forts in Wales
(en.wikipedia.org)

The Roman fort of Moridunum, from the Celtic 'môr' (sea) and 'dunum' (fort), stood at the junction of three valleys on the northern slopes of the Tywi Valley which commanded a strategic position only seven miles from the sea. The discovery of a pebbled roadway beneath demolished properties on modern-day Spilman Street (Carmarthen) in 1968 motivated serious excavations which revealed that the Roman fort lay just beyond the mediaeval castle in the Spilman/King Street area of the modern town. Further excavations in the Carmarthen District Council's car park in Spilman Street unearthed the location of the barrack blocks. The site was also protected by hills to the north and it had clear views of the land to the south. It was probably these natural features that influenced the Romans into choosing this site. It also had the advantage of being at the junction of three major paved roads, linking other forts. One ran northwards via Llanybydder and Lampeter, eventually reaching Caernarfon. Another road followed the Tywi Valley, perhaps to Llandovery, before heading north-east through Mid Wales to the Shropshire fort of Wroxeter (*Viriconium*); this road also branched north-west to the gold mines of Dolaucothi; it also branched north-east towards Trecastle Mountain and over the Brecon Beacons via Abergavenny and Usk to Gloucester (*Glevum*) and was known as '*Via Julia Montana*' (Julian Mountain Road); the modern A40 Carmarthen to Gloucester follows this route. The third major road called '*Via Julia Maritima*' (Julian Coastal Road), as its name suggests follows the coast to Loughor, Neath, Caerleon and eventually to Gloucester, and is the forerunner of the modern A48 and M4; recent excavations establish that it also ran westwards via St. Clears and Whitland to St. David's.

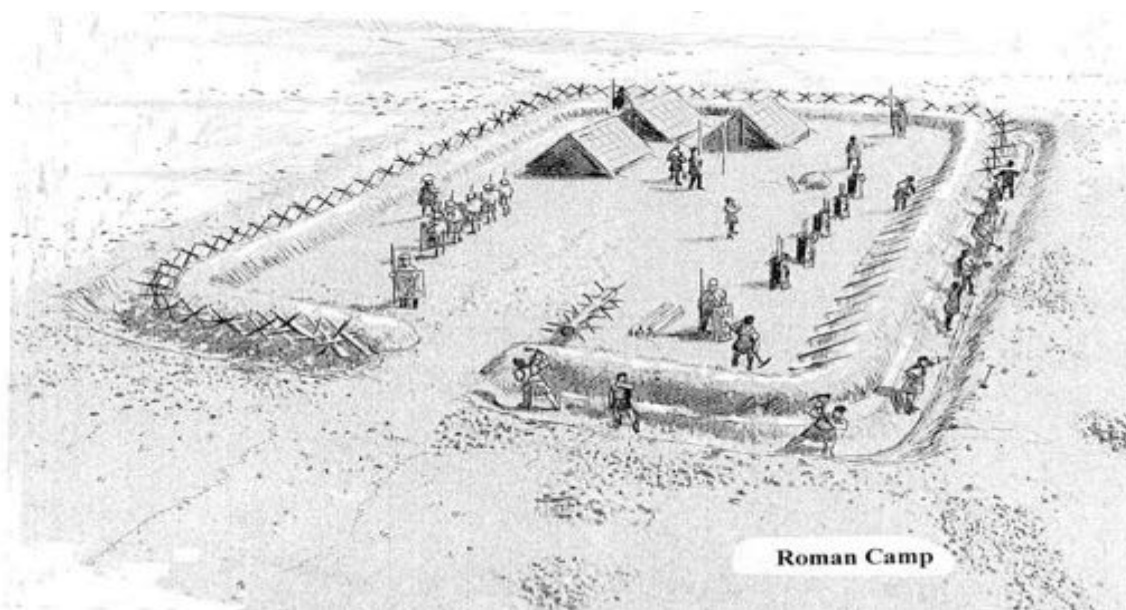
Excavations made in Carmarthen between the nineteenth century and the late 1990's established that Moridunum was a Roman town lying under the modern streets of Richmond Terrace in the north, Old Oak Lane in the east and Little Water Street in the west, and encompassing over 32 acres. It was a town of some significance, having baths, a temple, substantial residential buildings and an amphitheatre. Also, sometime before AD 150 a planned street system had been laid out on the eastern end of the settlement where Priory Street now stands, when rectangular buildings were added. Evidence revealed that this particular area had been a busy industrial quarter, with houses fronting a gravelled street, and some buildings incorporating both living quarters and workshops. One such building was believed to have belonged to a corn merchant. It had hearths set into the walls and cobbled stone floors on either side of a corridor. In the yard outside was a granary measuring fifteen by thirteen feet that had a raised floor supported by massive timber posts to keep out rodents. Wheat was also roasted for malting purposes. There was also a commercial bakery nearby where a number of clay ovens were found for baking bread, as well as stone querns which indicated that some corn grinding had been carried out by hand. Several 'Aladdin' shaped terracotta lamps were recovered whole from the area. These had been filled with oil to provide light in the homes. In other buildings, hearths and quantities of iron slag suggested that iron smelting had taken place. The abundance of nails and iron roof fittings indicated that they had been used on the thatched timbered houses that had once lined Priory Street. Scraps of leather found among the rubbish in another building suggested that a saddler or cobbler had also traded in the street. Excavations carried out in the garden of No. 104 Priory Street uncovered the foundations of a second century temple.

The most significant discovery, made in 1936, is that of the amphitheatre, situated at the western end of Priory Street, and lying just outside Moridunum's boundaries. It was probably constructed in the second century by cutting into the natural hillside to form a seating bank around the arena to accommodate about 4,500 to 5,000 spectators. In earlier days, the amphitheatre would have attracted people from the surrounding areas, as well as the legionaries, and its function was thought to have been more theatrical than religious or gladiatorial. Recently, while excavating near the amphitheatre, a large grey earthenware pot, containing the cremated bones of a woman was found. The cremation obviously marked the site where the people of Moridunum had been buried.

The town prospered well under the Romans, probably through trade initially, and judging from the number of enamelled seal boxes found, many of the citizens had learned to read and write. As the inhabitants embraced the Roman way of life, the town was endowed with the title of '*Moridunum Demetarum*', thereby making it the tribal and administrative centre of the Demetae. The town now has the distinction of being one of only two walled Roman towns in Wales, the other being Caerwent (*Venta Silurum*).

Other forts in Carmarthenshire were at Llandovery (*Alabum*), Llandeilo, Pumpsaint (*Luentinum*) and Llanio (*Bremia*) on the border with Cardiganshire.

Nearer home there is evidence of a Roman marching camp having been established in Llanelli, positioned on the rise of land between Castle Buildings and the former Post Office in John Street. On a 1761 map this mound was known as Old Castle. This would have been garrisoned by troops from the fort at Loughor (*Leucarum*) and the two practice camps situated on Mynydd Carn-Goch north of the fort. This marching camp may have existed to protect the inhabitants from raids by the neighbouring Silures, or possibly to guard the sea routes along Carmarthen Bay. Being a pastoral people, our ancestors would have provided the food needed by the Romans, and would have traded at Carmarthen and Loughor.



Pen-y-Castell Roman Marching Camp, Llanelli.
(Depiction by kind permission of John Wynne Hopkins)

To sum up, the presence of the Romans in Carmarthenshire, as indeed in the whole of Wales, had no deep or lasting effect upon the older way of life. With the exception of occupied territory around the garrisons, and the gold and lead mining communities, the inhabitants of the uplands continued to live very much as before, in their village settlements around the hill-forts, tending their flocks and herds and trading a little with the Romans. Possibly the only significant benefit of three and a half centuries of Roman rule was that order was maintained everywhere. Indeed, Wales was not to experience such period of tranquility again until the start of the Tudor epoch, nearly one thousand years later. Warfare was suppressed, travellers could move from place to place in safety, and the people enjoyed the benefits of the so called '*Pax Romana*' (Roman peace). The new metaled roads helped the development of communication and trade, and no doubt a small number of families, especially the aristocracy, became Romanized and others through intermarriage with foreign soldiers. Early in the third century, the Emperor Caracalla decreed that all free people within the Empire were to be given the privileges of Roman citizenship, so that all could claim the protection of Roman law. But probably few would ever have claimed them. The natives preferred to live according to their ancient tribal customs, and to speak their own language, rather than Latin.

6 THE CELTIC CHURCH AND THE AGE OF THE SAINTS

Throughout their occupation, the Romans made no attempt to impose their religion upon Britain. The local Celtic deities, which abounded throughout the length and breadth of the country, continued to hold the allegiance of the native population, and were even embraced by several of the Romans themselves. Once the dangerous political influence of Druidism had been destroyed, Rome adopted an attitude of *laissez-faire* in religious matters, allowing the natives to worship as they pleased, and even adopting some practices of Celtic worship themselves.

No one knows the circumstances surrounding the introduction of Christianity into Britain. Along the centuries many tales and legends have been told about the coming of Christianity to these islands. Some of these relate that St. Peter and St. Paul brought the new faith here; another story tells us that Joseph of Arimathea was sent from Gaul by the apostle Philip to plant the sacred thorn at Glastonbury; some say Caratacus and his relative Brân the Blessed, having converted to Christianity during their captivity in Rome were the first to preach the Gospel to the heathen Britons.

Not one of these stories rests on a firm foundation of fact, and all can safely be relegated to the realm of the fictitious and the fanciful. All we know for certain is that Christianity found a footing in Britain sometime during the second century after the birth of Jesus. Its introduction was probably due to innumerable unknown Christians - converted Roman soldiers, traders, travellers and immigrants from the Continent - rather than to any single person of the greatness of Columba or Patrick. Unlike in Ireland, its progress here, at first was slow due to the powerful forces of paganism in its Celtic, Roman, Romano-Celtic, and Mithraic forms, as well as to the surviving superstitions of the now-extinct Druidism.

By the fourth century the new faith had gained a good deal of ground in the more Romanized parts of our island. During this period the Bishops of some important British Churches attended Christian Councils on the continent, and by AD 378 Christianity had become the official state religion of the whole Roman Empire. Wales, however, was far away, and the people of our distant mountainous country had not been greatly influenced by the Romans. The real conversion of the tribesmen from paganism took place during the fifth and especially the sixth centuries, which came to be known as the 'Age of the Saints'.

These saints were missionary monks who obtained permission from local rulers to set up monastic church settlements in various parts of pagan Wales. The early monasteries founded by Welsh saints were not fine and beautiful buildings like those set up at Whitland, Talley and Strata Florida during the Middle Ages. The monastery church was a simple structure made of wood, clay and wattle, and thatched with straw or rushes. The abbot and monks lived in separate huts or cells, rather than together in a single building. There was also a hospice and various outhouses. All the buildings were contained within a rampart of earth or a fence of high stakes, and the whole was known as the 'llan' or enclosure, a word which later came to be applied to the church itself. From their settlements, these saints and their disciples travelled throughout their districts, preaching and teaching. They also established new 'daughter' monasteries and churches in the places to which they brought Christianity. It was upon the sites of these early churches - some of which were erected on old pagan sites - that many of our parish churches were later built. In Dyfed, the first and most important monastic settlements, or 'mother churches' as they were called were St. David's in Pembrokeshire, Llanbadarn Fawr in Cardiganshire and Llandeilo Fawr in Carmarthenshire. The earliest founders of Welsh monasteries were Saints Dyfrig and Illtud. They were followed by others like Samson, Paulinus, Dewi, Teilo, Cadog, Cybi and Deiniol.

The monasteries were very largely self-supporting, with the monks supporting themselves by rearing cattle and tilling the soil immediately attached to their 'llan'. They led very simple and frugal lives, and they possessed no riches or luxuries. They ate very little and some took neither meat nor wine. A long day in the field concluded with the solitary meal of the day - plain, though wholesome fare of bread, butter, cheese, eggs, milk, vegetables, and sometimes meat and beer. The abbot, who was the head of the monastery, chose each monk's daily duties according to their ability. Some laboured in the fields to provide food for the community; others cut down wood for fires, cooked, washed clothes and did domestic chores. A number of monks wrote or copied books by hand, and worked at various crafts such as woodwork and weaving. Some brethren taught in the monastery school, or went out to preach to the tribes around. Others went out as physicians to help the sick. Monasteries became known as places where everyone would be welcomed with kindness, and provided with food, clothing or medicine when needed. A certain amount of time was given to study, while devotional exercises and services naturally occupied a conspicuous place. Lapses from the monastic virtues - humility, obedience, almsgiving and chastity - were severely punished, often with banishment overseas.

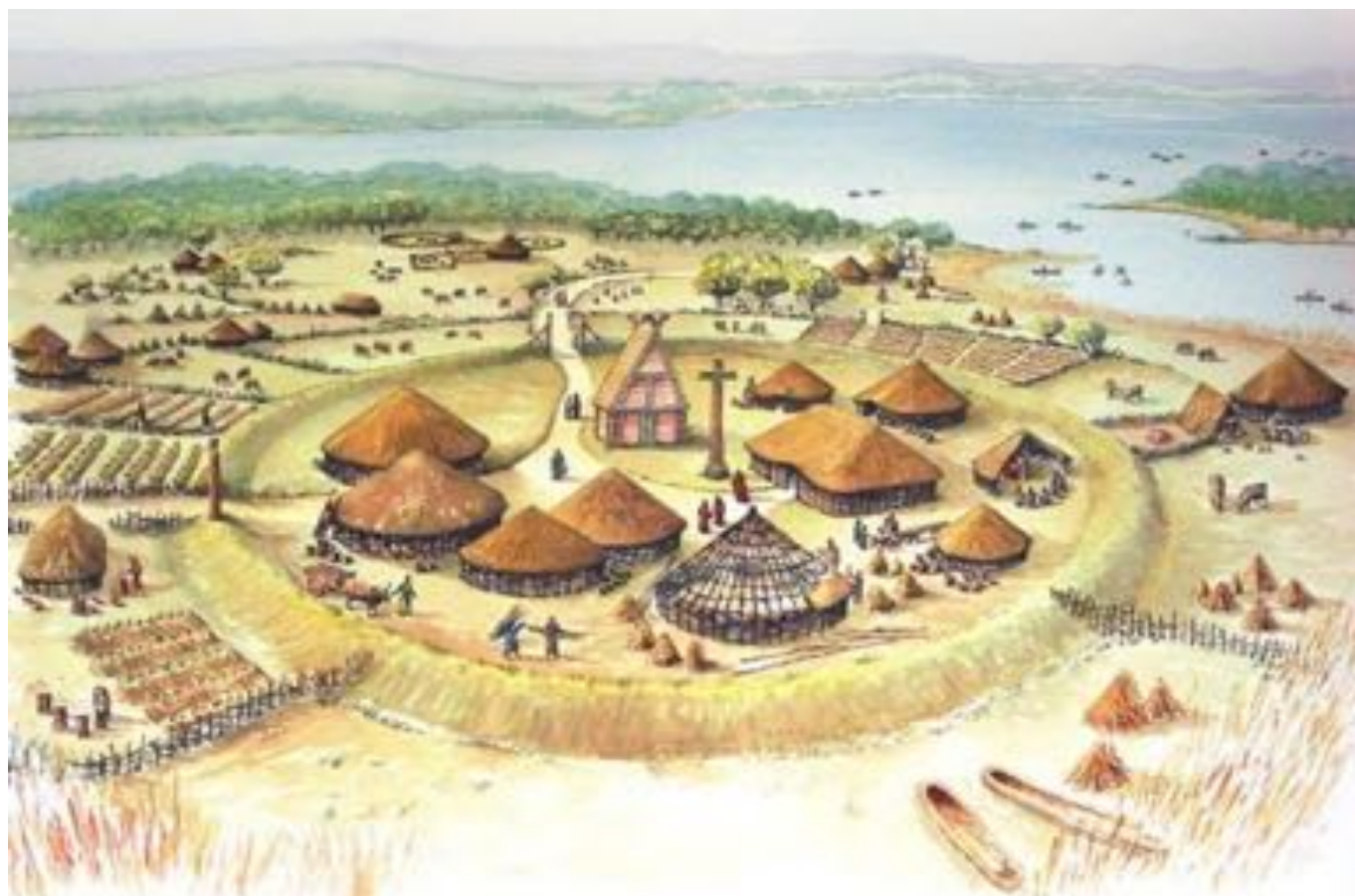
Not only were the early monasteries places to which people retreated for peace, solitude and quietness, they were also active centres for spreading Christianity and education among the people. The monastery of St. Illtud at Llantwit Major (Llanilltud Fawr) was a famous 'college' of great distinction, to which came many young men of noble birth who wished to devote their lives to the service of the Church or to studying and writing. Illtud, who was born in Brittany, of noble birth and a disciple of St. Germanus of Auxerre, became the head of this great monastery. Among its pupils were St. Samson and also Gildas, the sixth century monk, historian, writer and reformer. It is possible that Dewi, our patron saint may have received his education here. Nor must the missionary character of many monasteries be overlooked. Preaching tours were undertaken, the seeds of Christianity were sown in distant places, and very often on remote islands. The Welsh islands of Priestholme, Bardsey, St. Tudwal, Ramsey, Caldy and Barry were all founded in this way, havens of rest to men anxious to flee from the strife of the everyday world.

Wales owed its Christianity to the ardent missionary work of its early monastic saints. Welsh missionaries also helped to convert the people of Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany, as well as the Picts of Scotland.

For many years, because of the gradual conquest of eastern Britain by the pagan Anglo-Saxons, the Christians of Wales and the west were almost cut off from the church organisation of the continent, and became more or less independent of Rome. As a result, the Celtic Church, though completely Catholic in its doctrine, differed from the Roman Church in certain matters. Among these were the date of Easter, the shape of the clerical tonsure (the way in which a monk's head was shaved), and forms of baptism. The Celtic Church also allowed its clergy to marry, and permitted mixed monasteries of monks and nuns to be established. The Roman Church condemned both.

In AD 597, following missionary work among the Anglo-Saxons by the Celtic Church, especially in the north of England, Augustine, an emissary of Pope Gregory I and his band of missionary monks landed in Kent to begin their task of converting the English. He was very anxious to receive help from the Celtic Church in this work, but he insisted that its bishops and clergy should accept Roman rules and practices. Two conferences were held without securing any agreement, because Augustine's lack of tact and his arrogant manner made a bad impression upon the Welsh bishops. They refused to change their ancient customs. Between 625 and 705, although other branches of the Celtic Church - Ireland, Strathclyde, Iona, Northumbria, Devon and Cornwall - accepted the Roman demands, the Welsh Church continued to stand alone in its independence. In 768, Bishop Elfodd of Gwynedd agreed to the Roman date of Easter, and other Welsh bishops followed him. But the Welsh Church continued for many years to keep a number of its own distinctive features, while recognizing the Pope as its supreme head.

After this, Welsh princes like Cyngen of Powys, and later Hywel Dda, began to go on pilgrimage to Rome, and the churches of Wales gradually became united to those in England in forms of ceremony and worship.



Celtic Monastery Settlement
(Pinterest.ie)

Britain was ruled by the Roman Empire for three-and-a-half centuries. It was during this period that 'Britain' – by which was meant the Roman diocese of Britannia, south of Hadrian's Wall – was first envisaged as a single unit. But it was always a frontier outpost. It came under regular attacks from the Irish, Picts, Franks and Germanic raiders from the third century onwards and especially after the empire began to collapse from the late fourth century. In AD 410 Rome itself was captured and plundered by the Goths under their leader Alaric. From this time on Rome could no longer spare any troops for the defence of Britain, and they left these shores for good.

In the late Roman period, the region which was to become 'Wales' had been part of '*Britannia Prima*', probably based on a capital (*caput*) at Cirencester. Provinces were normally divided into *civitates*, the territorial extent of which usually corresponded with the tribal areas. There were two of them in Wales; that of the Silures in the south-east, and that of the Demetae in the south-west, with capitals at Caerwent and Carmarthen respectively. Around the time of the departure of the Romans, political authority seems to have gravitated towards the inhabitants of the hill-forts in many areas, as folk were moving back into the relative safety of these upland dwellings, and of course British tribal leaders and identity survived throughout the Roman occupation. Britain was no longer a colony of an empire; it was now a patchwork of small independent units. The *civitates* were becoming kingdoms.

From AD 600 pirates and raiders ravaged the western Atlantic coasts of Britain. These were the infamous 'Vikings', the Northmen from Norway and Denmark. The Irish Sea formed the heart of their maritime network, with the Isle of Man providing their main operational base. From here the coasts of Wales were well within their reach. In the early years, raids were a frequent occurrence, and particularly vulnerable were the rich monasteries of the south: St. David's, Caldey Island, Llantwit and Llancarfan. But in 878 a Viking force spent the winter in Dyfed, and in 914 a massive Viking navy attacked from Brittany. Place name evidence suggests that some Viking communities took land along the south coast of Wales, particularly around the Gower peninsula and Milford Haven, where they are likely to have set up a port-of-trade serving the Atlantic network. From here would have come Welsh products like slaves, horses, honey, and wheat which the Irish annals indicate were in much demand by the Dublin merchants. Slaves culled from Ireland, England and Wales were a valuable commodity much sought after by the Irish sea-traders. Together with hides, furs and wool, slaves would have been taken south to the slave markets in Andalusia, in Spain, to sell to the Arab merchants.

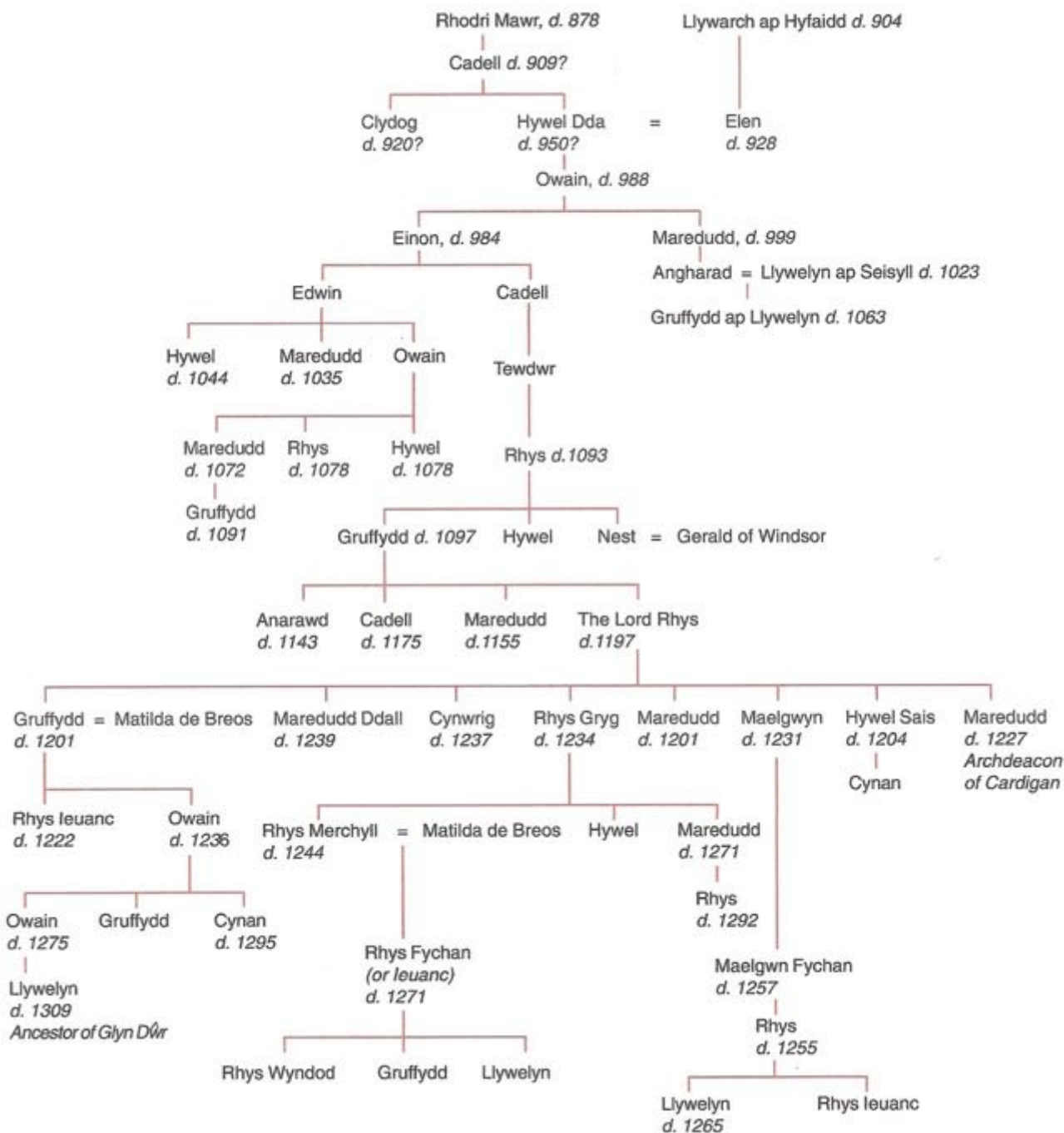
Barbarian raids continued unabated, and in many cases, they were accompanied by colonisation. The Irish, in particular, seem to have settled in several parts of what later became Wales. Memorial stones bearing inscriptions in the Irish writing system known as '*Ogam*', together with evidence of Irish place names, indicate a strong Irish influence in Dyfed, Brycheiniog and Gwynedd. Moreover, the dynasties of Dyfed and Brycheiniog claimed Irish ancestry.

An Irish account, '*The Expulsion of the Déisi*', composed in the ninth century, may give the origin of the region we now know as Dyfed. It tells of a tribe, the Déisi, an amalgamation of people whose name means 'payers of tribute' or 'vassals', in other words a class of people who were subservient to overlords, perhaps of a neighbouring conquering tribe. They were expelled from Meath to Leinster, and thence emigrated to *Demed* (Dyfed), where they made themselves rulers and kings, probably during the fifth century. Their territory expanded as far west as Kidwelly and the Gower Peninsula. Their first leader in Wales is named as *Eochaid mac Artchorp*, and a Tewdos ap Rhain of Dyfed is claimed as an eighth century descendant of the Déisi. This ties in neatly with the later Welsh genealogical tradition of Dyfed. The earliest known memorial stone to any king or ruler in the whole of Britain is preserved in the County Museum at Carmarthen, together with many other historical relics of great value. It bears the following inscription in both Ogham and Latin: 'The monument of Vorteporix the Protector'. Vorteporix (Gwrthefyr) was a ruler of Dyfed during the sixth century. This memorial stone inscribed with both languages, together with others found throughout the county, suggests that an intrusive Irish aristocratic elite took power in Dyfed during the fifth century, retaining the memory of their origins, but also imitating Roman practices, apparently in an effort to gain prestige by identifying themselves with the memory of Roman rule. The Irish line in Dyfed became extinct with the death of Llywarch ap Hyfaidd in AD 904.

How was it that a band of inferior peoples from Ireland could settle, apparently unopposed, in south-west Wales during the late Roman period? They were invited in by the Roman authorities and put in place as *foederati*, that is, federate settlers to help protect the coastal regions from other Irish raiders. Much of western Wales had been stripped of troops by this time, and to have established a strong new settlement here in the extreme south-west would have provided additional protection for the vulnerable Severn estuary and the rich heartlands of the province beyond. It coincides with what was happening at the same time along the Saxon Shore in south-east Britain. This is entirely consistent with Roman policy that barbarians who posed a threat to the empire were settled as federates or recruited into the field army to campaign in distant parts of the fast-decaying empire.

The two largest Welsh kingdoms were Gwynedd in the north and Powys in mid-Wales. In the south were Dyfed (Pembrokeshire), Ceredigion (Cardiganshire), Ystrad Tywi (Carmarthenshire), Brycheiniog (Breconshire), Glywysing, later called Morgannwg (Glamorganshire) and Gwent (Monmouthshire). In the eighth century Ceredigion and Ystrad Tywi were joined into a single kingdom known as Seisyllwg, after its ruler, Seisyll. Later this region, together with Dyfed became Deheubarth, a famous kingdom in Welsh history. Its heart was the fertile valley of the Tywi, and the royal seat of its rulers was at Dinefwr (Dynevor).

PEDIGREE OF THE PRINCES OF DEHEUBARTH



8 THE KINGDOM OF YSTRAD TYWI

In the early and later Middle Ages, the land under the rule of a single prince was called a 'gwlad' (kingdom). This meant an independent state. According to ancient law and custom, however, the princes of Gwynedd were looked upon as the supreme overlords of all the other Welsh rulers. In turn, the rulers of Powys and Deheubarth, when they were powerful enough, received the allegiance of their less important neighbouring princes. Every 'gwlad' was divided into areas called 'cantrefi' (hundreds). Originally these hundreds may have been the land occupied by a single tribe, or perhaps by a hundred families. Later, it became a district which contained a hundred 'trefi' (towns or villages). Just as each 'gwlad' was divided into 'cantrefi', so each 'cantref' was split up into smaller units called 'cymydau' (commotes). By the time of **Hywel Dda**¹, the commote, because it was smaller, had become a much more convenient division for the holding of the Prince's court and for collecting the royal dues. The old 'gwlad' or kingdom of Ystrad Tywi, which forms the major part of modern Carmarthenshire, consisted of three hundreds – Cantref Mawr in the north-west, Cantref Bychan alongside and to the east, and Cantref Eginog, although this last name is doubtful in origin.

Cantref Eginog covered the southern area of the kingdom which then included a substantial part of west Glamorgan. It was always the tendency of the rulers of Deheubarth to expand into Morgannwg (Glamorgan). Eginog was originally divided into two commotes, Cydweli (Kidwelly) and Gŵyr (Gower). But to curb the power of the Welsh princes, these two were split by the Normans, and a third commote, Carnwyllion (older form, Carnwallon) was created in between, having borders with Cydweli to the west, Is Cennen to the north and Gŵyr Uwch Coed to the east. Carnwyllion, meaning 'Cairn of the mad men, or frenzied warriors' was the old name for the mountain where Five Roads and its environs now stands.



Carmarthenshire in the 14th Century. Maps of South Wales and the Border by William Rees
(By kind permission of Dillwyn Clement, Carmarthen)

Life Under the Princes

The head of each 'gwlad' was the ruling prince. He was often known as 'Brenin' (King), or 'Arglwydd' (Lord), and he was held in high honour and respect. The later princes were highly educated and could speak both Norman-French and Latin, as well as their native Welsh. Next to him came the royal family and the officers of the court. All these were looked upon as people of the highest rank.

The old Welsh laws give us very interesting information about the palace of the prince, the duties of the important officials who formed part of the royal household, and the social classes into which people were divided.

The main building in the group of premises which made up the 'llys' (court) or 'castell' (castle) of the prince was the 'neuadd' (hall). This was a large room, or building made of wood, thatch and wattle. The framework consisted of great tree-trunks placed in two rows opposite each other with strong branches forking upwards from the trunks to support the arched roof. The inside walls were sometimes made from stone, but more often of wattle (woven branches and twigs), plastered over with clay and turf to keep out the wind and rain. From each of the middle piers a screen of wattle ran to the wall nearest to it, thus dividing the hall into two sections, but leaving open the space between the pillars. The part of the divided room which had a raised floor was called the 'uwch gyntedd' (upper court) and the other called 'is gyntedd' (lower court). In the upper court the prince, his family, and the more important officers of the household took their meals and entertained guests. The lesser members ate in the lower half. In the middle of the hall, on a big hearthstone between the pillars, was a fire which kept both halves warm. Small openings covered with lattice-work in the wattle walls provided a certain amount of light and air.



Depiction of the Court of a Mediaeval Welsh Prince. Based on excavations of 'Llys Rhosyr', Newborough, Anglesey²
Taken from "Anglesey, Past Landscapes of the Coast". Depiction by Helen Flook



Depiction of the interior of the Hall
Based on excavations of 'Llys Rhosyr', Newborough, Anglesey

The laws tell us that fourteen people were entitled to sit at table in the great hall; the others sat on benches or on the floor. Ten of those privileged persons ate in the upper court, and four in the lower. The laws also state exactly what position each was to occupy.

The prince's place was next to the screen. By his side sat the chancellor, then the royal guests, followed by the prince's heir (his eldest son or nephew), and the chief falconer. On the corner, next to the prince was the seat of the foot-holder, whose duties was to hold the prince's feet in his lap throughout the meal, and to keep his royal master from harm through falling, should he eat or drink too much! He also had to eat from the prince's dish. Next came the court doctor, the priest (who was also the prince's chaplain and secretary), the judge and the silentiary (court usher). The silentiary struck the pillar, near which he sat, to summon a command from the prince, or to call for quiet during the blessing or to a song from the 'pencerdd' (chaired bard), the chief poet in the kingdom whose place was next to the judge. Finally, the smith of the court completed the 'upper ten'.

On the other side of the screen next to the prince were seated the chief groom, with the huntsman opposite him. At the lower end of the hall, with his left hand near to the front door, sat the steward or chief of the household, with the 'bardd teulu' (household bard) at his side.

Surprisingly, we learn that the chief falconer and the smith were considered important enough to sit in hall. But hunting was one of the royal sports in those days, and the men responsible for the falcons, horses and hounds of the prince were held in high regard. The smith was honoured because he was a highly skilled craftsman. He was responsible for making armour, weapons of war, and other implements, and so his work was of immense value to the prince. A skilled craftsman was looked upon as a person to be welcomed with honour.

While most of the royal officers slept at night in the great hall on beds of rushes along the walls, the chief falconer had to sleep in the royal barn, where the hawks were carefully kept. It was forbidden to bring these birds into the hall, because their eyes might be injured by the drifting smoke from the fire which was kept burning all night. Other court officials were the mead-brewer, the chief cook and the apparitor. This last official could be called the 'firewatcher'. His duty was to see that no sparks from the blazing hearth set anything alight while the prince and his retinue sat at table.

Finally, and perhaps the most important official was the 'penteulu'. Best described as captain of the prince's bodyguard, or 'teulu' as it was called, he was the senior in rank after the prince and took complete control in the event of the prince's demise. He commanded a number of well-trained, fully-armed men who were able to defend the court buildings by day and night. The 'teulu' also accompanied the prince whenever he went on 'cylch' (progress or procession) throughout his kingdom, or to visit other rulers. Sometimes this bodyguard numbered as many as 120 men, and was composed mainly of the sons of chieftains, and other men of rank. These young cadets received not only training in the art of warfare, but also in manners and behaviour at the court. It was considered a high honour to be admitted as a member of the bodyguard, all of whom were pledged to defend their prince to the last.

The officials of the royal household were fed, clothed and maintained by the prince, and several had special privileges. Thus it can be seen that when the prince and his retinue travelled to various parts of his realm, a great deal of food and drink had to be provided by the tribesmen and bondmen (slaves or serfs) of the districts. Also, the bondmen of each district where the prince was to stay often had to erect a temporary hall and outbuildings to house the royal party, their horses and hounds.

In addition to the great hall, the court buildings included the prince's bed-chamber, kitchens, a mead-brewery, a smithy, a kiln, a bath-house, stables and barns, kennels for hounds, workshops for craftsmen, dormitories for servants and helpers, and of course barracks for the royal bodyguard. The whole area covered by these buildings was enclosed within a rampart of earth or stone, with a deep ditch dug around it. The entrance was known as the 'great gate' which also had a smaller door within it, called the 'wicket'. Inside the gate was the house of the porter, whose place was taken at night by the watchman who blew an alarm upon a horn to rouse the bodyguard if any suspicious-looking persons approached between nightfall and sunrise.

The rough work in the royal palace was done by 'caethion' (slaves), and they formed the lowest social class in old Welsh society. They were prisoners of war, criminals or people bought from the Danish slave-traders of Ireland. Their task was to labour in the fields and forests of chieftains and wealthy tribesmen, and to do the hard domestic work in the homes of their owners. They had practically no rights, and belonged completely to their lords. If a slave attacked his owner he could be punished by having his right hand cut off.

Next were the bondmen, 'eilltiaid' or 'taeogion', (serfs or villeins), and they worked in the prince's estates which surrounded the court. They were subject to the lords for whom they worked; but they had certain rights under the laws, and so their lives were so much better than those of the slaves. However, they were not allowed to hunt or hawk in the forests; and no bondman could become a priest, a smith or a bard. They had to remain in the lord's village all their lives. They owed perpetual service to him in return for their own strips of land which they cultivated for food; and they also had use of waste-land and woodlands where their animals fed.

The third group without freedom were the 'alltudion' (aliens or strangers). These were natives of other countries who, for one reason or other had come into Wales. They usually lived under the protection of the prince and so became bondmen.

The great majority of the people over whom the prince ruled were freeborn tribesmen. Of higher rank among them were the 'uchelwyr' (nobles), who were landowners of importance and influence within the tribe. They often governed their areas as chieftains under the prince. These nobles had homes which were similar to, though smaller than the royal palace. They possessed slaves and bondmen, and also maintained family bards and harpists.

The free tribesmen lived in clans composed of families whose homes were scattered over a fairly wide area. Each family 'tyddyn' (homestead) had its fenced enclosures and small buildings for cattle and horses, and for stacking corn. The dwelling was constructed around six strong posts, with mud and wattle walls and a thatched roof. A chimney hole was left in the centre of the roof to let out the smoke which arose from the fire that was kept constantly alight in the middle of the floor. Openings in the walls gave ventilation and light. The house contained very little furniture, perhaps only two or three wooden chairs. At night, the family slept on the rush-covered floor, and their bed-clothes were skins and coarsely woven cloth.

At meal-times all sat on the floor. Food was served in wooden bowls or on platters, and all helped themselves from the dish set in front of them. Everyone used their own knife and wooden spoon, but forks were not known. The meals usually consisted of 'cawl' (broth) with chopped meat; boiled or roasted meat; thin, freshly baked 'bara llechan' (griddle cakes); cheese, milk dishes and honey; and mead to drink. Very little was eaten during the day. The family meal took place in the evening when the hard day's work of ploughing, sowing or reaping, tending cattle and sheep, hunting and the usual agricultural and pastoral duties were done.

At the beginning of 'Calan Mai' (May), it was usual for the tribesmen and their families to move up with their flocks and herds from the lower slopes of the valleys to the higher hill pastures. Here they built their rough summer dwellings, 'hafodtai'. They returned to their winter dwellings, 'hendre', well before 'Calan Gaeaf' (November), by which time all the corn had to be harvested. Some clans had an autumn dwelling place, 'cynhaeaf dreflan', and this is the probable origin of the village name of Cynheidre. It is possible to picture a typical clan having its 'hendre' in the Gwendraeth Valley, moving all their belongings to their 'hafod' on Sylen Mountain during summer, then descending to their 'cynhaeaf-dre' for the autumn before returning once again to their original 'hendre' for the winter. In this context, Five Roads could so easily have been named 'Hafod', as the present house of this name, situated on the square adjoining 'Croeslaw', perhaps stood on the site of a summer abode of a pastoral family of 800 years and more ago.



Hafod & Croeslaw
(Five Roads W.I. Publication, "Our Vanishing Heritage")

Customs and Laws

The lives of the people were governed by customs and laws. The head of a family was originally known as 'penteulu', and this title in later times was transferred to the leader of the prince's bodyguard. On the land occupied by the head of the family were sons who eventually married and set up homes of their own. Each of these sons would have been given a small share of his father's land to farm for himself. The clan was based upon kinship, and the head of each group of tribesmen, related by blood, was known as the 'pencenedl' (head of kindred). In matters of dispute connected with clan affairs, the heads of families took their troubles to the 'pencenedl', who possessed the knowledge and wisdom needed to settle such cases.

The most important of these laws concerned murder, theft, injury and insult. The laws fixed a blood price for murder, according to the rank of the person slain. Thus, for instance, the fine to be paid for killing a head of kindred was 189 cows; a head of family, 84 cows; a free tribesman, 63 cows; a bondman, 31 cows; and a slave, 4 cows. These fines were called 'galanas' (compensation for murder). In the same way, the laws laid down fines which had to be paid in cases of injury, injustice or insult. These were known as 'sarhad' (insult and injury), and where injury had been inflicted on persons, or animals, a fixed price had to be paid in respect of each limb. Similarly, in cases of 'lladrad' (theft), all animals and articles had their known values.

Fines had to be paid by the whole kindred or clan of the guilty person, and were distributed among the relatives of the person murdered or injured. So, responsibility for doing wrong was shared by the clan, and all were compensated when any wrong was done to any one of them. The purpose of these laws was to prevent the relatives of a murdered, injured or wronged man from taking revenge upon the families of the murderer or wrong-doer, and stirring up bitter blood-feuds and clan wars. The fine for insulting or injuring a prince was an enormous one. In the case of the Lord of Dinefwr, the fine amounted to 'as many white cows, with the head of each to the tail of the other, and a bull between every twenty of them, as would stretch from Argoed to the Court of Dinefwr'. This ancient breed, called 'White Cattle' are to be seen to this day in Dynevor Park, Llandeilo.

Among the laws relating to theft, it was laid down that if a starving man begged for food for three days and no one gave him any, he was not to be punished if he stole enough to keep himself alive. This was a merciful law, as it implied that everyone, however poor, had the right to live. Wicked thieves, however, could be punished by death or exile. When sentenced to exile, robbers were allowed one day in which to travel through each cantref out of the kingdom, and if caught after that time they might be slain as outlaws.

There were a number of laws relating to responsibility for fires. Homes and buildings were made of wood, thatch and wattle, and fires were constantly burning on hearthstones in the centre of the floors, so care had to be taken to prevent homes, villages and royal residences from being set alight by sparks. Two of the laws state – 'If swine enter a house and scatter fire about so as to burn the house, and the swine escape, let the owner of the swine pay for the act'; and 'If a person, in carrying fire from the house of another, should occasion sparks to fly about, let him pay for the act'. To lower the risk, smithies and bath-houses in villages had to be erected a fixed distance away from the houses and royal residences, to avoid danger from their fires.

There were laws to do with the inheritance of land. The most important was, 'Brothers are to share the land of their father equally between them. The youngest is to divide, and the eldest is to have the first choice. If the brothers die without sons, the first cousins are to share the land equally. The second cousins also may further divide the land amongst themselves in equal parts. After that there is to be no division'.

This law of inheritance, which the Normans called 'gavelkind', differed to their 'primogeniture' law, under which the eldest son succeeded. This Welsh law, whilst protecting the rights of all the children, was a great source of weakness and feuding in early and mediaeval Welsh society. The dividing of land led to much jealousy, quarrelling and fighting between sons, cousins and grandsons. Gerald of Wales, writing in the 12th century, says that Wales was full of feuds and hatreds which arose between relatives. This was particularly the case among members of the royal family. The law relating to the division of territories among sons was one of the main reasons why Wales never really became united under the rule of a single king. Time and time again throughout Welsh history we find that on the death of a wise and powerful prince, his kingdom became a battleground on which his sons fought for supremacy. This is what happened after the death of **Hywel Dda**, and the **Lord Rhys**. Their realms were split up, and confusion and enmity reigned for many years.

Laws governing the position of women were interesting and respectful. A wife was not allowed to be beaten by her husband, except for serious offences. She was the legal owner of many of the household goods, such as milking vessels, dishes, pans, wool, flax, house-bags, some of the bed-clothes, and curiously enough, some of the farm implements like the axe, hedge-bill and ploughshare. She also owned all her own clothes, half the provisions of the house, and all the cats, except one. Both husband and wife were liable for debt in equal shares. A daughter was under the control of her father until she was twelve years of age. Afterwards she became independent and could marry when she wished, or remain at home as her own mistress. She was also entitled to own property, and to claim half the share of a son in her father's movable goods after his death. On marriage, certain fees had to be paid by women to the prince.

The revenue of the prince came from several sources. All shipwrecks and their cargoes belonged to him. He received part of the fines imposed by the courts for theft and other offences. Fees came from succession to property and on marriage, and from the movable property of a man who died without heirs. Further, he received regular food-rents or tributes of flour, meat, mead, butter, cheese and honey from the free tribesmen and from the bondmen of his own villages. He also had the right to go on 'cylch', the royal round of his dominion.

¹Those rulers printed in bold are kings and princes of the Kingdom of Deheubarth

²A reconstruction of the court of "Llys Rhosyr" can be seen at The National Museum of History, St. Fagans, Cardiff

Nor(d)manns (Northmen) were, as the name by which they were known in France implies, of Scandinavian origin. The original settlers in northern France were Scandinavian soldiers, mainly Danish but under the leadership of Earl Rollo of Møre, Norway. After fighting against the Franks at Chartres in 911 they were allowed, under a treaty from King Charles III, to settle on land in the lower Seine valley in return for protecting the approaches to Paris from further seaborne attack. Rollo was recognized as Count of the region, and his successors extended their domain gradually westwards until 933, when the Cotentin peninsula was taken into Nor(d)mannia. Thus, was created the maritime province that survives today as the French region of Normandy. The original Scandinavian settlement attracted other Scandinavians to join them, including Norse settlers from the Irish Sea zone. But the overall numbers were small and through intermarriage the immigrants were soon assimilated into Frankish culture, adopting the Frankish language in place of their mother tongue. It was of this hybrid community that Duke William became the leader.

The Norman invasion of Britain was essentially an aristocratic land grab. The Anglo-Saxon and Danish estate owners were almost entirely replaced by Norman lords. What had been 4,000 to 5,000 individual estates were now concentrated in the hands of 144 Norman barons. The Norman hierarchy not only included the upper echelons of Normandy, but also Bretons and Flemish lords eager to share the spoils of victory. It was mainly Flemings who settled in south-west Wales.

During the twenty-five years before the Norman conquest of England, an able and vigorous Welsh king, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, ruler of Gwynedd, drove the English out of their footholds within the borders of Offa's Dyke, and succeeded in uniting Wales for a time. But his power was broken by Earl Harold of Wessex in two invasions of north Wales. Gruffudd was betrayed and slain by one of his own followers in 1063, and Wales, once again, became torn by the ambitions and jealousies of its rival rulers. Three years afterwards, Harold, who succeeded to the English throne in 1066, was defeated and slain at Hastings by Duke William of Normandy. Within a very short time Wales developed into a battleground over which the new masters of England fought the Welsh on and off for well over two hundred years. No real attempt was made to subdue Wales as a whole until the close of the 13th century. The conquest of the mountainous regions was far too difficult and expensive a task for the Norman kings to undertake, and they had enough problems to face in England, Scotland and their continental possessions.

King William the Conqueror's first step towards the gradual conquest of Wales was to give a number of his barons a free hand to seize, piecemeal, as much as they could of the fertile lowlands ruled over by the Welsh princes. This was a clever plan, for it would provide these Norman lords and their followers with rewards for their services, and also keep the Welsh so fully occupied in fighting at home that they would cause no trouble in England. This policy was continued by successive English kings.

William, therefore, made grants of territory along the Welsh borders, or Marches, as they were called, to some of his ablest Norman leaders. These barons, known as Marcher Lords, were given special privileges. They were allowed to carry on private warfare against the Welsh, and to rule the conquered areas almost as independently as the Welsh princes had done. Four powerful Marcher lordships were set up at the main gateways into Wales. These were centred at Chester, Shrewsbury, Hereford and Gloucester. It was from these eastern military bases that Norman nobles with their well-armed knights and men-at-arms began their penetrations into Wales, seeking to win rich lands at the expense of the natives. Their advances were made along the easiest and most natural routes; through the coastal plains of the north and south, up the river valleys of the Severn, Usk, Wye and the Dee, and also in some instances by supporting attacks from the sea.

During these early Norman penetrations into Wales, **Rhys ap Tewdwr (c 1063-1093)**, claimed the throne of Deheubarth following the death of his cousin, and in 1081 regained his ancestral dominions from the princes of Powys. It was in this year that William the Conqueror made a pious pilgrimage to St. David's, though undoubtedly his real purpose was to impress the Welsh rulers of the south with the might of Norman power. It appears that during this pilgrimage Rhys met the Norman king, paid homage to him and was allowed to retain his territories in return for an annual tribute of £40, and the Domesday survey of 1086 records that Rhys was liable for a payment of this amount. So, during the reign of King William, and for a few years afterwards, Rhys ruled most of Deheubarth without interference from the Norman lords. But he was fiercely attacked by rival Welsh chieftains, and had to fight two pitched battles against his own fellow-countrymen during his reign.

Meanwhile, William Rufus, third son of the Conqueror, succeeded to the throne, and under his more aggressive policy, the Norman advance into South Wales made rapid progress. By 1093, Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, advanced to occupy Ceredigion (Cardiganshire) and Dyfed (Pembrokeshire), whilst Brycheiniog (Breconshire) fell into the hands of Bernard de Neufmarche. **Rhys ap Tewdwr's** dominions were now shrinking under heavy pressure, and Ystrad Tywi (Carmarthenshire), the heart of his principality, was virtually surrounded. He fell in battle against the invaders at Brecon. Thus, died the last independent ruler of Carmarthenshire.

The realm now lay disunited and open to the Normans, and the invaders were quick to seize the opportunity. That same year, 1093, William FitzBaldwin, a knight from Devonshire, was ordered by William Rufus to build a fortress to command the crossing of the River Tywi at Rhydygors, about a mile below Carmarthen. Fifteen years later, Henry I built a much better placed stronghold on the high ground overlooking the Tywi. This was the beginning of the New Town which grew up as a borough around the castle, as distinct from the Old Town which developed around the Roman fort and the noted Celtic monastic community of Llandeulyddog. As a royal lordship and borough in the hands of the king, Carmarthen became the chief administrative centre in West Wales of the Norman, and later, the Angevin monarchs of England.

For the Normans, Carmarthen occupied a strategic position. It commanded the routes to Pembroke, Milford Haven and Ireland; also to the Teifi Valley, Cardigan, Brecon and Builth, and to Cardiff. Now it was to become the link between the two strong Marcher lordships of Pembroke and Glamorgan. Moreover, its position as the highest navigable point on the Tywi ensured maritime communications with the Bristol Channel. This aspect of its importance was strengthened by the building of castles at Llanstephan and Kidwelly to command the Tywi and Gwendraeth estuaries, and at Laugharne to dominate the mouth of the River Tâf. Another castle at Loughor completed Norman control of Carmarthen Bay.

To the Normans, the Angevin, and later kings of England, Carmarthen, therefore, became invaluable as a central military base and civil bastion, from which not only the Welsh, but also their powerful and rebellious barons could be watched and kept under control. Finally, it was the key to the wide, productive lands of the Tywi, while the arable areas around the neighbourhood could provide all the food necessary for the garrison and the townfolk.



Old and New Carmarthen in the 14th and 15th Centuries
(dyfedarchaeology.org.uk)

10 MILITARY RULE AND LIFE UNDER THE NORMANS

In spite of fierce resistance and several revolts, the Normans had over-run Deheubarth by 1135. The Welsh were only able to hold on to the upland areas. There are two reasons why the invaders were so successful in seizing territory and making settlements in the lowland areas. Firstly, the lightly armed Welsh tribesmen could offer little resistance in open country to the cavalry charges of the heavily armoured Normans who were mounted upon powerful horses. As a rule, the Welsh avoided pitched battles on the plains, and retreated to the hills with their flocks and herds. Here they could move about much more quickly than their enemies, and had the advantage of knowing every inch of the uplands. Admirably suited to guerrilla warfare, they were skilful in fighting the Normans by swift retreats, harassing raids, night attacks and ambushes in woods, marshlands and mountain passes. The invaders suffered some of their heaviest defeats when venturing into this kind of territory.

Secondly, the Normans had devised a simple but effective structure for holding on to the areas of land from which the tribesmen had been driven out. This was the military stronghold known as the motte-and-bailey castle, though in some instances it consisted only of a motte. The motte was a round flat-topped mound of earth up to a height of thirty to forty feet, on top of which was erected a central wooden tower, or keep, as it was known. This was surrounded by a bailey constructed from a palisade of high, sharply-pointed stakes, and by a ditch or moat from which the earth for the motte had been dug. Here were stabled the horses of the garrison, the cattle and sheep housed when necessary, and the supplies and provisions kept. There were also barrack-rooms for the men-at-arms, and workshops for the repair of armour and weapons. The average size of baileys in Carmarthenshire was about half an acre, though the largest, at Llangadog, covered three acres. Many of these military outposts, in times of security, became hunting lodges, manorial residences or small centres of local government for minor lords. Comparatively few early motte-and-bailey castles in Carmarthenshire developed into strong or massive stone structures. Those which were best placed for the domination and control of wide surrounding areas became the centres of the major Norman lordships of Carmarthen, Kidwelly, Llanstephan, Laugharne, Llandovery and Newcastle-Emlyn. It should be remembered that Dinefwr, Carreg Cennen and Dryslwyn, three of the most impressive castles in the county, were not originally built by Normans, but by Welsh princes.

During the earlier periods of Norman incursions, the Welsh were not only more poorly armed and equipped than their opponents, but they were also unskilled in methods of attacking this new type of stronghold. Again, and again we learn that they could impetuously storm and burn the wooden outworks and buildings of a motte-and-bailey castle, only to find that the keep, which was built of stone, proved too costly in casualties to capture. Nevertheless, as time went on, they learnt many military lessons from their enemies. The princes armed their troops in the heavier style, and Welshmen became expert in siege-craft. They used wheeled platforms, battering rams, catapults, mangonels (stone throwers), and scaling ladders. They also learnt to tunnel beneath castle walls so as to cause these to collapse, thus creating a breach for entrance. For this reason, most of the castles in Carmarthenshire changed hands on many occasions before the long struggle was over.

The Normans took full advantage of the armed strife which so often broke out among the families of ruling Welsh princes that so weakened the natives' powers of resistance. In Deheubarth, there appeared to be no identifiable leader during the time between the death of **Rhys ap Tewdwr** in 1093 and the rise of the **Lord Rhys** in the middle of the 12th century. Conversely, the Welsh princes were equally quick to profit from the quarrels of rival Norman barons, and especially from the political difficulties which the kings of England so frequently experienced.

After a Norman baron had dispossessed a Welsh ruler, the land he took over was known as a lordship. Within this territory the new lord considered himself entitled to all the dues and services which had previously been paid by the inhabitants to the prince. The lord's principal castle became the main centre of government for the whole area. Among the chief officials who resided in the castle were the Constable who commanded the garrison, the Seneschal who was in charge of the courts, and the Receiver who looked after the exchequer.

Rewards of estates within the lordship were given by the baron to the knights who had helped him to subdue the district. These estates formed smaller lordships divided into manors, which were large divisions of cultivated and waste land. The latter consisted of woodlands and scrub where the domestic animals were pastured. The manor was the economic, social and local government unit of the Norman feudal system. In return for these estates, the knights had to give forty days' military service annually to their lords. Sometimes this meant active service against the Welsh, whilst during more peaceful occasions it involved taking over routine garrison duties at the lord's castle.

Sometimes, minor lordships or manors were allowed to remain in the hands of Welsh chieftains who paid allegiance to the Normans. Thus, we find that some of the Norman castles in Carmarthenshire were garrisoned from time to time by Welshmen.

The majority of workers on manors were serfs or bondmen who laboured for their overlord under the control of a bailiff. There were also native freemen who paid certain dues for the use of their land. In the upland areas of a lordship the Welsh freemen continued their customary tribal life in their scattered homesteads. But they now had to pay tributes of sheep and cattle to the Norman lord instead of to their former prince. These upland areas of a lordship came to be known as 'Welshries', as opposed to the 'Englishries' of lowland manorial centres where villages of the English type grew up around the castles and the churches.

The boroughs, which were the small townships or villages that came into being alongside the castles, exerted a still greater alien influence. Their inhabitants were English, Norman and Flemish soldiers, farmers, craftsmen and traders. Prior to the Industrial Revolution there were few townships in Wales which did not owe their origin to a Norman castle.

Though the Normans, like the Welsh, were fierce and often ruthless in warfare, they also shared with their opponents, a deep regard for religion, and were founders and builders of great churches, cathedrals and monastic houses. Whenever a castle was built, a church, a monastery, or the small religious off-shoot of a monastic order known as a 'cell' or priory, soon followed. As the clergy who ministered to the Normans were foreigners or Englishmen, their presence helped considerably to tighten Norman control and influence over the occupied territory.

So, during the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, two different social systems emerged in Wales. In the lowlands, the organisation was feudal, manorial and foreign. In the uplands, the older Welsh tribal and pastoral life continued. Nevertheless, the distinctions between them were by no means rigid and clear-cut. Intermarriage took place between members of aristocratic families of both races. Welsh princes adopted Norman modes of living in the new castles which they built for themselves; and they became generous benefactors of the new monastic orders. Conversely, the romantic imagination of the Normans was influenced by the old Celtic tales of Arthur and other legendary heroes. In their Norman setting these stories profoundly influenced later European literature.

Some of the most enterprising and ambitious of the Pembrokeshire barons were sons and grandsons of **Nest**, daughter of **Rhys ap Tewdwr**. These Cambro-Normans, who invaded and conquered Ireland, adopted St. David as their patron saint. One member of this family, Gerald of Wales, became the vivid chronicler of Welsh life during the 12th century, as well as the great champion for an independent Welsh Church.

11 RESISTANCE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

Gruffudd ap Rhys and Gwenllïan ferch Gruffudd ap Cynan

After the death of Rhys ap Tewdwr in 1093, the claims of his two young sons to rule after him in Deheubarth were not recognized. **Gruffudd** fled to Ireland, while **Hywel**, who was taken prisoner, suffered such ill treatment in captivity that he became an invalid for the remainder of his life. In 1113 **Gruffudd** came back to his native land and stayed for a time as a guest at Pembroke Castle. Gerald de Windsor, the commandant of this castle had married **Gruffudd's** sister, **Nest**. She was a lady so famed for her beauty that she was known as the "Helen of Wales", after the famous Helen of Troy.

During his exile, **Gruffudd** experienced an Irish lifestyle that had tempered him into a tough leader and warrior that Wales needed at this time. While staying at the castle, **Nest** furnished him with all the news and gossip from the court of her lover, King Henry I. An increasingly nervous Gerald looked on, and faced with her husband's displeasure, **Nest** provided her brother with money, horses and provisions, and **Gruffudd** and his followers fled to the wilds of the commote of Caeo in north Carmarthenshire where they lived a rebellious and outlaw existence. Henry I soon realized that the young prince was becoming dangerous, and ordered his arrest.

In 1114, **Gruffudd** fled again, this time to the court of Gruffudd ap Cynan, the ruler of Gwynedd, in Aberffraw, on the island of Anglesey. Here, he fell in love with the king's youngest daughter, the fair flaxen-haired **Gwenllïan**. From an early age, **Gwenllïan** eclipsed her elder sisters and was brought up as a warrior princess alongside her elder brothers. She had an illustrious pedigree and amongst her grandsires was the fabled Brian Boru, High King of all Ireland.



Gwenllïan ferch Gruffudd ap Cynan 1097-1136
(unusualhistoricals.blogspot.com)

After returning to Deheubarth **Gruffudd** immediately raised an army. In 1116 he destroyed Narberth Castle and heavily damaged the castles at Llandovery, Swansea, Cardigan and Aberystwyth. It was during this raiding period that an inconsolable, yet determined Gwenllïan, decided to join her lover. Her brother, the future Owain Gwynedd, offered her his full support and during their father's leave to attend a meeting with local chieftains he arranged for a small armed escort to take her to Aberdaron. There she boarded a vessel bound for Pembroke Castle. After receiving a warm welcome from **Nest** and spending a short time convalescing, she was escorted to the mountain fastness of the anxiously awaiting **Gruffudd**. She found him with his men in a sheltered valley in the most inaccessible northern parts of Ystrad Tywi. Hidden amongst the vast expanse of dense deciduous forest, **Gwenllïan** settled into a humble existence not normally befitting a royal princess. But this was no idyllic life for the two lovers, and she accompanied **Gruffudd** on raids into the Flemish settlements. Her infectious zeal and warrior upbringing positively galvanized the partisans who flocked to their cause. Soon, they were married, having realized that the blessing of the Church would only draw more warriors to their cause, as well as enhancing closer ties with Gwynedd.

Following many successful raids, **Gruffudd** felt confident enough to take on a major Norman stronghold, Carmarthen Castle. He successfully stormed the castle and killed the Norman garrison and the traitorous Welsh chieftains who guarded it. The Norman vassals outside the town were also put to the sword and their homes and businesses burned to the ground. He went on to storm Kidwelly Castle, but purposefully left it in good order, for he decided to relocate **Gwenllïan** into the comforts of its keep, which was a blessing to his now heavily pregnant wife. This also sent a message to King Henry that his grip on Deheubarth was slipping.

However, after further successful raids, **Gruffudd** very nearly escaped death when he and his men were resting prior to an attack on Aberystwyth Castle. Despite a brave stand, the Welsh were no match for the advancing heavy cavalry, and **Gruffudd** narrowly escaped to his place of safety in the highlands of Cantref Mawr, soon to be joined by **Gwenllïan**. Moving from 'safe place' to 'safe place', and wary of capture by the Normans and turncoat Welsh chieftains, **Gruffudd** and his family returned for a time to the safety of Ireland in 1127, and thence to the royal court of Aberffraw, in Gwynedd.

Next, Powys was in revolt, but Gwynedd, and **Gruffudd** remained neutral. His neutrality immediately raised him to King Henry's favour, and the threat of hostilities against **Gruffudd** and **Gwenllïan** was removed. He granted them rights to live in relative normality, subject to certain conditions. They had to swear to withdraw from all future violent conduct against Henry's crown, and live under house arrest in the newly built settlements near Carmarthen Castle. They were kept abreast of news by the Welsh clergy via the well-established network of churches throughout Wales. Having learned of **Gwenllïan's** brothers' uprising in Gwynedd, the Norman lords in Carmarthen contrived to inform Henry of **Gruffudd's** conspiring and planned treacherous insurgence against the crown. This was not so, and having learned of this heinous lie by the Normans, **Gruffudd** and **Gwenllïan** escaped in the dead of night back to their refuge in Caer, where they remained during the rest of Henry's reign.

In 1135 the strong and able Henry I died. He was succeeded by his nephew Stephen, a gentle, but weak man, whose reign proved to be a disastrous one for England. Civil war broke out between the new king and his cousin Matilda, King Henry's daughter also known as Maud, who claimed the throne. The barons took advantage of the lack of strong government, and ruled like petty kings in their own domains. So terrible was their tyranny that an English chronicler described Stephen's reign as 'nineteen long winters when Christ and his saints slept.'

Confusion and anarchy in England gave the Welsh another opportunity to rise up and throw off the alien yoke. The first blow to the Normans was dealt by Hywel ap Maredudd of Brecon. At Penllergaer, near Swansea, he routed a Norman army and plundered the foreign colonies in Gower. **Gruffudd ap Rhys**, in his Caer fastness decided that the time was now ripe to strike again for the recovery of his lost kingdom, and to this end he journeyed to Aberffraw, together with his sons, **Anarawd** and **Rhys** to enlist the help of his brothers-in-law, the princes of Gwynedd.

Meanwhile, the Norman lord of Kidwelly, Maurice de Londres had built up a network of native collaborators and spies. With the aid and advice of a traitorous chieftain, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, he decided once and for all to rid his lordship of the threat posed by **Gruffudd**, and to achieve this made plans to flush out **Gwenllïan** from her hideout in the wilds of north Carmarthenshire, whilst her husband was away recruiting support. **Gwenllïan** got word of his schemes from her own network of spies. Unsure whether or not to await the return of her husband, and however the decision was made, she unleashed immediately her own considerable army of over five hundred men. They marched down the Tywi valley, past Dinefwr, the royal seat of the princes of Deheubarth, making a wide berth of the settlements of Llandeilo and Carmarthen. At Llandyfaelog her army was split in two. One half was given to her most trusted officer to intercept alleged reinforcements negotiated with the English crown, from joining up with Maurice de Londres' garrison. **Gwenllïan** arrived, with her now depleted force, at the foot of Mynydd-y-Garreg, and there awaited until cock-crow to herald her attack on Kidwelly Castle.

But the trap hatched by Maurice de Londres and Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, sprang into action. Led by the Welsh traitor, twice the number of warriors fielded by the Welsh poured down from the misty heights of Mynydd-y-Garreg onto the unsuspecting encampment. Keeping a safe distance and barking out orders and promises of a generous reward in gold coins for the man who killed the Princess, was the coward Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. This spurred on the French who threw everything into a direct attack on **Gwenllian**. At her side fought her two sons, **Maelgwn** and **Morgan**. **Maelgwn** fought bravely but soon received the injuries that later took his life. Then, at the head of fifty horsemen, charging with lances, came Baron Maurice de Londres, and quickly overwhelmed **Gwenllian**, **Morgan** and her now valiant but depleted bodyguard. He immediately ordered her beheading. Thus ended the life of this brave and beautiful flower of Wales. It is said that her executioner shook the blade violently so as to remove her blood, and then walked away, before sinking to his knees where he wept and asked God for forgiveness. This was no ordinary princess. Indeed, Gerald of Wales, at a later date likened her to Penthesilea, the fabled Queen of the Amazons. To this day, the field of battle is known as Maes Gwenllian, and in its centre a spring still emanates from the very spot from which she lost her life. **Morgan** and the remnants of her army were led away to a life of incarceration in some filthy rat-infested jail, or if their skills were of some use to their Norman overlords, to serve on the battle-torn fields of France. A further five hundred Welsh and Norman warriors lay torn and battered on the field of conflict. Those not taken away for honourable burial were left to the crows.

Gwenllian's bravery had caught the imagination, and the manner of her death made her a martyr. This cruel act roused all Wales to bitter fury and vengeance and unleashed the great revolt of 1136. Richard fitzGilbert, lord of Ceredigion, was ambushed and slain in Gwent on his return from England. It aroused the sleeping dragon of Gwynedd, and **Gwenllian's** brothers, Owain and Cadwaladr marched south with thousands of warriors. As they crossed the River Dyfi, they were joined by their vengeful brother-in-law with a huge force of men to swell their ranks. The first target to feel the dragon's breath was Aberystwyth Castle. By sheer weight of numbers and with utter ferocity, they took the castle, slaughtered its defenders, plundered its riches and arms and then burnt it to the ground. This was now a force to be reckoned with, and well they learned the lessons of victory and defeat in their struggles with the Norman overlord. They now fielded heavily armed chainmail-clad knights on horseback who formed the very first effective heavy cavalry seen in Wales. Even the infantry wore mail, a practice normally reviled by Welsh warriors, who previously preferred to stay light-footed, being more suitable for guerilla tactics.

They then launched a fierce attack on Cardigan Castle, but although the defenders held out, they slaughtered a large relieving force of Norman, English and Flemish soldiers at Crug Mawr, near the town. This was **Gruffudd's** last battle. Shortly afterwards, he unexpectedly succumbed to an untreatable complaint which many believed to be a broken heart; he had lost the will to live. In that same year, 1137, **Gwenllian's** father, Gruffudd ap Cynan, king of Gwynedd, also passed away, in his bed, old and blind at the age of eighty-two. Buried by the high altar in Bangor Cathedral, he was mourned by an annalist of Brut y Tywysogion (Chronicles of the Princes) as the 'head and king and pacifier of all Wales'.

The Sons of Gruffudd and Gwenllian

The leaders of resistance in Ystrad Tywi were now Gruffudd's sons, **Anarawd**, **Cadell** and **Maredudd**, and later the youngest son, **Rhys**.

Anarawd carried on the fight with admirable zeal and there was a strong collaboration between north and south in which Carmarthen Castle was taken in 1138 and Ceredigion divided between the princes of Gwynedd. This partnership was to be fused into an unbreakable bond with the marriage of **Anarawd** and the daughter of his uncle, Owain Gwynedd. But the hot-headed and unpredictable Cadwaladr, brother of Owain, murdered **Anarawd**, probably over a territorial dispute, sometime between 1143 and 1145.

In 1146 **Cadell** and his brothers re-captured Carmarthen (which had fallen to Gilbert fitzGilbert of Pembroke in 1145), and also captured Llanstephan. In 1150 **Cadell** improved the defences of Carmarthen, and for a while it became the chief Welsh castle in Ystrad Tywi. From this base the brothers over-ran Kidwelly, attacked the Normans and Flemings in south Pembrokeshire, and expelled their Gwynedd allies from Ceredigion. **Cadell** was seriously wounded by Norman knights in 1151 while hunting in Tenby, and was never able to fight again. In 1153 he left for a pilgrimage to Rome, and nothing more is heard of him until 1175 when he entered the abbey of Strata Florida after a long illness and died there.

Maredudd and **Rhys** continued their sweeping campaigns. Destroying Loughor Castle, they fell upon the Flemish settlements in Gower, and later demolished the castle at Aberafon. **Maredudd** died in 1155 at the height of his success. Though he was well under thirty years of age, he had shown great powers of leadership, and was looked upon by both the Welsh and the Normans as a man of wisdom and justice.

Thus, during the reign of the English king, Stephen, the sons of **Gruffudd** and **Gwenllian** had regained Ceredigion, Ystrad Tywi and a substantial part of Dyfed. This realm now came into the hands of the youngest son, **Rhys**, a vigorous and determined leader who was to become the most dominant personality in south Wales for the next forty years.

Rhys ap Gruffudd, 'The Lord Rhys'

Rhys was now sole ruler of Deheubarth.

In 1154 Henry II, a powerful and vigorous king, succeeded Stephen. Immediately he turned his attention to north Wales and in 1157 received the homage of Owain Gwynedd. **Rhys** was now in a difficult position and retreated into the heart of Ystrad Tywi with the intention of resisting the king. But, changing his mind, he journeyed to England to pay homage to Henry. He was allowed to retain Cantref Mawr and was promised a second cantref. In the meantime, the Norman lords returned to the lands and castles they had lost, and Carmarthen went back into the king's hands.

Rhys did not remain quiet for long, and instead of the second cantref promised to him, was given small pieces of territory scattered among the lands of the Norman barons. He made no hostile move, but when Walter Clifford, lord of Llandovery raided Cantref Mawr, and Henry took no notice, **Rhys** retaliated by attacking and capturing Clifford's castle. He followed this with a devastating attack upon Ceredigion. When Henry sailed for France in 1158, **Rhys** besieged Carmarthen so heavily that a large army had to be raised to drive him back to Cantref Mawr. Again, he came to terms with the king's representatives, and remained at peace until 1162.

Rhys broke out once more and recaptured Llandovery Castle. During this time, Henry II was involved in his protracted quarrel with Thomas Beckett, Archbishop of Canterbury. Owain Gwynedd took advantage of this opportunity to join **Rhys** in revolt. Other Welsh princes followed their example, and for once, at any rate, the rulers of Gwynedd, Powys and Deheubarth marched together in unity to drive the foreigners out of Wales.

Henry realized the seriousness of this challenge, and in the summer of 1165 he assembled a great host of troops at Shrewsbury, and marched to Oswestry. Owain Gwynedd, **Rhys**, Owain Cyfeiliog of Powys, and other Welsh princes, with their combined forces, awaited the king at Corwen, on the other side of the Berwyn Mountains. As Henry's troops trudged up the heights, a terrible storm, with torrential rain, fell upon them. Provisions ran short and there was much confusion and dismay among the invaders, many of whom were foreign mercenaries. Henry had to retreat in order to avoid total defeat. This was his last attempt to conquer Wales.

In 1166 **Rhys** took the castles of Cardigan and Cilgerran and became the ruler of all the land between the Dyfi and the Teifi rivers. He also recovered Ystrad Tywi and a large part of Dyfed, thereby governing all the territory which he held in 1155. So, when Owain Gwynedd died in 1170, and his five sons fought among themselves for power, leadership among the princes of Wales passed to **Rhys**, and the centre of Welsh independence shifted from the mountains of Snowdonia to the valleys and uplands of the Tywi and the Teifi.

During this time, Henry became seriously alarmed at events happening in Ireland. The powerful Marcher lord, Richard fitzGilbert de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, known as 'Strongbow', invaded Ireland with his Norman-Welsh and Flemish followers, and ultimately succeeded to the kingdom of Leinster. Henry decided to pay an immediate visit there to assert his authority as overlord. Before embarking for Ireland, he was anxious to secure the friendship and assistance of **Rhys**, who, as the most powerful South Wales leader, could counter-balance any ambitious designs of the Norman barons of Dyfed. **Rhys** met the king in the Forest of Dean and was restored to royal favour. When Henry reached Pembroke he formally acknowledged **Rhys** as lord of the territories which the prince had regained. He also released **Hywel**, one of **Rhys's** sons, who had been kept a hostage for so long in England that he was known as **Hywel Sais** (Hywel the Englishman). Following de Clare's surrender of Dublin, Waterford and other fortresses to the king, Henry returned to Wales on Easter Monday 1172, landing near St. David's. He attended Mass at the Cathedral, walking to the shrine of St. David dressed as a pilgrim and leaning upon a staff. **Rhys** met the king again at Laugharne and shortly afterwards, Henry appointed **Rhys** as Royal Justiciar over South Wales. **Rhys** was now the king's deputy in all matters relating to Welsh affairs in the area.

From this time on Rhys is referred to by the Welsh chroniclers and bards of the period as 'Yr Arglwydd Rhys' (the Lord Rhys). Henry's trust in **Rhys's** loyalty was never betrayed again during his reign. Indeed, during the dangerous revolt by Henry's sons in 1173-4, aided by the king of France, Scotland and many Norman barons, **Rhys** sent his son, **Hywel** to assist the king in Normandy. **Rhys** himself led a large force into Staffordshire to assist in the siege of Tutbury, which Earl Ferrars was holding against Henry. **Rhys**, together with other vassal Welsh princes whom he controlled, regularly attended royal assemblies at Gloucester, Oxford and other places in England during Henry's reign. For this loyalty, Henry granted **Rhys** the land between the Dyfi and the Mawddach estuaries (Merioneth), but these he failed to hold against the men of Gwynedd.

It was at Cardigan Castle, as well as the nearby monastery at St. Dogmael's that the **Lord Rhys** entertained Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury, his companion Gerald of Wales, and their retinue on their journey around Wales in 1181 to secure volunteers and funds for the Third Crusade. During their journey through Ystrad Tywi, the Archbishop and his followers crossed the Loughor and the Gwendraeth rivers and stayed a night at Kidwelly Castle before a boat took them over the Tywi, near Ferryside, and onwards to Carmarthen.

Henry II died in France in 1189. **Rhys** felt no obligation of loyalty to his successor, Richard the Lionheart, and revolted. Before Richard was crowned, **Rhys** ravaged the Flemish colonies in South Pembrokeshire, Kidwelly and Gower, captured the castles of Laugharne and Llanstephan and laid siege to Carmarthen, which he failed to take. When Richard left England to go on crusade in the Holy Land, **Rhys** and his sons delivered St. Clears, Kidwelly, Nevern, Llawhaden and Wiston castles into Welsh hands. A later attack upon Swansea would have succeeded if his sons had not quarrelled amongst themselves.

From now on **Rhys** had as much trouble with his rebellious sons as he had with the Normans. In 1194, two of them, **Hywel Sais** and **Maelgwn**, turned on their father and took him prisoner, confining him in Nevern Castle, which **Rhys** himself had captured from his own son-in-law, the Norman lord, William fitzMartin. Following his release, two other sons, **Rhys Grug** and **Maredudd** seized the castles of Dynevor and Llandovery in 1195. But the wily old prince outwitted the two rebels, took them captive, and confined them in the distant castle of Ystradmeurig, in Ceredigion.

Rhys launched his last campaign against the Normans in 1196. He captured a number of castles, including Carmarthen, Radnor and Painscastle, and defeated an army led by Roger de Mortimer and Hugh de Say, near Radnor. The Norman lord of Builth, Radnor, Brecon and Abergavenny, William de Braose, offered terms and was granted the return of Painscastle.

In April 1197, **Rhys** died unexpectedly and was buried in St. David's Cathedral. He died having been excommunicated after a quarrel with Peter de Leia, Bishop of St. David's, over a theft of some of the bishop's horses some years previously. Before he could be buried in the Cathedral, the bishop had Rhys's corpse scourged in posthumous penance.

Rhys nominated his eldest legitimate son, **Gruffudd ap Rhys** as his successor, and soon after his father's death he met the Justiciar, Archbishop Hubert Walter, on the border of Wales and England, and was confirmed as **Rhys's** heir. **Maelgwn**, the eldest son, but illegitimate, refused to accept this and was given military assistance by Gwenwynwyn ab Owain of Powys. **Maelgwn** took the castle of Aberystwyth, captured **Gruffudd** and handed him over to King John, who imprisoned him at Corfe Castle in Dorset. He was set free the following year and regained most of Ceredigion, and in 1199 took Cilgerran Castle. In 1201 **Maredudd** was killed in battle in the commote of Carnwyllion, and his lands passed to **Gruffudd**. During this battle the castles of Kidwelly and Carnwyllion passed into Norman hands again. Carnwyllion Castle was erected on a mound in the middle of Pond Twym, Llanelli around 1106 and was constructed as a wooden fort. Also in 1201 **Gruffudd** died of an illness, but this did not end the sibling rivalry. In 1204 **Hywel Sais** died. **Rhys Grug** attacked the lordships of Gower and Kidwelly in 1215, and Carnwyllion Castle was destroyed by fire.



Siege of Carnwyllion Castle 1215, Llanelli.
(Painting by kind permission of John Wynne Hopkins)

In 1216, Llywelyn Fawr (the Great) of Gwynedd held a council at Aberdyfi where he allocated parts of Deheubarth to several sons and grandsons of the **Lord Rhys**.

After **Rhys's** death, the extensive principality which he had gained in arduous years of combat and diplomacy was rent asunder by the feuds and quarrels of his sons and grandsons. He was the last, and most powerful of the South Wales rulers. Henceforth, until the final extinction of independent native rule in Wales, supremacy among the princes passed once more to the ancient dynasty of Gwynedd, with its stronghold in the great mountain fastness of Eryri (Kingdom of the Eagle, Snowdonia).



Rhys ap Gruffudd's legacy is immense and far-reaching. He secured a commanding position in South Wales during his lifetime. His long, successful fight against the extension of Norman influence made him the greatest of the princes of Deheubarth, and an outstanding leader of Welsh independence. Under his skillful, enterprising leadership, Norman methods of fighting, castle-building and siege-craft were quickly learnt and adopted. The Welsh could now meet and defeat Norman troops in the open. The castles of the conquerors were no longer impregnable, and the princes were building strong stone castles for their own defence. Also, his diplomatic stance with Henry II, ensured a period of relative calm and peace for his people.

The **Lord Rhys** was not only a warrior. He was also a patron of bards and musicians, and is credited with inaugurating that great Welsh cultural event, the Eisteddfod, at his court in Cardigan in 1176.

He was a generous friend to the Cistercian monks. Owing to his liberal gifts of land, the monasteries of Whitland (Alba Domus) and Ystrad Fflur (Strata Florida) increased in importance and attracted many Welshmen into their order. Strata Florida became a great centre of Welsh learning, the home of chroniclers and poets. It was here that 'Brut y Tywysogion' (The Chronicles of the Princes) was compiled. Many of the South Wales princes of this period found their resting place here. Rhys was also responsible for the foundation of a Cistercian nunnery at Llanllŷr, not far from Strata Florida, and for the settlement of the Premonstratensian Canons at Talylychau (Talley Abbey). This was the only monastery belonging to this Order in the whole of Wales. Additionally, he was well-disposed towards the small Benedictine cells of monks at Cardigan and Llandovery.



Graves of the Princes of South Wales, Strata Florida Abbey.

12 CARMARTHENSHIRE AND THE WARS OF THE ROSES

The struggle continued under the leadership of **Lord Rhys's** sons and grandsons.

All of Wales periodically united under the princes of Gwynedd. In 1282, following the death of Llywelyn II it was annexed by Edward I, and in 1284 Wales became incorporated into England under the Statute of Rhuddlan. The King dubbed his newborn eldest son, Edward, Prince of Wales, since which time the eldest son of each English monarch has borne the same title.

Two revolts followed, keeping alive the dream of independence. The first, in 1294-5, was led by Madog ap Llywelyn, a distant cousin of Llywelyn II. This was to be surpassed in longevity by the revolt of Owain ap Gruffudd Fychan II (Owen Glendower) in 1400-1409.

The next conflicts to embroil Wales were the Wars of the Roses, essentially a glorified family feud in which sympathy and loyalty, victory and defeat swung back and forth like a pendulum. Carmarthenshire was strongly on the Lancastrian side, though one family, the Dwnns of Kidwelly, were Yorkists. Jasper Tudor was Earl of Pembroke and Lord of Llanstephan, making the Lancastrians more powerful throughout West Wales. The most influential nobleman in the county at that time was Gruffydd ap Nicholas of Dynevor, who acted as Sherriff of Carmarthen, deputy Chamberlain and deputy Justice, and also Mayor of Carmarthen Borough for one year. He was made Lord of Iscennen in 1455 and spent much money on repairing and strengthening the fortifications of Carreg Cennen. Among his official duties were those of inspecting levies of troops from the county, setting up beacons, and of guarding the coastal areas. His sons Owain and Thomas ably assisted him in this work. Thomas was the father of Sir Rhys ap Thomas (see Chapter 13).

From 1461, the fortunes of the House of York were on the ascendance. The Welsh Lancastrians led by Jasper Tudor, accompanied by his father Owain and the two sons of Gruffydd ap Nicholas marched up the Tywi valley with troops from Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire through Radnor to join Queen Margaret. They were met and routed at Mortimer's Cross, near Ludlow by the new Duke of York, who became King Edward IV in the same year. While the Earl of Warwick was subduing the north of England for Edward, Sir William Herbert of Raglan, a powerful Welsh noble, was entrusted with the task of bringing the Lancastrian parts of Wales under Yorkist control. He captured Pembroke and Tenby castles, and at the close of 1462 Harlech was the only castle left to the Lancastrians. John Dwnn of Kidwelly, who had also fought at Mortimer's Cross, was granted the Constablership of Carmarthen and Aberystwyth castles for life, and was appointed Sherriff of the two counties with control of the Welsh courts of Elfed and Widigada. Further, he was to take over the lordship and castle of Laugharne for Edward IV. The Herberts quickly set about their business of pacifying Carmarthenshire. Their first objective was to take Carreg Cennen Castle where the sons of Gruffydd ap Nicholas had taken refuge. In April 1462 Sir Richard Herbert of Raglan and Sir Roger Vychan of Tretower, Breconshire, arrived with troops to besiege the defenders. They succeeded in persuading Owain and Thomas ap Gruffydd to surrender the castle on honourable terms. After putting in a Yorkist garrison for the summer months it was felt safer to break up the fortress which records state 'was so strong that no one dare approach to it. It had been the haunt of rebels and robbers intent on the destruction of the countryside.' So, a labour force of 500 men equipped with 'bars, picks and crowbars of iron' was instructed to demolish the defences in order 'to avoid inconveniences of this kind happening in future.' The lands of the defeated Lancastrians were confiscated, and Thomas, with his young son, Rhys, went into exile at the court of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy.



Castell Carreg Cennen

Baron Herbert, now the Justice and Chamberlain of South Wales, brought an armed force to Carmarthen to hold the Great Sessions there. Having impressed the Carmarthenshire gentry with the strength of the Yorkists, he 'tarried to set rest and peace among them.' In 1464 a rebellion took place in South Wales, but this was only a minor affair in Carmarthenshire, and the few rebels were defeated by John Dwnn near Dryslwyn. Baron Herbert now received a further notable reward, Jasper Tudor's Earldom of Pembroke, and his son and heir was permitted to marry the Queen's sister.

Having taken Pembroke Castle, the young Henry Tudor fell into Baron Herbert's hands. The boy was well treated by the Baroness who brought him up with her own children, though he was looked upon as a valuable hostage. The new Earl planned to marry Henry to his daughter Mary. But by this time, Herbert's high standing with the king, brought him to the bitter hatred of the powerful Earl of Warwick, who sought to compel Edward to dismiss him. Prior to this, in Autumn 1467, there were rumours that Warwick, who was known as the 'King-Maker' was sympathetic to the Lancastrian cause. In 1468 Warwick raised an army in the north of England whilst Herbert raised another army in South Wales, and the two rival earls met in battle at Edgecote Moore near Banbury, Oxfordshire. Warwick routed his opponents, and Henry Dwnn, brother of John Dwnn was slain there along with nearly 200 other Welsh noblemen, and at least 2,000 soldiers. For a country with a small population, it was a grievous loss to bear. Baron Herbert and his brother Richard were taken prisoner and executed at Northampton by Warwick.

Following the death of Herbert, two grandsons of Gruffydd ap Nicholas, Morgan and Henry ap Thomas, seized the royal castles of Carmarthen and Cardigan. Warwick placed the Earl of Hastings in charge of the two counties, but after Edward IV's defeat of Warwick in Lincolnshire, the king's brother, Richard of Gloucester was granted Carmarthen Castle.

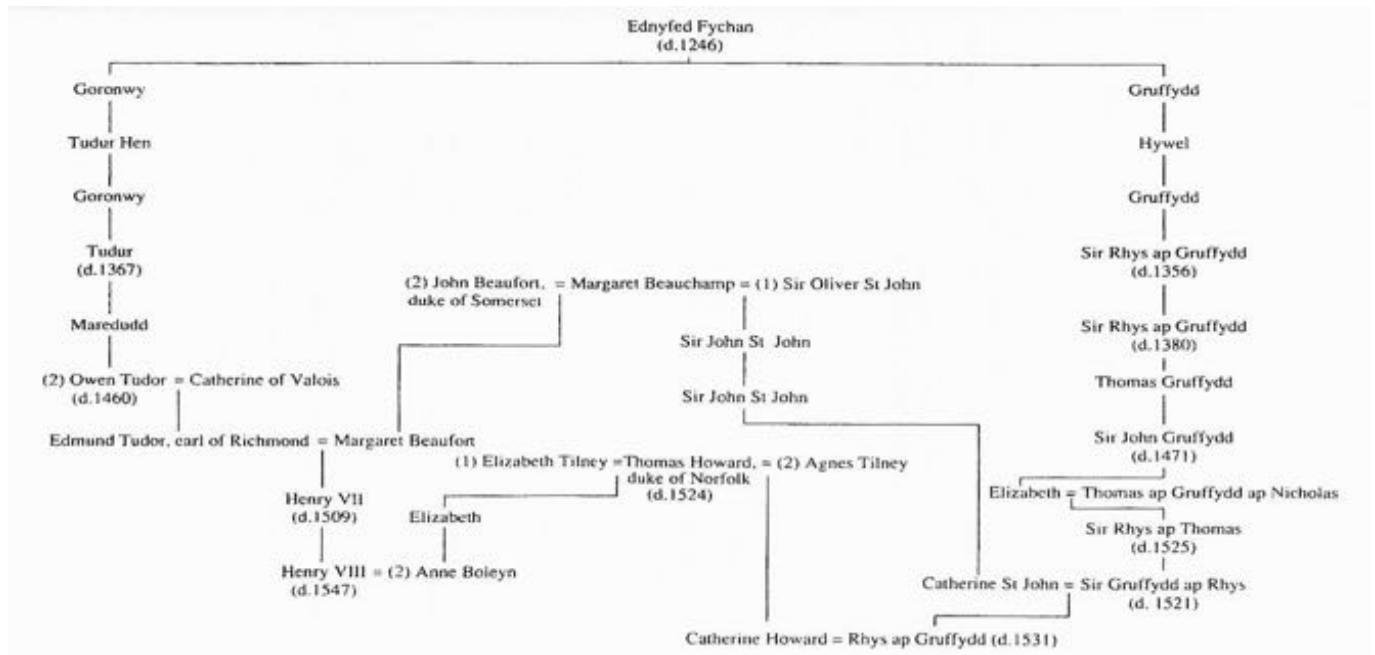
Warwick was now declared a traitor and fled to France where he entered into an alliance with Queen Margaret and Jasper Tudor. Returning with an army, Warwick marched to London whilst Edward IV and his brother, Richard of Gloucester fled to Flanders. Warwick restored Henry VI to the throne, but his triumph was short-lived, for Edward came back in 1471 and defeated and slew Warwick at the Battle of Barnet. Queen Margaret, landing in Weymouth was given the news of the disaster to her cause and decided to take her troops to Wales to join up with Jasper Tudor. But Edward IV, in a swift march to the west, caught the Lancastrian army at Tewkesbury. The Queen was completely defeated and taken captive, and her son Edward slain. Meanwhile, a Welsh army led by Jasper Tudor, earl of Pembroke, joined forces with an invasion force commanded by the earl of Wiltshire. As they marched towards the English border, Edward moved to check them. They met at Mortimer's Cross, near Leominster, and there Edward routed them. Earl Jasper and the earl of Wiltshire escaped from the debacle, but one elderly champion of the Lancastrian cause was captured, Owen Tudor. He was the lover and subsequently the second husband of Henry V's Queen, Catherine de Valois, and father of Edmund and Jasper. He was executed in the market place at Hereford, and died with quiet dignity. Jasper hurried back to Pembroke where he found his young nephew Henry among the castle household. Jasper then fled to Brittany, taking his young nephew with him.

After the death of the young prince Edward at Tewkesbury and the subsequent murder of Henry VI in the Tower of London, Henry Tudor was now the Lancastrian heir to the throne.

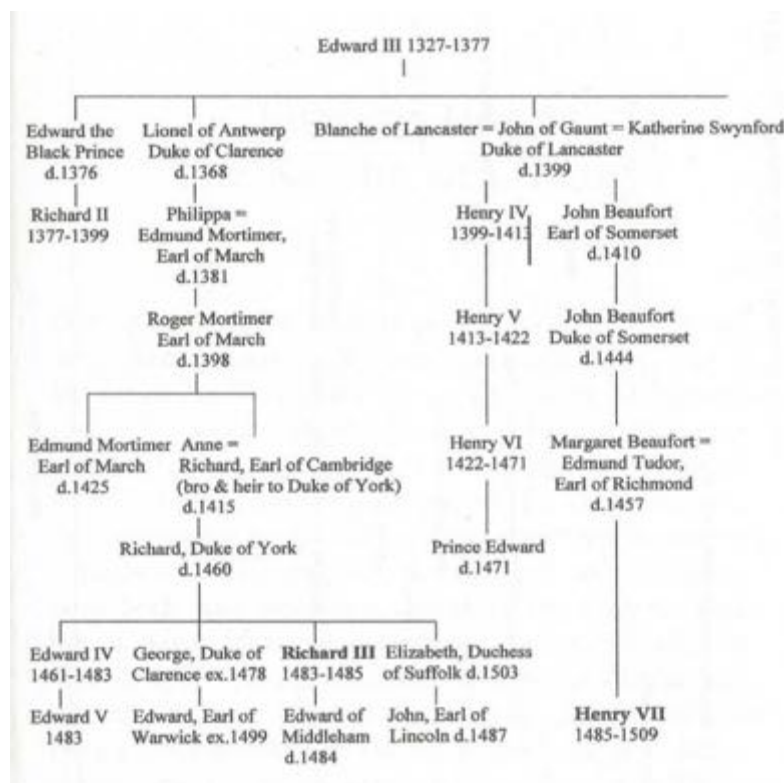
13 THE SON OF THE RAVEN AND THE SON OF PROPHECY

Background

Sir Rhys ap Thomas, KG (1449-1525) was a prominent and wealthy landowner and the most influential of Carmarthenshire's magnates. His paternal grandfather Gruffydd ap Nicholas began the family's rise to prominence. Gruffydd ap Nicholas's family traced their descent to Elidir Ddu, a knight of the Holy Sepulchre and a Knight of Rhodes, and whose journey to the Holy Land was probably inspired by the Knights Hospitallers of St. John who had a commandery at Slebech in Pembrokeshire. However, later poets would trace the line back even further to Urien Rheged, the sixth century legendary king of the northern British. Rheged's crest was three black ravens, which the family were later to adopt as their own emblem. Rhys's maternal branch of the family claim descent from Ednyfed Fychan ap Cynwrig, Seneschal or Chief Councillor to Gwynedd's Llywelyn Fawr and Dafydd ap Llywelyn.



Lineage of Sir Rhys ap Thomas and Henry VII



Lineage of the Houses Of York, Lancaster and Tudor

The Tudors were also distant descendants of Ednyfed Fychan, and following the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd they became administrators under Edward I. They were substantial landowners in Anglesey and became strong supporters of the Yorkist king, Richard II, under whom they acquired a series of local offices which added to their wealth and influence. Their hostility to Henry IV and the Lancastrians led them into open rebellion and their activities complemented the early phases of the revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr. They were penalized heavily and suffered mixed fortunes until one, Owen ap Maredudd found employment in the royal service as an officer in the household of Henry V's queen, Catherine. After Henry's death, leading politicians were anxious that his widow should not remarry, and to prevent that, a statute was passed in 1427-8 requiring the succeeding king, Henry VI's permission and providing heavy penalties for anyone who ignored the statute. The queen and her Welsh esquire formed a strong attachment and perhaps as early as 1431-2 they were married, in defiance of the statute. It would have been expected that Owen would use his father's name, Maredudd as a convenient surname, but for some unknown reason his grandfather's name, Tudor, was used instead. They had four children, but open acknowledgement of the marriage was delayed until after Catherine's death in 1437. The immediate penalties on Owen were severe but they were soon mitigated. Of their children, a daughter died in childhood, and one son became a monk at Westminster. The two remaining boys, Edmund and Jasper were cared for at the nunnery at Barking for some five years after their mother's death until they were brought into Henry VI's immediate circle and grew up as part of his family. They were not likely to be a source of political danger to Henry, and they gave him companionship, and in their adult years, advice. Though they could claim a king of France as a grandfather they had no dynastic connection with the Lancastrians.

Then in 1455 the family's fortunes took a crucial and decisive turn of events when Edmund Tudor married Margaret Beaufort, daughter and heiress of John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, and a descendant of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. John of Gaunt's children by his mistress and second wife, Katherine Swynford were legitimized in 1397, and the eldest of them, John, was Margaret's grandfather. It had not been intended for them to contend the English crown, but that was a difficult ban to enforce. Margaret's inheritance and shadowy claim were powerful inducements. That was part of the attraction that made her such a valuable bride. Earl Edmund and Margaret had one son, Henry, born at Pembroke Castle, three months after his father's death. Whatever claim he had to the English crown came to him through his mother.

Thus, the future tentative association of Rhys and Henry, scions of Carmarthenshire and Anglesey families, one, the Son of the Raven, the other, the Son of Prophecy, was to have political and dynastic consequences that still reverberates to this day.

The Road to Bosworth...

Following Richard III's accession to the throne, his staunchest ally, the Duke of Buckingham, who was lord of Brecon received the custody of Carmarthen, Dinefwr, Llansteffan and many other royal castles in North and South Wales. He was also made Justice and Chamberlain of Carmarthen, thus becoming the strongest feudal baron in Wales. Shortly after, Buckingham began to intrigue with the remnants of the Lancastrians and the Tudors to overthrow the new king. The conspirators planned to marry Henry Tudor to Elizabeth of York, Edward IV's daughter, and to place him on the throne. Jasper and Henry set sail to the south coast of England to join him, but returned without landing. As soon as Richard heard of Buckingham's treachery, he proclaimed him a traitor. Buckingham raised an army in Breconshire and marched towards the Severn, but floods prevented his advance and many of his troops deserted. He fled in disguise to Shrewsbury where he was recognized, captured and executed.

Buckingham's revolt had received no support in Carmarthenshire. Rhys ap Thomas, the county's most influential nobleman was awarded an annuity from the royal exchequer at Carmarthen for not aiding the rebellion, though he received none of Buckingham's official posts. Another of the Herbert family, Lord Huntingdon, was appointed Justice of South Wales instead. Secret negotiations were going on between Rhys ap Thomas and the exiled Tudor camp through Trahaearn Morgan of Kidwelly, resulting in Rhys promising support to Henry Tudor.

Richard III certainly expected the Tudors to make another attempt, and his major problem was assessing exactly where the invasion would land. He moved to Nottingham Castle with his army, believing that Nottingham was fairly central so he would be only a short distance away from any possible landing sites. From here it would be quicker to intercept the invaders. Since the death of Buckingham, Wales had been controlled piecemeal by the principal chieftains in South Wales, and the Stanleys in the North. Richard had shown favour to the Welsh and now counted on their support. To this end, he commanded 'all noblemen and gentlemen dwelling about the sea-coast and especially the Welshmen, to keep watch so that his enemies could not land without resistance.' In answer, Rhys ap Thomas, the principal chieftain in South Wales pledged his loyalty to the king, vowing that Henry Tudor would have to cross over his body to get into Wales. Nevertheless, not long after making this pledge, Rhys declared to Henry that he would welcome him and offered him his support.

During the long years of Tudor exile, Jasper had enlisted the help of a number of Welsh poets to strengthen the Tudor cause. Many of the bards prophesied the coming of a new deliverer, and their poems passed from mouth to mouth throughout Wales. Henry himself also proclaimed his ancient Welsh lineage, and his descent from Cadwaladr, in the hope of raising the nation to fervent expectation. Before his landing, he had prepared a declaration stating that he would come to overthrow “that odious tyrant, Richard, late Duke of Gloucester, and to restore the realm of England to its ancient estate, honour and prosperity”; and to free “this our Principality of Wales and the people of the same, delivering them of such miserable servitudes as they have piteously long stood in.” This declaration had been carried and announced far and wide throughout the country by special messengers.

On August 1st 1485, Henry, Jasper, Bishop Morton and the Earl of Oxford, with some two hundred other English and Welsh supporters, and a ragged, ill-equipped army of 2,000 French mercenaries set sail for Pembrokeshire from Harfleur at the mouth of the River Seine, believing that in Pembrokeshire, at least, there would be strong support, for this was Jasper’s old earldom. But everyone in that little expeditionary force knew that unless Wales as a whole rallied to the Tudor cause, their chances of success were desperate.

Six days later, at nightfall on August 7th, Henry and his retinue landed at Milford Haven near the village of Dale, unfurling the banner of the Red Dragon upon Welsh soil. Early the following morning the army marched to Haverfordwest. There is much confusion about Rhys’s loyalties, and a story is told that Rhys, in order to ease his conscience in respect of his sworn allegiance to Richard III, had crouched under Mullock Bridge, near Dale, while Henry and his troops passed overhead. Thus, he could state, in accordance with his oath, that the invaders had marched over his body! The constable of Pembroke, Richard Williams, fled to King Richard, carrying news of the landing.

Having marched ten miles, Haverfordwest surrendered, but Henry was to receive a crushing blow when he learned that Rhys had shifted his allegiance back to Richard. Henry carefully avoided Carmarthen, taking the route through Cardigan, Aberystwyth and Machynlleth to Newtown and Welshpool. Along the way, the small garrisons they encountered were quickly overcome or forced to submit. Some joined Henry’s cause, swelling his ranks, but many did not, and so he was still alarmingly undermanned. Meanwhile, Rhys with some thousands of Carmarthenshire men marched under his banner of the Black Ravens up the Tywi Valley to Llandovery, then east to Brecon and north towards Welshpool. Henry, in desperation, offered Rhys the lieutenancy of all Wales if he would come to the aid of his fellow Welshman. Rhys was hooked, and a meeting was arranged between them, traditionally said to have been at Long Mountain, a high ridge overlooking Welshpool. There, both forces are said to have spent the night of the 16th August with the result that Rhys joined with Henry. This was a significant addition, it being said that Rhys’s forces were large enough to have ‘annihilated’ the rest of Henry’s army, and an old ballad described it, thus:

‘Then, Sir Rice ap Thomas drawes Wales with hym,
A worthy sight it was to see,
How the Welshmen rose wholly with hym,
And stogged them to Shrewsburye.’

To Welshpool also came the Herberts of Monmouthshire with their levies, and North Welsh chieftains bringing their followers and supplies of cattle to feed the troops. Yet, despite all the nationalistic fervour, few ordinary Welshmen flocked to the call. This prompted Henry to issue an ultimatum to those lords who had promised him support – the Stanleys, Sir Gilbert Talbot, and Henry’s own kinsman, John ap Meredith of Anglesey – to join him immediately on pain of death. Despite the threat, the Stanleys replied that they were not ready to join. However, Talbot advanced from Newport with a contingent of 400-500 men.

With feelings of anxiety, Henry left the comparative safety of Wales and advanced towards Shrewsbury, where the town surrendered. He continued into the Midlands, through Stafford, Lichfield and Tamworth, and into Leicestershire. By the 19th August, Richard learnt of Rhys’s betrayal, left Nottingham and made his way to intercept the Tudor army at Leicester. Richard’s forces numbered 9,000, while Henry’s numbered 5,000.

On the morning of 22nd August 1485, the two armies met in a field at Market Bosworth. Richard launched an attack led by the Duke of Norfolk. According to a contemporary ballad Rhys’s men halted the assault, Norfolk’s line began to break under pressure and the Duke was killed by an arrow shot. The battle was decided when Richard made the decision to seek out Henry with the intention of cutting off the head of the rebellion, for, once Tudor was dead’ there would be nothing left to fight for. Fighting valiantly and shouting cries of “Treason, treason”, Richard hacked his way towards the Red Dragon standard, and in the process losing his horse and helmet. Finally, succumbing to overwhelming odds, with blows raining down upon him Richard met his death, with Rhys ap Thomas delivering the fateful blow. This accolade is given to Rhys by the poet Guto’r Glyn in his encomium which states that ‘Rhys killed the boar, shaved his head.’ This is confirmed by the Burgundian writer Jean Molinet who noted that a Welshman delivered the killing stroke to the back of the head with a halberd, a mediaeval pole axe.

...and Beyond

The battle lasted a mere two hours, with only one hour having been spent in actual combat. The victors gathered at Redmore Plain, where the crown was retrieved from Richard's battered helmet and placed upon Henry's head, whereupon all knelt and paid homage to the new king. That afternoon, Henry entered Leicester in triumph, followed later by Richard's naked, despoiled body. The bloody body was slung contemptuously across a horse, and as it made its way across the west bridge of the River Soar, his head was carelessly battered against the stone parapet. For two days, the body was kept on display in the house of the Grey Friars, after which he was given a quick burial.

Rhys played a prominent role in the court of the new king. Henry knighted him two days after the battle and bestowed on him many honours, lucrative posts and acquisitions of land. Among his many posts, he was appointed Constable and Lieutenant of Breconshire; Chamberlain of Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire; Seneschal and Chancellor of Haverfordwest and Builth; Governor of all Wales. He was also a Privy Councillor, and in 1505 Rhys received the highest possible accolade when he was made a Knight of the Garter, which he celebrated with a great tournament at Carew Castle. He was affectionately known by Henry as 'Father Rice', even though he was only seven or eight years older.

Rhys, as one of Henry's primary commanders, was instrumental in suppressing a Yorkist rebellion at Brecon in 1486. He campaigned against the pretender Lambert Simnel at the battle of Stoke Field 1487, considered to be the final engagement of the Wars of the Roses. He also played a part in the defeat of Perkin Warbeck's Cornish rebellion of 1497. After Henry's death in 1509, Rhys continued to serve his son and heir Henry VIII. Even though Rhys was now a man in his late sixties, he still took up arms to fight for his king in France and winning honours for his daring cavalry charge at Therouanne.

Rhys was a man of integrity and honour, a cultured man who wished to raise his people out of the despair they had plunged into since Owain Glyndwr's rebellion. He raised his family's fortunes as well as that of the Principality to a position not seen since Glyndwr's time. A fierce and brave warrior, his frugal diet and penchant for regular exercise kept him healthy even into his seventies. He was well known for his hospitality and patronage of the arts, especially poetry. His chivalric nature prompted him to commission a copy of the story of the Knights of the Holy Grail, and his one passion was horses. Rhys spent a large amount of money on buildings and parklands. He possessed many properties, including the castle of Newcastle Emlyn, his defensive and administrative headquarters, and Weobley Castle in the Gower, and acquired the rights and profits from ecclesiastical property which greatly added to his coffers. Newton House in Dinefwr, the family home, was no longer suitable to accommodate his exalted position and was left to fall into semi-ruin. His mother's property at Abermarlais in Carmarthenshire fared better, and had a park suitable for hunting. It was well-wooded and a well-fortified moated place.

Despite his healthy lifestyle, by February 1524 Rhys was failing and made his will. What he was suffering from we do not know, but the *Life of Sir Rhys ap Thomas* says that when he made his will he was 'syke in body'. At the age of seventy-six and regardless of his wealth and privileged existence, Rhys took himself to the house of the Grey Friars, in Carmarthen, where he died several weeks later in the summer of 1525. Ironically, he was laid to rest in the abbey by the same Franciscan order that had buried Richard III in Leicester. Rhys left instructions that his wife would join him there in due course. The tomb of his mother lay in the friary, as did that of Edmund Tudor, half-brother of Henry VI and father of Henry VII. His own tomb was erected on the north side of the choir, close to the high altar. During the Dissolution of the Monasteries instigated by Henry VIII not very many years later, his tomb was removed to St. Peter's Church in Carmarthen and set on the eastern aisle, where it can be seen today.

Henry VII (1457-1509) retained a strong attachment to Wales and all things Welsh. He took much pride in his Welsh descent, and acknowledged his ancestry by incorporating the Red Dragon on the Royal Coat-of-Arms. He enrolled a number of Welshmen in his new bodyguard, the 'Yeomen of the Guard' clad in the traditional colours of white and green. St. David's Day was celebrated at the royal court during his reign, the Welsh flag was flown on appropriate ceremonial occasions, and he particularly liked listening to Welsh harpists and singers. He named his eldest son Arthur, with the intention that another King Arthur should rule Britain. His supporters from North and South Wales at Bosworth were generously rewarded, none more so than his uncle Jasper, and Sir Rhys ap Thomas. His gratitude also extended to a pension given to his old Welsh nurse who had probably taught him what he knew of the language and heritage of his ancestors. She was the wife of Philip ap Howel of Carmarthen, who cared for him during his childhood at Pembroke Castle.

Despite these personal affections, some of the bards, including Lewis Glyn Cothi complained bitterly that the Welsh support given to the new king had been in vain. It may be argued that Henry paid so little attention to Welsh affairs because he was too preoccupied with making his own position secure, and his realm peaceful and prosperous. In his defence he had become king of a divided and discontented country, ravaged by the anarchy of the Wars of the Roses. He had to establish his authority, and during the first fourteen years of his reign he faced three insurrections at home, all backed by foreign rulers. He also had trouble with Ireland, and waged a short war against France.

His style of government was quiet and efficient, never using more cruelty or deceit than was necessary. He was a cautious monarch, his policy throughout his reign was to reduce the strength of the 'over-mighty lords' who had so often proved a menace to the crown. He established a new court of justice in 1487, the Court of the Star Chamber' which had power to punish aristocratic offenders who were too powerful to be convicted by the ordinary courts. But his greatest characteristic was his love of money; he amassed an enormous fortune in all sorts of cunning ways and guarded it like a miser. To this end, he encouraged the development of commerce, shipping, manufactures, printing and geographical discovery. He was also a patron of scholarship, music and architecture. He pursued a wise foreign policy based upon friendship with Spain, Flanders, Scotland, and later with France. So successful was this policy that on his death in 1509, England was free from any threat of foreign invasion, and the realm was united, peaceful and growing in prosperity. Furthermore, its standing abroad was becoming respected and influential.

Henry was only fifty in 1507, but even by sixteenth-century standards he was old for his age. He was often ill, and his eyesight sometimes troubled him. He became very religious and spent many hours in religious devotions. In the spring of this year he fell dangerously ill, and his courtiers were convinced that he would die. He recovered but suffered further bouts of serious illnesses which his physicians called, in the usual language of the period, 'consumption.' On 24th March 1509, he collapsed, and the Venetian ambassador reported that he was 'utterly without hope of recovery.' The more ill he was, the more devout he became and this final attack brought him to a state of great repentance. On 31st March, he made his will, in which he expressed his penitence for his sins, and left money for ten thousand masses to be said for his soul. Also, he stated that he wished reparation to be made to any subjects who had been unjustly expropriated, and appointed commissioners to see that this was done. On 10th April, he granted a general amnesty to criminals. Prince Henry, his son and heir, hurried to his father's bedside at Richmond, and on the 21st April 1509, this ablest of all the Tudor monarchs passed away.

According to the Pembrokeshire historian and antiquarian George Owen (1552-1613), there was a strong tradition that towards the close of his life, Henry was much troubled in conscience about Wales. Apparently, on his death-bed, 'he gave in charge to his son Prince Henry that he should have special care for the benefit of his own nation and countrymen, the Welshmen.'



On the 4th February 2013, the University of Leicester announced to the world a monumental archaeological discovery. Not only had they uncovered the Friary of the Greyfriars, but also unearthed the body of King Richard III, who was given a quick burial there by the Brothers. During the reinterment ceremonies of the king in March 2015, The Telegraph newspaper ran an article on Sir Rhys ap Thomas, lauding him as the man who killed Richard III. This also reopened the dynastic consequences of his actions. Dr. Susan Fern asserts in her biography of him, that "Without Sir Rhys, our present Queen would not be sitting on the throne", and "She has great reason to be thankful to him. He was, unquestionably, pivotal in changing the course of English history." Interestingly, apart from the presence of HRH Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester, the current incumbent of King Richard III's Dukedom, no member of the immediate Royal Family attended the ceremony!

Undoubtedly, despite the Anglo-centric inclination of British history, without this Welsh warrior and his men, Henry VII would never have made it to Bosworth. But what would Sir Rhys himself make of these accolades? As mentioned above, no one knows why he took himself to the Friary of the Grey Friars in Carmarthen. His family, who wrote a history of his life not long afterwards, never mentioned that he suffered any serious illness. This was the same Franciscan order that buried Richard III in Leicester. Was it remorse over his part in killing Richard, and the subsequent mistreatment of the body of an anointed king? Did he know the truth about the disappearance and alleged murder of the Princes in the Tower, and perhaps Tudor complicity in it? Regardless of Tudor propaganda, the truth is far more complex and subtle, not least because Richard III fits none of the criteria of a tyrant, having ruled in the interests of his people rather than himself. Was Sir Rhys also regretful that he backed the wrong horse over the Tudors' lack of interest in the well-being of his fellow Welshmen? He remained at the Friary until his death, six weeks later on February 9, 1525.

After his discovery, Richard was nicknamed "The King in the Car Park", the Priory in Leicester having been covered over the centuries and presently used as a car park. But destiny intervened, and above the exact spot of his burial, a large capital letter 'R' for 'Reserved' was painted, providentially denoting his place of rest! Astoundingly, the Friary at Carmarthen, the original resting place of Sir Rhys ap Thomas, was itself converted to a superstore and car park for Tesco (now Wilkinson's)!



Plas Penmynydd, Anglesey. Ancestral home of the Tudors
(By kind permission of Richard Cuthbertson)

Many, or nearly all historians regard Richard III as the last Plantagenet king of England, bringing to an end over three hundred years of rule under the Royal Houses of Anjou, Lancaster and York. The accession of Henry Tudor created a new royal house and an acknowledged new dynasty. But in actual fact, this was a continuation of Plantagenet rule, as Henry's bloodline to this illustrious dynasty comes from his mother, the enigmatic, scheming Lady Margaret Beaufort, great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and fourth son of Edward III. When Henry seized the throne, there were eighteen Plantagenet descendants who had a stronger claim. Henry mitigated this situation with his marriage to Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV. This legitimized his claim, unified the warring houses and ensured the bloodline ran thicker in the veins of their descendants.

Shining Lights

Much has been written (and debated) about the Tudors, who are generally acknowledged as England's greatest rulers, and this is echoed in Wales. Welshmen were quick to take advantage of having a monarch of their own blood ruling over England. Eagerly the sons of impoverished squires rode to London to snap up whatever posts, offices or occupations that could be got. They could hardly be blamed, for Wales was poor, and offered few opportunities for advancement. In comparison, London was immensely rich. Among those who accompanied the king to his capital was a David Lloyd who became keeper of the Tower of London. Another royal post went to a David Owen who was appointed chief carver at the court. David Seisyll became an officer of the King's bodyguard; he was the grandfather of Elizabeth I's great statesman and chief advisor, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, whose posts included Lord High Treasurer, Secretary of State and Lord Privy Seal. Few politicians were more subtle or unscrupulous than William Cecil, and his descendants include many politicians and two Prime Ministers. The Welsh have been thronging to London ever since, and the vigorous, prosperous and enterprising community now known as the 'London-Welsh' had its deep roots in the reign of Henry Tudor and his immediate successors.

Although the Tudor dynasty was relatively brief, it laid the foundations for our Navy, Church and Empire, and the five Tudor monarchs (or six, if you include Lady Jane Grey) were fundamental to the shaping of modern Britain. It oversaw the creation of the modern state complete with bureaucracy and administration. As early as Henry VII's reign, and particularly under Elizabeth, we see the beginnings of the secret service. Sir Francis Walsingham's agents formed a powerful web of relationships and patronage that brought him information essential to the protection of the Crown and state. Britain's standing in Europe and the rest of the world was transformed. This was famously demonstrated by Henry VIII's exploits at the Field of the Cloth of Gold designed to demonstrate our capacity for war while professing peace. Parliament too was transformed. As a result of the long sessions, profound measures, and revolutionary consequences of the Reformation Parliament (1529-1536), Parliament evolved from an occasional king's court into being a permanent and representative institution of political importance whose statutes bound everyone.

The Tudors had imperial ambitions, beginning with Henry VII's financing of Sir John Cabot, an Italian by birth, to sail west in 1497. In doing so, Cabot was the first European to lay claim to Newfoundland. Despite the Spanish gaining the ascendancy thereafter, the gauntlet was taken up once more under Elizabeth and spear-headed by men like Sir John Hawkins, Sir Francis Drake and Sir Humphrey Gilbert. Drake circumnavigated the globe and claimed what were arguably England's first overseas possessions – Elizabeth Islands off the coast of Cape Cod, and the Western coast of North America known as Nova Albion. Other Tudor adventurers sailed north-west and south-east, one of whom, Sir Ralph Fitch spent nine years in India. His actions prompted Elizabeth to grant a monopoly of trade to 218 merchants, creating the East India Company, thus laying the foundations of the British Empire.

Overseas exploration, adventure and exploitation was only possible due to the creation of the navy by Henry VIII. Previous kings had built ships, but the fleet of warships established under Henry was the first standing military force of its time, and the basis for Britain's future dominance overseas. Under the Tudors we see the creation of a naval administration and bureaucracy, the installation of permanent staff, and investment in shipbuilding, dockyards, and coastal fortifications. It also saw the birth of a new type of manoeuvrable, ocean-going, cannon-carrying warship.

The Tudor age was the era of the English Renaissance. The monarchs surrounded themselves with brilliant people like the artist Hans Holbein and the poets Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, who wrote the first sonnets in English. Henry VIII was the first king to authorize a Bible in English. William Tyndale's lyrical phrasing of the New Testament, which infused the Great Bible of 1538-9 and the King James Bible of 1611, earned him the title of 'architect of the English language.' It was also the age of the poet, playwright and actor, William Shakespeare; his successor, Ben Jonson described him as being 'not of an age, but for all time'. Education was also prominent, with the founding of Colleges and the establishment of the Grammar Schools.

Perhaps their most obvious legacy is the Church of England, and the role of the monarch as its Supreme Head (later Governor). Fuelled by Henry VIII's frustrations of a childless marriage, and the insecurity of the dynasty, the creation of a national Church, distinct and separate from the Church of Rome was postulated on the idea of the sovereignty of the realm. This meant claiming, as the preamble to the 1533 Act of Appeals did, that "this realm of England is an Empire" with a monarch whose imperial status entitled him to be addressed for the first time, from 1534, as "His Majesty". Consequently, the Church of England was a crucial part of the claim that England was a country with its own standing and power, isolated from Catholic Europe. To this day, the Queen remains the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and even the change to the law in 2011 only allows a monarch to marry a Catholic, not to become one.

The Tudors emerged from relative obscurity to become one of the most successful dynasties in English history. The uniquely colourful, larger-than-life Tudor monarchs burned brightly, indelibly changing the course of English/British history, with a reputation enhanced by the creation of their own mythology – one of the earliest forms of propaganda.

Dark Destroyers

There was another, darker side to the Tudors, however. A combination of insecurity, distrust, suspicion, political intrigue and turmoil, murder, adultery, incest and religious zeal underpinned this blood-soaked dynasty.

Henry VII (1457-1509). While he was still in Leicester, Henry VII was already taking precautions to prevent any future rebellions. He dispatched Robert Willoughby, one of his chief commanders to Sheriff Hutton in Yorkshire to arrest the ten-year old Edward, Earl of Warwick and imprison him in the Tower of London. Edward was the son of George, Duke of Clarence, brother of Edward IV, and as such he presented a threat as a rival for the throne of England. In 1499, Henry had the Earl of Warwick executed. However, he spared Warwick's elder sister Margaret. She survived until 1541, when she was executed by Henry VIII. The next possible Yorkist claimant was Edmund de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk. Imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1506, he was eventually executed when Henry VIII was king. To further strengthen his claim to the throne, Henry had Parliament repeal *Titulus Regius*, the statute that declared Edward IV's marriage invalid and the children illegitimate. By doing so, this legitimized Henry's wife and Queen, Elizabeth of York. A few historians have claimed that Henry may have been involved in the murder of the Princes in the Tower, as the repeal of this statute gave the princes a stronger claim to the throne than his own.

Henry VIII (1491-1547) looms large in more ways than one. Neglected by his father and brought up in the shadow of his elder brother, Prince Arthur, Henry promptly reversed most of his father's policies and executed his most trusted servants. A mediocre General, his foreign policy also was a failure. He repeatedly attempted to reconquer parts of France, and ended up with Boulogne, a third-rate port. He tried to conquer Scotland, but only succeeded in forcing the Scots to become allies of his enemies, the French.

Henry was determined to rule effectively and the best way to achieve this, was through fear. As well as savagely punishing ministers for failure, he encouraged them to spy on each other for signs of incompetence or disloyalty. This led to an atmosphere of chronic suspicion and rivalry at court. His reign probably contained more political executions than any other in English history – 330 in the years 1532-1540 alone – and he took a personal interest in subjecting the condemned to physical suffering and humiliation. Only two of his leading advisers, Archbishop Cranmer and Edward Seymour, escaped either disgrace or execution.

Matters of the heart didn't escape his attention, and his insecurity over the lack of an heir, or as a result of being cuckolded resulted in the execution of three of his Queens. In the case of Queen Katherine's divorce, this prompted a quarrel with the Pope. Henry's greed and love of the good life emptied the coffers, and together with his desire to diminish the power of the Pope in England, this may have prompted him to appoint Cromwell to instigate the dissolution and destruction of the monasteries. He seized their wealth for himself, repudiated Papal supremacy and founded the Anglican religion and the Church of England. In the process, he made countless martyrs of not only monks and priests but also Sir Thomas More and other extreme Protestants who threatened his absolute monarchy. His policies resulted in the destruction of hundreds of beautiful buildings, works of art and incalculable damage to libraries. Given his status as Father of the English Reformation, he displayed little personal piety, being concerned only with details of ceremony and royal power; he even deleted the blessing of the poor and meek from the Sermon of the Mount. He was far more interested in his control of religion, and his legacy was not a Protestant Church (that was left to his children), but a decaying Catholic Church. The bloodiest of all the Tudor monarchs, his murderous spree is tallied in thousands. Henry VIII is generally regarded as a formidable king, admired, feared and hated by Englishmen and foreigners in his lifetime. Also remembered as a handsome young king who was an accomplished musician, a patron of the arts, and a fine athlete, but who became a greedy, bloated old despot with a waist-measurement of 54 inches. Whilst opinion of him in his own time was high, modern historians have a lower opinion of him, and he is presented as a stupid, lazy blunderer who was moved, first in this direction and then in that, by scheming courtiers and by his latest wife or mistress, only to be saved from disaster by able ministers like Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell, whom he later sacrificed in order to please some favourite who made a fool of him. Indeed, Professor Elton, in his 'Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government' portrays him as a 'bit of a baby'.

Edward VI (1537-1553) became king on 28th of January 1547 on the death of his father and was crowned on Sunday, 20th February at the age of nine. Henry's will did not provide for the appointment of a Protector and during Edward's reign, the realm was governed by a Regency Council because he never reached his majority. The Council was first ruled by his uncle, Edward Seymour, 1st Duke of Somerset, and then by John Dudley, 1st Earl of Warwick who in 1551 became Duke of Northumberland. Edward's reign was marked by economic problems and social unrest, and during 1548, in England, this erupted into a series of armed revolts fueled by various religious and agrarian grievances. Also in that year, an expensive war with Scotland, although initially successful, ended with military withdrawal and the return of Boulogne to the French in exchange for peace. Edward is more famously remembered for establishing England as a Protestant country. Although his father severed the link between the Church of England and Rome, Henry VIII had never permitted the renunciation of Catholic doctrine or ceremony. Being England's first monarch raised as a Protestant, Edward's intense conviction and great personal interest in religious matters made reform obligatory. The English Reformation as it became to be known was entrusted to Thomas Cranmer and advanced under pressure from both traditionalist and zealot reformers who led incidents of iconoclasm, and who complained that reform did not go far enough. Sacred pictures and stained glass windows were whitewashed or destroyed, and church organs were vandalised. Altars were removed and replaced by communion tables. The observance of saints' days and traditional religious ceremonies was prohibited. The divine ordination of priests was replaced with a government-run appointment system, effectively making them into civil servants; from then on, priests could only preach the gospel and administer the sacraments if they had been authorised to do so. Other reforms included the abolition of clerical celibacy and the Mass, and the imposition of compulsory services in English, and Cranmer's revised Book of Common Prayer of 1552 remains the foundation of the Church of England's services. The confiscation of church property that had begun under Henry VIII continued under Edward, notably with the dissolution of church chantries, to the great monetary advantage of the crown and the new owners of the seized properties. Church reform, therefore, was political as well as a religious policy, and by the end of his reign, the Church had been financially ruined, with much of the property of the bishops transferred into lay hands. Edward's intense religious fervour, and priggish opposition to Catholicism depicted him, during his life and afterwards, as a new Josiah, the biblical king who destroyed the idols of Baal. Edward became ill during January 1553 with a fever and cough that gradually worsened. After several improvements and relapses, the hopelessness of his condition made Edward realize that the succession of his Catholic half-sister Mary would jeopardize the Reformation. This view was endorsed by the Council. Northumberland persuaded the king to declare his half-sisters illegitimate, and the monarchical claims of both Mary and Elizabeth were passed over in favour of his first cousin once removed, Lady Jane Grey. Edward died at the age of 15 at Greenwich Palace on 6th July 1553. • 39 •

Lady Jane Grey (1536/7-1554) became the nominal queen of England for just nine days in 1553, as part of an unsuccessful bid to prevent the accession of the Catholic Mary Tudor. She was the eldest daughter of Henry Grey, 1st Duke of Suffolk, and his wife, Lady Frances Brandon. Lady Frances was the eldest daughter of King Henry VIII's younger sister, Mary. Through her mother, Jane was the great-granddaughter of Henry VII, grand-niece of Henry VIII, and first cousin once removed to Edward VI and his half-sisters Mary and Elizabeth.

She had an excellent Renaissance humanist education and developed into an intelligent and pious woman professing a strong Protestant faith. In 1551 she entered court life where the real power lay in the hands of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland and whose son, Lord Guildford Dudley she married. Following the king's death on 6th July 1553 Lady Jane was officially proclaimed Queen of England and took up residence in the Tower of London, to await her coronation. Meanwhile, on 14th July, Northumberland set out from London with troops to capture Mary, but in his absence, the Privy Council switched their allegiance from Jane to Mary, and proclaimed her Queen on 19th July amidst a great jubilation of the people. The new queen entered London in a triumphal procession on 3rd. August, and the 'Moses of the Reformation', as the Duke of Northumberland was known, was executed on 22nd August. Jane and her husband was imprisoned in the Tower. They were both tried by a special commission which took place at the Guildhall on 13th November, convicted of treason and sentenced to death, but their lives were initially spared. However, a Protestant rebellion by Thomas Wyatt in January 1554 against Mary's planned marriage to the future Philip II of Spain sealed their fate. Jane's father, the Duke of Suffolk, and his two brothers joined the rebellion. The government carried through the verdict of the commission, and the execution was first scheduled for 9th February, but postponed so that Jane should get a chance to convert to the Catholic faith. This she refused to do, and on the morning of 12th February 1554, Guildford was taken from his rooms at the Tower to the public execution place at Tower Hill, where he was beheaded. A horse and cart brought his remains back to the Tower, past the rooms where Jane was staying. She was then taken to be beheaded. Jane gave a speech upon ascending the scaffold. Then, blindfolded she was helped to place her head on the block, whereupon she recited the last words of Jesus, "Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The axe then fell. Jane and Guildford are buried in the Chapel Royal of St. Peter ad Vincula on the north side of Tower Green. Jane's father was executed 11 days later, on 23rd. February. Her mother, the Duchess of Suffolk married her Master of Horse and Chamberlain in March 1555. She was fully pardoned by Mary and allowed to live at Court with her two surviving daughters.

Mary I (1516-1558). Her tragic life, like her half-brother and predecessor was sandwiched between the two Tudor giants of English history, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Throughout the first thirty-seven years of her life, she was tossed about by the whims of her father and later, perhaps more galling, by her Protestant half-brother and his council. Mary led a sheltered life, was well-educated by her mother, Queen Katharine, and was considered one of the most important European princesses. In 1525 Henry sent Mary to the borders of Wales to preside, presumably in name only, over the Council of Wales and the Marches. She was given her own court at Ludlow Castle and many of the royal prerogatives normally reserved for the Prince of Wales, although she was never invested with the title of Princess of Wales. She spent three years in the Welsh Marches, making regular visits to her father's court, before returning to London in 1528.

Her father used her as every king used his daughter – as a pawn in political negotiations – and he scoured Europe for a suitable husband for Mary. Henry's infatuation with Anne Boleyn signaled the end of the world for Mary, and her mother, Queen Katharine, was being forced aside by a former lady-in-waiting. Mary was declared illegitimate and she developed a lasting hatred of Anne Boleyn and this would later extend to Anne's daughter, Elizabeth. Following Henry's divorce from her mother, Mary, being a devout Catholic daughter, never acknowledged the Church of England and her father, Henry, as Supreme Head. Both paid for their refusal to submit. Katharine was sent from court and deprived of all accustomed luxuries. Mary was equally disgraced. Now declared a bastard by Parliament, she was denied any communication with her mother and made lady-in-waiting to Anne and Henry's daughter, Elizabeth. Unlike Mary, Elizabeth was recognized as a Princess of the realm. and this reversal of fortune proved to be devastating for the seventeen-year-old Mary. Henry had told Mary in 1536 that as long as he was alive, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, to whom Mary at the age of six was contracted to marry, would not be able to help her. As soon as Henry died, Charles proceeded to bully the government of Edward VI on her behalf and threatened the English with war if they attempted to punish her for her faith and for celebrating the old Catholic Mass which was suppressed in 1549. Mary, also defied Edward's government, and dared them to do their worst, telling them that their laws did not frighten her.

Following her half-brother's death, Mary became – excluding the brief, disputed reigns of Empress Matilda and Lady Jane Grey – England's first queen regnant i.e. a female monarch reigning in her own right. Given the unhappy, harsh, and see-saw life of her unfortunate past, what potent and intoxicating thoughts must have been going on in her mind at this first taste of power?

Firstly, at the age of 37, Mary turned her attention to finding a husband and producing an heir in order to prevent the Protestant Elizabeth (still next-in-line under the terms of Henry's will and the Act of Succession of 1544) from succeeding to the throne. Edward Courtenay and Reginald Pole were both mentioned as prospective suitors, but Mary's cousin, Charles V (see above) suggested she marry his only son, Prince Philip of Spain, who was heir apparent to vast territories in Continental Europe and the Americas. Lord Chancellor Gardiner and the House of Commons, fearing that England would be relegated to a dependency of the Habsburgs, unsuccessfully petitioned her to consider marrying an Englishman. Their pleadings landed on stony ground and Mary married Philip, at Winchester Cathedral on 25 July 1554, just two days after their first meeting Philip's father, the emperor, ceded to him the crown of Naples, as well as the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Thus, Mary became Queen of Naples and titular Queen of Jerusalem upon marriage. Philip sought this marriage for political and strategic gains alone, and had no amorous feelings towards Mary. Indeed, his aide, Ruy Gomez de Silva, wrote to a correspondent in Brussels, "the marriage was concluded for no fleshly consideration, but in order to remedy the disorders of this kingdom (Spain) and to preserve the Low Countries". The marriage was unpopular with the English – Gardiner and his allies opposed it on the basis of patriotism, while Protestants were terrified of impending Catholicism. Insurrections broke out and Thomas Wyatt's rebellious force from Kent, among others were instigated to depose Mary in favour of Elizabeth. This was defeated and eventually led to the executions of Wyatt, and the Duke of Suffolk, his daughter Lady Jane Grey and her husband (see above).

Mary's foreign policy consisted of the colonization of the Irish Midlands. Queen's and King's Counties (now the counties of Laois and Offaly) were founded and the plantation, confiscation of land and their colonization with settlers from Britain, began. Their respective principal towns were named Maryborough (now Portlaoise) and Philipstown (Daingean). The French Ambassador, Antoine de Noailles was implicated in a plot against Mary, and Sir Henry Dudley attempted to assemble an invasion force in France. But he was betrayed and the conspirators in England were rounded up. In 1557, Philip persuaded Mary to support Spain in a renewed war against France. Mary's councilors opposed it on the grounds that trade with France would be jeopardized, a bad economic legacy from Edward VI's reign, and a series of poor harvests meant England lacked supplies and finances. Nevertheless, war was declared in June 1557 after Thomas Stafford, with French help, invaded England and seized Scarborough Castle in another failed attempt to depose Mary. This war resulted in strained relationships between England and the Papacy, since Pope Paul IV was allied to Henry II of France. In January 1558, the French took Calais, England's sole remaining possession in Continental Europe. Although the territory was financially crippling, its loss damaged Mary's prestige. According to Holinshed's Chronicles, a collaborative description of British history published in several volumes in 1577 and 1587, Mary later lamented, "When I am dead and opened, you shall find 'Calais' lying in my heart". Although widely reported, this may be of doubtful authenticity.

Mary's accession to the throne triggered another violent religious revolution. The Mass and Catholic church services were revived; all the innovations of the reformers were swept away, and all the old penal laws against heretics came into force once again. Papal authority over the Church in England was resumed, and the Papal Legate, Cardinal Pole, became Archbishop of Canterbury. But the supremacy of the Pope was accepted by Parliament only on the condition that there would be no restoration of the property which had been pillaged from the Church during the previous two reigns. Incidentally, Queen Mary's ambassador to Pope Julius III at the Vatican was the Welsh lawyer, scholar and diplomat, Sir Edward Carne of Glamorgan. He had been one of Henry VIII's commissioners during the dissolution of the monasteries, and had purchased Ewenny Priory and its lands. Though the foreign Protestant teachers were allowed to leave England, the leaders of the Edwardian reformers, including John Hooper, Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were arrested. Under the revived Heresy Acts, a total of 283 Protestants were executed in the Marian persecutions, beginning in early February 1555. Thomas Cranmer, the imprisoned Archbishop of Canterbury, was forced to watch Bishops Latimer and Ridley being burned at the stake. Cranmer himself recanted, rejected Protestant theology, and rejoined the Catholic faith. Under process of law, he should have been absolved as a repentant. Mary refused to reprieve him, and on the day of his burning he dramatically withdrew his recantation, stating that his hand which signed the recantation would burn first. As the flames surrounded him, he fulfilled his promise by placing his right hand into the fire while uttering "that unworthy hand". The burnings proved so unpopular that even one of Philip's own ecclesiastical staff condemned them, and another adviser warned him that such cruel enforcement could cause a revolt. Mary persisted with the persecutions which continued until her death and aggravated anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish feeling among the people. The victims of the persecutions became martyrs.

During her marriage, Mary had several false pregnancies, and after Philip's visit in 1557, she thought herself pregnant again with a baby due in March 1557. But from May 1558, she became weak and ill, possibly from ovarian cysts or uterine cancer, and on 17 November 1558, aged 42, at St. James's Palace, 'Bloody Mary' died during an influenza epidemic. Her wish to be buried next to her mother was rebuffed and she now lies in Westminster Abbey in a tomb she would eventually share with her half-sister Elizabeth. The Latin inscription on their tomb translates as "Consorts in realm and tomb, here we sleep, Elizabeth and Mary, sisters, in hope of resurrection".

Elizabeth I (1533-1603) is considered by many as, arguably, England's greatest monarch. Born into a troubled family, she was the daughter of Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII, whom he married to replace the barren Queen Katharine. Her birth caused great rejoicing across the country, but was a bitter disappointment to Henry, desperate for a male heir to continue the Tudor dynasty. She was only two and a half years old when her mother was accused of adultery and beheaded. Her father married Jane Seymour, Elizabeth was declared illegitimate and downgraded from 'Princess' to 'Lady'. She was neglected for a number of years and put under the care of governesses until Henry's final wife, Catherine Parr, took her into her charge and made sure she continued to receive a good education. She became one of the best educated women of her time and could speak French, Flemish, Italian and Spanish. She could also write English, Latin and Italian. By the end of her life, Elizabeth was also believed to have spoken Welsh, Cornish, Scottish and Irish, as well as English. The Venetian ambassador, in 1603, stated that "she possessed these languages so thoroughly that each appeared to be her native tongue".

Elizabeth was thirteen years old when Henry died, and her nine-year old half-brother Edward became king. Catherine Parr married Thomas Seymour, uncle to Edward VI, and Elizabeth joined the household of her step-mother. There she experienced an emotional crisis which some historians believe affected her for the rest of her life. Thomas Seymour, approaching the age of 40, frequently entered the fourteen-year-old Elizabeth's bedroom in his nightgown and engaged her in romps and horseplay. When she was caught in his embrace, Catherine banished her from the house. In 1548, Catherine died in childbirth and Seymour renewed his attentions towards Elizabeth and was subsequently executed in 1549 for suspicion of plotting to marry Elizabeth and to overthrow the Lord Protector. When questioned by the authorities, Elizabeth protested her innocence and escaped prosecution.

After the death of Edward VI, Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed Queen by the Privy Council, but her support quickly crumbled and she was deposed after nine days. On 3rd August 1553, Mary rode triumphantly into London, with Elizabeth at her side. This show of unity did not last. Mary, a devout Catholic was determined to crush the Protestant faith into which Elizabeth had been brought up. Elizabeth outwardly conformed, but when Mary's popularity diminished following her marriage plans to Philip of Spain, discontent swept throughout the country, and many looked to Elizabeth as an alternative monarch. Following Wyatt's rebellion (see above), Elizabeth was implicated and interrogated regarding her role in the insurrection, and imprisoned in the Tower of London. She fervently protested her innocence. Mary's Catholic advisers argued that her throne would not be safe with Elizabeth alive. However, Elizabeth's supporters in the government convinced Mary to spare her half-sister in the absence of hard evidence, and she was placed under house arrest at Woodstock.

In April 1555, Elizabeth was recalled to court to attend the final stages of Mary's apparent pregnancy. When it became clear that Mary was not pregnant, Elizabeth's succession seemed assured. King Philip II, who ascended the Spanish throne in 1556 acknowledged Elizabeth as successor to his wife, regarding her as a better ally than Mary, Queen of Scots, who had grown up in France, and was betrothed to the Dauphin. When Mary fell ill in 1558, Philip sent his close advisor to consult Elizabeth at Hatfield House where she returned to live in 1555. Elizabeth was now making plans for her government, and Mary knowing her impending death, recognised Elizabeth as her heir. On 17 November 1558, Mary died and Elizabeth succeeded to the throne.

From the start of her reign, Elizabeth was expected by everyone – ministers, subjects and allies – to marry and produce an heir. She never did, and some historians have speculated that Thomas Seymour had instilled into her an aversion to sex, or that she was infertile. There were many foreign candidates for her hand, but it became evident that she was in love with her favourite, and former childhood friend, Robert Dudley. It was said that Dudley's wife, Amy, was suffering from a malady in one of her breasts, and should she die, the Queen would like to marry him. Amy Dudley died in 1560 from a fall from a flight of stairs, and despite the coroner's finding of accident, many suspected Dudley to have arranged the fall so that he could marry the Queen. This, Elizabeth seriously considered to do, but her chief adviser, William Cecil (see above) and other peers voiced their disapproval, even threatening that the nobility would rise up if the marriage took place. In 1564 she raised Dudley to the peerage as Earl of Leicester, and he finally married another to which the Queen reacted with repeated scenes of displeasure and lifelong hatred towards his wife. He died shortly after the defeat of the Armada, and after Elizabeth's death, a note from him was found among her most personal possessions, marked "his last letter" in her own handwriting. Elizabeth's unmarried status inspired a cult of virginity, and in both poetry and portraiture she was depicted as a virgin, or a goddess, and she made a virtue of her virginity. Selfishly, she insisted that she was married to her kingdom and subjects.

Elizabeth's personal religious convictions have come into question by scholars. She was undoubtedly a Protestant, but she still kept Catholic symbols, such as a crucifix. She adopted a pragmatic stance, and she and her advisers sought a solution to a Catholic crusade against heresy. Whilst she addressed the desires of English Protestants, she did not tolerate the more radical Puritans who were pushing for far-reaching reforms. She legislated for a church based on the Protestant Settlement of Edward VI, with the monarch at its head, but with many Catholic elements, such as priestly vestments.

The Act of Supremacy became law in 1559, and Elizabeth accepted the title of Supreme Governor of the Church of England. All public officials were to swear an oath to the monarch as the supreme governor; the heresy laws were repealed to avoid persecuting dissenters as had been done during the reign of Mary; and a new Act of Uniformity was passed which made attendance at church and the use of the 1552 Book of Common Prayer compulsory.

Elizabeth faced a rival claimant to the throne in the person of Mary, the Catholic Queen of Scots. Mary Stuart moved to France when she was a young child on the death of her father, King James V of Scotland, while Scotland was ruled by regents. She grew up a Catholic, married the heir to the French throne and was briefly Queen of France until her husband, Francis II died. No longer a queen of France, she returned to rule Scotland in person. Meanwhile in England, Elizabeth was increasingly nervous of Mary. As a Stuart, Mary had a strong claim to the English throne through Margaret Tudor, daughter of Henry VII, who married James IV of Scotland. To counteract this, Elizabeth advised Mary on prospective husbands and in return would recognise Mary's claim to the English throne. Mary rejected Elizabeth's choice of suitors and married her cousin, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, who was also a grandchild of Margaret Tudor. Any issue from the marriage would be descended on both sides from the Tudors and have an even stronger claim. The threat became a reality on the birth of Mary and Darnley's son, James. But Darnley was murdered by the Scottish lords and Mary married James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell only three months later. This scandalous union infuriated the Protestant Scottish nobility who rose against Mary. Bothwell was sent into exile, Mary was imprisoned in Lochleven Castle and in 1567 compelled to abdicate the throne in favour of her infant son. She escaped in 1568, raised an army, but was defeated and fled to England to seek Elizabeth's protection. But she was imprisoned. Given Mary's religion and lineage, she became the focus of Catholic plots to assassinate Elizabeth. She corresponded with one plotter, Anthony Babbage, but Elizabeth's spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham and William Cecil intercepted her letters and uncovered the plot. Mary was moved to Fotheringhay Castle, and put on trial for treason. She was convicted in October 1586 and sentenced to death. Elizabeth hesitated to sign the death warrant, being fearful that killing a queen would have serious consequences especially from a Catholic faction forming an alliance with Mary's son James and invading England. Pressure from her advisers persuaded Elizabeth to sign the death warrant on 1 February 1587. At Fotheringhay on the evening of 7 February, Mary was told that she was to be executed the next morning. She spent the last evening of her life in prayer and writing her will and a letter to the King of France. Her execution was botched. The first blow missed her neck and struck the back of her head. The second blow severed the neck except for a small piece of sinew which the executioner cut through. A small dog owned by her is said to have been hiding among her skirts, and following the beheading refused to be parted from its mistress, until forcibly taken away. Mary's courage at her execution established her popular image as the heroic victim in a dramatic tragedy.

Foreign policy was very much to the fore during Elizabeth's reign. It was mainly defensive in nature, the exception being the English occupation of Le Havre from October 1562 to June 1563. The intention was to exchange Le Havre for Calais, lost to France in 1558 during her half-sister's reign. But it ended in failure when her Huguenot allies joined with the Catholics to retake the port. After this loss, she avoided military expeditions on the continent until 1585 when she sent an English army to aid the Protestant Dutch rebels against Philip II of Spain. The siege of Antwerp in August of that year led to the Treaty of Nonsuch in which Elizabeth promised military support to the Dutch. This treaty marked the beginning of the Anglo-Spanish War. On the accession of the Protestant Henry IV to the French throne in 1589, Elizabeth sent him military support against the Catholic League and Philip II, fearing a Spanish takeover of the channel ports. The French expeditions led by various commanders were ineffective and disorganized. In all such expeditions abroad, Elizabeth was unwilling to invest in supplies and reinforcements requested by her commanders, who invariably ignored her orders, and as usual, she lacked control over them once they were abroad. Ireland was also her kingdom, and here she encountered a hostile, and in places independent and free minded Catholic population that defied her authority and plotted with her enemies. In many uprisings, her forces engaged scorched-earth tactics, burning the land and slaughtering man, woman and child. During a revolt in Munster in 1582, an estimated 30,000 Irish people starved to death. Edmund Spenser, the famed poet and colonist who served under the newly appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland wrote that the victims "were brought to such wretchedness as that any stony heart would have rued the same". In response, Elizabeth advised her commanders that the Irish, "that rude and barbarous nation", be well treated; but as ever, she showed no guilt or remorse when force and bloodshed were considered necessary.

Diplomatic relations were continued with Russia, originally established by her brother, Edward VI. She frequently wrote to Tsar Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible) on friendly terms, although Ivan would rather discuss the possibility of a military alliance, rather than matters of trade and commerce. The Tsar even proposed to her once, and in his later reign asked for assurance of asylum should his rule be in danger! Relations broke down with the accession of Ivan's feeble-minded son, Feodor. Trade and diplomatic relations developed between England and the Barbary states during Elizabeth's reign, especially with Morocco, in opposition to Spain, selling armour, ammunition, timber and metal in exchange for sugar. Relations were also established with the Ottoman Empire, with England exporting tin and lead (for casting cannons) and ammunition, as well as discussing joint military operations against their common enemy, Spain.

Elizabeth's only policy of aggression was through the activities of her fleets. This was successful in the war against Spain, when Francis Drake, whom she later knighted, won fame for his raids on Spanish ports and fleets. Following Drake's expeditions against Spanish ports and ships in the Caribbean and his successful raid on Cadiz destroying the Spanish fleet of war ships intended for his Enterprise of England, Philip II decided to take the war to England. The plan was to set sail for the English Channel, to escort an army from Flanders, and then invade southeast England. This was against the advice of the 7th Duke of Medina Sidonia, Commander of the Spanish Armada, who deemed it a failure from the start. The strong-willed and stubborn Philip refused the advice, and the great fleet of ships set sail on 12 July 1588. The Armada chose not to attack the English fleet at Plymouth, and dropped anchor at Calais. While awaiting communications from the Duke of Parma's army, English fireships scattered and damaged the Spanish fleet which was forced to abandon its rendezvous with Parma's army, who were themselves blockaded in harbour by the Dutch. The defeated Armada straggled back to Spain. Unaware of the Armada's fate, the Earl of Leicester invited the Queen to inspect her troops, in which she gave one of her most famous speeches, a part of which includes, "...I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king...". However, the victory was not a turning point in the war and Spain still controlled the southern parts of the Netherlands, and the threat of invasion remained. After her death, Sir Walter Raleigh criticized Elizabeth's caution, stating, "...But her Majesty did all by halves...". This is also the sentiment of some historians.

She fell ill in February 1603, suffering from frailty and insomnia. After a period of distress, she died on 24 March at Richmond Palace. The reign of Elizabeth I is often referred to as a Golden Age, and the epithets 'Virgin Queen', 'Gloriana' and 'Good Queen Bess' are ascribed to her. It was a time of extravagance and luxury, with a flourishing culture being expressed through writers and poets like Shakespeare and Spenser, and explorers like Drake and Raleigh. She embodied this ideal by wearing sumptuous costumes and jewellery, and being entertained in style at her court. However, this was a time when the poor became poorer, books and opinions were censored, and plots to overthrow the Queen were rife. Her ministers employed spies, and even used torture to gain information. She relied heavily on ministers close to her, but would exasperate them with her indecisions. Whilst being quick-witted, clever and scheming, she was at the same time vain, sentimental and easily swayed by flattery. She liked to surround herself with attractive people, and her portraits were carefully vetted to make sure that no physical flaws were ever revealed. Elizabeth could be as ruthless and calculating as any King before her. In 1558, the Protestant preacher John Knox wrote, "It is more than a monster in nature that a woman should reign and bear empire over man". This was written of Queen Mary, but his pamphlet deeply offended Elizabeth, who never forgave him.

Political and Legal Policies

Despite Henry VII's sentiments towards the land of his birth and youth, very little benefit came to Wales. Apart from the migration of a number of the nobility to England, the benefits to the common folk back home amounted to practically nothing. The Settlement of 1284 under Edward I should have uprooted Welsh customs and traditions and jeopardized the existence of the Welsh language. They were but faintly affected. Welsh remained the language of nobility and commoner alike, and changes were due more to economic than to political factors. The course of Welsh history was shifted by Henry VIII's revolutionary Acts of Union of 1536 and 1542. These abolished any vestige of legal status for 'Wales', aiming at an irrevocable union with England. The Act of 1536, in its preamble, states *'His Highness therefore, of a singular love and favour that he beareth towards his subjects of his said dominion of Wales, minding, and intending to reduce them to the perfect order, notice and knowledge of the laws of this his Realm and utterly to extirpate all and singular the sinister usages and customs differing from the same, and to bring his said subjects of this his Realm and of his dominion of Wales to an amiable concord and unity... ordained, enacted and established that his said country or dominion of Wales shall stand and continue for ever from henceforth incorporated, united and annexed to and with his Realm of England'*.

This indicated Henry VIII's determination to extinguish any hope of a separate political identity for Wales. In order to achieve these aims, the Marcher lordships had to go, leaving them with only a few of their previous privileges. Their territories were divided into the new shires of Denbigh, Montgomery, Radnor, Brecon and Monmouth. The smaller 'shires' of Pembroke, Cardigan, Carmarthen and Glamorgan were extended to include all the independent lordships within their prescribed boundaries. In the case of Carmarthenshire, the Act of 1536 attached the lordships of Laugharne and Llansteffan to Pembrokeshire. This arrangement brought the south-eastern portion of Pembrokeshire almost to the gates of Carmarthen Borough. But the Act of 1542 restored these areas to their more natural setting. The Carmarthenshire county boundary has remained largely unaltered since that time, apart from the period 1974-1996 when the county of Dyfed became the administrative boundary for the region. The comprehensive Act of 1542 removed every administrative and legal difference which remained between the two countries. In particular, the English common law relating to land tenure replaced the ancient Welsh tribal system of gavelkind by that of primogeniture. The eldest son or nearest male heir was now to succeed to landed property, and estates could be sold or mortgaged as in England.

Religion

Religious upheaval was no stranger to the Principality. Protestantism encroached into Wales and under the Reformation of Edward VI, rapacious commissioners were sent around the country raiding church property. It is believed that every church in Carmarthenshire suffered robbery and degradation at the hands of the commissioners. Apart from a silver paten (a church plate) at Llanddeusant and the base of a chalice at Llangyndeyrn, no genuine pre-Reformation plate is to be found in any church in the county. Capel Dyddgu, a 'chapel of ease' formerly situated in Sylen Farm for parishioners who had difficulty in attending the parish church is mentioned in a survey during Edward's reign. It says *'It'm in the chaple of St. Dyddgye, one chalice, sef un cwpan cymun.'* Elsewhere in South Wales, St David's Cathedral lost its shrine of the saint, its plate and its ornaments. At Llandaff, the shrine of St. Teilo is said to have been broken up by the cathedral clergy who shared among themselves the gold, silver and jewels it contained. The Book of St. Teilo, another of the Cathedral's treasures, disappeared without trace. Surprisingly, in a country which was so devoted to the Catholic faith, there was no active resistance to the Reformation. The dissolution of the monasteries, the destruction and plundering of shrines, and the innovations of the reformers were accepted without a struggle, contrary to the opposition and uprisings witnessed in England. The reason lies, perhaps, in the loyalty of the Welsh ruling classes, the gentry and the higher clergy, to the Tudors. Both had vested interests. The former, including Sir Rhys, had acquired monastic lands and tithes; the latter relied upon the Crown for their appointments, and often plundered their own sees. The lower clergy were frequently ill-trained, ignorant and apathetic. Without direction and leadership, the peasantry could do nothing.

Mary I's accession saw a return to Catholicism, and she appointed Sir Edward Carne of Glamorgan as Ambassador to the Vatican (see above). In Wales, generally, clergy, gentry and peasantry returned willingly to the old faith. Some of the former Edwardian reformers escaped into exile abroad. Among them were about a dozen Welshmen, including Richard Davies who later became Bishop of St. David's and his immediate predecessor, Thomas Young, a former precentor of St. David's and later Archbishop of York. Other Protestants like William Salesbury went into hiding. It is said that this distinguished Welsh scholar lived for four bitter years of Marian persecution in a secret room at a Denbighshire farmhouse. Sir John Perrott of Haverfordwest and Laugharne, who had been knighted by Edward VI escaped retribution, probably due to his alleged blood relationship to Queen Mary. Later he was denounced for having given refuge to heretics. Imprisoned for a short time in Fleet jail, he was released on the Queen's orders, and wisely went abroad to serve as a soldier in France until Elizabeth's accession.

The most notable martyr in Wales was Robert Ferrar, Bishop of St. David's. His burning at the stake linked Carmarthen closely with the most horrendous religious persecution which has ever befallen the country. A Yorkshireman, Ferrar was formerly an Augustinian monk who became Prior of Nostell in his native county. After the dissolution of the monasteries, and following the death of Henry VIII, he joined the reformers. His zeal attracted the attention of Archbishop Cranmer and Protector Somerset, and in 1548 he was appointed Bishop of St. David's. Here, he was the first to be consecrated in the new English form of service. He quarrelled fiercely with a group of his canons led by the aforementioned Thomas Young and Rowland Meyrick, the chancellor. Ferrar accused these canons of having made spoil of the plate and ornaments of the cathedral; of selling church livings (a guaranteed income and home for the lifetime of the incumbent) and of general bribery. After the fall of his patron, Somerset, the canons drew up a list of counter-charges against their Bishop indicting him for not being sufficiently zealous in his Protestantism. Further charges were made by another ardent reformer, George Constantine, registrar of St. David's, Archdeacon of Carmarthen and Vicar of St. Peter's. Constantine had taken down the high altar at the church and replaced it with a communion table in the nave without asking for Ferrar's consent, and who had commanded Constantine to put back the communion table in the chancel. Finally, it was alleged that Ferrar, in the course of an English sermon at Abergwili, had said 'The Welsh are more gentle than the English, and not without cause, for ye were the Britons sometime, and had the realm in governance. And if the prophecy be true, ye shall be Britons again, and this land shall be called Great Britain.' This was twisted into an accusation of encouraging public officials to use the Welsh language, which was forbidden by one of the provisions of the Act of 1536. His enemies were powerful enough to cause his arrest. He was in prison at the accession of Queen Mary and was removed in custody to Southwark. In 1554, Ferrar was deposed from his bishopric for heresy, and in 1555 he appeared for a preliminary trial before one of the Queen's most fanatical advisers, Lord Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester. Ferrar refused to recant and was taken back to Carmarthen for a further trial. The county sheriff took him to St. Peter's Church where his successor, Bishop Henry Morgan and the hypocritical Constantine were seated as his judges. Morgan offered him a pardon on condition that he recanted (or gave up his Protestantism) and conformed to the Roman Catholic faith. Ferrar refused, challenged the authority of his judges and said he would appeal to Cardinal Pole and the Queen. Morgan lost his temper and declared the prisoner to be a 'heretic excommunicate'. This was the end. The Church had no power to carry out the death penalty and the deposed bishop was handed over to the civil authorities. On March 30th 1555, Robert Ferrar met his end, probably in the market place of Carmarthen, though it has been claimed that a spot near the old preaching cross in Priory Street was the site of his burning. Ironically, tried and imprisoned in Edward VI's reign for not being zealous enough of a reformer, he was put to death in Mary's reign for not renouncing his Protestant convictions.

Bishop Henry Morgan, who is also said to have been mainly responsible for sacking the shrine of St. Teilo at Llandaff during Edward's reign, was deposed at the accession of Queen Elizabeth I. He was fortunate to be allowed to die peacefully among friends in Oxfordshire shortly afterwards. During the first 25 years of Elizabeth's reign came yet another religious change. The Welsh Protestants who had fled abroad or gone into hiding to avoid persecution were reappearing. These included Thomas Young and Rowland Meyrick, who had hounded Ferrar into prison. Both were appointed to bishoprics in December 1559, Young to St. David's, and Meyrick to Bangor. Within a year, Young became Archbishop of York and President of the Council of the North. It seems there was some truth in Ferrar's accusations against Young because he was severely censured at York for misusing the revenues of his see. His successor at St. David's and Abergwili in 1561 was the eminent scholar and genuine reformer, Richard Davies, who had returned from exile in 1558, to become Bishop of St. Asaph a year later.

The Elizabethan Religious Settlement and the Oath of Supremacy was accepted by all bishops in Wales, except one. However, in Wales and the Marches, most of the higher clergy did not follow their bishops' lead. All who refused the oath were deprived of their offices, but no persecution or vengeance ensued. The exception among the bishops was the former Benedictine monk, Anthony Kitchen, Bishop of Llandaff since 1545, and previously a royal chaplain. He was a clever religious chameleon, presenting himself without the slightest difficulty, to being an Anglo-Catholic under Henry VIII, a Protestant in the reign of Edward VI, a Papist in the time of Mary, and a middle-of-the-road man during the early years of Elizabeth I. But he showed equal tolerance towards other religious chameleons in his diocese. Llandaff was the only Welsh see in which no clergy were deprived of their offices under the Act of Supremacy. Despite conformity by the bishops in Wales, they reported their serious concern at the slow progress of the Reformation in their dioceses and the wide-spread persistence of Roman Catholic usages and practices among the common people. The continued affection for the old ways of worship, undoubtedly, was secretly sustained and encouraged by a number of the clergy and the tolerant attitude of magistrates. Thomas Huet, precentor of St. David's, discovered that the cathedral sexton had hidden away a collection of 'ungodly popish books', perhaps in anticipation of a Roman Catholic restoration. Huet dismissed the sexton and made a bonfire of the books. His Protestant zeal probably deprived posterity of a number of precious illuminated missals.

Bishop Richard Davies had to contend with the predominance of Catholic practices in his Diocese. In a funeral sermon preached in 1576, he harshly condemned those in his diocese who 'defend papistry, superstition and idolatry, pilgrimages to wells and blind chapels: and who procure the wardens of churches in time of visitation to perjure, to conceal images, rood lofts and altars.' He attributed this more to ignorance and superstition than to any deep sense of religious conviction. Even at the Cathedral, lack of education and poor discipline were found among minor residential clergy. Several were deficient in reading ability, others were dismissed for bad behaviour, and two were seriously reprimanded for selling ale within the cathedral grounds. Some of the parish clergy were reduced to keeping taverns adjacent to their churches in order to supplement their meagre incomes. No doubt, on a number of occasions, services were cut short to attend to customers. Well-cult was particularly prevalent in Carmarthenshire. Wells, springs and river pools have been closely connected with religious observances in Wales and elsewhere since time immemorial. Many, considered sacred in pagan days, were rededicated later for Christian purposes. In some instances, churches and little chapels were built near them, or canopies erected over them. Examples of former well-chapels in Carmarthenshire were Ffynnon Capel Begewdin, Llanddarog; Ffynnon Capel Herbach, Llanarthne; Ffynnon Capel Celer, Llangeler and Ffynnon Gwyddfaen now known as Ffynnon Llandyfaen, Llandeilo. A substantial number were healing wells. Most prominent were Ffynnon Antwn Sant (St. Anthony's Well), Llansteffan; Ffynnon Gwenno, Cynwyl Gaeo; Ffynnon Job (Job's Well), Johnstown, Carmarthen; and Ffynnon Ffos Ana, Cynwyl. All were previously held in high repute for the cures which were said to have occurred at them. St. Anthony's Well, Llansteffan is still visited as a 'wishing well' and is one of several Carmarthenshire wells where pin offerings were made. Nearer home, Ffynnon Fair (St. Mary's Well), near Kidwelly Castle, where pilgrimages were made on Lady Day, and Ffynnon Stockwell in the same parish, usually visited on Palm Sunday, attracted people up to the beginning of last century.

Bishop Marmaduke Middleton, who succeeded Richard Davies in 1581, again reported the continuance of Catholic ceremonies and practices in the diocese. People carried rosaries and used them during services; prayers were said for the dead; the host was elevated at Communion; images, rood-lofts and altars remained intact; and pilgrimages to sacred places, especially healing wells were common.

It was this religious scenario that gave birth to the Welsh translation of the Book of Common Prayer, the New Testament and the Bible. The English 'Great Bible', originally chained to the lecterns in churches; the 'King's Primer', which contained the Litany, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments and the two later Prayer Books of the Edwardian reformers were not much use to the ordinary people of Wales. The great majority of worshippers did not understand the Latin service and clearly any hope of progress for the Reformation in Wales was futile without the adoption of Wales's mother-tongue. This was first realized in the reign of Henry VIII by Sir John Price of Brecon. A distinguished civil servant and scholar, he became secretary of the Council of Wales and the Marches. He was also one of Cromwell's commissioners during the dissolution of the monasteries, and was rewarded with Brecon Priory, the rectory of Llanfihangel Ioreth (now Llanfihangel-ar-Arth) in Carmarthenshire, and St. Guthlac's Priory, Hereford. He was probably responsible for possibly the first book to be printed in the Welsh language. It has no proper title, but is known as 'Yn y lhyvyr hwn' (In this book), being the first words printed in the book. A small publication, it was intended as a book of devotions for the common people. It contained translations of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Commandments, and the seven deadly sins with their corresponding virtues. Strangely, it also included the Welsh alphabet, a calendar of the holy days of Welsh saints, some instruction on how to read Welsh, and general seasonal farming hints! An attempt was also made by William Salesbury (see above) who in 1551, published a book called 'Kynniver Llith a Ban' (As many lessons and parts of Holy Writ) which contained translations of the epistles and gospels.

Earlier in 1552 Salesbury pressured the government for a translation of the Scriptures, but the return of Roman Catholicism under Queen Mary postponed progress. Following Elizabeth I's succession, her government passed an Act in 1563 providing for the translation of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer into Welsh. This was entrusted to four Welsh bishops and the Bishop of Hereford. The work was to be accomplished by St. David's Day 1567 and copies were to be placed in every church. But copies in English had also to be provided in order that the people might 'by conferring both Tongues together – the sooner attain to the knowledge of the English Tongue'. The specified period proved insufficient for the task and the necessary funds were not provided. Bishop Richard Davies (see above) invited Salesbury to Abergwili palace and after two years of labour their contribution, in 1567 were the Book of Common Prayer and the New Testament. It was left to Dr. William Morgan, Vicar of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, Powys to complete the task. A brilliant scholar, Morgan entered St. John's College, Cambridge, where one of his tutors was the noted Hebrew scholar, John Tremellius. After graduating at the age of 23, he continued his studies in Hebrew and Greek and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity. Perhaps he commenced the translation whilst at Cambridge, but it was in the remote, rural solitude of his vicarage that he completed his great work. He was rewarded in 1549 with the appointment of Bishop of Llandaff, and then St. Asaph, where he died in 1604. Following a revised version, his Bible was issued to the churches in Wales in 1620. The first Welsh Bible made available for people to read in their own homes appeared in 1630 and became known as 'Y Bibl Bach'. Its price was five shillings (25p), and fifteen hundred copies of the 'Little Bible' were printed.

Education

University education at both Oxford and Cambridge has attracted countless Welsh students throughout the ages. We know that Welshmen had been students at the University since at least the 14th century, a time when the eminent scholastic philosopher, theologian and reformer, John Wycliffe taught at Oxford. We also know that Welsh students abandoned their studies to join Owain Glyndŵr in his great revolt which began in 1400. Owain himself studied law at the Inns of Court in London. During the 16th century, St. John's College, Cambridge, founded by Henry VII's mother, Margaret Beaufort, former Countess of Richmond, had attracted some notable Welshmen, including Dean Gabriel Goodman of Westminster; Bishop William Morgan; Archdeacon Edmund Prys; and John Williams, Archbishop of York, and Lord Keeper of the Great Seal.

As far as Wales is concerned, the most important institution of higher education established in Tudor times was Jesus College, Oxford, its full title being Jesus College in the University of Oxford of Queen Elizabeth's Foundation. A major driving force behind the establishment of the college was the Welsh lawyer and clergyman Dr. Hugh Price. Born in Brecon, the son of a butcher named Rhys ap Rhys, he studied Law at the University of Oxford, gaining the degrees of BCL (Bachelor of Civil Law), BCnL (Bachelor of Canon Law) and DCnL (Doctor of Canon Law), completing the last of these in 1526. He was one of a group of judges who condemned to death another lawyer, James Bainham, for heresy. He was later to become prebendary of Rochester Cathedral and treasurer of St. David's Cathedral, receiving both titles in 1541. Founded on 27th June 1571, Hugh Price, as one of eight commissioners, was a major driving force in the foundation of the college, so that 'he might bestow his estate of the maintenance of certain scholars of Wales to be trained up in good letters'. It was the first Protestant college to be founded at the university, and was originally intended primarily for the education of clergy. The intention was to satisfy a need for dedicated, learned clergy to promote the Elizabethan Religious Settlement in the parishes of England, Ireland and Wales. Price continued to be closely involved with the college after its foundation. On the strength of a promised legacy, worth £60 a year (approx. £15,000 today) on his deathbed, he requested and received the authority to appoint the new college's principal, fellows and scholars. He financed early building work in the college's front quadrangle, though it wasn't completed in his lifetime. On his death, he left the college 100 marks and his books. A small portrait of Hugh Price hangs behind the High Table in the hall of the college, and is attributed to the school of Hans Holbein the Younger.



Dr. Hugh Price (User: Bencherlite GFDL)



Stained glass window of St. David. Chapel, Jesus College

Jesus College gradually attracted many from the Principality, and continued to do so thanks to the generosity of later benefactors. During its early history, the college was intimately associated with Carmarthenshire through its Principals, with four appointed in succession. The first was Dr. Francis Bevans of Caer, holding the post from 1586-1602. He was also Chancellor of the diocese of Hereford, and for a time M.P. for Bishops Castle. Two Llansawel natives were next. Dr. John Williams (1550-1613) was made Principal in 1602, and in 1604 also held the Vice-Chancellorship of the University. His successor was Dr. Griffith Powell (1561-1620). A distinguished authority on the philosophy of Aristotle, he worked diligently at extending the buildings and was responsible for erecting the Chapel and the dining-hall. These extensions were financed by public subscriptions, and substantial sums came from the gentry and well-to-do merchants of Wales, including contributions amounting to £59 from the good people of Carmarthenshire. After his death, Dr. Powell left an estate of £650 (approx. £162,500 today) to the College. The fourth Carmarthenshire incumbent in succession was Dr. Francis Mansell (1579-1665) of Muddlescombe, Kidwelly. He was appointed by the Vice-Chancellor of the University. Some of the Fellows opposed his appointment and he dismissed four of them. But to avoid further unpleasantness he resigned his post a year later in 1621. Incidentally, between 1571 and 1915 only one Principal (Francis Howell, 1657-1660) was not from Wales or of Welsh descent.

From its inception, the college students were predominantly Welsh. Many previous Fellows were Welsh, since when new fellowships were created by benefactions, often by people of Welsh descent. There was frequently a stipulation that recipients of the fellowship would be related to the donor or come from a specified part of Wales. These specific stipulations were removed as part of the reforms of Oxford University during the 19th century.

Nevertheless, Jesus College still has strong connections with Wales, and is often referred to as 'The Welsh College'. It is home to the University's Professor of Celtic, and boasts a specialist Celtic library in addition to the college's normal library. From the bequest of the cleric and benefactor from Merionethshire, Edmund Meyrick, a former student at the college, scholarships are still awarded to this day. St. David's Day is marked by a choral Evensong in the chapel, decorated with daffodils. The service, including music, is entirely conducted in Welsh and is well attended by members of the Welsh community in Oxford. Its annual St. David's Day dinner traditionally culminates with the serving of Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn's Pudding, in memory of the Tory M.P. for Denbighshire, prominent Jacobite and former student at the College. Furthermore, in the time-honoured humorous traditions of students, the college's undergraduate magazine is called 'The Sheepsh***er' in allusion to the offensive joke about Welsh people's supposed penchant for sheep!

Prior to the establishment of the Grammar School, education in mediaeval Wales was provided in the home, great households, religious houses and free-standing schools. For centuries, schools were attached to every cathedral, monastery and the larger parish churches where lessons were taught in Latin and Welsh. Aristocratic and wealthy parents employed a tutor for the early education of their children. Harking back to a legacy of Druidic times there were also centres where eminent bards gave training in the poetic craft, for the bards were the guardians of the language and traditions. Qualification under the instruction of the Pencerdd (Chief Bard) meant an honourable and lucrative employment in the household of a prince or chieftain.

The dissolution of the monasteries and the confiscation of cathedral and church endowments during the Reformation brought an end to education by the monks, priests and teachers appointed by them. They were replaced by a different educational institution, the Grammar School. No longer controlled by the Church, many were founded from the relocated endowments of monastic houses and churches. Among these were Christ College, Brecon (1542) and Abergavenny Grammar School (1543). Other Grammar Schools were founded by the aristocracy, distinguished clergymen and wealthy merchants. Among these were Presteigne Grammar School (1549); Friar's School, Bangor (1561); Ruthin School (1595) and Cowbridge Grammar School (1608).

The curriculum was based on classical studies with some training in mathematics. Proficiency in the Classics was essential for admission into Oxford, Cambridge and the Inns of Court, which later secured entry into the learned professions - the Church; law; teaching; the civil service and diplomatic posts, lucrative professions that have attracted many notable Welshmen to the London of the Tudors. Many sons of poor parents were taught alongside sons of the affluent and the gentry. English was the medium of instruction and Welsh was forbidden, so these Grammar Schools became a vehicle for the anglicization of the Welsh, depriving them of any teaching in their native tongue and the study of its rich heritage and literature.

Education in Carmarthen would have probably been provided by a school affiliated to St. Peter's Church. Records say that the first Grammar School to be established in the town was 'The King's School of Carmarthen of Thomas Lloyd's Foundation.' An annual endowment of £10 was provided in 1536 to set up the school, but it was not established until 1543 following a petition to Henry VIII by the Mayor and Aldermen, and an appeal to Thomas Cromwell. Its location was the dissolved Benedictine Friary and its grounds, granted to Thomas Lloyd for an annual rental of three shillings (15p). It ceased to exist after his death during the short reign of Edward VI. Although he left enough property to maintain a Headmaster and an assistant, his executors betrayed his wishes and the property passed into private hands.

A petition for a new school was made to Queen Elizabeth I by Walter Devereux, first Earl of Essex and a native of Carmarthen. His associate petitioners were Richard Davies, Bishop of St. David's (see above), two aldermen of the Borough, Griffith Rees and Walter Vaughan, and a prominent burgess, Robert Toy. The petition was granted in 1576 and stipulated that there should be a school in the Borough to be called "The Free Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth of the Foundation of Walter, Earl of Essex, and others". According to the original charter the school was intended "for the instruction of boys and youths in grammar and other inferior books". The staff was to consist of a master and assistant, with the Mayor of the Borough and nineteen others, aldermen or burgesses, as the governing body. They were empowered to make fit and proper regulations for conducting the school only with the advice and approval of the Bishop of St. David's. Later the Mayor and Corporation became the governors. Very little is known about the early years of the school, but it is possible that among the earliest pupils were Lewis Bayly, Bishop of Bangor (d.1631), Vicar Prichard of Llandovery (1579-1644) and Thomas Howell, Bishop of Bristol (1588-1646), brother to James Howell (c.1594-1666) who was appointed Historiographer Royal by Charles II.



Sir Rhys ap Thomas was one of the most powerful and influential Welshmen of his time, and Henry Tudor was fortunate to have had such a supporter and friend. However, for Sir Rhys and his brave Carmarthenshire warriors, in their quest for the amelioration of Wales, and perhaps some form of autonomy from English rule, surely this was revenge gone awry!

A.H. Williams M.A., in his 'Introduction to the History of Wales, Volume II' states "...the man who struck down Llywelyn the Last, struck also a mortal blow to Welsh independence, but the blow he struck against Welsh nationalism proved harmless. In this respect the Edwardian Settlement was far less damaging and revolutionary than the Tudor Settlement. Welshmen who mourn the loss of their political independence will grieve for the events of 1284; but those who value the cultural nationalism of their native land will grieve far more for the events of 1536."



Chapter 1: Genesis

January 2024 Oldest signs of life? New techniques have allowed researchers to accurately date fossils found at Coed Cochion Quarry in Carmarthenshire for the first time and they could be some of the oldest signs of complex life in the world. The lead scientist of the study said “The Coed Cochion Quarry contains the richest occurrence of shallow marine life in Britain” and through these new techniques, researchers were able to date the fossils to **565 million years**. By placing them on a historical time-line, researchers say they have been able to track a key moment in the evolution of the first animals on Earth. These creatures in some ways resemble modern-day marine species such as jellyfish, yet in other ways be bizarre and unfamiliar. Some appear fern-like, others like cabbages, whereas others resembled sea pens. They are among the earliest evidence of multi-celled organisms. The study’s co-author said “ These Welsh fossils appear directly comparable to the famous fossils of Ediacara in South Australia”. (www.itv.com itv news 17 January 2024)

Chapter 3: Bronze Age

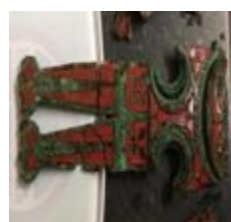
November 2020 A hoard from the Late Bronze Age 1000-800 BC was discovered in the Llanddeusant area, south of Llandovery. Artefacts include one large spearhead, three small spear fragments, a bracelet fragment, nine ribbed socketed axes, two plain socketed axes, one faceted axe, two sheet bronze fragments and a casting jet.



The artefacts were buried together in a specially dug pit, seemingly far away from any Bronze Age settlement. The large bronze spearhead, struck with a blunt tool and snapped in half prior to its burial was carefully placed on top of the hoard. This suggests that the breaking of the spearhead and the burial of the hoard was carried out during a ceremony held by a local Bronze Age community.

Chapter 4: Iron Age and the Celts

February 2018 A discovery of immense significance was discovered in a Pembrokeshire field on the banks of the River Cleddau. A burial mound yielded several decorated horse trappings. These included fragments of a large horse brooch, a terret (rein guide), a bridle bit, strap unions and harness fittings. All were decorated with designs linked to late La Tène style art. Later findings included two iron tyre rings which would have covered a chariot’s wooden wheels. Also discovered was an iron sword which may have been placed on or near a human burial that would have accompanied the chariot. The evidence suggests that this was a warrior or chieftain of high status. This chariot burial is the only one unearthed in southern Britain. All other chariot burials found thus far have been in northern England, particularly Yorkshire, and in Scotland.



Chapter 5: Roman Occupation

2018 During the heatwave of this year aerial photographs uncovered a section of a Roman road showing how the Roman armies pushed their way south from Carmarthen to Kidwelly. Previously unknown, this aerial image reinforces the speculation that Kidwelly town was home to a Roman fort, possibly covered now by Kidwelly Castle. (bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-52911797 7 June 2020)



Chapter 6: The Celtic Church and the Age of the Saints

2024 Archaeologists have discovered materials more than 7,000 years old during a dig at Strata Florida Abbey, Ceredigion. Results of tests on materials found suggest there was activity at the site centuries before it was used as an abbey. 11 charcoal samples which were found across the site were sent to experts for examination. Five of the samples were found to date back to the 12th and 13th century, while another five dated back to between 951AD and 1172AD, a time before the arrival of monks to the site. It is believed that these samples are associated with flat stone surfaces and stone walls

However, it is the final sample which has proved to have the most fascinating history. According to a spokesperson for the Strata Florida Trust: “The final sample dates from between 5920 and 5758BC, a staggering 7,500 years ago in the Mesolithic Period. How the site was used before the Cistercians arrived is still unclear, but continued excavation and the use of techniques such as radiocarbon dating will help to further the Trust’s research and understanding of this site.”

Early Mediaeval 13th – 14th Century

September 2020 A mediaeval silver annular brooch was found on land in the Pontyberem area. The brooch has a pin in the shape of a dagger, with distinctive “stirrups” to prevent cloth from catching when worn.



Chapter 14: The Tudor Dynasty

November 2020 A silver-gilt pendant was found in a field in the Llangeler area, south of Llandysul. The pendant is heart-shaped and decorated with a bleeding wound design representing Christ's wound.



This personal ornament, a symbol of Catholic faith, dates to the mid-16th century at a turbulent time of conflicting views held by opposed Church of England and Roman Catholic faiths. The pendant is closely paralleled by a similar find from the Fishguard and Goodwick community in Pembrokeshire and could represent an affirmation of faith during the Marian period of Britain's Counter-Reformation.

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