A TIMELINE OF CONFLICT IN WALES

616 — 1421 AD

A Complete Historical Narrative Companion to the Interactive Map

Introduction

A Personal Statement

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I live in Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire. Below the castle above my town there is a field called Maes Gwenllian — the Field of Gwenllian. It has been called that for nearly nine hundred years. The woman it is named for died there in 1136, executed after leading a Welsh force against the Norman garrison of Kidwelly Castle. She was captured in the field below the castle and beheaded on the ground where her army had stood.

Gwenllian ferch Gruffudd ap Cynan is my 24th great-grandmother.

I did not always know that. I did not always know very much about Welsh history at all — not because I was not Welsh, not because I did not care, but because Welsh history is one of the most systematically neglected subjects in the education and public life of Wales itself. We live on this ground. We speak this language. And most of us do not know what happened here, or why it matters, or how extraordinary the story is.

My wife Linda died on 4 July 2015. Her last words to me were: Go and travel. I took those words seriously. In 2018 I drove a campervan along the Wild Atlantic Way in Ireland with my dog Lizzy, and when I got lost I taught myself digital mapping to find my way. That mapping led me back to Wales. It led me to the war memorials and the parish registers and the cemetery projects and the heritage research that has occupied the years since Linda died. And it led me here — to this map, to these eight volumes, to the story of eight centuries of Welsh conflict told as a living landscape that anyone, anywhere, can open on their phone and walk through.

Welsh history is not neglected because it is unimportant. It is neglected because the mechanisms of power — educational, administrative, cultural — have not, historically, been in Welsh hands. The battles in this series were fought by people defending their language, their land, their identity, their right to exist as a distinct people with a distinct culture. Most Welsh people today do not know those battles were fought. Most do not know the names of the people who fought them. Most have never heard of Gwenllian, or Llywelyn Bren, or Owain Lawgoch, or the Treaty of Montgomery, or what happened at Cilmeri on 11 December 1282.

That is what this project is about. Not academic completeness. Not institutional recognition. A retired independent heritage researcher in Kidwelly, working alone, using the digital tools that did not exist a generation ago, doing the work that he believes needs to be done — taking Welsh history off the specialist shelves and putting it on a map that anyone with a phone can open, anywhere in the world, and follow pin by pin through eight centuries of a story that belongs to them.

The interactive map that this series accompanies contains over 160 precisely researched locations across eight colour-coded layers. The eight volumes that follow tell the story of every one of them in full narrative prose, written in sequence, so that the reader who opens the map and follows the pins from Chester in 616 to the mountains of Gwynedd in 1421 can hold these pages alongside and read the full story of what happened at each place and why it mattered.

Where the history is certain it is placed on the ground with precision. Where it is disputed or lost that uncertainty is acknowledged honestly — because honest uncertainty is better scholarship than false precision.

I have always written from a personal viewpoint. I make no apology for that. The personal viewpoint is not a weakness in heritage research. It is the reason the research gets done — the reason someone sits down and does the work rather than assuming someone else will. The connection to Gwenllian is personal. The connection to Kidwelly is personal. The connection to Linda and to her last words is personal. The work that came from all of those connections is real, documented, formally accessioned by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, and published on People's Collection Wales for anyone to use freely.

This is Welsh history. It happened on Welsh ground. It shaped the language you are reading these words in — because the language survived because the people survived, and the people survived because they refused, generation after generation, to stop.

Vivit Post Funera Virtus. Virtue lives on after death.

Graham Tudor Emmanuel · Tudor59 · Kidwelly · 2026

The Interactive Map

A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

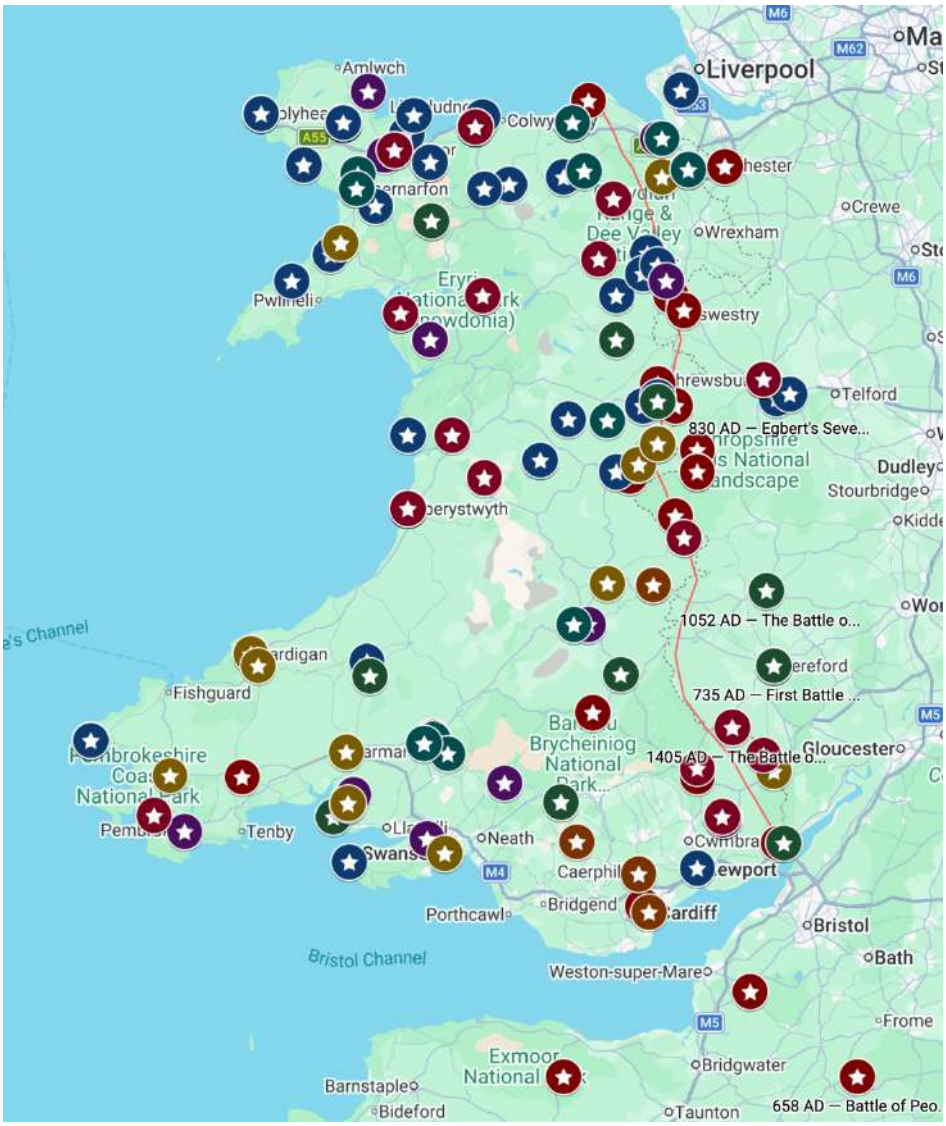
People's Collection Wales · Tudor59

This map presents eight centuries of Welsh conflict as a living landscape — not a list of dates on a page but the actual geography of Welsh history spread across the ground where it happened. Open the map and you can see immediately why certain valleys kept mattering across centuries, why the same river crossings appear again and again in the records, why the mountains were both a prison and a fortress, and why Wales — against every odd — survived.

Follow the pins chronologically from the Dark Age kingdoms fighting Saxon expansion in 616 AD, through generations of Viking coastal raids, the Norman invasion that transformed the landscape forever with its iron ring of castles, the great wars of the Welsh princes under Llywelyn the Great and Llywelyn the Last, to the final revolt of Owain Glyndŵr and his disappearance into legend in 1421.

Every pin marks a precisely researched location with a description of what happened, who fought, and why it mattered. Where locations are certain they are placed precisely. Where they are disputed or lost that uncertainty is honestly acknowledged with the best geographical reasoning available. Offa's Dyke is mapped as a continuous line from Prestatyn to Chepstow. Pins marked ★ NEW are additions made during the 2026 revision, identified through cross-referencing all original pins against the full documented record of Welsh conflict.

164 locations. Eight centuries of conflict. Eight colour-coded layers. Every pin a doorway into a story that shaped a nation.



Access the Interactive Map

Scan the QR code or visit the link below to open the full interactive map on any device. The map works on mobile, tablet and desktop. Every pin opens to a full description of what happened, who fought, and why it matters.

https://tinyurl.com/Conflicts-in-Wales-616-1421-AD

People's Collection Wales · Tudor59 · Graham Tudor Emmanuel · Kidwelly · 2026

Map Layers — corresponding to the eight volumes in this series

Dark Ages · 616–799 AD — Volume One

The Viking Age · 800–999 AD — Volume Two

The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD — Volume Three

Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD — Volume Four

Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD — Volume Five

Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD — Volume Six

The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD — Volume Seven

Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD — Volume Eight

Why This Matters

A Direct Address to the People of Wales

This is your history.

Not the history that was taught to you — or more likely, not taught to you — in school. Not the history that appears on the specialist shelves, written for academics, priced for institutions, filed in sections that most people never reach. This is the history that happened on the ground under your feet, in the valleys you drive through, on the mountains you can see from your window, in the towns whose names you say every day without knowing what they mean or what happened there.

The 805 years covered by this map and this series contain some of the most extraordinary human stories in the history of these islands. A Welsh king who united all of Wales for the only time in history and sacked an English city. A princess who led an army and was executed in a field below a castle that still stands. A poet-warrior who killed a Viking leader in 856 and was celebrated in the courts of continental Europe. A man who signed a letter to the King of France proposing a Welsh university, a Welsh church, and a Welsh legal system, from his court in a castle he had taken from the man who built it to stop him.

Most people in Wales do not know these stories. That is not a criticism of Welsh people. It is a consequence of history — of the same forces that the people in these pages were fighting against. The mechanisms of power in

these islands have not, historically, encouraged the Welsh to know their own history in detail. What is not taught is not known. What is not known cannot be valued. What is not valued is at risk of being lost.

This project exists because one person in Kidwelly decided that was not acceptable.

The map is free to access on any device. The eight volumes that tell its story are published alongside it. The research behind them draws on the Annales Cambriae, the Brut y Tywysogion, the work of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, and the accumulated scholarship of Welsh historians who have spent their careers keeping this record alive. What this project adds is something different not new primary research, but a new form of access. A map that anyone can open. A narrative that anyone can read. Eight centuries of Welsh conflict made available to the Welsh people who are the inheritors of it.

The people in this map were fighting for something. They were fighting for the right of Wales to exist — as a distinct nation, with a distinct language, a distinct law, a distinct culture. They lost, in the narrow political sense, in 1282 when Llywelyn died at Cilmeri and in 1283 when Dafydd's head was placed on the Tower of London. They did not lose in the larger sense. The language survived. The culture survived. The memory survived — imperfectly, incompletely, carried in poetry and chronicle and oral tradition through centuries of occupation and neglect. It is still here.

You are the inheritors of what Gwenllian died for in the field below Kidwelly Castle in 1136. Of what the Lord Rhys built in the decades that followed. Of what Llywelyn the Great reached at the Treaty of Montgomery in 1267. Of what Owain Glyndŵr refused to surrender even when his family was taken, his capital fallen, and every practical reason for continuing had gone. He refused the pardon. He walked into the mountains. He was never found.

Know it. Share it. Keep it.

The Complete Series

Volume One: Dark Ages · 616–799 AD — The making of Wales through conflict

Volume Two: The Viking Age · 800–999 AD — The two-front war, sea and land

Volume Three: The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD — The only unified Wales, and its ending

Volume Four: Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD — The iron ring and Gwenllian

Volume Five: Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD — The closest Wales ever came

Volume Six: Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD — The systematic destruction

Volume Seven: The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD — The long patience

Volume Eight: Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD — The last fire and the endless waiting

164 map locations · Eight colour-coded layers · Eight narrative volumes · 805 years of Welsh conflict · One interactive map · One complete companion work.

Researched, written and published by Graham Tudor Emmanuel · Tudor59

People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · Carmarthenshire · 2026

https://tinyurl.com/Conflicts-in-Wales-616-1421-AD

A TIMELINE OF CONFLICT IN WALES

616 — 1421 AD

A Complete Historical Narrative Companion to the Interactive Map

VOLUME ONE

Dark Ages · 616–799 AD

Graham Tudor Emmanuel

Tudor59 · People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · 2026

A Note on This Series

This document is the first of eight volumes forming the complete narrative companion to the interactive digital map A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD, published on People's Collection Wales and available at the map link printed at the close of this volume.

The map itself marks over 160 locations across Wales and the wider British Isles where Welsh forces fought, died, were betrayed, or triumphed across eight centuries of conflict. Each pin on that map is a doorway into a story. This series of documents is what lies beyond the doorway — the full narrative, written in sequence, so that the reader who opens the map and follows the pins from Chester in 616 to the mountains of Gwynedd in 1415 can hold these pages alongside and read the story of what happened at each place and why it mattered.

The eight volumes follow the eight layers of the map:

Volume One: Dark Ages · 616–799 AD

Volume Two: The Viking Age · 800–999 AD

Volume Three: The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD

Volume Four: Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD

Volume Five: Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD

Volume Six: Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD

Volume Seven: The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD

Volume Eight: Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD

Each volume can be read independently. Together they form a single continuous narrative of Welsh resistance across eight centuries — a story that has never been told in this form before, mapped and narrated simultaneously, the geography and the history inseparable.

A note on voice. This is not an academic text. It does not pretend to be. It is the work of an independent heritage researcher who has spent years walking the ground, reading the chronicles, and trying to understand what happened in these places and what it cost the people who were there. Where locations are certain the narrative places the reader on that ground. Where they are disputed or lost that uncertainty is acknowledged honestly — because honest uncertainty is better scholarship than false precision.

The coordinates given below each entry title correspond directly to the pin placement on the interactive map. They are provided so that the reader with the map open can locate each event precisely as they read.

Vivit Post Funera Virtus. Virtue lives on after death. These people are long gone. But what they did here, on this ground, still matters. It shaped the nation. It shaped the language. It shaped the identity of a people who are still here, still speaking Welsh, still remembering.

That is why this map exists. That is why this book exists.

Volume One

Dark Ages · 616–799 AD

The First Wars for Wales

Stand at Chester today and look west across the River Dee. The water is calm. The city goes about its business. Nothing visible marks what happened here in 616 AD — no monument, no plaque, no trace on the ground of the day that changed the shape of Britain forever.

But close your eyes and the chronicle opens. An army of Northumbrians moving west. A combined force of Welsh warriors from Powys and Gwynedd marching to meet them. And behind the Welsh line, in a field apart, twelve hundred monks from the great monastery of Bangor-is-y-Coed, gathered not to fight but to pray.

They carried no weapons. They posed no military threat. They came because they believed prayer could change the outcome of battles.

The Northumbrian king Æthelfrith was informed. He is recorded as saying: if they pray against us, they fight against us. He ordered his cavalry to kill the monks first. Twelve hundred men of God were cut down before the battle had properly begun. Then Æthelfrith turned on the Welsh army and destroyed that too.

This is where the story of Welsh conflict begins. Not with glory. With a massacre on a riverbank, twelve hundred dead who never drew a sword, and a Welsh army broken in the field of a city that would never belong to Wales again.

The Dark Age period covered in this volume spans 616 to 799 AD — nearly two centuries of the most formative conflict in Welsh history. These are the years in which Wales was made. Not made in the sense of being created — the Welsh had been here since before the Romans — but made in the sense of being defined. Bounded. Forced into the geographical and political shape that would persist into the modern era.

The enemies in this period were primarily the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms pressing from the east — Northumbria in the north, Mercia in the centre, Wessex in the south — and they pressed hard. Every decade of this period brought new campaigns, new raids, new losses of territory.

The kingdom of Elmet, near modern Leeds, was Welsh in 616. Pengwern, the royal palace of Powys near modern Shrewsbury, was Welsh in 658 before a Northumbrian night raid massacred its royal family. The Somerset hills were Welsh-speaking when the century began. By its close they were English.

And yet Wales survived. Not by standing firm in open battle — it rarely won those. It survived by the same combination of geography, stubbornness, and political flexibility that would characterise Welsh resistance for the next eight centuries.

The mountains were an impenetrable refuge. The rivers were defensive barriers. And the Welsh princes, whatever their faults, kept fighting — generation after generation — long after any reasonable calculation of odds would have suggested surrender.

There is one more thing to say before the first battle. These are not simply Welsh-versus-English conflicts. The political world of the 7th century was vastly more complicated than that. Welsh kings allied with pagan Mercian kings against Christian Northumbrian kings. Welsh princes fled to Brittany and came back with Continental alliances.

A Norse fleet accidentally saved Gwynedd from Norman conquest — in 1098, a generation after the era this volume covers, but the pattern was established early: survival in these islands often depended on unlikely allies, unexpected interventions, and enemies who had enemies of their own.

Follow the pins. The story is in the ground.

Offa's Dyke · c.780–796 AD

The Line That Divided a Nation

Prestatyn to Chepstow · Full route mapped on the interactive map as a continuous line

Before the battles of this era are told in sequence, one feature of the map requires its own treatment — because it is not a battle but the permanent consequence of all the battles that came before it, and many that were still to come.

Offa's Dyke runs from Prestatyn on the north Wales coast to Chepstow on the Severn estuary. Approximately 177 miles of earthwork — a bank, a ditch, a frontier cut across the landscape by human hands in the late 8th century under the direction of Offa, King of Mercia, the most powerful Anglo-Saxon ruler of his age.

It took years to build. Thousands of workers. The logistics of feeding, organising and directing a workforce capable of cutting a continuous earthwork through 177 miles of varied terrain — upland and lowland, forest and farmland, river valley and mountain ridge — were extraordinary for the period. Offa could not have built this Dyke without commanding the resources of the most powerful kingdom in England.

The Dyke did not follow a line of Mercian conquest. Scholars have argued about its purpose for generations. The most persuasive modern interpretation is that it marked an agreed frontier — a boundary negotiated between Offa and the Welsh kingdoms of Powys and Gwent, formalising a line that both sides accepted, at least for the moment. There are sections where the Dyke follows river valleys that would have given Mercia a tactical advantage, and sections where it appears to concede ground to the Welsh, following ridgelines that gave the Welsh the higher view. It looks, in places, like a compromise.

But do not be deceived by the word compromise. This was not an agreement between equals. Offa had spent years raiding Wales — into Dyfed in the far south-west, into Brycheiniog, across the southern border kingdoms. He had crushed the South Wales men in 776. He had devastated the border lands repeatedly. When he built his Dyke he was building it from a position of overwhelming military power. The Welsh kingdoms that accepted this line did so because the alternative was worse.

The Dyke is still there. You can walk it today for most of its length. Stand on the bank above Knighton — Tref y Clawdd, the Town on the Dyke — and look west into Wales, then east into England, and understand that you are standing on the most significant piece of earthwork in the history of two nations. This is where the line was drawn. This is where it has been, more or less, ever since.

The interactive map traces the full route of the Dyke as a continuous line from Prestatyn to Chepstow. Three additional pins mark the northern terminus at Prestatyn, the midpoint at Knighton, and the southern terminus at Chepstow. The Pillar of Eliseg — the great carved stone erected by Cyngen ap Cadell of Powys to celebrate the liberation of his kingdom from Mercian occupation — stands just west of the Dyke near Llangollen, a defiant Welsh monument to resistance against the very power that built the line.

The Battles · 616–799 AD

In Chronological Sequence

616 AD — The Battle of Chester

Chester, Cheshire · 53.1905°N, 2.8927°W

It begins here. At a river crossing near the old Roman fortress of Deva, at the city the Romans had called Castra Legionis and the Welsh still called Caer Legion, two worlds collided and one of them would never be the same.

The Northumbrian king Æthelfrith was one of the most aggressive and effective military rulers of the early Anglo-Saxon period. He had already destroyed Welsh power in the north, pushing the kingdom of Rheged toward extinction and cutting off the Welsh of Wales from their Brythonic kin in what is now Scotland. Chester was the next logical target — the great fortress city on the Dee, still occupied by Welsh forces, still connected to the wider web of Brythonic resistance.

The Welsh response was substantial. A combined force from Powys and Gwynedd — two of the three great Welsh kingdoms — marched to Chester. With them, in a separate enclosure away from the fighting, came twelve hundred monks from the great monastery of Bangor-is-y-Coed, the most important monastic community in north Wales. They had come to pray. In their theology, prayer could turn battles. They had done it before.

Æthelfrith was told about the monks. His response has been preserved in the chronicle of the Venerable Bede, and it is worth reading in full because it tells you everything about how these men thought. He said: if they pray against us, then though they do not bear arms, they fight against us, because they oppose us by their prayers.

He ordered the monks killed first. Twelve hundred men, unarmed, were cut down before the battle began. Bede records the number with precision, which suggests it was remembered with precision — not as a vague massacre but as a specific, counted crime. Then Æthelfrith turned on the Welsh army and destroyed that too.

The military consequences were immediate and permanent. The battle at Chester severed the last land connection between the Welsh of Wales and the Brythonic kingdoms of the north — Rheged and Strathclyde. After Chester, the Welsh were geographically isolated. The Britons to the north were cut off. The Britons of the south-west — in Somerset, Devon, and eventually Cornwall — were being pushed back by Wessex. Wales was becoming what it would remain: a peninsula of resistance, surrounded on three sides by the sea and on the fourth by an enemy that never stopped pressing.

The two Welsh leaders who died at Chester were Selyf Sarffgadau of Powys — his name means Selyf Battle-Serpent, which tells you what kind of warrior he was — and Cadwal Crysban of Rhôs. Iago of Gwynedd may also have been killed. The flower of Welsh leadership in the north, cut down in a single afternoon.

Chester is the pin from which everything else in this map flows. Everything that follows — every campaign, every alliance, every desperate stand in every era — is a consequence of the world that was made at Chester in 616. Open the map. Find the pin. Stand there for a moment before you move on.

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620 AD — Edwin Invades Anglesey

Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

Four years after Chester the humiliation continued. Edwin of Northumbria — who had been present at Chester, possibly fighting on the Welsh side before switching allegiance, and who had now inherited Æthelfrith's kingdom — turned his ambitions westward. He seized the Isle of Man. Then he came for Anglesey.

Anglesey was not merely another island. It was the breadbasket of Wales — the most fertile agricultural land in the north, the grain store that fed the kingdom of Gwynedd, the foundation of royal wealth and military capacity in the north. Whoever held Anglesey held the key to Gwynedd. Edwin knew this.

Cadwallon ap Cadfan — King of Gwynedd, son of the man who may have died at Chester — was driven from his throne. He took refuge on Puffin Island, the small tidal island off the eastern tip of Anglesey, with his remaining followers. Then, when even that last refuge became untenable, he fled across the sea to Brittany.

A king of Wales in exile. It was the lowest point of Gwynedd's fortunes since the Roman withdrawal. The most powerful Welsh kingdom in the north had its king sitting in a Breton court, dispossessed, humiliated, and separated from his kingdom by the Irish Sea.

Cadwallon spent years in Brittany. He was not idle. He was building alliances, learning from the Breton military tradition, waiting. When he came back it would be with a strategy that turned the tables completely — and with a Mercian ally who would help him do what no Welsh king had done before: kill a king of Northumbria on Northumbrian soil.

But that is 633. For now, the island is Edwin's, and Gwynedd is headless, and the darkest period in north Welsh history has barely begun.

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630 AD — The Battle of Pont y Saeson

Near Mathern, Monmouthshire · 52.9°N, 3.1°W

While Gwynedd was enduring its humiliation in the north, the Welsh kingdom of Gwent in the south was fighting its own battles on its own frontier. At Pont y Saeson — the Bridge of the Saxons — a Welsh force under Tewdrig, King of Gwent, and his son Meurig met a Saxon incursion at a river crossing and drove it back.

The name of the place tells the story. Pont y Saeson — the Bridge of the Saxons. In Welsh topography, place names are memory. When a place is named after an enemy event, it is because something happened there that the

community never forgot. A Saxon army crossed this bridge, or tried to, and was stopped. The Welsh named the crossing after the event. The name survived the people who gave it.

Tewdrig was mortally wounded in the fighting. He had to be carried from the battlefield. The chronicles tell the story of what followed with the kind of detail that marks a genuine memory rather than a later invention: oxen were harnessed to a cart to carry the dying king to the sea, where it was hoped the healing waters might save him. The oxen stopped at a spring — they would not move forward. Tewdrig's wounds were cleansed at that spring. He died there.

His son Meurig built a church on the spot. The church became Merthyr Tewdrig — the Martyrium of Tewdrig. The place is now Mathern, near Chepstow. The well where the oxen stopped is still there. It is called St Tewdrig's Well. You can visit it today.

Tewdrig later became St Tewdrig — one of the warrior-saints of early Welsh Christianity, a king who died in battle defending his people and was remembered as a martyr for it. His story is precisely the intersection of military history and sacred memory that makes Dark Age Wales so extraordinary — the geography of faith and the geography of war occupying the same ground simultaneously.

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630 AD — The Battle of Cefn Digoll — Long Mountain

Long Mountain, near Welshpool · 52.65°N, 3.0833°W

In the same year — and the chronicles compress events in ways that may not be chronologically precise, but the sequence matters — something changed. Cadwallon came back.

He came back from Brittany not alone but in alliance with Penda of Mercia — the pagan king of the most powerful midlands kingdom in England. It was one of the most unlikely alliances in British history: a Christian Welsh king and a pagan English king, united by a common enemy. Northumbria had humiliated both of them. Cadwallon's hatred was personal. Penda's was political. It was enough.

At Cefn Digoll — the Long Mountain that rises above the Severn plain near Welshpool — they met the Northumbrian forces of King Edwin and broke them. The battle ended Northumbrian dominance over Gwynedd. The island of Anglesey that had been taken from Cadwallon was now within reach of recovery. And the alliance between Gwynedd and Mercia was about to produce something even more dramatic.

Stand on the Long Mountain today and you understand the ground. The ridge runs north to south above the Severn valley — from the summit you can see deep into England to the east and deep into Wales to the west simultaneously. An army that held this ridge controlled the crossing point between the two worlds. Cadwallon and Penda took it. Edwin's forces were driven back. The counterattack on Northumbria was about to begin.

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633 AD — The Battle of Hatfield Chase

Near Doncaster, South Yorkshire · 53.5667°N, 1.0°W

Three years after Cefn Digoll the alliance bore its ultimate fruit. At Hatfield Chase, on the great flat marshland south of Doncaster, Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd and Penda of Mercia met Edwin of Northumbria in open battle — and killed him.

Edwin was not just any Northumbrian king. He was the man who had driven Cadwallon from his throne, who had taken Anglesey, who had reduced the King of Gwynedd to a refugee in Brittany. His death at Welsh and Mercian hands was the completion of a fifteen-year campaign of revenge, and Cadwallon had earned every moment of it.

What happened next was extraordinary. Cadwallon did not go home. He stayed in Northumbria. He ruled it. For approximately a year — the chronicles are imprecise — the King of Gwynedd held court on Northumbrian soil, and the Northumbrian kingdom fell into disarray around him. Bede, writing from a Northumbrian monastic perspective, describes what followed with unconcealed horror: Cadwallon was, he says, so barbarous in his disposition that he spared neither the female sex nor the innocent age of children. He was resolving to cut off all the race of the English within the borders of Britain.

Bede is not a neutral witness. He is a Northumbrian monk writing about a Welsh king who had just ravaged his homeland. But even allowing for bias, it is clear that Cadwallon's year in Northumbria was not a gentle administration. It was a reckoning. Every farm burned, every village sacked was an answer to what Northumbria had done to Gwynedd. History, in the Dark Ages, tended to run on debts.

This is the moment — 633 AD, at Hatfield Chase in South Yorkshire — when a Welsh king achieved something no Welsh ruler before or since has matched: he killed a king of England on English soil and held English territory for a year. It was not repeated. But it happened. It is in the record.

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633 AD — The Battle of Heavenfield

Near Hexham, Northumberland · 55.0167°N, 2.15°W

The year in Northumbria ended badly. It was always going to.

Oswald — Æthelfrith's son, exiled in Dál Riata during Edwin's reign — returned from seventeen years in the west with an army and a claim to the Northumbrian crown. He met Cadwallon's forces at Heavenfield, near Hadrian's Wall north of Hexham. The night before the battle Oswald is said to have raised a wooden cross, gathered his men around it, and prayed for victory. Bede records the story with reverence. The cross became famous. The site became a place of pilgrimage.

Cadwallon had greater numbers. Oswald had better ground — a narrow front between Brady's Crag to the north and the Wall to the south, where the Welsh could not outflank him. The Welsh line broke. The retreat became a rout. Cadwallon was caught at a place called Denis's Brook — now identified as the Rowley Burn in Northumberland — and killed.

With Cadwallon died the last Welsh military presence north of the Humber. His year of rule in Northumbria, remarkable as it was, ended without permanent gain. Wales contracted back behind the Dee. The brief, extraordinary moment when a Welsh king held English territory closed forever.

Heavenfield is one of the most remote pins on the entire map — far to the north-east, far outside Wales, far beyond what most people think of as the geography of Welsh history. But it belongs here. What happened at Heavenfield shaped the next three centuries of Welsh existence. The boundary was confirmed. The north was lost. Wales would face the future from behind its mountains.

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642 AD — The Battle of Maes Cogwy

Near Oswestry, Shropshire · 52.8667°N, 3.05°W

Nine years after Heavenfield the wheel turned again. Oswald of Northumbria — the man who had killed Cadwallon, raised his cross at Heavenfield, and become the great Christian hero of the north — was killed at Maes Cogwy by Penda of Mercia. And Welsh princes fought alongside Penda.

Oswald had made powerful enemies. His aggressive expansion into Mercia and his religious politics had created the coalition that destroyed him. Penda's Welsh allies almost certainly included Cynddylan ap Cyndrwyn of Powys — the king whose palace at Pengwern would be destroyed sixteen years later — and possibly forces from Gwynedd under Cadwaladr, the son of the Cadwallon who had died at Heavenfield.

Oswald was killed. His body was mutilated. Penda displayed his arms and head on stakes — the Dark Age equivalent of a public statement. The place of the battle took his name: Oswestry, Oswald's Tree, the tree on which the display was made.

For Wales the significance of Maes Cogwy was the continued survival of the Mercian alliance that had been Cadwallon's great strategic achievement. Penda remained, for another decade, the buffer between Mercia and the Welsh kingdoms. He was not a friend of Wales. He was simply an enemy of the same enemies. In the politics of these islands that was often enough.

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655 AD — The Battle of the Winwaed

Near Leeds, West Yorkshire · 53.795°N, 1.549°W

The Mercian alliance ended at the Winwaed. Near Leeds, in the wet November country of what is now West Yorkshire, Oswiu of Northumbria met Penda's great coalition and destroyed it. Penda was killed. The most powerful pagan king in England died in the battle, and with him the political arrangement that had given Wales its eastern buffer for a generation.

The Welsh dimension of Winwaed is uncomfortable to tell. King Cadafael ap Cynfeddw of Gwynedd had marched his forces south to join Penda's coalition. He was there. His army was ready. And then, the night before the battle, he left. He took his men and marched them home in the darkness, leaving Penda to face Oswiu alone.

The Welsh chronicle did not forget this. Cadafael was given a nickname that followed him into history: Cadomedd. Battle-Shirker. It is a name that carries contempt across thirteen centuries. Whatever calculation he made that night — whatever intelligence he had received, whatever fear gripped him in the dark — the Welsh tradition judged him and found him wanting. A king who abandoned his ally on the eve of battle was not a king worth following.

Penda died. Northumbrian power over the English midlands was established. The great pagan coalition that had kept the Christian kingdoms off balance for thirty years collapsed in a single engagement. Wales lost its most effective political shield, and the man who might have saved it had marched his army home in the night.

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658 AD — The Battle of Peonnum

Near Penselwood, Somerset · 51.1°N, 2.4°W

The pressure from the south continued. At Peonnum — believed to be in the Penselwood area of Somerset, though the identification is not certain — West Saxon forces drove the Britons further back toward the sea.

This is one of the most melancholy entries in the Dark Age record. The Britons of the south-west were not Welsh in the way that the kingdoms of Gwynedd, Powys and Deheubarth were Welsh — they were the survivors of the Romano-British population of Dumnonia, speaking a related but distinct dialect of the Brythonic language, occupying Somerset, Devon, and the peninsula that would become Cornwall. They were, in the most fundamental sense, the same people as the Welsh — the original inhabitants of Britain, the descendants of those who had been here before the legions came.

Battle by battle, decade by decade, they were being absorbed. Peonnum was another step in a process that no single battle could reverse. The land connection between Wales and the south-western Britons was already gone — severed at the Battle of Deorham in 577, a generation before Chester. Now the south-western Britons themselves were being pushed toward their final refuge on the Atlantic peninsula.

The pin at Peonnum sits far from Wales on the map. But it belongs in this timeline because what happened to the Britons of the south-west is what was happening to Wales in slow motion, and the Welsh knew it. Every defeat in the south was a reminder of what the future held if the mountains of Gwynedd and Powys were ever taken.

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658 AD — The Fall of Llys Pengwern

Shrewsbury, Shropshire · 52.7082°N, 2.7546°W

In the same year — the chronicle places both Peonnum and this event within 658 — a Northumbrian raiding party descended on Llys Pengwern, the royal palace of the kingdom of Powys, near modern Shrewsbury, and massacred the royal family.

Cynddylan ap Cyndrwyn, King of Powys — the man who had probably fought alongside Penda at Maes Cogwy sixteen years earlier — was killed. His brothers were killed. His household was slaughtered. The palace burned. Only his sister Heledd survived.

What Heledd did with her survival was create one of the greatest works of early Welsh literature. The Canu Heledd — the Songs of Heledd — are a cycle of poems written in her voice, mourning the destruction of everything she had known. The burning hall. The dead brothers. The empty throne. The silence where there had been song and fire and life.

One verse has survived thirteen centuries: Cynddylan's hall is dark tonight, with no fire, no bed. I weep for a while and then am silent.

These are the words of a woman who watched her world end. They are among the oldest surviving Welsh-language poems in existence, and they were born in this event — in the night raid on Shrewsbury, in the killing of a king, in the survival of a single witness who had no weapon but words.

The fall of Llys Pengwern pushed the kingdom of Powys westward permanently. The eastern territories — the lands around Shrewsbury, the Wrekin, the Severn valley — passed into Mercian and then Anglian hands. Part of them would eventually become the Anglian sub-kingdom of the Magonsæte. What remained of Powys contracted toward the mountains, where it would remain. Shrewsbury was lost. It would not be Welsh again.

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682 AD — Centwine Drives the Britons to the Sea

Somerset/Devon coast · 51.1°N, 3.5°W

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 682 is one of the shortest in the record. Centwine of Wessex chased the Britons into the sea. Seven words. A world reduced to seven words.

The campaign was almost certainly in Somerset and Devon — the remaining territories of the south-western Britons who had been under pressure since Peonnum in 658. After this campaign the records of a Brythonic presence in Somerset effectively cease. The people who had been speaking a language close to Welsh in the Somerset hills were absorbed, driven west, or killed. Only Cornwall remained, and Cornwall was shrinking.

Seven words. But behind those seven words are settlements abandoned, farms burned, communities shattered, a language retreating to the far peninsula where it would survive another five centuries before that too was absorbed. The Chronicle writer did not feel the need to explain or describe. It was the kind of thing that happened. He wrote it down and moved on.

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710 AD — Seisyll of Ceredigion Seizes Ystrad Tywi

Ystrad Tywi, Carmarthenshire · 51.89°N, 3.99°W

Not every conflict in this timeline was Welsh against Saxon. Some of the most consequential events in Welsh history were Welsh against Welsh — internal territorial seizures that shaped the political map of the nation long before the Normans arrived to complicate it further.

In 710 King Seisyll of Ceredigion invaded the neighbouring Welsh kingdom of Dyfed and annexed the Cantref of Ystrad Tywi — the fertile river valley that stretches from the uplands around Llandovery south and west to the sea at Carmarthen. The valley of the River Tywi. The same river whose estuary would, three centuries later, be the site of a battle between Gruffudd ap Llywelyn and Hywel ab Edwin. The same river below which Carmarthen — the oldest recorded town in Wales — sits at the tidal limit.

This annexation matters for the heritage of Carmarthenshire in particular. The Cantref of Ystrad Tywi is Carmarthenshire's spine — the valley that the Romans had followed, that the medieval lords would fight over, that the Lord Rhys would rule, that Llywelyn the Great would capture in 1215. Its seizure by Seisyll in 710 was the first step in a long process of consolidation that would eventually produce the kingdom of Deheubarth from the fragments of the south-west.

The pin for this entry sits near Llandeilo — the town in the Tywi valley that stands roughly at the centre of the ancient Cantref. Look at the river from there and understand that what you are seeing is ground that kings have fought over for thirteen hundred years.

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722 AD — The Battles of Pencon and Garthmaelog

South Wales borderlands · 51.5°N, 3.2°W

In a rare moment of recorded Welsh triumph the Welsh Annals note not one but two Welsh victories against the Mercians in south Wales around 722 AD. The battles of Pencon and Garthmaelog are brief entries, frustratingly lacking in detail, but their significance is larger than their size in the chronicle.

They are a reminder that the south Welsh kingdoms — Gwent, Glamorgan, Brycheiniog — were not passive victims of Mercian expansion. They were fighting back. They were winning, occasionally. The RCAHMW records the likely site of Garthmaelog near a farm in Radnorshire called Cae Faelog, where local tradition remembered that a heavy battle had been fought and whose field name — Battlefield, Banc y Sidi — preserved the memory into modern times. A field name that carried a battle for twelve centuries.

Garthmaelog is the kind of entry that rewards the heritage researcher who looks past the major events. The great battles get the chronicle space. But it is the small victories — two Welsh kingdoms in the south, fighting back, winning twice in a year — that tell you what the ground was really like. Wales was not simply waiting to be defeated. It was fighting, constantly, on every front.

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728 AD — The Battle of Carno Mountain

Carno, Powys · 52.5264°N, 3.5856°W

Deep in the upland heart of Powys, at a place called Carno Mountain, a battle was fought in 728. The details in the chronicle are sparse. The Brut y Tywysogion gives it a single line, placing it at 730 by its chronology. But the location speaks for itself.

Carno sits high in the hills of central Wales — remote, windswept, far from any major settlement. A battle fought here was not a border skirmish or a raid on a frontier town. It was a battle in the interior of Powys, suggesting a Mercian incursion that had penetrated well beyond the border zone. The Welsh forced the Anglo-Saxons back to the River Usk where many were drowned — the river used as a weapon of war, the retreating army pushed into water it could not cross.

The mountain country of central Wales changed the nature of warfare. Cavalry lost its advantage on the steep slopes and in the narrow valleys. The lightly armed Welsh warriors who knew this ground had every tactical advantage over a heavy Mercian force that had marched too far from its supply lines. Carno Mountain may be one of the smaller engagements of this era but it illustrates a principle that Welsh commanders understood for eight centuries: give your enemy the wrong ground and his numbers become a liability.

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735 AD — The First Battle of Hereford

Hereford · 52.0567°N, 2.716°W

Hereford sits on the River Wye at the precise point where two worlds meet — England to the east, Wales to the west, the river itself an ancient and imperfect frontier between them. In 735 Welsh forces attacked Hereford for the first recorded time. They would return in 760. The city that sat on the frontier proved impossible to hold permanently from either direction.

The 735 attack was a Welsh victory. The Annales Cambriae records it as such — the Welsh defeating Mercian forces and freeing themselves, at least temporarily, from Mercian overlordship. Hereford, with its bishop and its market and its administrative significance, was a prize worth taking and worth defending. The Welsh took it in 735 and the Mercians would have it back. The city would burn and be rebuilt and burn again across the decades and centuries of this frontier war.

There is something almost weary about Hereford's position in Welsh history. It appears in this timeline twice — in 735 and in 760 — because its frontier location made it permanently contested. Look at the map: Hereford sits on the English side of Offa's Dyke, barely. The Dyke was not built yet when these battles were fought. But the line it would later formalise was already the line that armies were fighting over. The Dyke did not create the frontier. It confirmed one that already existed in blood.

743 AD — Mercians and West Saxons Fight the Welsh

Welsh borderlands · 52.55°N, 3.05°W

The Annales Cambriae records a combined campaign by Mercians and West Saxons against the Welsh — two of the three great Anglo-Saxon power blocs coordinating against a common enemy. The entry gives no location and no detail beyond the fact of the combined effort.

That combination is itself the significant detail. Mercia and Wessex were rivals as often as they were allies. When they cooperated it meant the threat they were facing was serious enough to override their normal competition. A coordinated Mercian-West Saxon campaign against Wales suggests that the border Welsh kingdoms were mounting a resistance significant enough to require the resources of two kingdoms to counter.

The mid-8th century borderlands were not settled or safe from either side. Welsh raiders were crossing into Mercia and Wessex. Mercian and West Saxon forces were pushing back into Wales. The violence was almost constant — raids, counter-raids, ambushes, campaigns — and the chronicles catch only the largest events. For every battle that made it into the record, a hundred smaller encounters did not.

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753 AD — Cuthred of Wessex Fights the Welsh

Welsh borderlands · 51.3°N, 2.8°W

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Cuthred king of the West Saxons fought against the Welsh. That is the entire entry. No location. No outcome. No names on the Welsh side. Seven words again — this seems to be the characteristic register of the Chronicle when it comes to Welsh affairs.

The brevity is informative. By 753 border warfare with the Welsh was so routine that it barely merited explanation. It happened, and happened again, and the chronicler noted that it happened and moved on to the next year's business. The Welsh were not interesting enough, in the Chronicle's estimation, to deserve detail. They were simply there, on the other side of whatever frontier currently existed, fighting back as they always fought back, generation after generation, sufficiently persistent to require periodic military attention but never quite defeated enough to stop mattering.

That persistence is, in its own way, the story of this entire volume.

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760 AD — The Second Battle of Hereford

Hereford · 52.0567°N, 2.716°W

Twenty-five years after the first recorded Welsh attack on Hereford, the Welsh came back. The Brut y Tywysogion is direct about what happened: a battle between the Britons and Saxons took place, to wit, the action of Hereford. And the Welsh prevailed.

The second Battle of Hereford was a Welsh victory over the Mercians, who were now under the command of Offa — the same Offa who would within two decades build the great Dyke that bears his name. Here, early in his reign, he was being beaten at Hereford. The frontier city was changing hands again.

This is an important moment in understanding the relationship between the battles and the Dyke. Offa did not build his Dyke from a position of total dominance. He built it after decades of border warfare — raids, counter-raids, Welsh victories as well as defeats — that had demonstrated the impossibility of holding the frontier by military force alone. The Dyke was not the product of conquest. It was the product of exhaustion. Both sides had been fighting long enough. A line was needed. This is what that line cost.

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765 AD — The Welsh Invade Mercia

Mercian borderlands · 52.5°N, 3.0°W

Wales struck back. In 765 Welsh forces crossed into Mercia and caused widespread devastation — the same word the chronicles repeatedly use for what Mercia had been doing to Wales. The raid was deep enough and damaging enough to be recorded as a significant event rather than a routine frontier skirmish.

This entry is often overlooked because it falls between the more famous events of Offa's reign. But it matters for the same reason that all the Welsh counter-strikes matter. The narrative of this period is too often written as Mercia advancing and Wales retreating. That is not the whole truth. Wales raided into Mercia. It won battles at Hereford. It invaded and devastated. It pushed back, repeatedly, with real military effect.

What Wales could not do was hold English territory permanently — the same problem that Cadwallon had faced in Northumbria in 633. The Welsh could strike deep. They could inflict serious damage. They could not garrison what they had taken. They lacked the administrative infrastructure to hold settled territory away from the mountains. So the raids ended and the Welsh went home and Mercia rebuilt and came back. And Wales rebuilt and went back. The cycle continued for centuries.

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776 AD — Offa Crushes the South Wales Men

South Wales border · 51.8°N, 3.0°W

King Offa of Mercia turned his power on the Welsh kingdoms of the south in 776 with devastating effect. The Welsh Annals record: the destruction of the South Wales men by king Offa. That single line covers a campaign of systematic violence through the southern Welsh border kingdoms — Gwent, Glamorgan, Brycheiniog — that left them weakened and temporarily unable to resist.

Offa was at the height of his power. He was corresponding as an equal with Charlemagne, the most powerful ruler in western Europe. He was minting coins with his own image on them — a statement of royal authority unprecedented in the Anglo-Saxon world. He was issuing charters, organising his kingdom, building his church. He was also periodically devastating his Welsh neighbours whenever they showed signs of becoming troublesome.

The 776 campaign against south Wales was one of several. It was followed two years later by the raid into Dyfed. Then Brycheiniog. Offa was not trying to conquer Wales in the permanent sense — his Dyke, built a few years after these campaigns, suggests a different intention. He was demonstrating that resistance was expensive. He was making the cost of Welsh military activity against Mercia higher than the cost of accepting Mercian dominance. And when the cost was high enough, he built a line.

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778 AD — Offa Raids Dyfed

Dyfed, south-west Wales · 51.8°N, 4.7°W

Two years after crushing the South Wales men Offa struck again — this time driving deep into Dyfed in the far south-west of Wales. Dyfed is modern Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion. To reach it Offa's forces had to cross the entire width of south Wales. This was not a border raid. This was an expedition of extraordinary reach — a demonstration that no Welsh kingdom, however distant from the Mercian frontier, was safe from Offa's military arm.

The record of this raid is brief: the devastation of the Southern Britons by Offa, in the Annales Cambriae. No detail of the route, the scale, the resistance. Only the fact of it. But the fact is remarkable enough. Offa raided Dyfed. The south-western peninsula of Wales, bounded by the sea on three sides and separated from Mercia by the full width of the Welsh kingdoms, was reached by a Mercian army. The message was unmistakable: there is nowhere to hide.

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784 AD — The Welsh Invade Mercia

Mercian borderlands · 52.5°N, 3.0°W

Wales had been absorbing Mercian raids for twenty years. In 784 it struck back again — a Welsh invasion of Mercia causing widespread devastation. The chronicles use the same language for this Welsh raid that they use for Offa's raids into Wales, and that equivalence is significant. Wales was not a passive victim. It was an active military force capable of cross-border operations of its own.

The 784 invasion is a separate event from the 765 Welsh invasion of Mercia that this volume has already recorded. Two Welsh invasions of Mercia in the same generation, bookending Offa's raids into Wales. The violence was mutual, sustained, and exhausting for both sides. It is against this background of continuous border warfare that the construction of the Dyke — begun around 780 — must be understood. The Dyke was not built in peace. It was built in the middle of a war that had been going on for generations, and it was an attempt to end that war by drawing a line and saying: here. This is where we stop.

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795 AD — Offa Raids Brycheiniog

Brycheiniog (Brecon area) · 51.9481°N, 3.3872°W

In one of his final campaigns Offa raided deep into Brycheiniog — the Welsh kingdom of modern Breconshire, sitting in the uplands north of the coastal plain of south Wales. He was over sixty years old. He had been building his Dyke, raiding Wales, managing his relationships with Charlemagne and the Pope, and generally running what was arguably the most sophisticated state in 8th-century Britain. Now, in what was almost his last military act, he turned south into the Welsh hills one more time.

Brycheiniog is a kingdom that appears and disappears in the historical record — smaller than Gwynedd or Powys, less often at the centre of events, but persistent. It sat on the high ground between the Usk and the Wye, a buffer territory between the great kingdoms of south Wales and the English border. Offa raided it in 795 and died the following year. He never came back.

The raid on Brycheiniog is the last entry in Offa's Welsh campaigns. He had spent his entire reign in periodic conflict with the Welsh kingdoms — from his defeat at Hereford in 760 to this final raid in 795 — and the Dyke he built stands as his permanent legacy on that frontier. But the raids did not stop with his death. Coenwulf, his successor, continued them. The pressure on Wales did not cease when any individual king died. It was structural, not personal. The kingdoms of England needed to expand westward, and Wales was west.

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796 AD — The Battle of Rhuddlan

Rhuddlan, North Wales · 53.2897°N, 3.4676°W

Offa of Mercia was dead. Wales noticed immediately. The Battle of Rhuddlan was fought in the very year of his death — 796 — a swift and deliberate Welsh response to the removal of the man who had spent thirty years making himself the most feared enemy Wales had faced since the Northumbrian campaigns of a century earlier.

Rhuddlan appears in this timeline for the first time here. It will not be the last. The fortress site on the Clwyd estuary in north-east Wales was one of the great strategic positions on the north Welsh coast — the gateway between Gwynedd and the lowlands of the north-east, the place where any military movement along the coast had to pass. In 796 a battle was fought there between Welsh and Mercian forces, possibly in the very weeks following news of Offa's death.

Whether the Welsh won outright or simply fought to demonstrate that the death of Offa changed the strategic balance, the Annales Cambriae records it as significant. It was a statement: the man who built the Dyke is gone, and Wales is still here, and the terms of engagement are now open for renegotiation.

Two years later Coenwulf of Mercia would raid Wales and kill a Welsh leader. The pressure would not stop. But the psychological moment of Offa's death was real, and the Welsh responded to it at Rhuddlan with the only language that had ever worked in this frontier: force.

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798 AD — Coenwulf Invades — Caradog ap Meirion Killed

Welsh border region · 52.7°N, 3.15°W

The last entry in this volume is not a Welsh victory. It is a reminder that the death of Offa changed the personality of Mercia's leadership but not its direction.

Coenwulf of Mercia — Offa's successor and almost his equal in ambition — invaded Wales in 798 and in the fighting killed Caradog ap Meirion, a Welsh frontier leader of sufficient standing that his death was specifically recorded in the Annales Cambriae. When the chronicle names someone it means they mattered — they were known, their death was grieved, their loss was felt.

Caradog ap Meirion is otherwise unknown to history. He held a border territory. He resisted a Mercian invasion. He was killed. His name was written down. That is all we have of him. It is, in its way, enough.

He stands for the thousands of Welsh men and women in this volume whose names were never written down — who held their ground on their particular patch of border, who resisted the raids and the campaigns and the systematic pressure of the English kingdoms for generation after generation, who died in fields that were later given English names or ploughed under for English farms, who left no chronicle entry and no monument and no stone.

The history of the Dark Age border is built on the named few and the unnamed many. Caradog ap Meirion is the last-named man of this volume. But behind him stand all the others — the ones who held the bridge at Pont y Saeson, the monks who prayed at Chester, the farmers of Anglesey who watched the longships come, the people of Llys Pengwern whose world ended in fire one night in 658.

This is their story. It is told here so it is not forgotten.

Volume One Complete

Dark Ages · 616–799 AD

Volume One covers 25 events across 183 years from the Battle of Chester in 616 to the Mercian invasion of 798. Together they tell the story of how Wales was defined by conflict: geographically bounded, politically isolated, militarily persistent, and culturally resilient in ways that no amount of raiding or conquest ever quite extinguished.

The interactive map layer Dark Ages · 616–799 AD contains 31 placemarks corresponding to the events and locations described in this volume, including the full route of Offa's Dyke from Prestatyn to Chepstow. Each pin on the map carries a description. Each description connects to the fuller narrative in these pages.

Volume Two — The Viking Age · 800–999 AD — follows the same ground into the next century, when a new enemy arrived from the sea and Wales found itself fighting on two fronts simultaneously, against the Mercians from the land and the Norse from the water.

Map Layer: Dark Ages · 616–799 AD

Interactive Map: A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

Published: People's Collection Wales · Tudor59 · 2026

A TIMELINE OF CONFLICT IN WALES

616 — 1421 AD

A Complete Historical Narrative Companion to the Interactive Map

VOLUME TWO

The Viking Age · 800–999 AD

Graham Tudor Emmanuel

Tudor59 · People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · 2026

Volume Two

The Viking Age · 800–999 AD

When the Sea Became the Enemy

In 810 the Vikings came to St Davids and burned it. That single sentence contains a world of changed reality.

For the previous two centuries — the entire span of Volume One — Wales had understood where its enemies came from. They came from the east. Northumbria pressed down from the north-east. Mercia pushed in from the centre. Wessex threatened from the south-east. The geography of danger was fixed. The mountains in the west were refuge. The sea was safety.

In 810 the sea stopped being safe. Longships from Scandinavia had been raiding the coasts of Britain and Ireland since the 790s — Lindisfarne in 793, Iona in 795, the Irish coast from 795 onward. Wales appears to have had a brief grace period. Then the period ended.

What the Vikings brought to Wales was something qualitatively different from anything that had come before. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms attacked on foot and on horseback along roads and river valleys. Their campaigns had logistics, preparation, seasons. You could read them. You could prepare. You could position your forces.

A Viking fleet could arrive anywhere on a coastline without warning. It needed no roads. It was not slowed by river crossings. It could strike at dawn and be gone before a mounted response could be organised. The Norse had perfected a form of war that the island world of Britain had no framework for defending against — fast, amphibious, coastal, brutal, and driven by a calculation of risk and reward that was completely indifferent to the sacred geography of the communities it targeted.

And Wales had a great deal of coastline. The Anglesey coast. The Lleyn Peninsula. The shores of Ceredigion. The Pembrokeshire harbours. St Davids, sitting exposed on its headland above the Irish Sea, within easy reach of any longship that knew the tidal patterns of the western approaches. From a Norse navigator's perspective, Wales was an archipelago of targets.

The two centuries covered in this volume were also the centuries in which Wales produced its most extraordinary political figure of the first millennium: Rhodri Mawr — Rhodri the Great. He inherited Gwynedd in 844, added Powys through marriage, and eventually controlled most of Wales north and east of Deheubarth. He fought the Vikings from the sea and the Mercians from the land simultaneously, for thirty years, and mostly held both at bay. When he killed the Viking leader Gorm in 856 the news reached the court of the Frankish king in Europe and a scholar there wrote a poem in his honour. A Welsh king, celebrated in continental Europe for killing a Viking. It happened. It is in the record.

Rhodri died in 877 — killed by Mercians, not Vikings, which tells you something about the complexity of the threats he was managing — and after his death Wales fragmented in the familiar Welsh way. His sons divided his kingdom. His grandsons fought each other for the pieces. And through all of it the Viking raids continued, season after season, year after year, the longships appearing on the western horizon and the coastal communities of Wales learning to live with a terror that never fully went away.

This volume covers 51 events across two centuries. It is the largest volume in the series, reflecting the density and variety of the Viking Age in Wales — raids, battles, political manoeuvres, internal Welsh conflicts, the occasional moment of triumph, and the slow accumulation of damage to the communities that could not be moved inland fast enough to escape the sea.

Not everything in this volume is Welsh against Norse. Several entries cover the continuing conflict with Mercia and the internal dynastic struggles that became, in this period, as dangerous to Welsh survival as any foreign enemy. The Viking Age in Wales was not simply a story of Norse raiders and Welsh victims. It was a century of warfare on multiple fronts simultaneously, with Wales caught between the land and the sea, fighting both.

Find Anglesey on the map. It appears more times in this volume than any other location. The most fertile island in Wales, the breadbasket of Gwynedd, the foundation of royal power in the north — it was also the most exposed, most repeatedly attacked, most persistently violated piece of Welsh territory in these two centuries. Anglesey is where this story lives most vividly. Keep it in mind as you follow the pins.

The Events · 800–999 AD

In Chronological Sequence

810 AD — St Davids Burned

St Davids, Pembrokeshire · 51.8817°N, 5.2694°W

The first recorded Viking attack on the most sacred site in Wales. St Davids — the cathedral of the patron saint of Wales, the spiritual and cultural heart of the entire nation — was burned by Norse raiders in 810.

St Davids sits on its exposed headland above the Irish Sea, twelve miles from the nearest substantial settlement, at the far western tip of Pembrokeshire. From a Viking navigator's perspective it was almost perfectly positioned: visible from the sea, accessible on a rising tide, far enough from any military garrison to guarantee a comfortable margin between arrival and any possible response. The monks knew they were vulnerable. They rebuilt after every attack. They stayed.

That decision to stay — to rebuild, to continue the community, to maintain the liturgy in the same place generation after generation despite knowing the ships would come again — is one of the most remarkable institutional acts of defiance in Welsh history. St Davids was burned again in later years. It was destroyed three more times in this volume alone. Each time the monks rebuilt. The cathedral that stands there today is the direct descendant of the community that refused to abandon its ground in 810.

The burning of St Davids in 810 opens the Viking chapter of Welsh history. Everything that follows in this volume flows from the moment the longships found the western coast of Wales and understood what was there.

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813 AD — Cynan Defeats Hywel in Gwynedd

Gwynedd, North Wales · 53.1°N, 4.2°W

The Vikings were not the only danger in the early 9th century. Gwynedd was fighting itself.

Cynan Dindaethwy defeated his rival Hywel Farf-Fehinog in battle for control of the kingdom of Gwynedd. It is a brief entry in the Brut y Tywysogion, and its brevity risks concealing its significance. Internal Welsh dynastic conflict in this period was not merely domestic politics. It was a direct military vulnerability. A Gwynedd divided between competing princes was a Gwynedd that could not mount a coordinated response to either the Mercian pressure from the east or the Viking pressure from the sea.

The pattern of internal Welsh conflict — sons against fathers, brothers against brothers, cousins against cousins — runs through this entire timeline and is never more dangerous than when an external enemy is simultaneously pressing on the borders. Wales's greatest military weakness across these eight centuries was not lack of courage or skill. It was the inability, in most eras, to present a unified front. Every dynastic civil war was a gift to whatever enemy was waiting on the other side of the border or over the western horizon.

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816 AD — Mercians Invade Snowdonia

Snowdonia, Gwynedd · 53.0685°N, 3.9942°W

While the Viking threat was gathering from the sea, Mercia was continuing to press from the land. In 816 Mercian forces under King Coenwulf penetrated deep into Snowdonia — the mountain heartland of Gwynedd, the terrain that had always been the last refuge when everything else was lost.

This was not a border raid. This was an army that had crossed the full width of north-east Wales and reached the mountains themselves. Snowdonia — Eryri, the Abode of Eagles — was not simply a geographical feature. It was a political and military concept. It was the place Welsh kings retreated to when they had nowhere left to go. The English knew this. To reach Snowdonia was to reach the inner sanctum of Welsh resistance.

That Coenwulf managed it in 816 speaks to the weakness of Gwynedd at this particular moment — the dynastic conflict of 813 still raw, the leadership divided, the military capacity of the kingdom below its best. Mercia took

its opportunity. Wales remembered it. The memory of 816 would be part of what drove Rhodri Mawr, a generation later, to build the unified Welsh political and military structure that could resist on both fronts.

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818 AD — Battle of Llanfaes, Anglesey

Llanfaes, Anglesey · 53.2627°N, 4.0889°W

Anglesey — the island that would be attacked, occupied, and devastated more times than any other place in Welsh history during this volume — enters the record in 818 not as the victim of a Viking raid but as the site of an internal Welsh conflict.

A battle was fought at Llanfaes on the eastern shore of Anglesey, and in the same year Coenwulf of Mercia devastated the region of Dyfed in the far south-west. Two threats, two directions, the same year. Wales in 818 was under simultaneous pressure from the land and preparing, though it did not yet know it, for the sea.

Llanfaes on Anglesey's eastern shore would later become significant as the site of a Franciscan friary founded in memory of Joan, wife of Llywelyn the Great, in the 13th century. But in 818 it was a battleground in the struggle for control of the island that mattered more to Gwynedd than any other single piece of territory. Control Anglesey, control Gwynedd. Lose Anglesey, lose everything.

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820 AD — Deganwy Destroyed

Deganwy, Conwy · 53.2902°N, 3.8132°W

Deganwy — the ancient royal stronghold of Gwynedd, sitting on its twin rock summits above the mouth of the River Conwy — was destroyed in 820 by Mercian forces under Coenwulf. With its fall, the whole of Powys passed into Mercian control.

Deganwy was not just a fortress. It was one of the oldest royal sites in Wales — a place associated with the legendary King Maelgwn Gwynedd in the 6th century, with a history of occupation stretching back into the Roman period. Its destruction was a symbolic blow as much as a military one. When Deganwy fell, the statement being made was not simply that the Mercians had taken a castle. The statement was that the most ancient seat of Welsh royal power in the north was rubble.

The Annales Cambriae records it without comment. There are moments in this chronicle when the absence of comment is the comment. Deganwy fell. Powys was taken. The chronicler moved on. What else was there to say.

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828 AD — Powys Liberated: The Pillar of Eliseg

Near Llangollen, Denbighshire · 52.9934°N, 3.185°W

After years of Mercian occupation, Wales fought back. Cyngen ap Cadell — King of Powys — drove out the Mercian occupiers and reclaimed his kingdom's eastern territories. To celebrate that recovery he erected a great carved stone pillar near Llangollen — the Pillar of Eliseg — inscribed with the history of the Powys dynasty and a declaration of their liberation.

The Pillar of Eliseg still stands. You can visit it today, beside the ruined Valle Crucis Abbey in the Dee valley west of Llangollen. It is one of the most personal monuments in the entire Welsh historical landscape — not a grave marker, not a church foundation, but a king's statement to the world: we were here, we endured, we took our land back.

The inscription, which has been partially reconstructed by scholars from fragments, claims descent from the great Vortigern — the legendary king who, in British tradition, invited the Saxons to Britain and set in motion the catastrophe that the Welsh had been living with ever since. Whether or not that genealogy is accurate, the political intent is clear: Cyngen was placing his recovery of Powys in the context of the longest possible Welsh history, asserting that his dynasty's roots went back to the very beginning of the conflict that Offa's Dyke had formalised.

The Pillar of Eliseg stands just west of Offa's Dyke — the line that Offa had drawn between Wales and Mercia. Cyngen put his monument on the Welsh side of that line, in his recovered kingdom, facing east. That is not an accident of geography. That is a statement.

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830 AD — Egbert of Wessex Invades Powys

Powys · 52.65°N, 3.2°W · Egbert's Severn Crossing: Atcham · 52.6667°N, 2.7°W · Wroxeter / Viroconium · 52.6769°N, 2.652°W

The newly dominant Egbert of Wessex — who had recently made himself master of England by defeating Mercia and receiving the submission of the other English kingdoms — turned his attention westward. His invasion of Powys in 830 is mapped at three locations on the interactive map: the Powys incursion itself, Egbert's crossing of the Severn at Atcham, and the great Roman site of Wroxeter.

Atcham is the key to understanding Egbert's route. The Roman river crossing at Atcham — where Watling Street, the great Roman road, crossed the Severn — was still in 830 the primary military artery for movement from the English midlands into Wales. Armies did not cross rivers at random. They crossed at known fords, at Roman bridges, at the same strategic points that had served soldiers since the legions marched this way. Egbert crossed at Atcham because every commander who had gone west before him had crossed at Atcham.

Wroxeter — Viroconium Cornoviorum, the fourth largest city in Roman Britain — lay on that same route. By 830 the great basilica and public baths had long since decayed, but the walls still stood and the site was still occupied. Any army staging from the Severn into Powys would have used Wroxeter as a base or a waypoint. The Roman infrastructure of Britain did not disappear with the Romans. It shaped military movement for centuries after they left.

Egbert's invasion was brief and inconclusive. He forced Cyngen ap Cadell to submit before withdrawing. Wales had a way of absorbing invaders and sending them home without decisive result. Egbert had more pressing concerns in England. He left. Wales remained.

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850 AD — Death of Cyngen ap Cadell — Killed by Vikings

Southern Welsh coast · 51.6°N, 4.3°W

The Welsh Annals record that Cyngen — a Welsh ruler — died on the swords of the Heathen. Five words of original chronicle. The first recorded killing of a named Welsh king by Viking raiders.

Cyngen ap Cadell had erected the Pillar of Eliseg to celebrate the liberation of Powys. He had seen his kingdom recovered from Mercian occupation. He had, in his own way, been one of the success stories of early 9th-century Welsh politics. And then the Norse came, and he died on their swords, somewhere on the southern Welsh coast where the longships found him.

The southern Welsh districts — Gwent, Glamorgan, Dyfed — were all suffering Norse coastal attacks at this time. Cyngen's death was not an isolated incident but the most prominent in a pattern of coastal violence that was systematically undermining the political structures of south Wales. A king could hold his throne against Mercian invasions and internal rivals and still be killed on a beach by men who had sailed from a different world entirely.

The Vikings did not respect the political geography of Wales. They did not know which kingdom they were raiding, or care. They saw a coastline, they saw settlements, they saw opportunity. The Welsh political map that had been built through two centuries of conflict with the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms meant nothing to a Norse navigator reading the tidal patterns of the Bristol Channel.

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853 AD — Burgred of Mercia Overruns Powys

Powys, central Wales · 52.5°N, 3.3°W

Burgred of Mercia launched a major invasion of Powys and succeeded where previous Mercian commanders had only partially managed. Cyngen ap Cadell — the man who had liberated Powys in 828 and erected the Pillar of Eliseg — abdicated. He retired to Rome, where he died. His kingdom was annexed by Rhodri Mawr of Gwynedd.

There is something both moving and revealing about Cyngen's decision to go to Rome rather than fight. He was an old man by 853. He had already achieved one great act of Welsh statecraft in liberating Powys from Mercia. Now Mercia was back, stronger than before, and the man who might have resisted — the ruler of Gwynedd with the military capacity to help — chose instead to absorb Powys into his own kingdom rather than defend it under its own dynasty.

Rhodri Mawr's annexation of Powys was not aggression. It was the only available form of salvation. A Powys without its dynasty, unable to defend itself, would have been absorbed by Mercia permanently. Under Gwynedd it remained Welsh. The price was the end of the House of Powys as an independent ruling force. Wales was consolidating under pressure — the political map shrinking toward unity not by choice but by necessity.

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854 AD — Vikings Ravage Anglesey: Y Llu Du

Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

The Black Host came to Anglesey in 854. Y Llu Du — the Black Horde — was the Welsh name for the Dubhgaill, the Black Danes, the newly arrived force of Viking raiders who had been operating in Irish waters and who now turned their attention across the Irish Sea to Wales.

They were called black not because of skin colour but because of the colour of their shields and equipment — dark-painted, distinctive, recognisable from a distance. When the coastal watchers of Anglesey saw the black sails on the western horizon they knew what was coming and there was almost nothing they could do about it.

Anglesey had no adequate naval defence. The island that was the breadbasket of Gwynedd — the most fertile agricultural land in north Wales, the source of the grain that fed the kingdom's armies and population — lay open to the sea on every side. Defending it against a seaborne attack required a fleet, and Wales had no fleet capable of meeting the Norse in open water. The communities of Anglesey could flee inland, hide their valuables, take to the hills. They could not fight the longships on the water.

854 was the first of many Anglesey raids in this volume. The island would be attacked again in 856, 865, 872, 876, 880, 918, 963, 972, 980, 987, 993, and 995. This is not a list of isolated incidents. This is a pattern of systematic exploitation — Norse commanders who knew the island, knew its resources, knew its tidal approaches, and returned to it the way a farmer returns to a productive field.

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856 AD — Rhodri Mawr Kills Viking Gorm

Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

In 856 Rhodri Mawr met a Viking fleet in battle on Anglesey and killed their leader. The man's name was Gorm — sometimes written as Horm — and his death at Welsh hands was remarkable enough to travel across the whole of Europe.

The Frankish scholar Sedulius Scottus, writing at the court of the Frankish king, composed a poem celebrating the victory. A Welsh king killing a Viking leader was news in continental Europe. It was that rare, that unexpected, that significant. The Norse had been raiding the coasts of Britain and Ireland for sixty years and were generally used to getting what they came for. Meeting a Welsh king who could beat them in the field was not in the normal script.

Rhodri Mawr — Rhodri the Great — was already the most powerful Welsh ruler since Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, and he was only partway through his reign. He controlled Gwynedd, had absorbed Powys, and was extending his influence south toward Ceredigion and Deheubarth. He was fighting the Mercians from the east and the Vikings from the sea and, for most of his reign, holding both at bay. The killing of Gorm in 856 was his most celebrated single act — the moment when the resistance of a Welsh king against the Norse threat received international recognition.

It did not stop the raids. Nothing stopped the raids. But it changed the scale of the response, and it proved that the Vikings were not invincible, that a Welsh force that met them on the right ground could beat them, and that Rhodri Mawr was the man capable of doing it.

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865 AD — Burgred of Mercia Captures Anglesey

Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

Burgred of Mercia — the king who had overrun Powys in 853 — occupied Anglesey, briefly annexing the island from Gwynedd. It was an opportunistic move, taking advantage of a moment when Rhodri Mawr's attention and military resources were stretched between too many fronts simultaneously.

The occupation did not last. Burgred was forced to withdraw when the Great Heathen Army — the enormous Viking force that had been systematically dismembering the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England since 865 — invaded Mercia and demanded his complete attention. He could not hold Anglesey and fight the Danes in his own heartland simultaneously. He chose his heartland. Anglesey reverted to Gwynedd.

There is an almost darkly comic quality to the situation — the Mercian king who had been raiding Wales for years was driven off Welsh territory by the same Viking menace that was simultaneously threatening Wales from the sea. The Great Heathen Army saved Anglesey from Mercian occupation, at least temporarily. One enemy's enemy, even when that enemy was also your enemy, could occasionally perform a useful function.

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870 AD — The Battle of Bryn Onnen

Near Llangollen · 53.2°N, 4.0°W

Bryn Onnen — the Hill of the Ash Trees — was the site of one of Rhodri Mawr's victories against the Mercians, in the sustained campaign he fought on two fronts throughout his reign. The precise location has never been definitively identified, though RCAHMW research points to two farms, Rhyd Onnen Isaf and Uchaf, on a steep hill approximately four kilometres west of Llangollen. A farmhouse in the same area is recorded on early Ordnance Survey maps as Coed-y-gadfa — the Battlefield Wood — five kilometres north-west of Llangollen.

Place names do not lie. When a wood is called the Battlefield Wood on the earliest maps we have of an area, it is because the community that named it knew something had happened there that deserved remembering. The wood is the monument. The name is the record.

Rhodri Mawr's victory at Bryn Onnen in 870 was part of the continuous Mercian pressure on the eastern frontier of Gwynedd that ran throughout his reign. He was fighting these border campaigns at the same time as he was dealing with the Viking raids on the coast. The demands on his military capacity were extraordinary. That he maintained Welsh control of both frontiers for as long as he did is the measure of the man.

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872 AD — Rhodri Mawr: Two Victories in a Single Year

Norse Engagement — Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W · Mercian Engagement — NE Powys · 52.9°N, 3.3°W

872 AD is one of the most extraordinary years in the history of Welsh military resistance. Rhodri Mawr won two separate battles in a single year — one against Norse raiders on Anglesey, one against Mercian forces pressing from the north-east.

The Norse engagement is recorded in the chronicles as a hard battle at a place called Bangolau, where Rhodri met Viking raiders on Anglesey and defeated them. The Mercian engagement was at a place called Manegiu, where the Vikings — possibly a separate Norse force operating inland — were destroyed.

Two fronts. Two battles. Two victories. In the same year. The logistics of this — maintaining military readiness on the sea coast and the land frontier simultaneously, moving forces between the two threats, fighting two different types of enemy in two different types of terrain — represent a military achievement that deserves far more recognition than Welsh history typically gives it.

Rhodri Mawr is remembered. He has the title Mawr — the Great — which the Welsh did not award lightly. But the specific achievement of 872 — two victories in a single year against enemies pressing from opposite directions — is the kind of thing that should be taught in every school in Wales. It was the high point of Welsh military capability in the first millennium.

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873 AD — The Battle of Rhiw-saeson

Caerau hillfort, Glamorgan · 52.95°N, 3.2°W

Rhiw-saeson. The Slope of the Saxons. The name carries its own history across twelve centuries.

A hillside in what is now Glamorgan was named for the Saxons who died on it — a defeat so complete, so memorable, so definitive that the local community renamed the place after the event. The Welsh knew what they were doing when they gave places names like this. They were building a geography of memory, a landscape that would tell future generations what had happened here without any written record being necessary. Walk this hill, they were saying. Walk it and know.

The Brut y Tywysogion records the battle with satisfaction: The action of Rhiw Saeson, in Glamorgan, took place, in which the Welsh conquered the Saxons, and slaughtered them dreadfully. The chronicle has given us moments of grim brevity throughout this timeline. This is one of the rare moments of straightforward Welsh triumph, recorded without equivocation.

The battle site is within the enclosure of Caerau hillfort in Glamorgan — an Iron Age fort that was still, in the 9th century, being used as a military position. The Welsh were not abandoning their ancient defensive sites. They were maintaining and using them, incorporating the accumulated defensive knowledge of three thousand years of occupation into the military practice of the Viking Age.

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876 AD — The Sunday Battle of Anglesey

Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

The Vikings came to Anglesey on a Sunday in 876. The chronicle records the day specifically — Gweith Duw Sul, the Sunday Battle — which tells you the timing was significant enough to be remembered. A Sunday attack on a Christian community caught people at worship, gathered in the same place, far from their weapons, with their attention on God rather than the horizon.

Whether it was deliberate — a Norse commander calculating the military advantage of a Sunday dawn raid on a community predictably at prayer — or coincidental, the result was the same. Rhodri Mawr was forced to flee to Ireland following this defeat. The king of most of Wales, the man who had killed Gorm twenty years earlier and celebrated it across Europe, was a refugee in Ireland.

He came home. He always came home. The Welsh kings of this period had extraordinary resilience — the capacity to absorb a defeat that would have ended most political careers, to regroup in exile, to return with enough support to reclaim their position. Cadwallon had done it. Rhodri did it. Later, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn would do it. And later still, Owain Glyndŵr would simply vanish rather than be caught. The mountains were always there. There was always somewhere to go.

But the Sunday Battle of Anglesey was the beginning of the end for Rhodri. The following year the Mercians killed him.

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877 AD — The Death of Rhodri Mawr

North Wales · 53.15°N, 3.7°W

In 877 Rhodri Mawr — Rhodri the Great, King of most of Wales, victor over Gorm, two-front commander, the nearest thing to a unified Welsh ruler that the first millennium produced — was killed in battle against Mercian forces. His son Gwriad died alongside him.

The Vikings, hearing the news, mocked Wales from across the sea. That detail — preserved in the Irish annals — is heartbreaking in its specificity. The Norse knew who Rhodri was. They knew what his death meant. They were glad of it. The king who had beaten them, whose victory had been celebrated at the Frankish court, was gone, and they were pleased, and they said so.

Wales lost its greatest unifying figure in a single afternoon on a battlefield whose location we cannot now identify with certainty. He had controlled more of Wales than any ruler since before the Roman conquest. He had maintained that control against two simultaneous military threats for thirty years. He died not in his bed, not in old age, but fighting — which was, perhaps, the right death for the king he had been.

The sons of Rhodri divided his kingdom between them. Gwynedd, Powys, Ceredigion — each went to a different son. The unity Rhodri had built collapsed with his death as inevitably as it always had and always would. Wales was not, in this period, capable of sustaining political unity beyond the lifetime of the individual strong enough to impose it. The geography argued for unity — the mountains, the rivers, the coastline that surrounded a single peninsula. The political culture argued against it — the Welsh law of partible inheritance, which divided kingdoms among sons rather than passing them to a single heir, was a structural guarantee of fragmentation.

Rhodri Mawr had overcome the political culture through personality, military ability, and political skill. His sons could not. Wales divided. The Vikings returned.

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878 AD — Norse Mercenaries Destroy Clynnog Fawr

Clynnog Fawr, Lleyn Peninsula · 52.99°N, 4.37°W

The year after Rhodri's death, the political instability of Gwynedd produced one of the most troubling entries in this volume. Hywel ab Ieuaf — fighting for the throne of Gwynedd against his rival Iago — hired Norse mercenaries to assist him. Those Norse mercenaries destroyed the church of Clynnog Fawr on the Lleyn Peninsula and attacked the communities of the Lleyn.

Clynnog Fawr was not a minor foundation. It was one of the most important early Christian sites in north Wales — a monastery established in the 6th century by the saint Beuno, one of the great founding figures of Welsh Christianity, a contemporary of Columba and David. Its destruction was not collateral damage. It was the direct consequence of a Welsh prince hiring the very raiders who had been threatening Wales from the sea, turning them against his own people, against his own sacred sites, in the service of his own political ambition.

This is one of the darkest moments in the Viking Age in Wales. Not a Norse attack on a defenceless coast but a Welsh prince weaponising Norse violence against Welsh communities. It tells you how desperate and how fractured the political situation in Gwynedd had become in the year after Rhodri's death. There were no principles that could not be compromised when the throne was at stake.

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879 AD — Gentiles Capture Iago ab Idwal

North Wales coast · 53.2°N, 4.0°W

The year after Clynnog Fawr, the Norse involvement in Gwynedd's succession crisis continued. Iago ab Idwal — Hywel's rival for the throne — was captured by the Gentiles, the Norse, and removed from the political equation. With his capture, the path to the throne was clear for Hywel.

The Norsemen as kingmakers. It had come to this. The raiders who burned monasteries and enslaved coastal communities were now being employed — or at least opportunistically used — to determine who sat on the throne of Gwynedd. The line between Viking threat and political instrument had dissolved completely.

There is no record of what happened to Iago in Norse captivity. He disappears from the chronicle. Captured, enslaved, ransomed, or killed — we do not know. He had been a claimant to the greatest Welsh kingdom, and then he was gone, taken by men who came from across the sea and cared nothing for the succession of Gwynedd except as a commercial opportunity.

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880 AD — The Battle of the Conway

Mouth of the River Conwy · 53.2785°N, 3.829°W

Three years after the death of Rhodri Mawr, his sons avenged him. At the River Conwy — the great frontier river of Gwynedd, the boundary that would define the edge of Welsh resistance for centuries — Anarawd ap Rhodri met the Mercian forces that had killed his father and destroyed them.

The Welsh Annals call it God's vengeance for Rhodri. The Brut y Tywysogion records: Eight hundred and eighty was the year of Christ when the battle of the Conway took place for God to avenge Rhodri. The language is theological but the military achievement was real and significant — a decisive Welsh victory on the frontier river, the Mercians who had killed the greatest Welsh king of the century receiving their answer three years later at the river that marked the edge of Wales.

Anarawd ap Rhodri went on to rule Gwynedd for twenty years. He was not his father — no one in this period was — but he was capable, and the victory at the Conway gave him the political authority he needed to hold Gwynedd together in the chaotic generation after Rhodri's death. The River Conwy as a military and political boundary appears again and again in this timeline, through Norman resistance, through the age of the princes, into Edward I's castle-building programme. It begins here, with the sons of Rhodri defending it in 880.

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890 AD — Black Northmen Attack Castell Baldwin, Powys

Castell Baldwin, Powys · 52.62°N, 3.48°W

Y Normanyeit Duon — the Black Northmen — struck Castell Baldwin deep in Powys. The location of Castell Baldwin has been debated by scholars, but it was clearly an inland site, far from the usual coastal raiding pattern that characterised Norse activity in Wales.

This is one of the most geographically surprising entries in the Viking Age record. The Norse are in Powys — in central Wales, away from the coast, deep in the upland interior of the country. How did they get there? The most likely explanation is that they came up the River Severn from the Bristol Channel — the Norse using rivers as motorways inland, penetrating to Powys along the same river valley that Mercian armies had used for generations. The Severn was navigable by longship to a considerable distance inland.

Castell Baldwin, wherever precisely it stood, was not on the coast. It was not a typical Viking target. Its attack in 890 demonstrates that by the late 9th century the Norse were moving beyond opportunistic coastal raiding into something more systematic — using river systems to penetrate inland, striking at targets that would not have expected them, demonstrating that the mountains of Wales were not a guaranteed refuge from a seaborne enemy who had learned to use the rivers.

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893 AD — The Battle of Buttington

Buttington on Severn, near Welshpool · 52.67°N, 3.15°W

The Battle of Buttington in 893 is one of the most remarkable events in the entire Viking Age in Wales — remarkable because it was not a Welsh defeat, not a Viking raid, not a Mercian incursion, but something that had never happened before in this timeline and would rarely happen again: a Welsh-English military alliance against a common enemy.

A large Danish force under the commander Haesten had been operating in England, ravaging the Severn valley. An allied army of men from Mercia, Wessex, and Wales besieged the Danes at Buttington on the banks of the Severn near Welshpool — pinning them against the river. The Welsh contingent included forces from Gwent, Glynwysing, and Gwynedd — three different Welsh kingdoms, fighting alongside the English, against the Danes.

The siege lasted weeks. The Danes ran out of food. They ate their horses. When there was nothing left to eat they broke out — those who had not already starved to death — and were destroyed in the fighting that followed. The survivors fled back to Essex.

Welsh forces from Gwent and Gwynedd, fighting alongside Alfred the Great's allies on the banks of the Severn. It sounds improbable given everything else in this timeline. But the Viking threat was real enough, and the Danish army pressing up the Severn valley was a threat to Welsh territory as much as English territory. The men of Gwent

and Glynwysing — the south-east Welsh kingdoms closest to the Severn valley — had entirely pragmatic reasons to fight alongside the English at Buttington. This was not sentiment. This was survival.

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894 AD — The Northmen Ravage Wales: Gwent and Gwynllywiog

Gwent · 51.7042°N, 2.9°W · Gwynllywiog · 51.5881°N, 2.9977°W

In the same year as Buttington — a year of extraordinary military complexity in Wales and England both — the Northmen ravaged Gwent and Gwynllywiog. This is mapped at two separate pins on the interactive map because the chronicle distinguishes between the two locations, suggesting separate raids rather than a single campaign.

Gwent was the south-eastern Welsh kingdom bordering the Severn estuary — the most exposed territory in south Wales to seaborne attack from the Bristol Channel. Gwynllywiog was the small commote immediately south of Gwent, sitting between the kingdom and the estuary coast. Any Norse force moving up from the Bristol Channel would have struck Gwynllywiog first before reaching Gwent proper.

These are the communities that had also sent their men to fight at Buttington earlier in the year, helping to destroy the Danish force on the Severn. And then the same men who had fought the Danes came home to find that different Norse forces had been raiding their homes while they were away. The Viking Age in Wales was not a series of clean, distinct events with clear beginnings and ends. It was a continuous, overlapping pressure — raids while campaigns were being fought, attacks on different parts of the coastline in the same year, enemies appearing simultaneously from multiple directions.

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902 AD — Dublin Vikings Expelled — Welsh Repel Them at the Coast

North Wales coast · 53.3°N, 3.8°W

In 902 the Irish expelled the Viking occupiers of Dublin — a significant moment in the politics of the Irish Sea world — and the displaced Norse crossed to North Wales. Welsh forces under Hywel ap Cadell or his brother Clydog resisted the incursion and drove the Norse toward Chester.

This is one of the most interesting entries in the whole volume because it reverses the usual dynamic. The Vikings came to North Wales not as raiders but as refugees — expelled from Dublin, looking for somewhere to settle, pushing onto the Welsh coast with the desperation of the landless. The Welsh refused them. They drove them toward Chester — English territory — where the Norse would attempt to establish themselves in the following years, leading to the attacks on the Welsh coast that this entry initiates.

The displacement of the Dublin Vikings was a wave that rippled across the Irish Sea for years. Ingimundr's attack at Ros Meilon in 903 came directly from this displacement. The 915 Viking raid on Gwent that captured a bishop came from the same source. The expulsion from Dublin in 902 was not a local Irish event. It was a reshuffling of Norse power across the entire Irish Sea region, and Wales sat in the middle of that sea.

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903 AD — The Battle of Ros Meilon: Ingimundr Attacks the Welsh

Possibly near Holyhead, Anglesey · 52.9333°N, 4.5167°W

In 903 a Danish force under the commander Ingimundr crossed the Irish Sea and attacked the Welsh in a pitched battle at Ros Meilon — sometimes written as Osmeliavn in the sources, the variant spellings reflecting different attempts to transliterate a Welsh place name into Latin or Irish script.

Ingimundr was one of the Norse leaders displaced from Dublin in 902. He had tried to settle in Gwynedd and been driven out by Welsh forces. He had then moved to the Wirral in Cheshire, where the English allowed him to settle. From there he launched his attack on Ros Meilon — a retaliatory strike against the Welsh who had refused him, fought at a location probably on or near the Anglesey coast.

The battle at Ros Meilon is one of the few Viking Age battles in Wales where we have a named Norse commander, a named location, and a reason for the attack. Most of the raids in this volume are anonymous — unnamed crews

from unnamed ships attacking unnamed communities. Ingimundr gives us a moment of biographical detail that the others lack, and that detail reveals the interconnected nature of the Irish Sea world: the same man expelled from Dublin, refused by Gwynedd, settled in the Wirral, attacking Anglesey. One displaced Norse leader creating a chain of events across four different territories in three years.

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904 AD — The Death of Mervyn ap Rhodri Mawr

Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

Mervyn was one of the sons of Rhodri Mawr. In 904 he was killed by the Danes in a retaliatory raid — the Norse striking back after Welsh resistance had checked their operations. The sons of Rhodri were holding their father's divided kingdom together piece by piece, each ruling his portion of what had once been a unified Welsh state. Each death weakened the whole.

Mervyn's death in 904 is recorded briefly in the chronicles. He is identified specifically as a son of Rhodri Mawr, which tells you the chronicler understood the dynastic significance — this was not just any Welsh lord killed in a Norse raid, this was one of the sons of the Great King, one of the men holding Wales together in the generation after his death. His death mattered. It was remembered. It was written down.

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905 AD and 910 AD — Eiríkr Bloodaxe Raids Wales

North Wales coast (First Raid) · 53.309°N, 4.633°W · (Second Raid) · 53.309°N, 4.633°W

Eiríkr — son of King Harald Fairhair of Norway, one of the most feared Norse warriors of his generation — conducted a sweeping circuit of raids across the British Isles and beyond from approximately 905 to 910. Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany — all suffered at his hands. Wales was one theatre in a wider strategic campaign of plunder.

The north Welsh coast was his likely target in both raids — Anglesey, Holyhead, the Lleyn Peninsula, the same communities that had already endured decades of Norse attention. Eiríkr did not innovate. He went where the wealth was, using the routes that Norse commanders had been using since the late 8th century. The consistent targeting of the same coastlines by successive generations of Norse raiders tells you two things: the wealth was real and persistent, and the communities were not moving inland fast enough to deprive the raiders of a reason to come back.

Eiríkr Bloodaxe went on to be King of Northumbria twice — expelled twice, killed at Stainmore in 954 — one of the more dramatic careers in Norse history. His Welsh raids were a footnote in his biography. In Welsh history they are part of the unrelenting pressure of the Viking century.

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915 AD — Viking Fleet Ravages Gwent — Bishop Cyfeiliog Captured

Gwent and Archenfield · 51.7°N, 2.9°W

A large Viking fleet from the Continent — under the command of Norse leaders named Óttarr and Hróaldr — ravaged Gwent and penetrated as far inland as Archenfield, the area of Herefordshire that had historically been Welsh territory. In the course of this raid they captured Bishop Cyfeiliog, the bishop of the Welsh see, known in the English chronicle as Cameleac.

A bishop. Captured. The shepherding of a Christian community — a man whose role was pastoral, spiritual, administrative — taken by Norse raiders and held for ransom. The Anglo-Saxon king Edward the Elder ransomed him for forty pounds. Forty pounds of silver for the release of a Welsh bishop, paid by an English king — it is one of the few moments in this timeline where English and Welsh interests aligned cleanly, and it aligned around the simple principle that bishops should not be captive to pagans.

The capture of Bishop Cyfeiliog is one of the better-documented incidents of the Viking Age in south Wales, precisely because it involved a person of sufficient ecclesiastical status to generate chronicle entries on both sides

of the border. Most of the victims of the Viking raids in this volume are invisible — unnamed communities, unnamed farmers, unnamed monks. The bishop is named. The ransom is recorded. The English king's intervention is noted. For once we have detail, and the detail makes the event real in a way that the anonymous raids cannot quite manage.

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918 AD — Dublin Norse Attack Anglesey

Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

In 918 Sihtric re-established Norse power in Dublin — recovering the city that the Irish had expelled the Vikings from sixteen years earlier — and his forces almost immediately raided Anglesey. The re-establishment of Dublin as a Norse base restored the direct threat to the north Welsh coast that had briefly diminished after 902.

For Anglesey, 918 was another in the seemingly endless sequence of raids that the island endured throughout this century. The communities of Anglesey by 918 had been living with the Viking threat for over a hundred years. This was not an emergency for them, not an exceptional crisis. This was the condition of life on the most exposed island in Wales. The harvest was gathered. The longships came. The harvest was taken. The longships left. The community rebuilt. The next year the longships came again.

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922 AD — The Battle of Dinasnewydd

Central Wales · 52.97°N, 3.15°W

Dinasnewydd — the New Fortress. The battle is recorded in the chronicles without location detail beyond the name, and the name has never been firmly identified with a specific modern site. The dinas — fortress — is somewhere in the Welsh interior. The battle was significant enough to be recorded by name, which means it was remembered, which means it mattered to the community that witnessed it.

The frustrating brevity of this entry is characteristic of the chronicles at their most opaque. We know a battle was fought. We know it was at a place called the New Fortress. We know it was in 922. We know nothing else. The entry stands as a reminder of how much of Welsh history is present only as a name — a fragment of record that tells us something happened here without telling us what, or why, or who survived.

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937 AD — The Battle of Brunanburh: Welsh Forces Join the Coalition

Probably Wirral, Cheshire · 53.36°N, 3.06°W

The Battle of Brunanburh in 937 is one of the most celebrated events in early English history — the great victory of Athelstan of England over a coalition of Scots, Scandinavians and Welsh that is commemorated in one of the finest poems in the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition. The poem does not mention the Welsh side. The Welsh angle of Brunanburh is almost never told. This is where it gets told.

Welsh forces joined the coalition against Athelstan — joining the King of Scots, the Norse King of Dublin, and various Scandinavian leaders in the largest military coalition assembled against the English crown in this period. They chose the losing side. Athelstan won decisively. The coalition was shattered.

Why did Welsh princes fight at Brunanburh? Not because they loved the Norse or the Scots — they had been fighting both for generations. They fought because Athelstan of England was the most powerful ruler in Britain, was asserting overlordship over the Welsh kings, and was demanding submission that felt uncomfortably like the beginning of conquest. A coalition that promised to reduce English power was a coalition worth joining, regardless of who else was in it.

The calculation was wrong. Athelstan won, and his victory at Brunanburh accelerated the process of English unity and English dominance over Wales. But the decision to fight — to join the coalition, to take the risk — was not irrational. It was the same calculation that Welsh princes had been making for three centuries: find allies where you can, fight when you must, and hope that someone else's army can do what your own cannot.

940–942 AD — Idwal Foel Against the English

Gwynedd · 53.1667°N, 3.5°W

Idwal Foel — the Bald — was King of Gwynedd and a man who refused to accept the growing dominance of the English crown over Welsh affairs. In 940 he took a decision that was courageous to the point of recklessness: he invaded England. He was driven back. Two years later, in 942, he took arms again against Edmund of England, and this time the response was decisive. Idwal and his brother Elisedd were both killed in battle against Edmund's forces.

Hywel Dda — Hywel the Good — the great Welsh lawgiver who had maintained peace with the English by accepting their overlordship, seized his moment. He sent Idwal's sons into exile and took Gwynedd for himself, becoming for a brief period the ruler of almost all Wales. The man who would not fight the English died fighting the English. The man who accepted English overlordship became king of Wales.

There is no comfortable lesson in this. Idwal was brave and he was wrong, in the tactical sense. Hywel was pragmatic and he succeeded, in the immediate sense. But the pragmatism that Hywel built his career on required accepting a submission to English authority that stored up resentment for the generations that came after him. The princes who came after Hywel would not all be as willing to accept that submission. Some of them would be as brave and as wrong as Idwal. And eventually, from the mixture of bravery and pragmatism and stubbornness, something more like sustained resistance would emerge.

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949 AD — The Battle of Carno

Nant Carno, Arwystli · 52.5264°N, 3.5856°W

Hywel Dda died in 949 and Wales immediately erupted. The sons of Idwal Foel — the men Hywel had sent into exile when he took their father's kingdom — came back and defeated the sons of Hywel at the Battle of Carno in the uplands of Arwystli, on the border between north and south Wales.

The RCAHMW records cairns on the high land between the parishes of Carno and Llanbrynmair — particularly the cairn known as Twr Gwyn Mawr — that Welsh historians and antiquaries associated with this battle. A 19th-century source notes that the high ground between Carno and Llanbrynmair was the scene of bloody battles some time after the death of Hywel Dda. The cairns may be genuine battlefield monuments — the remains of those who died here, piled on the upland ridge above the valley.

This is the first of what would become a long dynastic civil war between the sons of Hywel and the sons of Idwal. The sons of Idwal won at Carno. But winning one battle did not resolve the question. The fighting continued.

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954 AD — Sons of Hywel Checked at Llanrwst

Llanrwst, Conwy valley · 53.1393°N, 3.7944°W

The sons of Hywel Dda pushed north after their defeat at Carno, fighting a grinding multi-year campaign to extend their power into Gwynedd. For several years they gained ground. Then the Conwy valley stopped them.

The River Conwy is one of the great natural frontiers of Wales — a boundary that the geography enforces whether or not any human authority chooses to. It runs from the mountains of Snowdonia north to the sea at Conwy, cutting off the heartland of Gwynedd from the territories to the east. An army coming from the south trying to push north into the Conwy valley faced the river, the narrow valley walls, and the mountains rising behind. Llanrwst sits in the Conwy valley at the point where the river becomes a military obstacle.

The sons of Hywel were checked there. The north held. The dynastic war between the two branches of the house of Rhodri Mawr continued, but the geographic limit of southern Welsh military power was established at the Conwy. It would be established there again and again in the centuries that followed.

961–972 AD — The Sustained Norse Campaign: Six Raids in Eleven Years

961: Caer Gybi/Lleyn · 53.3087°N, 4.6329°W · 963 Tywyn · 52.5833°N, 4.0833°W · 963 Aberffraw · 53.194°N, 4.4706°W · 971 Penmon · 53.3055°N, 4.0569°W · 972 Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

The years from 961 to 972 represent one of the most sustained periods of Norse raiding against Welsh targets in the entire Viking Age. In eleven years, five separate raids are recorded against five separate locations — Caer Gybi and the Lleyn Peninsula in 961, Tywyn and Aberffraw in 963, Penmon monastery in 971, and the conquest of Anglesey itself in 972. These are not random opportunistic attacks. This is systematic exploitation.

Caer Gybi — the sacred monastic community built inside the walls of the old Roman fort at Holyhead — was struck in 961 alongside the Lleyn Peninsula, demonstrating coordinated dual-target raiding in a single campaign. Two strikes in one voyage, the Norse maximising the return on a single crossing of the Irish Sea.

Tywyn in 963 was a mainland monastery on the Gwynedd coast — the first specific recorded attack on the mainland coast rather than Anglesey in this sequence. The monastery at Tywyn was one of the oldest Christian foundations in north Wales, with roots going back to the 6th century. Its destruction was both material and spiritual.

Aberffraw in the same year was more significant still. Aberffraw was not just a monastery. It was the ancient royal seat of the kings of Gwynedd — the palace site that had housed the court of the north Welsh kings since the 7th century. Striking Aberffraw was striking the symbolic heart of the kingdom. It was a statement: there is nothing sacred, nothing royal, nothing ancient enough to be beyond our reach.

Penmon in 971 was attacked by King Magnús Haraldsson of Man and Limerick — one of the few raids in this volume where we have a named Norse commander targeting a named Welsh site. Penmon was one of the oldest Christian foundations in Wales, established by Saint Seiriol in the 6th century. Its sanctity gave it no protection.

And then in 972 Goðfriðr Haraldsson did something different from any previous Norse commander in Wales. He did not raid Anglesey. He conquered it. He took the whole island, installed his own authority, and held it as a Norse possession. Anglesey — Gwynedd's breadbasket, the foundation of north Welsh power — under Norse rule. The king of Gwynedd watched from the mainland and there was nothing he could do.

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980 AD — Anglesey Devastated

Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

In 980 a combined Welsh and Danish force devastated Anglesey from end to end. The involvement of Welsh forces alongside Danish raiders is one of the more uncomfortable details of the Viking Age in Wales.

But it is not incomprehensible. By 980 the Irish Sea world was a place of fluid alliances and pragmatic partnerships. Norse and Welsh had been neighbours across the Irish Sea for nearly two centuries. Some Norse had settled in Wales — place name evidence shows Norse settlement on parts of the Pembrokeshire and Gower coasts. Welsh princes hired Norse mercenaries. Norse commanders married into Welsh aristocratic families, or attempted to. The idea that the Norse and Welsh were simply and always on opposite sides is a simplification that the evidence does not support.

What is harder to excuse is a Welsh political decision to turn Norse military force against Anglesey — against Welsh communities, Welsh farmers, Welsh families. Whoever the Welsh component of the 980 raid was, they chose to devastate their own island for political or financial reasons that the chronicle does not explain. It happened. It is recorded. It should not be forgotten.

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981 AD — The Battle of Llanwenog

Llanwenog, Ceredigion · 52.0667°N, 4.2333°W

A Welsh victory in Ceredigion, recorded in the Welsh Annals for 981. Llanwenog sits in the gentle hill country of southern Ceredigion, in the landscape of river valleys and farmland that lies between the mountains of the north and the coast of the south-west. A battle here was a battle for the fertile lowlands of Ceredigion — territory that was always worth fighting over and always capable of producing enough food to justify the fighting.

The 981 victory at Llanwenog is one of the smaller entries in this volume but it belongs here for the same reason that all the Welsh victories belong — because the history of the Viking Age in Wales is not only a history of raids and defeats. It is also a history of Welsh communities that resisted, Welsh princes that organised that resistance, and occasional moments when the resistance worked. Llanwenog in 981 was one of those moments.

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987 AD — Godfrid Returns: Two Thousand Slaves

Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W

Godfrid — the Norse commander who had conquered Anglesey in 972 — came back in 987 and carried out one of the most devastating single raids in Welsh history. Two thousand people were taken from Anglesey and sold into slavery.

Two thousand. The number sits in the chronicle like a stone. It is not the kind of number that was invented — it is too specific, too large, too memorable to be a rhetorical flourish. Two thousand people. Not warriors. Not military casualties. People — farmers, monks, craftsmen, women, children — taken from their homes and transported across the Irish Sea to be sold in the slave markets of Dublin or further afield.

The Viking slave trade in the Irish Sea world was real, substantial, and persistent. Dublin was one of the great slave trading cities of early medieval Europe. Norse raiders across Britain and Ireland fed that market with human beings taken in exactly this way — coastal raids on defenceless communities, the population driven to the ships in chains, transported to market, sold. The Two Thousand of Anglesey in 987 were one consignment in a trade that moved thousands of people every decade.

We do not know their names. We do not know what happened to them. We know only the number, and the year, and the place they were taken from. It is enough to understand what the Viking Age cost the communities of the Welsh coast. Not in battles, not in kings, not in castles — in people. In the irreplaceable, unrecoverable human cost of two centuries of seaborne predation.

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992 AD — St Davids Destroyed Again

St Davids, Pembrokeshire · 51.8817°N, 5.2694°W

St Davids was burned again in 992. The monks had rebuilt after 810, and after subsequent attacks, and they rebuilt again after 992. The act of rebuilding the same walls on the same ground knowing the Norse would come again is one of the most quietly remarkable acts of institutional defiance in Welsh history.

Consider what it meant in practice. The community that rebuilt St Davids in 810 did not know when the Norse would return. They hoped, perhaps, that they would not. By 992 the community rebuilding for what may have been the third or fourth time had no such hope. They knew the Norse would come again. The geography of the site had not changed — still on its exposed headland, still visible from the sea, still within easy reach of a rising tide. The monks rebuilt anyway.

The decision to maintain the community in an indefensible location was not strategic stupidity. It was theological conviction — the belief that the sacred geography of a saint's burial place created an obligation that overrode practical calculation. St David was buried here. His community was here. To move was to abandon both the saint and the spiritual truth that his presence guaranteed. They stayed. They paid the price. They stayed again.

993–999 AD — The Final Years: Three More Raids

993 Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W · 995 Anglesey · 53.2874°N, 4.3241°W · 999 St Davids · 51.8817°N, 5.2694°W

The final years of the 10th century brought three more recorded raids in quick succession — the Black Pagans on Anglesey in 993, King Sveinn Forkbeard of Denmark on Anglesey in 995, and the destruction of St Davids with the killing of Bishop Morgeneu in 999.

That King Sveinn Forkbeard — the King of Denmark himself, one of the most powerful rulers in the Norse world, the man who would conquer England in 1013 — personally raided Anglesey in 995 says something extraordinary about the island's reputation. This was not an opportunistic raid by a minor Norse captain looking for easy pickings. This was the King of Denmark making a deliberate decision to cross the North Sea, sail around the north of Britain, navigate the Irish Sea, and raid this particular Welsh island. Anglesey was worth the King of Denmark's personal attention.

And then, in 999, the century ended with the worst possible event for Welsh Christianity. The Vikings came to St David's and killed the bishop himself. Morgeneu — shepherd of the most sacred flock in Wales — was murdered at his altar. The chronicle records his death with a grief that cuts through the centuries. A bishop killed in his own cathedral. A community that had rebuilt again and again losing its spiritual leader to the same enemy that had burned the walls around him.

The year 999. The turn of a millennium. Wales entering the new century with St Davids in ruins and its bishop freshly martyred. The Viking Age was not over. It would continue into the 11th century, overlapping with the new Welsh kingship of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn and the Norman arrival that would transform everything yet again.

But the core of the Viking Age in Wales — the two centuries from 810 to 999 — is contained in this volume. Fifty-one events. Hundreds of communities attacked. Thousands of people enslaved, killed, or displaced. And through it all, Wales still there, still Welsh, still building its churches and its chronicles and its poetry, still refusing to stop.

Volume Two Complete

The Viking Age · 800–999 AD

Volume Two covers 39 events across two centuries of sustained attack from both sea and land. The Viking Age was the most geographically diverse period of Welsh conflict — events on Anglesey, on the Lleyn Peninsula, at St Davids, deep in Powys, on the Severn at Buttington, as far north as Brunanburh in the north of England. Wales was a small country being pressed from every direction simultaneously, and it survived.

The interactive map layer The Viking Age · 800–999 AD contains 51 placemarks corresponding to the events described in this volume, including the multiple Anglesey raids mapped individually to show the pattern of sustained Norse exploitation of the most vulnerable Welsh territory.

Volume Three — The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD — tells the story of the extraordinary Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, the only man to unite all of Wales under one crown, and the Norman arrival that would transform the landscape of Wales forever with its iron ring of stone castles. The Viking Age fades. A new and more permanent threat takes its place.

Map Layer: The Viking Age · 800–999 AD

Interactive Map: A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

Published: People's Collection Wales · Tudor59 · 2026

A TIMELINE OF CONFLICT IN WALES

616 — 1421 AD

A Complete Historical Narrative Companion to the Interactive Map

VOLUME THREE

The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD

Graham Tudor Emmanuel

Tudor59 · People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · 2026

Volume Three

The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD

The Last King of Wales and the Coming of the Normans

There is a question that runs through the whole of Welsh history and never quite resolves itself: could Wales have survived as an independent nation if circumstances had been different at one particular moment? Most Welsh historians settle on 1282 — the death of Llywelyn the Last — as the decisive moment of loss. But there is an argument to be made for an earlier date. An argument that the real hinge was 1063.

In 1063 Gruffudd ap Llywelyn was killed by his own men on a hillside in Snowdonia, and with him died the only unified Welsh state that had ever existed. He had spent twenty-four years building it — kingdom by kingdom, battle by battle, alliance by alliance — until by 1057 every Welsh ruler from the Dee to the Severn acknowledged him as their overlord. All of Wales, under one king, for the first and last time in history.

It lasted six years before Harold Godwinson's campaign took it apart. And when Gruffudd died, Wales fragmented so completely and so immediately that the Normans who arrived three years later found not a unified kingdom to conquer but a patchwork of competing princes who could not agree on anything long enough to mount a coordinated defence.

The ninety-three years covered in this volume — from 1000 to 1093 — are the years in which that story plays out. They begin in the shadow of the Viking Age, with Wales still dealing with Norse raids alongside its internal conflicts. They run through the extraordinary career of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn — his rise, his unification of Wales, his campaigns deep into England, his destruction of a Mercian army and the sack of Hereford, his final desperate flight through Snowdonia and his death. And then they turn on a date that most people associate with English history: 1066.

William the Conqueror landed at Hastings in September 1066. He defeated and killed Harold Godwinson in October. By Christmas he was King of England. And within a year the first Norman castles were appearing on the Welsh border, planted by the lords William had given the Marcher territories as rewards for their service.

The Norman impact on Wales was transformative in a way that no previous enemy had managed. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had raided, pressured, and occasionally occupied Welsh territory. They had never fundamentally changed the landscape of Wales. The Normans changed it permanently. They built in stone. They built castles that could be held by small garrisons against large Welsh forces. They planted those castles across the landscape of Wales — on river crossings, on high ground, at coastal harbours — and the stone they used is still there. Most of those castles are still standing.

Chepstow Castle — the first Norman castle in Wales, begun in 1067 — still stands on its cliff above the Wye. Kidwelly Castle — the castle that features in Volume Four of this series, the castle above which Gwenllian was executed in 1136 — was built by the Normans in the early 12th century. The castle that defines the skyline of the town where this map was created is a Norman creation. The landscape of Wales is a Norman landscape, imposed on a Welsh country, and it begins in this volume.

Follow the pins of this layer from the battle of Rhyd y Groes in 1039 — where Gruffudd ap Llywelyn announced himself to the world by destroying a Mercian army — through the campaigns that made him king of all Wales, through Harold's winter raid on Rhuddlan in 1062 and the death in Snowdonia in 1063, through the Norman advance that followed, to the last native Welsh resistance in this period at the Battle of Hirwaun Wrgant in 1090 and the ambushes that followed.

Twelve events. Ninety-three years. The making and unmaking of the only unified Wales that ever existed. And the beginning of the stone ring that would hold Wales for the next two centuries.

The Events · 1000–1093 AD

In Chronological Sequence

1039 AD — The Battle of Rhyd y Groes

Ford of the Cross, near Welshpool · 52.6588°N, 3.1469°W

At Rhyd y Groes — the Ford of the Cross, a river crossing on the Severn near Welshpool — a young Welsh king destroyed a Mercian army and announced himself to the world. His name was Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, and from this battle forward he would dominate Welsh history for the next twenty-four years.

The Mercian army that crossed the Severn in 1039 had come to suppress what must have seemed like a routine border disturbance. A new Welsh king in Gwynedd, asserting his authority, needed to be reminded of the limits of that authority. The Mercians had been performing this function on the Welsh border for three centuries. They knew the drill.

Gruffudd did not follow the drill. He ambushed the Mercian force at the river crossing and destroyed it. The brother-in-law of Earl Leofric of Mercia — one of the most powerful men in England — was killed in the fighting. This was not a minor border skirmish. This was a statement: the new king of Gwynedd was not going to accept the tributary relationship that the Welsh kingdoms had maintained with England since the days of Hywel Dda. He was going to fight.

Rhyd y Groes means the Ford of the Cross — a river crossing marked by a religious monument, possibly a wayside cross or a chapel, significant enough to give its name to the place. The ford itself was one of the main crossing points on the upper Severn, where the Roman road system had created a node of movement between the midlands of England and the interior of Wales. Armies had been crossing this ford for a thousand years before Gruffudd was born. He chose it deliberately — ambushing the Mercians at the point where they were most committed, halfway across the river, unable to advance and unable to retreat cleanly.

It is the battle that made Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. Everything that followed — the unification of Wales, the campaigns into England, the sack of Hereford, the brief extraordinary moment of a unified Welsh state — began here, at a ford on the Severn, with a Mercian army that did not know what it was walking into.

1041 AD — The Battle of Pencader

Pencader, Carmarthenshire · 52.0319°N, 4.2267°W

Two years after Rhyd y Groes, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn turned south. His ambitions were not confined to Gwynedd and the border with Mercia. He intended to rule all of Wales, and ruling all of Wales meant dealing with the kingdoms of the south — Deheubarth, the great south-western kingdom whose territory covered modern Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire, and Morgannwg in the south-east.

At Pencader in northern Carmarthenshire Gruffudd met Hywel ab Edwin, the ruler of Deheubarth, in battle and defeated him. Hywel escaped, but his wife was captured and taken by Gruffudd — a standard practice of this period, when the capture of a ruler's family served as both a political statement and a practical hostage. Gruffudd had not yet conquered Deheubarth, but he had demonstrated that he could reach its ruler in the field and defeat him.

Pencader sits at a natural crossroads in the hill country of northern Carmarthenshire, where the river valleys of the south-west converge. A battle here was a battle for the approaches to the whole of south-west Wales — the routes that led to the Tywi valley, to Carmarthen, to the coast. Gruffudd's reach in 1041 extended to a landscape that would, within two centuries, produce some of the most significant events in Welsh history: the Battle of Kidwelly, the death of Gwenllian, the campaigns of the Lord Rhys.

He was here first. In 1041, at Pencader, the man who would unite Wales for the only time demonstrated that his ambition and his military reach extended to the very ground of this map's home territory.

1044 AD — The Battle of the Tywi Estuary

Mouth of the River Tywi, Carmarthenshire · 51.705°N, 4.36°W

Three years after Pencader, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn returned to the south-west and finished what he had started. At the mouth of the River Tywi — the estuary where the river meets the sea below Carmarthen, in the bay that opens onto the western approaches — he met Hywel ab Edwin again. This time Hywel did not escape.

The battle was fought partly in the water. The tidal estuary of the Tywi is not a simple river crossing — it is a complex of sandbanks, channels, mud flats, and tidal races that change character completely with the state of the tide. A battle fought here was a battle in which the ground itself was treacherous, in which a man unhorsed or surrounded could drown as easily as he could be killed by a blade. Hywel ab Edwin died in the water of the Tywi estuary. His body, if it was recovered at all, was recovered from the river.

This battle sits at the mouth of the same river that flows past Carmarthen, through Llandeilo, through the vale that the Romans followed and the Normans would later fortify. The Tywi is the defining river of Carmarthenshire — the river that gave the county its shape and its character, that brought the town of Carmarthen into existence at its first fordable point, that drained the interior of the county to the sea. A battle fought at its mouth in 1044 was a battle for the entire river valley and everything it contained.

After this victory, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn was the effective master of Deheubarth. The south-west was his. He had fought from Gwynedd to the Tywi estuary, from the Severn ford to the western sea. The project of unifying Wales was more than halfway complete.

1052 AD — The Battle of Leominster

Leominster, Herefordshire · 52.2279°N, 2.7388°W

By 1052 Gruffudd ap Llywelyn was ready to carry the war beyond Wales entirely. At Leominster — deep in Herefordshire, well inside England, far beyond any traditional Welsh frontier — he defeated an English force and demonstrated that the restraint his predecessors had generally shown toward English territory was not a principle he intended to observe.

Leominster in 1052 was not a border town. It sat in the heart of Herefordshire — English administration, English settlements, English farms and churches and markets. For a Welsh army to be at Leominster at all was extraordinary. For it to win there was unprecedented in living memory. Three English campaigns defeated in four years. No English force had been able to stop him.

Gruffudd's campaign at Leominster was conducted in alliance with the English nobleman Ælfgar, who had been outlawed by King Edward the Confessor and was using Welsh military power to press his case for reinstatement. It was a familiar dynamic — a Welsh king providing military muscle for an English political dispute, in exchange for territorial or political concessions. Gruffudd was not simply raiding. He was playing English politics with Welsh swords, and he was winning.

The reach of this campaign into England tells you something important about how far the strategic situation had shifted from the world of Offa's Dyke. The Dyke had been built to mark a line that England would not cross and Wales would not cross. By 1052 Gruffudd was crossing it whenever he chose, marching to Leominster and beyond, and there was nothing England could do about it.

1055 AD — The Sack of Hereford

Hereford · 52.0567°N, 2.716°W

Three years after Leominster, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn and his English ally Ælfgar came back. This time the target was not a market town but a city — the administrative capital of the English western frontier, the seat of a bishop, the home of a cathedral, the most important English stronghold on the Welsh border.

Hereford fell. The city that appears twice in Volume One of this series — attacked and taken by Welsh forces in 735 and again in 760 — fell again, this time more completely than before. The Norman garrison that had been installed by Ralph the Timid — the Norman earl who held Hereford for King Edward — attempted to fight in the Norman fashion, on horseback in open formation. The Welsh, who fought on foot in the way they had always fought, destroyed them in the field before they reached the city walls.

Then Gruffudd burned Hereford. The cathedral. The town. The administrative buildings. The markets. Everything that made Hereford the capital of the western frontier was put to the torch. It was the most dramatic single act of Welsh military power in the entire first millennium of conflict — a king of Wales standing in the ruins of an English cathedral city, having defeated the English army sent to stop him, with nowhere in south-west England that his forces could not now reach.

The only time in the medieval period that a Welsh army sacked an English city. It happened in 1055. The city was Hereford. The king was Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. It should be in every textbook that teaches Welsh history, and in most it is not.

England noticed. Edward the Confessor appointed Harold Godwinson — the most capable military commander in the kingdom — to deal with the Welsh problem. Harold would spend the next eight years building the strategy that eventually brought Gruffudd down.

1056 AD — The Battle of Glasbury

Glasbury, River Wye · 52.0367°N, 3.2833°W

At Glasbury on the River Wye — sitting precisely on the ancient boundary between Wales and England, the river that Offa's Dyke meets at its southern extremity — Gruffudd ap Llywelyn defeated yet another English army. Three victories in as many years. Every English force assembled against him had been broken.

Glasbury is a quiet place now. The Wye flows through it without urgency, the Black Mountains rising to the west and the gentler hills of Herefordshire falling away to the east. In 1056 it was the exact point where the Welsh world and the English world met — the river crossing that any army moving between Brecon and Hereford had to use. Gruffudd controlled it. He controlled the crossing. He controlled what moved through it.

After Glasbury, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn was at the absolute peak of his power. He controlled all of Wales — Gwynedd, Powys, Deheubarth, Morgannwg — and was projecting military force deep into England with impunity. The English king's best commanders had failed to stop him. The border that Offa had built was irrelevant. The mountains that had been Wales's prison for four centuries were now Wales's springboard.

It would not last. But in 1056, standing at Glasbury on the Wye with England broken before him and Wales united behind him, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn was the most powerful Welsh king who had ever lived and the most powerful king who would ever live in Wales. The summit was reached here. The descent began almost immediately.

1062 AD — Harold Strikes Rhuddlan

Rhuddlan, North Wales · 53.2897°N, 3.4676°W

Harold Godwinson understood that Gruffudd could not be defeated in battle in the conventional sense. No English force had managed it in twenty-three years. What Harold understood was that Gruffudd could be destroyed from within — his wealth stripped, his fleet burned, his ability to reward and retain followers undermined until the coalition that supported him collapsed from its own internal contradictions.

In December 1062 — a winter campaign so unexpected that even modern military historians note its audacity — Harold led a mounted force from Gloucester to Rhuddlan in a single swift march. Rhuddlan was Gruffudd's seat of power in the north: his palace, his harbour, his fleet. Harold arrived to find the palace occupied. Gruffudd escaped to the sea in a single ship, barely ahead of the English cavalry. The palace burned. The fleet in the harbour burned. Gruffudd's wealth, his ships, his prestige — gone in an afternoon.

The speed of the raid was its genius. A winter campaign in Wales was almost unheard of — the assumption had always been that the Welsh uplands were impassable in winter, that campaigns had to wait for the roads and the weather. Harold ignored the assumption. He moved faster than anyone expected, in the season nobody expected, and hit Gruffudd before any defence could be organised.

Gruffudd escaped. He was still king. He still had followers. But the narrative of his invincibility had been broken. Harold had reached his palace. Harold had burned his fleet. The king who had humiliated every English commander for two decades had run from a winter raid. The psychological damage was as significant as the material damage. In the politics of the 11th century, a king who ran was a king whose followers began to recalculate their loyalties.

1063 AD — The Death of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn

Snowdonia, Gwynedd · 53.0685°N, 3.9942°W

Harold came back in the summer of 1063 with a plan that left Gruffudd nowhere to run. His brother Tostig led an army overland into north Wales from the east. Harold himself took a fleet south around Land's End and north along the Welsh coast to meet him — a pincer movement of land and sea, north and south, east and west, closing simultaneously. Gruffudd was hunted through Snowdonia.

He was killed by his own men. That detail — preserved in the chronicles with brutal clarity — is the most important single fact of his death. Harold did not catch him. An English sword did not end him. His own followers, calculating that his position was untenable and that their survival required offering his head to Harold, made the decision that his career could not survive. He was killed on a hillside in Snowdonia in August 1063. His head was sent to Harold. His body was not given the burial of a king.

Wales fragmented instantly. The brothers and rivals and suppressed princes who had held their ambitions in check while Gruffudd lived reasserted those ambitions within weeks of his death. The unified Wales he had built was gone before the year was out. The sons of the men he had defeated divided the south between them. Gwynedd passed to new hands. The border with England returned to something like its pre-Gruffudd position.

Three years later the Normans arrived.

The timing is one of the great what-ifs of Welsh history. If Gruffudd had lived another decade — if his successors had inherited a unified Welsh state rather than a fragmented collection of competing kingdoms — the Norman advance into Wales would have met a coordinated resistance. Instead it met a series of individual Welsh princes, each defending his own territory without reference to any wider Welsh interest, each susceptible to being picked off one by one by lords who built in stone and understood the logic of the castle in a way that no Welsh prince had yet matched.

Gruffudd ap Llywelyn is remembered in Wales, but not as he should be. He was the only king ever to rule all of Wales. He was a military commander of the first order — twenty-four years of sustained campaigning without a decisive defeat until the very end. He took the war to England in a way that no Welsh king before or after him managed. He sacked Hereford. He stood at Glasbury on the Wye and looked east into a country he had broken four times running.

He deserved better than a hillside in Snowdonia and a head sent to Harold as a trophy. But the hillside in Snowdonia is where it ended. The mountains that had always been Wales's refuge became, in August 1063, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's grave.

1067 AD — Norman Conquest of Gwent: Chepstow Castle

Chepstow, Monmouthshire · 51.6441°N, 2.6752°W

The first blow of the Norman conquest of Wales fell in 1067, one year after Hastings. William FitzOsbern — one of William the Conqueror's most trusted commanders, rewarded with the earldom of Hereford for his service at Hastings — invaded the Kingdom of Gwent and conquered it in a single campaign. Its king, Caradog ap Gruffudd, was driven into exile.

Before the year was out FitzOsbern had begun building a castle on the cliff above the River Wye at Chepstow. It was unlike anything Wales had ever seen.

The Welsh had built in timber and earth — hill forts, wooden palisades, earthwork ramparts. The Normans built in stone. The castle that FitzOsbern raised at Chepstow in 1067 was a stone hall keep — rectangular, massive, permanent — planted on a cliff above the river at the point where the Wye met the Severn estuary, commanding

every approach from England into south-east Wales. It could not be burned. It could not be moved. It could not be dismantled by a raiding force in a single night.

Chepstow Castle still stands. You can walk through it today. The great tower that FitzOsbern built in 1067 — modified over the centuries but structurally still there — is one of the oldest surviving secular buildings in Britain. Stand inside it and understand what it meant to the Welsh who saw it rising on the cliff in 1067: something entirely new in their world had arrived. Something that did not go away when the campaign was over. Something that stayed.

The logic of the Norman castle was the logic of permanent occupation. A Welsh force could besiege a castle and fail to take it. A small Norman garrison could hold it against a much larger Welsh army. The lord who built it could go back to England for months knowing that his position in Wales was secure behind his stone walls. The castle was not just a military installation. It was a statement of intent: we are here, permanently, and the stone proves it.

Chepstow was the first. Within two decades there were Norman castles at Monmouth, at Abergavenny, at Brecon, at Cardiff, at Pembroke, and at dozens of sites across the southern half of Wales. Each one was a nail driven into the landscape. Together they would form the iron ring that defined the Norman occupation of Wales.

1069 AD — The Battle of Mechain

Mechain, Powys · 52.8°N, 3.3°W

In 1069 — just two years after the Norman advance into Gwent — the Welsh were already fighting each other again. At Mechain in Powys, the sons of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn came to fight for the throne of Gwynedd. Both were killed. The battle was not against the Normans. It was Welsh against Welsh — Bleddyn ap Cynfyn, the king who had succeeded Gruffudd in Gwynedd, defeating the sons of the man he had replaced.

The sons of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn — sons of the greatest Welsh king who had ever lived — died at Mechain in a dynastic conflict that had nothing to do with the Norman threat pressing on the southern border. While the Normans were building their stone castles in Gwent and Glamorgan, the men of Gwynedd were killing each other at Mechain for the right to sit on the throne that Gruffudd had built.

This is the Welsh political tragedy that the Norman conquest exploited. The Normans did not conquer Wales in a single campaign. They could not have — Wales was too large, too mountainous, too capable of absorbing invaders and sending them home. What they did was advance opportunistically into a country that could not stop fighting itself long enough to present a unified defence. Every Welsh civil war was a Norman opportunity. Mechain in 1069 was the first of many.

1073 AD — The Normans Occupy Arfon

Arfon, Gwynedd · 53.1405°N, 4.2764°W

In 1073 the Normans reached Arfon — the land facing Anglesey, the ancient heartland of the kingdom of Gwynedd, the most sacred ground in north Wales. This was not a border territory. This was the inner sanctum.

Arfon had been the core of Gwynedd since the 6th century. The royal court at Aberffraw on Anglesey faced Arfon across the Menai Strait — the strait being both a boundary and a connection, the water that separated the island granary from the mainland heartland but also the channel that linked them. Caernarfon — then a settlement, later the site of Edward I's great castle — sat in Arfon. The region that the Romans had called Segontium was in Arfon. Everything that was deepest and oldest in the kingdom of Gwynedd was in Arfon.

The Norman occupation of Arfon in 1073 was a statement of extraordinary ambition. They had moved from Chepstow in 1067 to the heartland of Gwynedd in 1073 — six years, the full length of Wales, from the Severn estuary to the Menai Strait. No English king, no Mercian king, no Viking commander had penetrated this deep into Gwynedd in the recorded history of the kingdom.

It did not hold. The Norman occupation of Arfon was temporary — driven out, in the end, by Welsh resistance and the simple impossibility of maintaining a supply line across the full length of Wales without the secure base that would require decades more castle-building to create. But the fact that they reached Arfon in 1073 tells you

everything about the speed and ambition of the Norman advance and the degree to which the fragmentation of Welsh political authority after Gruffudd's death had stripped Wales of its capacity to resist.

1090 AD — The Battle of Hirwaun Wrgant

Hirwaun, Glamorgan · 51.7412°N, 3.5087°W

The Battle of Hirwaun Wrgant in approximately 1090 is one of the pivotal moments in the Norman conquest of south Wales, and one of the least known. It brought together three forces — two Welsh and one Norman — in a conflict whose outcome opened the entire south-east of Wales to permanent Norman occupation.

Rhys ap Tewdwr, the Prince of Deheubarth, was fighting Iestyn ap Gwrgan, the last native ruler of Morgannwg — the kingdom of Glamorgan. Iestyn, unable to defeat Rhys alone, invited Norman allies from across the border to assist him. The Normans came. They helped defeat Rhys ap Tewdwr. And then they stayed.

The Normans who came to help Iestyn at Hirwaun Wrgant were led by Robert FitzHamon — a lord of the Norman Marches who understood the opportunity that Iestyn's invitation represented. He defeated Rhys ap Tewdwr. He then turned on Iestyn, the man who had invited him, and took Glamorgan for himself. Iestyn was the last native ruler of Morgannwg. He died dispossessed. The kingdom he had ruled passed to the Normans who had come to help him.

It is one of the oldest stories in the book of conquest: invite the powerful stranger to help you defeat your neighbour, and discover that the powerful stranger has no intention of leaving. Robert FitzHamon built Cardiff Castle. He distributed the land of Glamorgan among his followers in the Norman feudal pattern. The Norman conquest of south-east Wales was complete, initiated not by an English invasion but by a Welsh prince who could not resist asking for help from the wrong people.

Rhys ap Tewdwr — the last independent king of Deheubarth, father of the Gruffudd ap Rhys whose wife Gwenllian would die at Kidwelly in 1136 — was killed here. The direct genealogical line from this battle to the most significant event in Carmarthenshire's medieval history runs clearly: Rhys ap Tewdwr falls at Hirwaun Wrgant, his son Gruffudd leads the resistance that his wife Gwenllian dies for, and the story of Norman Wales in the south-west begins in this field above Hirwaun in 1090.

1096 AD — The Ambush at Celli Carnant and the Battle of Aber Llech

Celli Carnant · 51.7°N, 2.9°W · Aber Llech, Ystrad Gynlais · 51.7833°N, 3.7167°W

By 1096 the Norman advance had penetrated across most of south Wales and was pressing into the borderlands of Gwent and Brycheiniog. The Welsh were watching and waiting. In 1096 they struck — twice, in the same year, in the same general region, with the co-ordination of communities that had been absorbing Norman pressure for almost thirty years and had finally chosen their moment.

At Celli Carnant — the Grove of the Carnant, somewhere in the south-east — a Welsh force ambushed a Norman column and destroyed it. The men of Gwent, who had been the first Welsh kingdom to fall to the Norman advance in 1067, had been waiting twenty-nine years for this moment. They knew their ground in ways that no Norman garrison ever could. The ambush at Celli Carnant was the knowledge of a people who had lived in this landscape for generations, turned against an occupier who did not know it at all.

In the same year, at Aber Llech — the mouth of the River Llech where it meets the Tawe near Ystrad Gynlais — the men of Brycheiniog routed a separate Norman force. Two Welsh victories in the same year in the same general region: Gwent rising from the east, Brycheiniog rising from the north, the south Welsh kingdoms striking simultaneously in what appears to have been a co-ordinated uprising rather than two independent events.

These victories did not reverse the Norman advance. The castles remained. The lords remained. The feudal structure that FitzOsbern and FitzHamon and their contemporaries had imposed on south Wales was too well entrenched to be dislodged by ambushes and field victories. But the ambushes at Celli Carnant and Aber Llech demonstrated that the Welsh of the south had not accepted Norman rule as permanent. They were waiting. They were watching. They would rise again.

And in 1136, at Llwchwr and then at Maes Gwenllian and then at Crug Mawr, they did.

1098 AD — The Battle of Anglesey Sound

Menai Strait, Anglesey · 53.2167°N, 4.1667°W

The final entry in this volume is one of the most extraordinary moments in the whole of Welsh history — not because of what the Welsh did, but because of what happened to save them.

By 1098 the Norman advance into north Wales had reached Anglesey. Hugh of Chester and Hugh of Shrewsbury — two of the most powerful Norman lords in the Marches — led a fleet into the Menai Strait to complete the conquest of Gwynedd. Gruffudd ap Cynan, King of Gwynedd, had fled to Ireland. Anglesey was being occupied. The last great refuge of Welsh resistance in the north was falling.

Then a Norwegian fleet appeared in the Irish Sea.

Magnus Barefoot — King of Norway, conducting one of the great Norse expeditions of the late 11th century through the western isles of Scotland and the Irish Sea — encountered the Norman fleet in the Menai Strait. What happened next has been debated by historians ever since. The sources suggest some kind of engagement, deliberate or accidental, in which the Norman fleet was damaged or driven off. Hugh of Shrewsbury was killed — struck, according to one source, by an arrow fired from a Norse ship, possibly fired by Magnus himself.

The Normans abandoned Anglesey. Gruffudd ap Cynan came back from Ireland. Gwynedd was saved.

Not by Welsh arms. Not by Welsh strategy. By a Viking who happened to be in the Irish Sea at the right moment and whose engagement with the Norman fleet — for whatever reason, in whatever precise circumstances — removed the threat to Anglesey before the conquest could be completed.

Wales has been saved by unlikely interventions before in this timeline. Cadwallon was saved by Penda's pagan Mercia. Anglesey was saved in 865 when the Great Heathen Army pulled Burgred of Mercia back from the island. Now Gwynedd was saved by a Norwegian king on a raiding voyage who had no particular interest in Welsh independence and simply happened to be there.

History does not always move through will and strategy. Sometimes it moves through accident, through coincidence, through the arrival of a Norwegian fleet at precisely the moment its presence was decisive. Gwynedd survived in 1098 because Magnus Barefoot was in the Irish Sea. That is the truth. It does not diminish what happened. It makes it more extraordinary.

Volume Three Complete

The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD

Volume Three covers 12 events across 93 years — the shortest era in the series but arguably the most consequential. The rise and fall of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn changed what was possible for Wales, and his fall changed what was possible for the Normans. The two processes are inseparable: Gruffudd's death created the vacuum that the Norman advance filled.

The interactive map layer The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD contains 12 placemarks covering the full arc of this period — from Rhyd y Groes in 1039 to the Battle of Anglesey Sound in 1098. The layer sits between the Viking Age that precedes it and the Norman Resistance that follows, and it is the hinge on which the whole narrative turns.

Volume Four — Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD — picks up the story from where this volume ends, with Gwynedd saved by a Norwegian accident and the Welsh of the south already beginning to organise the resistance that will produce the great revolt of 1136, the death of Gwenllian at Kidwelly, and the extraordinary career of the Lord Rhys. It is the volume that comes home — to Carmarthenshire, to Kidwelly, to the landscape where this map was made.

Map Layer: The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD

Interactive Map: A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

Published: People's Collection Wales · Tudor59 · 2026

A TIMELINE OF CONFLICT IN WALES

616 — 1421 AD

A Complete Historical Narrative Companion to the Interactive Map

VOLUME FOUR

Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD

Graham Tudor Emmanuel

Tudor59 · People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · 2026

Volume Four

Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD

The Iron Ring and the Welsh Fire

There is a field below Kidwelly Castle. It is called Maes Gwenllian — the Field of Gwenllian. It has been called that for nearly nine hundred years. The woman it is named for died there in 1136, captured after leading a Welsh force against the Norman garrison of Kidwelly, executed on the ground where her army had been defeated. Her head was cut from her shoulders in the field below the castle that still stands above the town.

Gwenllian ferch Gruffudd ap Cynan is the 24th great-grandmother of the creator of this map. This is not a neutral volume. It is written with that connection present in every sentence — not to distort the history, but because the history is personal in the most direct possible sense. She died here. On this ground. In this town. And the map that commemorates eight centuries of Welsh conflict was made in the same place, by someone who carries her blood.

Vivit Post Funera Virtus. Virtue lives on after death. These words close every document in this series. For this volume they carry a weight they carry nowhere else.

The century covered in Volume Four — 1094 to 1200 AD — is the century of Norman consolidation and Welsh resistance. The Normans who arrived in Wales after 1066 had by 1094 built their stone castles across the south and were pressing into the north. Welsh resistance in this period was not a single co-ordinated campaign but a series of uprisings, ambushes, retreats, recoveries, and occasional moments of devastating Welsh success that checked the Norman advance without ever quite reversing it permanently.

The period produced two of the greatest figures in Welsh medieval history. Owain Gwynedd — who stopped Henry II's largest-ever invasion of Wales in the Berwyn mountains in 1165, in a campaign that the English king never recovered from politically. And Rhys ap Gruffudd, the Lord Rhys — grandson of the Rhys ap Tewdwr who died at Hirwaun Wrgant in 1090, son of the Gruffudd ap Rhys who avenged Gwenllian at Crug Mawr in 1136, and the dominant political and cultural figure of south Wales for the last three decades of the 12th century.

Between them, Owain Gwynedd and the Lord Rhys held Wales together across a century in which the Norman lords of the March — the Marcher lords, the Clares and the Mortimers and the de Braoses and the de Lacys — were pressing on the borders from every direction. They did not recover all the lost territory. They could not. The castles remained, and the feudal structure the Normans had imposed remained, and the English settlers in Pembrokeshire remained. But they preserved Welsh political identity and Welsh cultural life in the face of a Norman power that had already absorbed England and most of Ireland.

The great revolt of 1136 — the year this volume is built around — began in the south. It began at Llwchwr on New Year's Day, when a Welsh force destroyed a Norman army near Loughor. It reached Kidwelly in the spring, when Gwenllian marched on the castle and was killed. It peaked at Crug Mawr near Cardigan, where the greatest Welsh military victory of the 12th century was won. And it spread across Wales in a wave of uprising that demonstrated, definitively, that the Norman occupation had not extinguished the capacity or the will for Welsh resistance.

This volume comes home. The pins in this layer include Kidwelly. They include the Tywi valley. They include the landscape of Carmarthenshire that shaped the person who made this map. Read it knowing that.

The Events · 1094–1200 AD

In Chronological Sequence

1094 AD — Welsh Uprising: The Normans Expelled from Gwynedd and Ceredigion

Gwynedd and Ceredigion · 52.8°N, 4.0°W

In 1094 Wales rose. Not in the south, not in the border territories where Norman pressure had been most sustained, but in the north and west — in Gwynedd and Ceredigion, the heartlands of Welsh political identity, the kingdoms that traced their dynasties back to the age of Rhodri Mawr and beyond.

The uprising of 1094 was co-ordinated in a way that suggests preparation rather than spontaneous revolt. Cadwgan ap Bleddyn of Powys led the northern element. The Welsh of Ceredigion rose simultaneously. The Norman lords who had occupied Gwynedd — the men who had reached Arfon in 1073 — were driven out across the full width of the north. Ceredigion was reclaimed. The Norman advance that had seemed unstoppable was, for the first time in a generation, stopped.

The uprising of 1094 did not reverse the Norman conquest of the south. The castles at Cardiff, Brecon, Pembroke and Chepstow remained. The Norman lords of Glamorgan and Gwent remained. But it demonstrated something that the Normans needed to learn and kept needing to re-learn: Wales was not England. The feudal logic that had conquered England at Hastings — one battle, one king, the country's fate decided in an afternoon — did not work in Wales. The mountains were not a country that could be defeated in a single campaign. They had to be held, castle by castle, generation by generation, against people who never accepted that the holding was legitimate.

The 1094 uprising sits in this volume between the Norman advance of 1073 and the ambushes of 1096 — a sequence that shows Wales finding its resistance, establishing the pattern that Owain Gwynedd and the Lord Rhys would perfect in the decades that followed. Strike when the moment is right. Use the ground. Give the enemy the wrong terrain. And when the castles hold and the Norman lords return, wait and prepare and strike again.

1096 AD — The Ambush at Celli Carnant and the Battle of Aber Llech

Celli Carnant, Gwent · 51.7°N, 2.9°W · Aber Llech, Ystrad Gynlais · 51.7833°N, 3.7167°W

Two Welsh victories in the same year, in the same general region of south Wales, separated by perhaps fifty miles of terrain. The ambush at Celli Carnant in Gwent and the battle at Aber Llech in the Tawe valley near Ystrad Gynlais are recorded separately in the chronicles, suggesting they were distinct engagements rather than a single campaign.

Celli Carnant — the Grove of the Carnant. A Norman column moving through the wooded terrain of Gwent was ambushed and destroyed. The men who chose the site knew it. They had probably grown up near it, walked it as children, understood its angles and its cover and its escape routes. The Normans who marched through it did not. A wood in Welsh hands was a weapon. A wood that a Norman commander had not personally surveyed was a trap waiting to be sprung.

At Aber Llech — the confluence of the River Llech with the Tawe, in the upland country north of the coastal plain of Glamorgan — the men of Brycheiniog met a Norman force in the open and defeated it. Aber Llech is different from Celli Carnant — not an ambush in woodland but a pitched engagement at a river confluence, the kind of ground where Welsh light infantry could meet Norman cavalry on more equal terms than the open lowlands allowed.

Two victories. Two different kinds of ground. Two different methods. The versatility of Welsh military resistance in this period — ambush in the woods, battle at the river — is part of what made it so difficult to suppress permanently. The Normans could adapt to one style of warfare. Adapting simultaneously to all the styles that the Welsh landscape demanded of them was a different and more difficult problem.

1098 AD — The Battle of Anglesey Sound

Menai Strait · 53.2167°N, 4.1667°W

This entry is carried forward from Volume Three because the Battle of Anglesey Sound in 1098 sits precisely on the boundary between the Welsh Kings layer and the Norman Resistance layer — it is both the conclusion of the story of Gwynedd under Norman occupation and the beginning of the recovery that Gruffudd ap Cynan would lead in the 12th century.

Hugh of Shrewsbury was killed in the Menai Strait by an arrow from a Norwegian ship. The Norman occupation of Anglesey collapsed. Gruffudd ap Cynan returned from Ireland. Gwynedd was saved by accident — by the presence of Magnus Barefoot's fleet at precisely the right moment in precisely the right place.

But the salvation, however accidental, was real. Gruffudd ap Cynan rebuilt Gwynedd over the following decades into the political and military force that his son Owain Gwynedd would inherit — the most powerful Welsh kingdom of the 12th century, the state that would produce the resistance to Henry II that stopped the most ambitious English invasion of Wales in a generation. Everything that Owain Gwynedd achieved began with his father's return from Ireland in 1098, which began with a Norwegian arrow in the Menai Strait.

History moves through improbable chains of consequence. This is one of them.

1116 AD — The Deheubarth Revolt and Aberystwyth Castle

Aberystwyth, Ceredigion · 52.4153°N, 4.0829°W

In 1116 the sons of Gruffudd ap Rhys rose in revolt against Norman rule in Deheubarth. Gruffudd ap Rhys — the man who would later avenge Gwenllian at Crug Mawr, whose wife she was — was at this point beginning the long resistance campaign that would define his life. The revolt of 1116 was not its climax. It was its beginning.

Aberystwyth Castle — the Norman fortification at the mouth of the Rheidol where it meets the sea, the western anchor of the Norman position in Ceredigion — was among the targets. Gruffudd and his sons struck at the castles that had been planted across their kingdom since the conquest of Deheubarth by the Normans in the 1090s, demonstrating that the Norman garrison system, however impressive in stone, was not immune to determined Welsh attack.

The revolt of 1116 was suppressed. The Norman castles held. Gruffudd ap Rhys survived — barely, by hiding in the forests and marshes of Deheubarth while the Norman lords of the south hunted him. He went to ground. He waited. He studied the Norman military system from the position of a man who could not yet defeat it. And twenty years later, when the great revolt of 1136 came, he was ready.

Aberystwyth Castle appears in this timeline three times: here in 1116, as a target of Welsh revolt; in 1277, as one of Edward I's great concentric fortresses; and in 1404, when Owain Glyndŵr took it. The castle on the headland above Cardigan Bay was fought over across four centuries. The Normans built it. The Welsh attacked it. Edward rebuilt it. Glyndŵr took it. The sea watched all of it and remained.

1136 AD — The Battle of Llwchwr

Loughor, Swansea estuary · 51.657°N, 4.0102°W

New Year's Day, 1136. The great Welsh revolt of the 12th century began not at Kidwelly, not at Crug Mawr, but here — at Llwchwr, Loughor, on the estuary where the River Loughor meets the sea between what is now Llanelli and Swansea.

A Welsh force from Brycheiniog and northern Gŵyr met a Norman army from southern Gŵyr and destroyed it. The Norman castle at Loughor — one of the chain of fortifications planted across south Wales — had been the base of Norman power in Gower. On the first day of 1136 the Welsh came out of the hills and broke the Norman force in the field. Approximately five hundred Normans were killed.

Five hundred dead in a single engagement. It was not the largest battle in this timeline but it was the spark. The news of Llwchwr travelled across south Wales with the speed of fire in dry grass. The Normans could be beaten. They had been beaten, on New Year's Day, at Loughor. The decades of accommodation, of grudging survival

under Norman overlordship, of watching the castle walls go up and accepting that they were permanent — all of that collapsed in the light of what had happened at Llwchwr.

Gwenllian heard the news at Dinefwr. Her husband Gruffudd ap Rhys was in the north, seeking military support from her father Gruffudd ap Cynan of Gwynedd. The south was rising. The castle at Kidwelly — Maurice de Londres's garrison, the Norman fortification that controlled the lower Tywi valley — was there, exposed, its lord temporarily absent on campaign. Gwenllian made her decision.

The Battle of Llwchwr and the Battle of Gwenllian must be read together. One caused the other. Without Llwchwr there was no uprising to join. Without the uprising Gwenllian had no reason to march. The two events are a single narrative in two locations, twelve miles apart, separated by weeks. Open the map. Find both pins. Read the line between them. That line is the trajectory of the revolt.

1136 AD — The Battle of Gwenllian: Maes Gwenllian, Kidwelly

Maes Gwenllian, north of Kidwelly Castle, Carmarthenshire · 51.75595°N, 4.28302°W

This is the entry that this volume was always moving toward. Everything before it is context. Everything after it is consequence.

Gwenllian ferch Gruffudd ap Cynan was born the daughter of the King of Gwynedd and grew up in the court of the most powerful Welsh kingdom in the north. She married Gruffudd ap Rhys — the Prince of Deheubarth, the man who had spent decades in the forests and marshes of the south-west evading Norman capture, the man whose father Rhys ap Tewdwr had been killed at Hirwaun Wrgant in 1090 opening the south to Norman conquest. She was a princess of the north who became a princess of the south, and when the revolt came in 1136 she was in the south, and her husband was not.

Gruffudd ap Rhys had gone north to seek military support from her father in Gwynedd. He left Gwenllian at Dinefwr — the ancient royal seat of the lords of Deheubarth, above the Tywi valley. When news of the uprising at Llwchwr reached her she did not wait for her husband to return. She raised a force. She marched on Kidwelly.

Why Kidwelly? Because Kidwelly Castle was the Norman stronghold that controlled the lower Tywi valley and the coastal plain of south-west Wales. It was not the largest Norman fortress in the region but it was strategically placed — the point where the road from the west crossed the River Gwendraeth, the gateway to Carmarthen and the whole of the Tywi valley above it. Taking Kidwelly would have opened the south-west. That was the calculation.

The Norman constable of Kidwelly was Maurice de Londres. He was not caught unprepared. Either he had intelligence of Gwenllian's march or he moved quickly enough to organise a response before she reached the castle. He met her force in the fields to the north of the castle — the low ground between the castle and the hills, the ground that the town of Kidwelly now partly occupies, the ground that has been called Maes Gwenllian ever since.

The Welsh force was defeated. Gwenllian was captured. The chronicle is brief about what followed: she was beheaded. In the field. Below the castle. The Princess of Deheubarth, daughter of the King of Gwynedd, the woman who had raised an army and led it in the field, was executed on the ground where her army had stood.

One of her sons was killed in the battle. Another was captured. Her daughter may have been present and escaped. The details are fragmentary — the chronicles of this period are not generous with the details of Welsh deaths. But the fact of her death, and the manner of it, and the place of it, are certain. She died at Kidwelly. Below the castle. In the field that still bears her name.

What happened after her death is the measure of what she had done. The revolt did not collapse. It intensified. Her husband Gruffudd ap Rhys returned from the north with the support she had sought, and the uprising that she had helped trigger spread across the whole of Wales. The battle cry that followed — Dial Gwenllian, Revenge for Gwenllian — became the rallying call of the 1136 revolt, spoken at Llwchwr, spoken at Crug Mawr, spoken across every Welsh kingdom that rose against the Normans that year.

A woman who died in a field below a castle became a name that moved armies. That is not a small thing. That is not an ordinary thing. That is the measure of what Gwenllian ferch Gruffudd ap Cynan was.

The field below Kidwelly Castle is still there. The castle is still there. Maes Gwenllian is still called Maes Gwenllian. Nearly nine centuries have passed. The name has not changed. The place has not forgotten.

1136 AD — The Battle of Crug Mawr

Near Cardigan · 52.0833°N, 4.6667°W

If Gwenllian's death lit the fire then Crug Mawr was the conflagration.

Later in 1136 — fired by grief, by fury, by the battle cry of Dial Gwenllian that was on every Welsh tongue — Gruffudd ap Rhys led a Welsh army north to Cardigan. With him were forces from Gwynedd under Owain and Cadwaladr, the sons of Gruffudd ap Cynan — the brothers of Gwenllian herself, come south to avenge their sister. The combined force met the Norman army near Crug Mawr — the Great Mound — and broke it completely.

The scale of the Norman defeat at Crug Mawr was extraordinary. Three thousand Normans killed — the figure is probably an exaggeration, as medieval battle casualty counts routinely were, but the defeat was real and the losses were severe. The Norman army that had controlled Ceredigion was destroyed in the field. The great bridge over the Teifi at Cardigan was so packed with fleeing soldiers that it collapsed under their weight, drowning hundreds in the river below.

Ceredigion was reclaimed for Wales in the aftermath of Crug Mawr. The Norman castles in the region — planted across the landscape of west Wales with such apparent permanence — fell one by one to the Welsh forces that swept through the county in the weeks after the battle. The Norman advance that had seemed so irreversible was reversed, at least in the west, by the combination of Gwenllian's sacrifice and her husband's victory.

Crug Mawr is the largest Welsh military victory of the 12th century. It is almost unknown outside Wales, and barely known within it. If it had been an English victory of the same scale it would be in every textbook. Because it was Welsh — because the winners wrote their chronicles in Latin and Welsh rather than in the language that would eventually dominate the historical record — it sits in relative obscurity. This map, and this document, are part of the process of recovering it.

Gruffudd ap Rhys had avenged Gwenllian at Crug Mawr. He won the battle she had marched to make possible. He lived to see Ceredigion Welsh again. He did not live to see the Norman lords return — but they did return, because they always returned, because the castles were still there, because the feudal logic of the March could absorb a military defeat and rebuild. The recovery of Ceredigion after 1136 was real but not permanent. The battle was won. The war continued.

1157 AD — The Battle of Tal-y-Moelfre

Eastern Anglesey coast · 53.3570°N, 4.2316°W

Twenty-one years after Crug Mawr, a new English king came to Wales with a new army and a new determination to assert English dominance over the Welsh kingdoms. Henry II — the most energetic and capable English king of the 12th century — launched his first Welsh campaign in 1157, directed against Owain Gwynedd of the north.

Henry's strategy was the classic pincer against Gwynedd: an army overland from the east, a fleet around the coast to attack Anglesey from the sea. At Tal-y-Moelfre on the eastern coast of Anglesey the Welsh met the fleet and destroyed it. Henry's brother was killed in the fighting. The sea wing of Henry's campaign was broken before it had properly begun.

The land campaign fared little better. At Cwmsyllt — the Battle of Coleshill — Henry's vanguard was ambushed in the woodland of the Ewloe area of Flintshire, with Henry himself nearly killed. He was forced to negotiate rather than advance. Owain Gwynedd had stopped the King of England in two engagements in two different parts of north Wales in the same campaign.

Henry went home and regrouped. He was not the kind of king who accepted a single defeat as final. He would come back to Wales in 1165 with the largest army he had ever assembled. But in 1157, at Tal-y-Moelfre and Cwmsyllt, Owain Gwynedd had demonstrated what Welsh resistance looked like when it was properly organised and properly led.

1157 AD — The Battle of Cwmsyllt

Ewloe, Flintshire · 53.2528°N, 3.14686°W

The land engagement of Henry II's 1157 campaign deserves its own entry because it illustrates, with clarity, the nature of Welsh tactical advantage in their own landscape.

Henry's army was advancing along the northern coastal route into Gwynedd — the route that any invader of north Wales had to take, constrained between the sea to the north and the rising ground to the south. Near Coleshill, in the dense woodland of the Ewloe area of Flintshire, Owain Gwynedd's forces struck the English vanguard. The trees gave the Welsh cover, concealment, and the ability to withdraw without being pursued effectively by cavalry. The English formation — designed for open ground, dependent on the shock power of armoured cavalry — was useless in the wood.

Henry himself was almost killed. The detail survives because it was remarkable — a king of England, in personal danger, on a campaign he had expected to be a demonstration of royal power. He escaped. But the experience in the woodland near Cwmsyllt stayed with him. Eight years later he would come back with an army designed to crush Welsh resistance permanently. The scale of that response tells you how seriously Henry took what had happened in this wood.

1165 AD — The Battle of Crogen

Ceiriog valley, Chirk area · 52.9333°N, 3.1167°W

Henry II came back to Wales in 1165 with the largest army he had ever assembled — soldiers from England, mercenaries from France, a force designed not merely to defeat Owain Gwynedd but to end Welsh military resistance permanently. He advanced along the Ceiriog valley beneath the Berwyn hills, into the terrain where Wales transitions from the borderland into the mountain heartland.

At Crogen — in the dense woodland of the valley, at the point where the river runs narrow between the rising ground — Owain Gwynedd's forces struck the English vanguard and inflicted heavy casualties. It was not a decisive battle in the field. It was something more effective than a battle: it was a delay. And delay, in this terrain, in this season, against this army, was enough.

The weather broke. Rain came — the prolonged, soaking, mountain rain that the Berwyn hills generate with relentless Welsh efficiency. Henry's great army, designed for continental warfare, found itself bogged down in the uplands with supply lines stretching back to England, food running low, horses struggling in the mud, and a Welsh enemy that simply melted into the mountains and waited.

Henry retreated. He retreated in fury — the chronicles record that he ordered the blinding and castration of the Welsh hostages he held, an act of rage that tells you how completely his campaign had failed. He had come to Wales with the greatest army he had ever raised, and he was going home without a victory, without territory, and without the submission of Owain Gwynedd.

The Welsh called it Berwyn. The mountains that had always been the last refuge held against the best that England could send. The lesson was the same lesson that every English commander who came to Wales eventually learned: you cannot conquer a country by winning battles if the country's most effective military asset is its landscape. The Berwyn range in 1165 did more to defend Wales than any army could have.

Henry II never invaded Wales again. He turned his attention to Ireland, to France, to the conflict with Thomas Becket that would define his reign in English memory. Wales was left, not quite defeated, not quite free, in the position that the 12th century produced most often: surviving.

1168 AD — The Lord Rhys Attacks Builth

Builth Wells, Breconshire · 52.1489°N, 3.4068°W

The Lord Rhys — Rhys ap Gruffudd, son of Gruffudd ap Rhys who avenged Gwenllian at Crug Mawr, grandson of Rhys ap Tewdwr who died at Hirwaun Wrgant — was by the 1160s the dominant political and military figure in south Wales. He had outlasted the Normans who had tried to suppress his father's revolt. He had watched Henry II's great invasion of 1165 fail in the Berwyn mountains. He was building something: not just a military

resistance, but a political relationship with England that preserved Welsh identity while accepting a degree of English overlordship.

But he also fought. In 1168 he attacked Builth — the castle in the upper Wye valley that controlled the routes between Brecon and mid-Wales — as part of his systematic campaign to recover the territories of Deheubarth from the Norman lords of the March. Builth appears again in this timeline in 1282, when Llywelyn the Last died near it in circumstances that remain disputed. In 1168 the Lord Rhys was the aggressor, pressing Norman power back from the upland territories of the former Deheubarth.

The Lord Rhys understood something that eluded many Welsh princes: military success had to be converted into political structure to be lasting. He used his military campaigns not just to recover territory but to establish the legal and political framework of Welsh authority over what he recovered. When Henry II eventually recognised him as justiciar of south Wales — a formal English acknowledgement of Welsh authority — it was the product of decades of exactly this combination of force and political intelligence.

1187 AD — The Lord Rhys Captures Kidwelly Castle

Kidwelly Castle, Carmarthenshire · 51.7348°N, 4.3057°W

In 1187 Rhys ap Gruffudd — the Lord Rhys — took Kidwelly Castle.

The castle that Maurice de Londres had held in 1136 when Gwenllian marched against it and was killed below its walls — the castle that had stood above the town for half a century as the symbol of Norman power in the lower Tywi valley — passed into Welsh hands in 1187. Fifty-one years after Gwenllian's death. Fifty-one years after the field below it was named for her.

The Lord Rhys was Gwenllian's nephew. The son of her husband's line, the inheritor of the Deheubarth resistance that she had contributed her life to. When he took Kidwelly in 1187 he was completing, in some sense, the act she had begun — the recovery of the south-west from the Norman lords who had occupied it since the 1090s. She had marched on the castle and been killed below it. He took it.

This is the pin on this map that sits closest to the home of its creator. Kidwelly Castle is visible from the town. The field below it — Maes Gwenllian — is walked by people who live in Kidwelly today without always knowing what the name means or what happened there. The castle that the Normans built, that Gwenllian died below, that the Lord Rhys took, that has been standing above the town for nine hundred years — it is there now, above the town, as it has always been.

The Lord Rhys taking Kidwelly in 1187 is one of the moments in Welsh history that deserves to be known by every person in Carmarthenshire. It is the completion of a fifty-one year arc that began with Gwenllian's death. It is the answer that her sacrifice made possible. It happened here, in this town, to this castle, which stands here still.

1189 AD — The Lord Rhys Attacks Pembroke

Pembroke Castle · 51.6741°N, 4.916°W

The Lord Rhys spent the last years of his reign pushing Norman power back toward the furthest edges of Wales — attacking the castles that had been planted in his kingdom since the conquest and demonstrating that even the mightiest Norman fortresses were not beyond Welsh ambition.

Pembroke Castle — built by Arnulf de Montgomery at the very tip of the Pembrokeshire peninsula in the 1090s, one of the earliest and strongest Norman fortresses in south Wales — was among his targets in 1189. Pembroke sits on its limestone promontory above the tidal waters of the Pembroke River with the sea on three sides, its natural defences formidable before a single stone was laid. The Normans chose the site precisely because it was almost impossible to attack from the land.

The Lord Rhys attacked it anyway. He did not take it — Pembroke Castle was never taken by Welsh forces, a record it maintained across the entire medieval period — but the attack demonstrated the scope of his ambitions and the reach of his military capacity in the final years of his reign. From Kidwelly in 1187 to Pembroke in 1189: the Lord Rhys was pressing Norman power to the very tip of the Welsh peninsula.

He died in 1197. The kingdom he had built in south Wales fragmented immediately — his sons fought each other for the inheritance with the same dynastic destructiveness that had weakened Wales at every critical moment in this timeline. But the political and cultural legacy of the Lord Rhys outlasted the fragmentation. He had hosted the first recorded Eisteddfod at Cardigan Castle in 1176. He had maintained a Welsh court of genuine cultural sophistication in the face of Norman occupation. He had taken Kidwelly. He had proven, for the last time in this century, that Wales could resist.

1194 AD — The Battle of Aberconwy

River Conwy, North Wales · 53.2797°N, 3.8309°W

While the Lord Rhys was building his political and military achievement in the south, a young prince in the north was beginning the career that would define Welsh history for the first half of the 13th century. At Aberconwy in 1194, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth — the man who would become Llywelyn the Great — fought and won the battle that secured his control of Gwynedd.

The River Conwy — the great frontier river of north Wales, the boundary that had defined the edge of Welsh resistance since the age of Rhodri Mawr — was the site of his triumph. He had been fighting his uncles and cousins for control of Gwynedd since the 1190s. At Aberconwy he won decisively. His rivals were driven out. Gwynedd was his.

He was in his mid-twenties. He would live until 1240. In the forty-six years between Aberconwy and his death he would become the dominant figure in Welsh politics, the architect of a Welsh political unity that came closer to real nationhood than anything since Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's brief unified kingdom in the 1050s. He would fight King John and win. He would ally with the English barons against John and win again. He would reach Carmarthen and Cardigan and Swansea. His story belongs to Volume Five.

But it begins here, at Aberconwy in 1194, at the river that has always marked the edge of what could be held.

1196 AD — The Lord Rhys Defeats Mortimer Near Radnor

Near New Radnor, Powys · 52.2414°N, 3.1617°W

One of the last great victories of the Lord Rhys's career. In the hills of mid-Wales near New Radnor — Maesyfed, the field of Rhyd, at the edge of the border country where Wales and England had been meeting in conflict for five centuries — Rhys ap Gruffudd defeated a Mortimer force in the field.

The Mortimers were one of the great Marcher dynasties — lords who had carved out vast territories on the Welsh border from their base at Wigmore in Herefordshire, accumulating land, building castles, intermarrying with Welsh nobility, and generally treating the March as their personal domain. To defeat a Mortimer force in the field near New Radnor was to strike at one of the most powerful families on the Welsh border, in their own territory.

The Lord Rhys was approaching seventy. He had been fighting the Normans for sixty years — since childhood, since the years when his father Gruffudd ap Rhys was hiding in the forests of Deheubarth and the Lord Rhys was a child who learned that resistance was what his family did. He died the following year, in 1197, still fighting.

The Lord Rhys. He is not as well-known as he should be. He held south Wales together for a generation. He took Kidwelly. He won at New Radnor. He hosted the first Eisteddfod. He corresponded with Henry II as a political equal. He was the greatest figure in the history of the region that this map was made in, and his story runs through this volume from beginning to end — from his father's death at Hirwaun Wrgant through Gwenllian's sacrifice through Crug Mawr through his own campaigns through Kidwelly and Pembroke and finally to this hillside near New Radnor in 1196, where he won his last recorded victory.

This volume ends with him. It is the right place for it to end.

Volume Four Complete

Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD

Volume Four covers 16 events across 106 years — from the Welsh uprising of 1094 to the death of the Lord Rhys in 1197. It is the volume that comes home, to Kidwelly, to Carmarthenshire, to the landscape where this map was made and where its creator lives.

The interactive map layer Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD contains 16 placemarks. The pin at Maes Gwenllian — 51.75595°N, 4.28302°W — is the most personally significant location in the entire 164-pin map. It sits below Kidwelly Castle, in the field that has borne Gwenllian's name for nine centuries. Every other pin on the map connects to this one, in the sense that the resistance she embodied and the revolt her death ignited are the thread that runs through Welsh history in this whole era.

Volume Five — Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD — follows the story into the 13th century, with Llywelyn the Great at the height of his power reaching Carmarthen and Cardigan and Swansea, taking the fight to every corner of Wales, and bringing Welsh political ambition closer to the formal recognition of nationhood than it had ever been. The Treaty of Montgomery in 1267 is the high-water mark — and Volume Six will show what Edward I did to it.

Map Layer: Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD

Interactive Map: A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

Published: People's Collection Wales · Tudor59 · 2026

A TIMELINE OF CONFLICT IN WALES

616 — 1421 AD

A Complete Historical Narrative Companion to the Interactive Map

VOLUME FIVE

Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD

Graham Tudor Emmanuel

Tudor59 · People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · 2026

Volume Five

Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD

The Closest Wales Ever Came

In September 1267 Llywelyn ap Gruffudd — Llywelyn the Last, Prince of Gwynedd — signed a treaty with Henry III of England at Montgomery. Under the terms of that treaty the English crown formally recognised Llywelyn as Prince of Wales. Not Prince of Gwynedd. Not lord of the north. Prince of Wales. The other Welsh rulers were required to do homage to him. The principality he governed was acknowledged by England as a legal and political reality.

It was the closest Wales ever came to formal, recognised, internationally acknowledged statehood. For fifteen years — from 1267 to 1282, when Edward I destroyed everything the Treaty of Montgomery represented — Wales existed in international law as a principality with a named prince and a defined territory and a legal relationship with the English crown that fell short of full independence but was as close to it as any Welsh ruler ever achieved.

The Treaty of Montgomery is the pin at the end of this volume. Everything in these pages is the story of how Wales got there — through sixty-seven years of military campaigning, political manoeuvre, alliance-building, and the extraordinary personal achievement of two men: Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, Llywelyn the Great, who dominated Welsh politics from 1194 to his death in 1240; and his grandson Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Llywelyn the Last, who built on his grandfather's foundations to reach the summit in 1267.

The 13th century is the most politically sophisticated period in the whole of this timeline. The Welsh princes of this era were not simply warriors — they were statesmen, diplomats, and legal innovators who understood that survival in the world of the Plantagenet English monarchy required as much intelligence as military force. Llywelyn the Great corresponded with Pope Innocent III. He allied with the English barons who forced Magna Carta on King John in 1215. He presided over a Welsh court that produced legal codes, poetry, and a cultural life of genuine sophistication.

The campaigns of this volume take the war across the whole of Wales. Llywelyn the Great came to Cardigan, Carmarthen, Swansea, Haverfordwest, Montgomery. He burned and took and held territory from one end of Wales to the other, demonstrating a military reach that no Welsh ruler since Gruffudd ap Llywelyn had matched. His grandson, Llywelyn the Last, consolidated that reach through the strategic genius of Bryn Derwin, the military victory of Cymerau, and the diplomatic achievement of the Treaty of Montgomery.

The volume also covers the darker passages of this era — King John's invasion of 1211, which came closer to breaking Gwynedd than any English campaign before Edward I; the Battle of Abermule, where the English suffered a devastating ambush; and the internal Welsh conflicts that continued to weaken the principality even at its strongest moments.

Read this volume knowing what comes next. Volume Six is Edward I and the Conquest. The Treaty of Montgomery that ends this volume is the high point. What follows is the destruction of everything it built. Knowing that, the achievement of 1267 is both more remarkable and more heartbreaking. Wales reached the summit. It was allowed to stand there for fifteen years. Then it was pushed off.

The Events · 1200–1267 AD

In Chronological Sequence

1199 AD — Llywelyn Captures Mold Castle

Mold, Flintshire · 53.1667°N, 3.1333°W

Llywelyn ap Iorwerth had secured Gwynedd at Aberconwy in 1194. By 1199 he was already moving east — into the Perfeddwlad, the Four Cantrefs, the contested middle territories between the Conwy and the Dee that every ruler of Gwynedd needed to control to project power into north-east Wales and toward the English border.

Mold Castle — sitting on its motte above the town of Mold in Flintshire, commanding the routes into north-east Wales — was one of the key Norman fortifications in this region. Its capture by Llywelyn in 1199 was an early demonstration of what he intended: not merely to hold Gwynedd but to extend Welsh authority across the full extent of the north. This was not consolidation. This was expansion. Llywelyn was twenty-five years old and he was already thinking about the whole of Wales.

The capture of Mold announces, in the language of military achievement, the career that was about to unfold. Over the next forty years Llywelyn ap Iorwerth would reach every corner of Wales — Flintshire in the north-east to Pembrokeshire in the south-west, Anglesey to Monmouth. Mold in 1199 is the first step in that journey.

1211 AD — King John Burns Bangor

Bangor, Gwynedd · 53.2274°N, 4.1292°W

King John of England came to Wales in 1211 determined to break Llywelyn the Great once and for all, and he came close. Closer than any English king had come to breaking Gwynedd since the Norman advance of the 1070s. His first campaign in 1211 was the most successful English invasion of the north in a generation — pushing deep into Gwynedd, forcing Llywelyn to retreat to Anglesey, burning Bangor.

Bangor — the cathedral city at the southern end of the Menai Strait, the seat of the Bishop of Bangor, one of the oldest continuous episcopal sees in Britain — was burned by John's forces. The destruction of a cathedral city was not a casual act. It was a deliberate statement: nothing in Wales was beyond reach, nothing was sacred, the English crown's military power could reach the very foundations of Welsh religious and cultural life.

Llywelyn was forced to cede territory and surrender hostages, including his son Gruffudd. The terms were humiliating. For a moment in 1211 it appeared that John might succeed where every previous English king had failed — that Gwynedd might be subdued permanently, that the mountain kingdom of the north might finally be broken.

It did not happen. John's attention was pulled back to England by the baronial crisis that produced Magna Carta. The hostages he held — including Gruffudd — were eventually returned or died in captivity without breaking Llywelyn's resolve. Within four years Llywelyn was allied with the very barons who were forcing John to his knees. By 1215 he was the most powerful Welsh ruler in a generation, taking Cardigan, Carmarthen, and a dozen other strongholds while John was fighting for his political survival in England.

The burning of Bangor in 1211 is one of the low points in the whole of Welsh medieval history. The recovery from it — Llywelyn's alliance with the barons, his campaigns of 1215, his eventual dominance of all Wales — is one of the most remarkable political recoveries in this timeline. He came back from the edge of destruction and built something that lasted another generation.

1215 AD — Llywelyn Captures Cardigan

Cardigan (Aberteifi) · 52.0833°N, 4.6667°W

The year Magna Carta was sealed at Runnymede, Llywelyn the Great was remaking the map of Wales. While King John was being forced to his knees by his own barons on the meadow beside the Thames, Llywelyn was sweeping through south Wales with an army that no English force was in a position to stop.

Cardigan — Aberteifi, the mouth of the Teifi — fell to Llywelyn in 1215. The castle on the bluff above the river, built by the Normans in the 11th century and rebuilt in stone, was one of the key strongholds in the south-west. Its capture gave Llywelyn control of the Teifi valley and the approaches to Ceredigion. It was also, symbolically, the site of the first recorded Eisteddfod — hosted by the Lord Rhys in 1176. Taking Cardigan was taking a piece of Welsh cultural as much as military history.

Llywelyn did not take Cardigan alone. He was operating in alliance with the English barons who were fighting John — a coalition of convenience that served Welsh interests perfectly. The English barons wanted to weaken John. Llywelyn wanted to recover Welsh territory. Their objectives aligned, and Llywelyn exploited the alignment with surgical precision, taking castle after castle across south Wales while the English establishment was too distracted by its own constitutional crisis to respond.

1215 AD — Llywelyn Captures Carmarthen

Carmarthen · 51.8567°N, 4.3118°W

In the same sweep of 1215 that took Cardigan, Llywelyn the Great captured Carmarthen — the oldest recorded town in Wales, sitting at the tidal limit of the River Tywi where the river narrows and the land rises, the administrative capital of the Norman south-west and the key to the whole of the lower Tywi valley.

Carmarthen had been Welsh before the Normans came. It had Roman roots — Moridunum, the sea fort, recorded in Roman geography as the most westerly Roman town in Britain. It had been part of Deheubarth, part of the landscape of the Lord Rhys, part of the territory that Gruffudd ap Rhys and Gwenllian had fought for. When Llywelyn took it in 1215 he was not simply taking a military objective. He was recovering a town that had always been Welsh, that had been under Norman administration for a century, that sat at the heart of the region where the most personal entries in this series of volumes are located.

Carmarthen under Welsh control in 1215. The town thirteen miles from Kidwelly, the town at the mouth of the river that flows past Llandeilo, the town whose name means the Fort of Merlin in Welsh tradition — it was Welsh again, for a time, under the banner of Llywelyn the Great.

He could not hold it permanently. The Normans returned when their political situation in England stabilised. But the capture of Carmarthen in 1215 demonstrated the extraordinary reach of Llywelyn's military authority — from the Dee in the north to the Tywi in the south, from Mold to Carmarthen, in the same lifetime, by the same man.

1217 AD — Llywelyn at Swansea

Swansea · 51.6214°N, 3.9436°W

By 1217 Llywelyn the Great's campaigns had reached the southern coast of Wales. Swansea — the principal port of the south-west, the gateway to the Bristol Channel trade routes, and the centre of Norman power in Gower — fell within the reach of his military authority. His presence at Swansea in 1217 demonstrated that there was almost no limit to where Llywelyn could project Welsh power.

Swansea sits at the mouth of the River Tawe where it meets Swansea Bay — a natural harbour that had been significant since Roman times. The Norman castle at Swansea commanded the town and the river crossing. Llywelyn's appearance here, at the furthest south-western point of his campaigns, completed a circuit of Wales that no Welsh ruler had managed since Gruffudd ap Llywelyn in the 1050s.

There is a pattern in Llywelyn's campaigns that becomes visible when you follow all the pins in this layer on the map. He moved systematically — north-east to south-west, securing each territory before advancing to the next, building a chain of Welsh-controlled or Welsh-influenced territory from Flintshire to Swansea. He was not raiding. He was governing — establishing Welsh authority, installing Welsh administrators, imposing Welsh law where he could, and building the political structure that he hoped would outlast him.

It outlasted him by a generation. His grandson would reach Montgomery in 1267 and the Treaty would formalise everything Llywelyn the Great had built. But the foundations were laid at Swansea in 1217, at Carmarthen in 1215, at Mold in 1199. The man who built those foundations is the subject of this volume.

1220 AD — Llywelyn Burns Haverfordwest

Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire · 51.8024°N, 4.9729°W

The Norman and Flemish settlements of Pembrokeshire — the region the Welsh called Little England Beyond Wales — were the most deeply rooted, most thoroughly anglicised, most thoroughly alien part of occupied Wales. Pembroke Castle had never been taken by Welsh forces. The Flemish settlers whom Henry I had planted in the Pembrokeshire countryside in the early 12th century had been there for a century by Llywelyn's time, speaking English and Flemish, farming the land, building their own communities, becoming in every practical sense the permanent population of the far south-west.

Llywelyn could not absorb them. He could not administer them. He could not govern Pembrokeshire in the way he governed Gwynedd or the territories of the princes who accepted his authority. What he could do was demonstrate that not even the deep south-west was beyond his reach.

In 1220 he burned Haverfordwest — the principal market town of Pembrokeshire, sitting at the head of the Western Cleddau tidal river, the administrative centre of the far south-west. The town burned. The statement was made. Llywelyn the Great had been to Haverfordwest.

He could not hold it. No Welsh force ever held Haverfordwest permanently. The town was rebuilt, as towns always were. The Flemish settlers remained, as they always did. But for one day in 1220 a Welsh army was in the streets of the most English town in Wales, and the Prince of Gwynedd had shown that the whole country, from Mold to Haverfordwest, was within his military reach.

1228 AD — Llywelyn Burns Montgomery

Montgomery · 52.5622°N, 3.1486°W

Montgomery — the castle town that sits on its hill above the Severn plain with its Norman fortification commanding the main road west into Powys — was one of the great symbols of English power on the Welsh border. It gave its name to the treaty that would represent the high point of Welsh political achievement in 1267. In 1228 Llywelyn the Great burned it.

The burning of Montgomery in 1228 was part of a sustained campaign of pressure on the Marcher lords who held the border territories — the de Braoses, the Mortimers, the de Lacys — demonstrating that Welsh military power could reach their principal strongholds and that no border castle was entirely secure behind its walls. Burning a town was not simply destruction. It was communication. It said: we were here, we can come back, and your stone castle does not make you safe if everything around it is ash.

Montgomery would appear in this timeline one more time — in 1267, when the treaty that bears its name gave Wales the legal recognition it had been fighting for since the Norman conquest. That the town Llywelyn burned in 1228 became the town where his grandson's greatest political achievement was formalised is one of those ironies of Welsh history that the landscape seems deliberately to produce.

1231 AD — The Ambush at Abermule

Abermule, upper Severn · 52.5167°N, 3.2167°W

Near the village of Abermule on the upper Severn a Welsh force ambushed and destroyed an English column in 1231 — one of the most effective single Welsh tactical strikes of Llywelyn the Great's later campaigns. The geography of the site made it inevitable that an ambush would work here, if properly prepared.

The Severn valley above Welshpool narrows as it approaches the foothills of the Welsh uplands. The river runs fast and brown between rising ground on both sides, the valley walls closing in, the routes forward limited by the terrain. An army moving up the valley was channelled by the geography into a corridor where it could not deploy properly, could not use the width of its formation, could not bring its cavalry to bear on ground that gave horsemen no room to manoeuvre.

Llywelyn's forces knew this valley the way they knew every valley in Wales — in the way that people know the ground they have grown up in, walked in every season, used for every purpose. The English force moving up the Severn in 1231 was moving through someone else's landscape, in someone else's knowledge. The ambush at Abermule was the inevitable consequence of that asymmetry.

The Welsh advantage in ambush warfare — the same advantage that had been decisive at Celli Carnant in 1096, at Crogen in 1165, at Cwmsyllt in 1157 — was the advantage of intimate local knowledge deployed against an enemy that was always, in some fundamental sense, a stranger in the landscape it was trying to occupy.

1233 AD — The Battle Near Monmouth

Near Monmouth · 51.812°N, 2.716°W

In 1233 Llywelyn the Great struck deep into the south-east — raiding the Marcher territories around Monmouth as part of an alliance with Richard Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, who was in open revolt against Henry III's administration. It was a familiar pattern: a Welsh prince aligning with an English political rebel, using the rebellion to recover Welsh territory or inflict damage on the English crown's border interests.

The alliance with Richard Marshal was sophisticated politics. Marshal was one of the greatest military figures in England — son of the legendary William Marshal, the greatest knight of his age — and his revolt against Henry III gave Llywelyn a powerful English ally and a legitimate political cover for Welsh military action in the south-east. The battle near Monmouth demonstrated that Llywelyn's military reach extended to the borderland between Wales and the English midlands, even in his later years.

Richard Marshal died in Ireland the following year, the revolt collapsed, and Llywelyn returned to his negotiations with Henry III. The Welsh-English alliance of convenience had served its purpose. It always served its purpose, for precisely as long as the interests aligned, and no longer. This was the reality of Welsh political life in the 13th century — building alliances with English political factions to offset the power of the English crown, then managing the inevitable collapse of those alliances without losing what had been gained during them.

1255 AD — The Battle of Bryn Derwin

Bryn Derwin, Gwynedd · 53.0167°N, 4.3333°W

Llywelyn the Great died in 1240 and Wales immediately began to fragment. His son Dafydd ap Llywelyn held the principality together until his own death in 1246, but without an heir the succession passed to Dafydd's nephews — the sons of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, Llywelyn the Great's elder son who had spent years in English captivity — and the old Welsh habit of division reasserted itself with brutal speed.

The succession was contested between brothers. Owain and Llywelyn — two of the sons of Gruffudd — held Gwynedd jointly, an arrangement that satisfied neither of them. Dafydd, the youngest, held nothing and wanted everything. At Bryn Derwin in the hills of western Gwynedd in 1255, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd moved against his brothers and won decisively. Owain was captured. Dafydd fled to the English court.

Llywelyn ap Gruffudd — who would become Llywelyn the Last, the man who signed the Treaty of Montgomery in 1267 and died at Cilmeri in 1282 — was master of Gwynedd from Bryn Derwin forward. He was twenty-five years old, the same age his grandfather had been when he captured Mold in 1199. The parallel is not coincidence — Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was consciously building on his grandfather's achievement, attempting to recreate the unified Welsh principality that Llywelyn the Great had built and that had fragmented with his death.

Bryn Derwin is where that attempt began. A battle between brothers, in the hills of Gwynedd, for the right to try again for the thing that had been lost at Llywelyn the Great's death. The right to try for Wales.

1257 AD — The Battle of Cymerau

Near confluence of Teifi and Cych, south-west Wales · 51.8858°N, 3.9892°W

Two years after Bryn Derwin, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd demonstrated that his ambitions extended far beyond Gwynedd. At Cymerau — near the confluence of the Teifi and the Cych rivers in the south-west, in the borderland between Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire — his forces met and destroyed an English army under Stephen Bauzan.

The scale of the English defeat at Cymerau was significant. Stephen Bauzan was a capable commander and his force was not a minor garrison detachment but a substantial English army assembled to check Llywelyn's advance into the south. It was destroyed. The casualties were heavy. The message was unmistakable: the new Prince of Gwynedd was not going to confine himself to the north.

Cymerau sits in country that this series knows well — the river valleys of south-west Wales, the landscape of Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, the ground that had been fought over since Seisyll seized Ystrad Tywi in 710 and that had produced the battle of the Tywi estuary in 1044 and the battle of Kidwelly in 1258. Llywelyn's advance to Cymerau in 1257 brought the military campaign of the new Prince of Wales to the approaches of Carmarthenshire. The following year it would reach Kidwelly itself.

1258 AD — The Battle of Cilgerran

Cilgerran, Pembrokeshire · 52.05574°N, 4.64138°W

In September 1258 forces under Dafydd ap Gruffudd — Llywelyn's younger brother, recently returned from his English exile — were operating in the region of Emlyn in west Wales. At Cilgerran, on the bluff above the dramatic gorge of the River Teifi where the castle still sits on its two conical rock towers above the river, Welsh forces engaged the Marcher interest.

Cilgerran Castle is one of the most romantically situated fortifications in all of Wales — the river running dark and fast below the cliff, the woodland closing in on both banks, the twin towers rising from their rock bases above the gorge. Constable Turner painted it. Countless artists have painted it. But before it was a subject for painters it was a military position, and in 1258 it was a contested one.

The engagement at Cilgerran in 1258 is part of the wider Welsh resurgence of 1257-1258 — the period when Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was rapidly extending his authority across Wales, receiving homage from Welsh lords who had been under English pressure, and demonstrating that the political momentum that would reach its formal expression at the Treaty of Montgomery in 1267 was already well established. Cilgerran sits in the south-west, in the territory that the subsequent pin — the Battle of Kidwelly — occupies. The two events together show Llywelyn's forces operating across the whole of south-west Wales in the same year.

1258 AD — The Battle of Kidwelly

Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire · 51.73723°N, 4.30847°W

The Battle of Kidwelly in 1258 — a Welsh victory against the Norman garrison under Patrick de Chaworth, seneschal of Carmarthen Castle — is one of the several victories achieved by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's forces in south-west Wales during the campaigns of 1257 and 1258.

Kidwelly. Again. The town appears in this timeline three times across three centuries — in 1136 when Gwenllian died below its castle, in 1187 when the Lord Rhys took the castle, and now in 1258 when Welsh forces under Llywelyn's banner fought in and around the town again. The castle above Kidwelly was not simply a military installation. It was a contested symbol — the place where Welsh resistance had paid its highest personal price in 1136, the place that the Lord Rhys had recovered in 1187, and the place that Welsh forces were fighting around again in 1258 as the new Prince of Wales asserted his authority across the south-west.

Maredudd ap Rhys — a Welsh lord who had been aligned with the Marcher interest — eventually submitted to Llywelyn's authority in the aftermath of these south-western campaigns. The submission of the south-western

Welsh lords was a critical step in the political consolidation that led to the Treaty of Montgomery. Kidwelly in 1258 was part of that process — a battle in the town where this map was made, fought as part of the campaign that would produce the closest thing to Welsh nationhood that was ever formally recognised.

1262 AD — Cefnllys Castle Seized

Near Llandrindod Wells, Powys · 52.2440°N, 3.3349°W

Cefnllys Castle — perched on a rocky ridge above the River Ithon near what is now Llandrindod Wells — was one of the Mortimer family's key strongholds in the middle March. The Mortimers of Wigmore were among the most powerful Marcher dynasties, with deep roots in the borderland between Wales and England and a long history of conflict with the Welsh princes of the south-east.

Llywelyn ap Gruffudd seized Cefnllys in 1262 as part of his systematic campaign to press the Marcher lords back from the territories they had occupied in the borderland — the contested ground between the Welsh uplands and the English lowlands that had been fought over since the age of Offa's Dyke. The Mortimers were not simply border lords managing English-Welsh relations. They were one of the structural obstacles to Welsh political unity — their power in the March created a barrier between the Welsh principalities that Llywelyn was trying to bridge.

The capture of Cefnllys was a direct strike at Mortimer power in the middle March. It was also a demonstration that Llywelyn's military reach was not confined to the north or the south-west but extended across the full width of Wales — from Anglesey to Carmarthenshire, from Flintshire to the Ithon valley. He was governing a principality, not raiding a border.

1265 AD — Llywelyn Captures Hawarden

Hawarden, Flintshire · 53.1822°N, 3.0322°W

In 1265 Llywelyn ap Gruffudd captured Hawarden Castle in Flintshire — bringing his military authority to the north-eastern frontier of Wales, the edge of the Perfeddwlad where Gwynedd met the English borderland of Cheshire. Hawarden appears again in this timeline in 1282, when Dafydd ap Gruffudd's attack on it triggers the final war of Welsh independence.

The capture of Hawarden in 1265 was a statement about the extent of Llywelyn's authority. He was now operating on the north-eastern frontier as confidently as he operated in Ceredigion or Carmarthenshire. The principality he was building was not a Gwynedd-centred expansion with Welsh client states arranged around it. It was a genuinely pan-Welsh political structure — Llywelyn at the centre, the Welsh lords of the north, south, and middle doing homage to him, English recognition approaching.

Hawarden in 1265 completed the circuit. From Mold in 1199 to Hawarden in 1265 — from his grandfather's first campaigns at the beginning of the century to his own final consolidation before the Treaty — the north-eastern frontier of Wales had been contested, lost, partially recovered, and now definitively claimed by the Prince of Wales. The Treaty of Montgomery was two years away.

1267 AD — The Treaty of Montgomery

Montgomery, Powys · 52.5622°N, 3.1486°W

This pin does not mark a battle. It marks something rarer and more precious than any battle — a moment of peace, of recognition, of the closest Wales ever came to permanent legal nationhood. The Treaty of Montgomery was signed in September 1267 between Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and King Henry III of England, brokered by the papal legate Ottobono Fieschi.

Under the terms of the Treaty, England formally recognised Llywelyn as Prince of Wales. Not a courtesy title. Not an informal acknowledgement. A formal legal recognition, in a written treaty, that Wales had a prince, that the

other Welsh lords were obligated to do homage to him, and that his position had standing in English and European law. Wales was a principality. Llywelyn was its prince. The Treaty said so.

For the Welsh lords who had been fighting for this recognition since the Norman conquest — since Gwenllian died below Kidwelly Castle in 1136, since the Lord Rhys built his court at Dinefwr and hosted the Eisteddfod at Cardigan, since Llywelyn the Great swept from Mold to Haverfordwest in his decades of campaigning — the Treaty of Montgomery was the answer. Not a complete answer. Not independence. Not full sovereignty. But recognition. Legal existence. The acknowledgement by the most powerful kingdom in Britain that Wales was a defined political entity with a prince at its head.

It lasted fifteen years. Edward I became King of England in 1272. By 1277 he had launched his first Welsh campaign, systematically dismantling everything the Treaty of Montgomery represented. By 1282 Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was dead on a hillside near Builth Wells, his brother Dafydd was being hunted through the mountains of Gwynedd, and the principality that the Treaty had recognised was being absorbed into the English crown.

But for fifteen years it existed. Formally. Legally. Recognisably. The princes who had fought for Wales across the whole of this timeline — from Cadwallon dying at Heavenfield in 633 to Gruffudd ap Llywelyn killed by his own men in Snowdonia in 1063 to Gwenllian executed below Kidwelly Castle in 1136 — had been fighting for exactly this: the right of Wales to exist as a political reality, acknowledged by the world. The Treaty of Montgomery was that acknowledgement.

It was not enough. It was never going to be enough, given what was coming. But it was real, and it mattered, and the people who made it happen — Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, his grandfather Llywelyn the Great, the Lord Rhys, and before them all the men and women of Wales who had refused to accept the Norman and English occupation as permanent — deserved their moment on the summit.

They stood there. In September 1267, at Montgomery, they stood there.

Volume Five Complete

Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD

Volume Five covers 16 events across 67 years — from Llywelyn the Great's capture of Mold in 1199 to the Treaty of Montgomery in 1267. It is the volume of achievement and hope — of Wales at its closest to formal statehood, of two princes across three generations building something that the Treaty of Montgomery recognised and that Edward I would destroy.

The interactive map layer Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD contains 16 placemarks. The pin at Montgomery — 52.5622°N, 3.1486°W — marks the high point of Welsh political history. Every pin that follows it in Volume Six is the story of its destruction.

Volume Six — Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD — is the hardest volume in the series to write and to read. It begins with the Treaty of Montgomery intact and ends with Dafydd ap Gruffudd's head displayed on the Tower of London. Between those two facts is the most systematic military and legal destruction of a Welsh political structure that had ever been attempted. Edward I did not simply defeat Wales. He dismantled it, castle by castle, law by law, name by name. Volume Six tells that story.

Map Layer: Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD

Interactive Map: A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

Published: People's Collection Wales · Tudor59 · 2026

A TIMELINE OF CONFLICT IN WALES

616 — 1421 AD

A Complete Historical Narrative Companion to the Interactive Map

VOLUME SIX

Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD

Graham Tudor Emmanuel

Tudor59 · People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · 2026

Volume Six

Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD

The Iron Will and the End of Everything

Edward I of England is not a figure Welsh history can be neutral about. He conquered Wales. He dismantled the principality that the Treaty of Montgomery had recognised. He killed the last Prince of Wales at Cilmeri and executed his brother Dafydd at Shrewsbury with a method of barbarity invented specifically for him. He built the iron ring of castles that still stands around the coast of north Wales as the permanent monument to what he did.

He was also the most capable military and administrative mind that medieval England produced. His castles were the most sophisticated military architecture in Europe. His legal instruments — the Statute of Rhuddlan, the Statute of Wales — were precisely crafted tools for the permanent absorption of a conquered nation. He did not merely defeat Wales in the field. He tried to erase it as a political concept, to make it legally and administratively indistinguishable from England.

He did not fully succeed. Wales persisted — in language, in law, in cultural identity, in the memory of what had been lost. Volume Seven and Volume Eight of this series are the proof of that persistence. But in the years covered by this volume — 1268 to 1295 — he came as close to success as any enemy of Welsh independence ever managed.

The story of this volume has a shape that is almost classical in its arc. It begins with the Treaty of Montgomery intact — Wales at its legal high point, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd recognised as Prince of Wales, the principality formally acknowledged by English law. Then Edward becomes king in 1272 and the pressure begins, steady and remorseless and extraordinarily well planned. The First Welsh War of 1277 reduces Llywelyn to a coastal strip of Gwynedd. The Second Welsh War of 1282 is triggered by Dafydd's Palm Sunday attack on Hawarden Castle and ends with Llywelyn dead at Cilmeri and Dafydd executed at Shrewsbury. The conquest is complete.

And then, because Wales never simply accepted what was done to it, the revolts begin. Rhys ap Maredudd in 1287. Madog ap Llywelyn in 1294 — the most serious Welsh revolt since 1282, which overran Caernarfon and besieged Edward I in Conwy Castle, and which was crushed at Maes Moydog in 1295. The conquest was not accepted. It was never accepted. But by the end of this volume it was enforced, by the castles and the law and the weight of English administrative power, in a way that the Welsh could resist but could not reverse.

The castles of Edward I appear in this volume as both military facts and as symbols. Flint, Rhuddlan, Aberystwyth, Builth, Harlech, Conwy, Caernarfon, Beaumaris — the names alone are a list of the places where English stone was planted in Welsh ground to hold it permanently. They are extraordinary buildings. They are also monuments to a conquest. Walk through any of them and both things are true simultaneously.

Read this volume slowly. It carries the weight of everything the previous five volumes built.

The Events · 1268–1295 AD

In Chronological Sequence

1277 AD — Flint Castle: Edward's First Stone

Flint, Flintshire · 53.2516°N, 3.1298°W

Edward I came to Wales in 1277 with a plan that no English king had ever brought before. Not a campaign — a system. He was not going to raid Wales and go home. He was not going to fight a battle, extract submission, and leave the structural problem unresolved. He was going to build Wales into permanent submission, one castle at a time, and he was going to start at the water.

Flint was chosen as the first site with the logic that characterised every decision Edward made in Wales. It sat on the Dee estuary — accessible by sea, able to be supplied directly from ships without dependence on Welsh roads or Welsh goodwill, commanding the coastal approach into north-east Wales. Edward's first castle was also his first supply depot. The sea was his road. The castles were his milestones.

The first stone of Flint Castle was laid in the summer of 1277. The castle that rose from it was a concentric design — walls within walls, towers commanding every angle of approach, a detached round donjon that stands apart from the main ward and is unlike anything else in Edward's Welsh portfolio. It was built by forced Welsh labour, which added its own layer of meaning to every stone. The people whose country was being occupied were building the instrument of their occupation.

Edward's army moved along the north Wales coast from Flint westward — building, fortifying, cutting a road through the woodland along the shore, advancing methodically in a way that no previous English army in Wales had ever managed. He was not fighting the Welsh. He was surrounding them. The campaign of 1277 was as much engineering as warfare.

Llywelyn ap Gruffudd understood what was happening. He understood it clearly enough to agree to the Treaty of Aberconwy in November 1277 — surrendering the overlordship of the other Welsh princes, ceding the Four Cantrefs, reducing himself to the Prince of Gwynedd west of the Conwy. He kept the title Prince of Wales but the substance was gone. The principality that the Treaty of Montgomery had recognised was dismembered in five months.

Flint Castle still stands, on its promontory above the Dee estuary, the round donjon rising from the tidal flat. The first stone. The beginning of the iron ring that would close around Gwynedd by 1283 and never release it.

1277 AD — Rhuddlan Castle

Rhuddlan, Denbighshire · 53.2897°N, 3.4676°W

Rhuddlan appears in this timeline for the fifth time. In 796 a battle was fought here in the year of Offa's death. In 1062 Harold struck Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's palace and fleet here. In 1063 the palace burned. In 1196 the Lord Rhys fought near here. And now in 1277 Edward I rebuilt Rhuddlan as one of the keystones of his north Welsh castle system.

The castle Edward built at Rhuddlan was a double concentric design — an outer and inner ward, towers at every corner and midpoint, a water-filled moat fed by a channel cut from the River Clwyd specifically for this purpose. The channel engineering alone was a major civil works project. Edward diverted a river to fill his moat. He had the resources to do it and the administrative capacity to organise it, and he used both.

More significantly, he made Rhuddlan accessible by sea. The Clwyd channel he dug was navigable by flat-bottomed supply ships, which could reach the castle directly from the coast without passing through Welsh-controlled territory. Edward's entire Welsh castle system was designed on this principle — sea access as the lifeline, the Welsh landscape neutralised as a defensive asset by bypassing it entirely from the water.

The Statute of Rhuddlan was issued from this castle in 1284 — the legal instrument that imposed English law and English administrative structures on Wales, divided the country into English-style counties, and formally began the process of making Wales legally indistinguishable from England. Edward's conquest was not only military. It was legal and administrative. The Statute of Rhuddlan was the stone he laid on top of the castles to hold Wales down permanently.

1277 AD — Aberystwyth Castle: Edward's Western Anchor

Aberystwyth, Ceredigion · 52.4153°N, 4.0829°W

While the northern coastal campaign was building Flint and Rhuddlan, Edward's western strategy was anchored at Aberystwyth. The castle on the headland above Cardigan Bay — previously a Norman fortification, previously a target of Welsh revolt, previously taken by Welsh forces in their campaigns — was rebuilt by Edward as one of his primary western positions.

Aberystwyth was the point where Edward's supply lines from Ireland and Bristol met the Welsh coast. Ships from Dublin could reach Aberystwyth directly. The castle that guarded that landing point was therefore as much a logistics hub as a military installation. Edward understood, in a way that his predecessors had not, that conquering Wales required solving the supply problem first. Every castle he built was designed around the answer to the question: how do we feed and arm the garrison without depending on Welsh roads?

The answer, always and everywhere in Edward's Welsh campaign, was the sea. Aberystwyth in the west. Harlech and its water gate on the Cardigan Bay coast. Beaumaris on the Menai Strait. Conwy at the mouth of its river. The castles are a coastal necklace, each one linked to the sea, each one capable of being supplied and reinforced without setting foot on Welsh ground outside the castle walls.

Aberystwyth Castle was besieged by Owain Glyndŵr in the early 15th century and finally taken by him — the story belongs to Volume Eight. But its construction under Edward in 1277 was part of the system that made the conquest of 1282 possible. Without the western anchor at Aberystwyth, the 1282 campaign would have had an exposed flank. With it, Edward could advance on Gwynedd from north, south, and west simultaneously.

1282 AD — Dafydd Attacks Hawarden: The Last War Begins

Hawarden Castle, Flintshire · 53.1822°N, 3.0322°W

On Palm Sunday, 21 March 1282, Dafydd ap Gruffudd — the younger brother of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the man who had fought against his own brother at various points in his complicated career, the man who had spent time at the English court and received English lands and then lost them — attacked Hawarden Castle without warning.

Hawarden had appeared in this timeline before. Llywelyn ap Gruffudd had captured it in 1265 as part of his consolidation of Welsh authority in the north-east. Now his brother Dafydd attacked it again — not in the context of Welsh expansion but as the opening shot of a revolt that Llywelyn had not planned and may not have wanted.

The timing was terrible from a strategic perspective. Wales in 1282 was not in the political condition of 1267. The Treaty of Aberconwy had stripped Llywelyn of most of his overlordship. The Welsh lords who had done homage to him at the height of his power were now operating under English administration. The momentum of the principality had been broken by the First Welsh War of 1277. Llywelyn was rebuilding, slowly, trying to re-establish the political framework through legal means rather than military force.

Then Dafydd attacked Hawarden on Palm Sunday. And Llywelyn, understanding that his brother's revolt had ignited a fire that Welsh public feeling would not allow him to stand aside from, joined it. Whether that decision was strategic, emotional, or simply inevitable — the joining of it was the last act of the last Prince of Wales as a free man.

Edward I was informed. His response was immediate, systematic, and overwhelming. He declared Llywelyn a traitor. He called out the full military resources of England. He began to move.

1282 AD — The Battle of Llandeilo Fawr

Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire · 51.8858°N, 3.9892°W

The revolt of 1282 spread rapidly from the north where it had begun to the south. Within weeks of Dafydd's attack on Hawarden, the Welsh of Deheubarth were rising — the south-west, the Tywi valley, Carmarthenshire, the

landscape of the Lord Rhys and Gwenllian and the whole southern tradition of Welsh resistance, joining the war that Dafydd had started in the north.

At Llandeilo Fawr — in the Tywi valley at the heart of Carmarthenshire, the town that sits on the ridge above the river at the centre of the ancient Cantref of Ystrad Tywi — a Welsh force defeated an English army under Gilbert de Clare. The victory was significant enough that Clare was removed as the English commander in south Wales as a result. A Welsh victory in Carmarthenshire, in the valley of the Tywi, in the landscape where this map was made.

The Battle of Llandeilo Fawr in 1282 is one of the entries in this series that comes directly home to the ground of its creator. The Tywi valley — the river that flows past Carmarthen to the sea, that Gruffudd ap Llywelyn fought over at its estuary in 1044, that the Lord Rhys governed from Dinefwr above Llandeilo, that Llywelyn the Great captured at Carmarthen in 1215 — was the site of a Welsh victory in the last war of independence. For a moment, in the summer of 1282, the south was winning.

It did not last. The English response was overwhelming. But the Battle of Llandeilo Fawr deserves to be known in Carmarthenshire as clearly as the Battle of Kidwelly, as clearly as Gwenllian's death, as clearly as the Lord Rhys at Dinefwr. It happened here. It mattered.

1282 AD — The Battle of Moel-y-don: Menai Strait

Menai Strait crossing · 53.1733°N, 4.27°W

Edward I's strategy in 1282 was the strategy that every English commander who understood Wales eventually arrived at: cut off Anglesey, remove the grain supply, starve Gwynedd into submission. He sent a force under Luke de Tany to occupy Anglesey and then to cross the Menai Strait to attack the Gwynedd mainland — to bring the war to the heartland while his main army pressed from the east.

De Tany built a pontoon bridge across the Menai Strait. On 6 November 1282 his force began to cross from Anglesey to the mainland. The Welsh were waiting on the other shore. The crossing — a force committed to a pontoon bridge, unable to deploy properly, unable to advance quickly or retreat safely — was the kind of tactical error that comes from overconfidence. The Welsh destroyed the crossing force. Luke de Tany was killed. The bodies of English knights floated in the Menai Strait.

The Battle of Moel-y-don was one of the last significant Welsh military victories of the war. It happened five weeks before Llywelyn's death at Cilmeri. The Welsh were still fighting. They were still capable of winning in the field. The war was not yet lost on the battlefield.

It was lost on a hillside near Builth Wells on 11 December 1282. Not at Moel-y-don. Not in any battle that Edward's strategy determined. It was lost in the way that so many decisive moments in Welsh history were lost — in a skirmish, an ambush, a chance encounter that had no strategic significance but an absolute personal consequence.

1282 AD — Carreg Cennen Captured

Carreg Cennen Castle, Carmarthenshire · 51.8544°N, 3.9356°W

Carreg Cennen Castle sits on one of the most dramatic sites in all of Wales — a limestone crag rising almost vertically from the rolling farmland of Carmarthenshire, the castle clinging to its summit as though grown from the rock itself. It has been called the most romantically situated castle in Wales. In 1282 it was a military objective.

Welsh forces captured Carreg Cennen during the revolt of 1282 — demonstrating that the uprising in the south had real military effect, that the Welsh of Deheubarth were not simply a sideshow to the main campaign in the north but an active force capable of taking fortified positions. Carreg Cennen, with its limestone crag defences, was not an easy target. Its capture required planning, courage, and the kind of knowledge of the ground that only local Welsh forces possessed.

The castle stands now as a ruin above the Cennen valley, its walls following the line of the cliff edge, its great vaulted passageway through the rock to the cave below still accessible to visitors. Stand on its ramparts and look south toward Carmarthenshire spreading below and understand that in 1282 Welsh forces held this position —

held it in the last war of independence, in the months when the south was still fighting even as the north was beginning to collapse.

Carreg Cennen in Welsh hands in 1282. It is a detail that the landscape holds, even when the history forgets it.

1282 AD — The Death of Llywelyn at Cilmeri

Cilmeri, near Builth Wells · 52.1519°N, 3.4618°W

The most significant single pin in the entire timeline. There are moments that divide history into before and after. The death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd at Cilmeri on 11 December 1282 is one of them. Before it, Wales had a prince. After it, Wales did not, and never would again under its own terms, until the 20th century granted it an assembly that is not a principality.

The circumstances of his death are debated by historians and always have been. The broad outline is clear: Llywelyn had come south from Gwynedd, possibly to meet with Welsh lords in mid-Wales, possibly to raise further support for the revolt, possibly — the speculation is endless because the chronicle evidence is sparse — to reach Builth, which had Welsh sympathies. Near Builth, at Cilmeri, he was caught in a skirmish or ambush by English forces.

He was not recognised immediately. That detail matters. The last Prince of Wales was killed in a minor engagement by men who did not know who they had killed until after he was dead. One account says a soldier named Stephen de Frankton struck him down. Another says he was killed by a lance thrust after being surrounded. The chronicles do not agree on the details because nobody on the English side understood the significance of what they had done until the body was identified.

Then they understood. His head was cut from his body and sent to Edward at Rhuddlan. Edward had it mounted on the Tower of London, crowned with ivy in mockery of a Welsh prophecy that said a Welsh prince would be crowned in London. It was displayed there for fifteen years. The last Prince of Wales, his head on a pike above the Tower, crowned with weeds.

At Cilmeri today there is a monument. A great rough-hewn stone, inscribed in Welsh: Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Ein Llyw Olaf — Our Last Leader. The monument stands at the place where he fell. Welsh people come to it still, on the 11th of December each year — eight centuries later — to remember.

There is no adequate way to write about Cilmeri in a document that has followed this story from Chester in 616. Every entry in the six volumes that precede this one was moving toward this moment, whether the men and women in those entries knew it or not. Cadwallon fighting in Northumbria. Gwenllian marching on Kidwelly. The Lord Rhys taking the castle. Llywelyn the Great at Carmarthen. All of it leading to a hillside near Builth Wells on a December afternoon, a skirmish, a lance thrust, a body that nobody recognised until it was too late.

Wales did not end at Cilmeri. That must be said, clearly. The next three volumes of this series are the proof of it. But the Wales that existed before Cilmeri — the Wales that had a prince, a principality, a legal existence acknowledged by the Treaty of Montgomery — that Wales ended here. What came after was different. Persistent, resilient, culturally extraordinary, linguistically alive, but different. The principality was gone.

1283 AD — Dafydd Executed at Shrewsbury

Shrewsbury, Shropshire · 52.7082°N, 2.7546°W

Dafydd ap Gruffudd — the man whose attack on Hawarden on Palm Sunday 1282 had triggered the last war — did not die at Cilmeri. He was hunted through the mountains of Gwynedd for the better part of a year after his brother's death, a prince without a principality, a commander without an army, moving through the landscape of the country his family had ruled for generations while Edward's forces closed in from every direction.

He was captured in June 1283, betrayed by his own countrymen — men who calculated that the reward Edward offered for his capture was worth more than the loyalty they owed their prince. He was taken to Shrewsbury and tried before a parliament that Edward convened specifically for the purpose.

The sentence was death. But Edward was determined that the death would be a statement — a lesson not just to Wales but to the world about what happened to those who raised rebellion against the English crown. Dafydd was

hanged for treason. He was drawn — disembowelled — for his crimes in Lent. He was beheaded. His body was quartered and the quarters sent to the four corners of England. His head joined his brother's on the Tower of London.

He was, by the best current historical understanding, the first person in recorded history to be executed by the method of hanging, drawing and quartering. The method was invented for him. Edward I created it specifically for the last independent prince of Wales.

Shrewsbury appears in this timeline before: Llys Pengwern, the royal palace of Powys, was destroyed near Shrewsbury in 658. The sons of Rhodri Mawr may have fought near it. The border city that had been Welsh, then Mercian, then Norman, then English, was the city where Welsh independence was formally extinguished in September 1283. The coincidence of geography — Shrewsbury as both the place where the Welsh royal court of Powys was destroyed in 658 and the place where the last Welsh prince was executed in 1283 — is not a comfort. But it is a fact, and the map holds it.

1287 AD — Rhys ap Maredudd and Dinefwr

Dinefwr Castle, Carmarthenshire · 51.8768°N, 4.0183°W

Four years after Dafydd's execution Wales rose again. Not in the north, not in Gwynedd, but in the south — in Deheubarth, in Carmarthenshire, at Dinefwr above the Tywi valley, where the ancient seat of the lords of the south had stood since before the Norman conquest.

Rhys ap Maredudd was a Welsh lord who had made the pragmatic calculation that his survival required cooperation with the English administration. He had fought on Edward's side against Llywelyn in 1277. He had accepted English overlordship. He had done everything that a Welsh lord in the post-conquest order was supposed to do. And then the English administration had treated him with exactly the contempt that the English administration consistently showed toward cooperative Welsh lords — ignoring his legal claims, dismissing his petitions, refusing to acknowledge the terms on which he had submitted.

In 1287 Rhys ap Maredudd revolted. He briefly captured Llandovery Castle, Carreg Cennen Castle, and Dinefwr — the ancient royal seat above the Tywi valley, the castle that the Lord Rhys had governed from, the most symbolically significant fortification in the whole of south-west Wales. For a brief, extraordinary moment Dinefwr was Welsh again.

The English response was overwhelming. Rhys was hunted for five years — hiding in the forests and hills of Deheubarth in the same way that his ancestor Gruffudd ap Rhys had hidden a century and a half earlier. He was captured in 1292 and executed. The revolt that had seemed to promise a recovery of the south ended as all the post-conquest revolts ended: in capture, trial, and death.

But Dinefwr. For a moment in 1287 the castle above the Tywi was held by a Welsh lord in the name of Welsh resistance. The river below it is the same river that runs past Llandeilo, past the site of the battle of 1282, past Carmarthen, to the estuary where Gruffudd ap Llywelyn killed Hywel ab Edwin in the water in 1044. The Tywi valley holds all of this. The castle above it held it for a moment in 1287 before the English came and took it back.

1294 AD — Madog ap Llywelyn Overruns Caernarfon

Caernarfon Castle · 53.1405°N, 4.2764°W

On the feast of All Saints, 1 November 1294, Madog ap Llywelyn — a distant relative of the princes of Gwynedd, a man with a credible enough claim to the lineage to call himself Prince of Wales — launched a revolt that achieved something that astonished the whole of England. He took Caernarfon.

Edward I's castle at Caernarfon was not finished in 1294 — it was still under construction, the great polygonal towers and the eagle tower still being built. But it was already the most powerful and most symbolically significant fortification in Wales — the castle that Edward had chosen as the birthplace of his son, the future Prince of Wales, the castle built to dominate Gwynedd permanently and to serve as the administrative capital of the conquered principality. That Madog's forces took it tells you something important about the gap between Edward's ambitions and the actual state of his Welsh administration in 1294.

The Welsh killed the sheriff of Caernarfon in the assault. They burned the town. They took the castle. Edward I, on the Continent at the time, received the news with fury and returned to Wales personally to deal with the revolt. A king of England came back from France because a Welsh prince had taken his greatest castle.

Caernarfon Castle stands today as one of the most visited historic sites in Wales — its great walls and towers largely as Edward built them, the eagle tower rising above the Menai Strait, the town walls still encircling the medieval core of the town. Tourists walk through it every day. Almost none of them know that in 1294, twelve years after it was begun, a Welsh force took it. The guidebooks tend not to feature that detail prominently.

1294 AD — Harlech Besieged · Denbigh Castle Besieged

Harlech Castle · 52.8603°N, 4.1103°W · Denbigh Castle · 53.1810°N, 3.4206°W

While Madog's forces were overrunning Caernarfon in the north-west, Welsh forces were besieging Harlech on its rock above Cardigan Bay and Denbigh Castle in the north-east simultaneously. The co-ordination of these three separate operations across the full width of north Wales was not accidental. The revolt of 1294 was the most organised Welsh military uprising since the war of 1282 — planned, timed, and executed across multiple fronts simultaneously.

Harlech Castle in 1294 was one of Edward's four great concentric castles on the Gwynedd coast — walls within walls, towers at every angle, a water gate supplying it from the sea. It had been designed to be impregnable. The Welsh besieging it in 1294 did not take it — the sea gate was exactly the kind of relief route that made Edward's coastal castles effectively resistant to extended siege. But they tried. The attempt itself demonstrates the ambition and the organisation behind the revolt.

Denbigh Castle in the north-east was built by Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, as part of Edward's second wave of castle construction following the 1282 conquest. Its besieging in 1294 extended the revolt into the north-east — showing that the uprising, like the 1282 war before it, was not confined to Gwynedd proper but spread across the full width of north Wales.

Three castles besieged or taken simultaneously. One of them — Caernarfon — taken. Edward I personally coming from France. For a few months in the winter of 1294-1295, Wales was at war across its full extent, and the English administration was in genuine crisis.

1295 AD — The Battle of Maes Moydog

Maes Moydog, Powys uplands · 52.6167°N, 3.3333°W

Edward I came back from France in person and hunted Madog ap Llywelyn's forces across the mountains of north Wales through the winter of 1294. In March 1295, at Maes Moydog in the uplands of Powys, his forces under William de Beauchamp finally brought the Welsh army to battle.

It was a massacre. De Beauchamp used a combination that would become familiar on later medieval battlefields — dismounted men-at-arms holding the centre, cavalry on the flanks, and longbowmen providing the fire that broke the Welsh formation before the cavalry could be committed. The Welsh army, armed in the traditional fashion and fighting in the way that Welsh forces had always fought, was destroyed by a tactical combination it had no answer to.

The longbow. The weapon that would win Crécy in 1346, Poitiers in 1356, Agincourt in 1415 — the weapon that would define English military power for a century and a half — was being used here, at Maes Moydog in Powys in 1295, against Welsh forces. The irony is almost unbearable: the longbow was a Welsh weapon, developed and perfected by Welsh archers, adopted and systematised by the English crown, and then turned against Wales at Maes Moydog.

Madog ap Llywelyn escaped the battle. He was eventually captured and imprisoned in the Tower of London, where he died. The revolt was over. The castles held. The English administration, shaken but not broken by the revolt of 1294, reasserted itself. Wales entered the 14th century occupied, administered, taxed, and governed by English law — but not quiet. Never quite quiet.

1295 AD — Edward Besieged in Conwy Castle

Conwy Castle · 53.2797°N, 3.8309°W

During the revolt of 1294 Edward I himself was caught by the speed of the Welsh rising and was besieged in Conwy Castle — cut off from his supply lines, his communications disrupted, Welsh forces between him and any possibility of reinforcement overland. The King of England, in his own greatest castle, in his own conquered Wales, besieged.

The detail has a quality almost of dark comedy — Edward, the man who had built Conwy Castle specifically to be impregnable, the man who had designed the whole Welsh castle system precisely so that small garrisons could hold out against large Welsh forces, finding himself in the position of the small garrison. He held out. The castle held, as it was designed to hold. Supply ships eventually reached him by sea — the sea gate working exactly as intended.

But the image of Edward I of England, besieged in his own castle in Wales, unable to move for Welsh forces outside the walls — that image should be held alongside the image of Cilmeri and Dafydd's head on the Tower. Wales was not simply enduring the conquest. It was fighting it, constantly, at every level, with every means available, including the means of making the conqueror sit in his own castle and wait for the ships.

Conwy Castle is extraordinary to walk through today — the great drum towers, the inner and outer wards, the walls that follow the rock of the headland above the river. Stand in it and look out over the town and the estuary and know that in the winter of 1294 a Welsh uprising had Edward I of England confined within these walls, waiting for a tide that would bring him relief. Wales put him there. Wales held him there. And Wales, though the revolt was eventually crushed, had demonstrated once more that the conquest was not final, was not accepted, would never be accepted.

Volume Six Complete

Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD

Volume Six covers 15 events across 27 years — the shortest and heaviest span in the series. From the first stone of Flint Castle in 1277 to the imprisonment of Madog ap Llywelyn following Maes Moydog in 1295, this volume contains the conquest of Wales, the death of the last Prince of Wales, the execution of the last independent Welsh prince, and two post-conquest revolts that demonstrated, definitively, that the conquest had not produced acceptance.

The interactive map layer Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD contains 15 placemarks. The pin at Cilmeri — 52.1519°N, 3.4618°W — is the hinge on which the whole timeline turns. Everything before it is the story of how Wales survived. Everything after it is the story of why survival, even under conquest, was not the same as defeat.

Volume Seven — The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD — covers the century between the conquest and Glyndŵr: Llywelyn Bren's revolt in Glamorgan, the illegal execution that generated the fury that fed into Glyndŵr's uprising, and Owain Lawgoch — the exile prince in France who came closest to returning until an English spy ended his life at the siege of Mortagne. The century is darker than what came before it, but it is not silent. Wales was never silent.

Map Layer: Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD

Interactive Map: A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

Published: People's Collection Wales · Tudor59 · 2026

A TIMELINE OF CONFLICT IN WALES

616 — 1421 AD

A Complete Historical Narrative Companion to the Interactive Map

VOLUME SEVEN

The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD

Graham Tudor Emmanuel

Tudor59 · People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · 2026

Volume Seven

The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD

The Long Silence That Was Never Quite Silent

The century between the conquest and Glyndŵr is the hardest century in this timeline to write about, because it is a century defined largely by absence. The principality is gone. The princes are gone. The legal framework that had given Welsh political identity its formal expression has been dismantled and replaced with the apparatus of English administration — sheriffs, justiciars, county courts, the Statute of Wales operating in the place where Welsh law had operated.

And yet Wales was not England. The language endured. The poetry endured. The memory endured. And periodically, with the regularity of a people who had never been taught how to accept permanent defeat, the resistance erupted again — in Glamorgan in 1316, in the Marches in the 1320s, in France across the 1370s where an exiled Welsh prince was building the reputation and the military force that might, had circumstances been different, have brought him home.

The seven events covered in this volume are fewer in number than any previous layer except the Welsh Kings, and they span a longer period than any previous volume. The sparseness is not absence of Welsh activity — it is the difficulty of recording Welsh resistance under an administration that had no interest in commemorating it. The chronicles of this period are largely English chronicles. The Welsh perspective survives in fragments — in poetry, in legal records, in the occasional detailed account of a revolt that the English administration was too alarmed to ignore.

Two figures dominate this volume. Llywelyn Bren — Lord of Senghenydd in Glamorgan, a man of patience and dignity who tried every legal avenue before resorting to revolt in 1316, who surrendered voluntarily to save his men from further suffering, and who was then murdered by Hugh Despenser the Younger in 1318 in a judicial killing so obviously corrupt that it generated the fury that fed directly into Glyndŵr's uprising eighty years later. And Owain Lawgoch — Owain ap Thomas ap Rhodri, the exiled Welsh prince who fought for the King of France, who led two expeditions toward Wales that were diverted by continental politics, who was murdered by an English spy in France in 1378 before he could come home. The last of the direct Gwynedd dynasty, killed by a knife in a French siege camp.

Between them these two men represent the two faces of Welsh resistance in this century: internal revolt that was crushed by judicial murder, and external ambition that was crushed by assassination. Neither succeeded. Both mattered. Both fed into the fire that Owain Glyndŵr lit in September 1400 — a fire that had been burning underground for a century, fed by injustice and memory and the specific, personal, deeply felt Welsh knowledge that what had been done to their country was wrong and would one day be answered.

This is the volume of the long patience. Read it knowing what comes next. Volume Eight is the fire.

The Events · 1296–1399 AD

In Chronological Sequence

1316 AD — Llywelyn Bren: The Revolt Begins — Caerphilly

Caerphilly Castle, Glamorgan · 51.5752°N, 3.22°W

Thirty-four years after Cilmeri, Wales rose again. The man who led it was Llywelyn ap Gruffudd ap Rhys — known to history as Llywelyn Bren, Llywelyn of the Wood — Lord of Senghenydd in Glamorgan, a Welsh lord of considerable standing and considerable patience who had tried everything the English legal system offered before concluding that the English legal system had nothing to offer him.

His complaint was straightforward. The English administration of Wales, under the lordship of the late Gilbert de Clare, had been confiscating Welsh lands, imposing illegal levies, and treating Welsh lords with a contempt that made a mockery of the legal protections that even the Statute of Wales, Edward I's instrument of conquest, nominally guaranteed. Llywelyn had petitioned. He had appealed. He had done everything that a loyal subject of the English crown was supposed to do when he had a grievance. He had been threatened with arrest in response.

On 28 January 1316 Llywelyn Bren raised his standard and attacked Caerphilly Castle — the most powerful castle in south Wales, the great concentric fortress that Gilbert de Clare had built in the 1260s to dominate the upland territory of Glamorgan. Caerphilly Castle was not taken — it was never taken in the medieval period, its concentric defences and water barriers making it effectively impregnable to the kind of assault that Welsh forces could mount. But the attack on it was the statement that began the revolt.

Caerphilly Castle stands today as the largest castle in Wales and the second largest in Britain after Windsor. Its great walls, its water defences, its massive leaning tower — all still there, in the town that grew up around it. When you stand in its outer ward and look at the scale of what Llywelyn Bren attacked in January 1316, the courage of the attempt becomes visceral. He attacked this with the forces available to a Welsh lord of Senghenydd. He did not take it. He rose anyway, because the alternative was to accept the arrest that was coming for him, and he chose to fight.

1316 AD — The Battle of Bryn y Castell

Glamorgan uplands · 51.65°N, 3.45°W

As the English response to Llywelyn Bren's revolt gathered strength — and it gathered quickly, because the revolt in Glamorgan alarmed an English administration that was already dealing with the instability of Edward II's reign and could not afford a serious Welsh uprising simultaneously — his forces were pushed into the uplands of Glamorgan.

The uplands were always the Welsh refuge. From Snowdonia to the Brecon Beacons to the Glamorgan hills, the high ground had been the fallback position for Welsh resistance across seven centuries of this timeline. English cavalry was weakened by the terrain. English supply lines stretched. The Welsh who knew the ground could move through it faster, could disappear into it, could choose their ground for any engagement that was forced upon them.

At Bryn y Castell — the Castle Hill — Llywelyn's forces made their stand in the uplands. The engagement was not decisive. The revolt was contracting, the English response closing in from multiple directions. But Bryn y Castell represents the moment when the upland resistance was active — when Llywelyn Bren was still in the field, still fighting, before the calculation that ended his revolt replaced the military option with a different kind of courage.

1316 AD — Llywelyn Bren Surrenders to Save His Men

Glamorgan · 51.65°N, 3.22°W

Llywelyn Bren made a decision in 1316 that reveals the character of the man more clearly than any battle could. His revolt was failing. The English forces were closing in. His followers — the Welsh of Glamorgan who had risen with him — were facing the prospect of mass casualties if the campaign continued. He could have fled. He could

have dispersed his forces and disappeared into the uplands in the way that Welsh leaders had disappeared before him, waiting for another moment.

He surrendered. Voluntarily. He gave himself up to the Earl of Hereford — Humphrey de Bohun, one of the most powerful magnates in England — on the understanding that his surrender would be accepted honourably and his men spared. It was the act of a leader who valued the lives of his followers above his own freedom. He walked into English custody knowing what English custody for a Welsh rebel typically meant.

He was imprisoned in the Tower of London. He was promised honourable treatment. He was held for two years.

What happened next was not honourable.

1318 AD — The Execution of Llywelyn Bren

Cardiff · 51.4837°N, 3.1827°W

In 1318 Hugh Despenser the Younger — the favourite of King Edward II, the man who had acquired the lordship of Glamorgan and who regarded Llywelyn Bren as both a personal enemy and a political inconvenience — had Llywelyn taken from the Tower of London and brought to Cardiff. He was tried there, convicted, and executed. Hanged, drawn and quartered — the method invented for Dafydd ap Gruffudd in 1283, now applied to the man who had surrendered voluntarily on the promise of honourable treatment.

There was no legal basis for the execution. Llywelyn had surrendered under terms. He had not been tried for capital offences before his imprisonment. The execution at Cardiff in 1318 was a judicial murder — Hugh Despenser using the apparatus of English law to eliminate a man he regarded as a threat, without the legal foundation that even the English crown's own courts required.

The Welsh knew it. They remembered it. The memory of Llywelyn Bren's illegal execution — a man who had surrendered voluntarily, who had trusted English justice, who had been murdered in Cardiff by a lord who regarded Welsh lives as disposable — did not fade. It was still live, still burning, when Owain Glyndŵr raised his standard at Glyndyfrdwy eighty-two years later. The roll of Welsh grievances that Glyndŵr's revolt expressed was long, and the murder of Llywelyn Bren was on it.

Hugh Despenser the Younger was himself executed in 1326 — hanged, drawn and quartered, in Hereford, by the barons who had finally overthrown Edward II. History noted the method. Wales noted that justice, however delayed, had come for the man who murdered Llywelyn Bren. It was not enough. It was never enough. But Wales noted it.

1321 AD — The Despenser War: Welsh Involvement

Welsh Marches and border · 52.2414°N, 3.1617°W

The baronial revolt against Hugh Despenser the Younger and his father Hugh Despenser the Elder — the favourites of Edward II whose power and corruption had alienated virtually every significant magnate in England — drew significant Welsh involvement in 1321. Welsh lords and fighting men joined the English rebel barons in opposition to a regime that had, in the most concrete possible way, demonstrated its contempt for Welsh lives through the murder of Llywelyn Bren three years earlier.

Roger Mortimer of Wigmore — a Marcher lord with deep Welsh connections, whose family had been part of the border world between England and Wales for generations — led the revolt on the Welsh March side. Mortimer's Welsh allies gave the revolt a geographic base in the borderland that made it genuinely dangerous to the Despenser regime. The March between Wales and England had always been a place where the normal rules of English royal authority were attenuated — where lords governed by their own customs and where Welsh military force could be brought to bear against English political targets without the logistics that a full-scale invasion of England would have required.

The revolt of 1321 failed in the short term — Edward II and the Despensers suppressed it and Mortimer was imprisoned in the Tower. But the forces it mobilised did not simply disperse. Mortimer escaped from the Tower in 1323, fled to France, and returned with Queen Isabella in 1326 in the invasion that deposed Edward II and resulted in the execution of both Despensers. The Welsh lords who had supported the revolt in 1321 were on the

winning side in 1326. The murder of Llywelyn Bren had consequences that ran across a decade and reached into the highest levels of English politics.

1369 AD — Owain Lawgoch: The Exile Prince

France · 45.4839°N, 0.7845°W

While Wales endured the English occupation — paying the taxes, answering to the sheriffs, living under a law that was not its own — a Welsh prince was building his reputation as the finest soldier in Europe. His name was Owain ap Thomas ap Rhodri. The Welsh called him Owain Lawgoch: Owain of the Red Hand. He would have been, had the line of succession operated in the way Welsh tradition understood it, the rightful Prince of Wales.

He was the grandson of Rhodri ap Gruffudd — the brother of Llywelyn the Last. When Llywelyn died at Cilmeri and Dafydd was executed at Shrewsbury, the direct Gwynedd dynasty did not end. It went into exile. Owain was born in that exile, in France, and grew up to become a commander in the French royal service. He fought in the great campaigns of the Hundred Years War. He led free companies — the mercenary forces that operated across the battlefields of 14th-century France — with a skill and ferocity that made him famous across the continent.

The French knew what they had in Owain Lawgoch. He was not simply a good soldier. He was the legitimate heir of the last Welsh dynasty, the man whose claim to Wales gave France a potential weapon against England — a claimant who could destabilise the English crown's hold on Wales if he landed with French support. The French king pensioned him, supported his operations, and eventually backed his expeditions toward Wales with military resources.

The pin for this entry sits in France — in the Charente region, far from Wales, far from Gwynedd, far from everything that Owain Lawgoch was heir to. It marks the beginning of his sustained campaign to return, which would occupy the last decade of his life and end not in Wales but in a French siege camp with an English knife in his back.

He never came home. But while he lived, Wales had a prince. Not in Wales, not in Gwynedd, not at Aberffraw or Dinefwr or Mathrafal — but in France, in the service of the French king, building the military reputation that he hoped would carry him home. Wales waited. He did not come. And then he was killed, and Wales stopped waiting, and began instead to remember.

1372 AD — Owain Lawgoch Raids Guernsey

Guernsey, Channel Islands · 49.4482°N, 2.5895°W

In 1372 Owain Lawgoch launched what was intended to be the opening move of a full-scale invasion of Wales. The French king provided ships, men, and resources. Owain assembled his force and set sail. The first objective was Guernsey — an English possession in the Channel Islands, a demonstration of intent, a signal to England that what was coming was real.

He took Guernsey. The island fell without significant resistance. Owain held it, demonstrated his military capability, and prepared to turn north and west toward Wales. His force was real. His plan was real. The Welsh community — inside Wales, waiting under English administration, and in the diaspora of Welsh exiles and servants in French employment — knew he was coming.

Then the French strategic priorities changed. The expedition was redirected. The fleet that was pointed at Wales was needed elsewhere. Owain's invasion was postponed — set aside by the calculations of a French king who had multiple theatres to manage and who regarded the Welsh expedition as one option among many rather than the overriding strategic commitment that Owain needed it to be.

The ships turned. Wales waited.

There was a second expedition, in 1378. It too was diverted before reaching Wales. Each time the fleet assembled, each time the course was set, each time the English court received intelligence that Owain Lawgoch was coming and prepared its response — and each time the expedition was pulled away by continental politics before it reached the Welsh coast. The exiled prince and the waiting country were separated by the Irish Sea and by the indifference of French strategy, and the separation held until it was too late.

1378 AD — The Assassination of Owain Lawgoch

Mortagne-sur-Gironde, France · 45.4833°N, 0.7°W

The English crown decided that Owain Lawgoch alive was too dangerous to be left to the contingencies of French politics. He was not going to be defeated in the field — he was too good a soldier, too well protected by the French royal service, too capable in the open. He was going to be killed.

The man chosen for the task was John Lamb — a Scot, apparently, in English pay, who infiltrated Owain's entourage over a period of months and worked himself into a position of trust. The chronicles describe him as Owain's secretary, or his close companion, or simply a man who had made himself indispensable to the commander's daily life. However he managed it, by 1378 he was close. Close enough.

The siege of Mortagne-sur-Gironde in the Charente-Maritime region of south-west France. July 1378. Owain Lawgoch — Owain ap Thomas ap Rhodri, the Red-Handed, the last legitimate heir of the house of Gwynedd, the man who had twice assembled fleets to sail for Wales — was stabbed to death by John Lamb. One strike. He died immediately.

The English crown paid for the assassination. The records show the payment. There was no pretence, in English administrative terms, that this was anything other than a state-sponsored killing. The last heir of the Gwynedd dynasty was murdered by an agent of the English government, in a French siege camp, far from the country he had spent his adult life trying to reach.

His men buried him at the church of Saint-Léger in Mortagne. He has no grave in Wales. He has no monument in Gwynedd. He has the memory of the Welsh poets who wrote about him — the bards who called him the son of prophecy, the man who would return, y mab darogan — and the knowledge that he tried, twice, to come home, and was stopped both times, and finally killed before the third attempt could be made.

The last of the direct Gwynedd line. Killed in France. By a knife. Paid for by England.

Twenty-two years later Owain Glyndŵr raised his standard at Glyndyfrdwy. The fire that Owain Lawgoch had tried to light from France, Glyndŵr would light from Wales itself. The line of the princes was ended. The spirit of the princes was not.

The Century Between

Seven events across a hundred and three years. The sparseness of this volume — compared to the fifty-one pins of the Viking Age or the sixteen of the Norman Resistance — reflects not a century of Welsh passivity but a century in which the mechanisms of English administration had become sophisticated enough to suppress Welsh military activity before it could reach the scale that generated chronicle entries.

Behind the seven events recorded here were thousands of smaller acts of resistance — legal challenges, refusals to pay, flight from English courts, the maintenance of Welsh language and Welsh poetry and Welsh law in defiance of the Statute of Wales. The bards continued to compose. The Welsh continued to speak their language in their homes and their fields and their chapels. The oral tradition of Welsh history — the memory of Gwenllian, of Llywelyn the Last, of Madog ap Llywelyn besieging Edward in Conwy Castle — continued to circulate in a country that had no Welsh-language press, no Welsh-language administration, no Welsh-language legal system, but did have Welsh-language memory.

Memory is a form of resistance. In this century it was the primary form. The grievances accumulated — the illegal execution of Llywelyn Bren, the contempt of the English Penal Laws that restricted Welsh people from holding office, owning property in English towns, or seeking legal redress against English citizens. The resentments built, layer on layer, decade on decade, until the specific combination of personal grievance and national fury that Owain Glyndŵr embodied and expressed found its moment.

The moment was 16 September 1400, at Glyndyfrdwy on the River Dee. The fire was a hundred years in the making. Volume Eight tells the story of what happened when it finally caught.

Volume Seven Complete

The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD

Volume Seven covers 7 events across 103 years — the longest span and the fewest entries in the series. The sparseness is part of the story. The century between the conquest and Glyndŵr was not a century of peace. It was a century of suppressed resistance, of memory maintained under occupation, of injustice accumulating until the weight of it became unbearable.

The interactive map layer The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD contains 7 placemarks. Two of them — the Owain Lawgoch pins at Guernsey and Mortagne-sur-Gironde — sit outside Wales entirely, in the Channel Islands and in south-west France. They are the furthest-flung pins on the map. They mark the distance to which the Welsh royal line had been driven by English power — exile, assassination, a grave in a French churchyard with no monument at home.

Volume Eight — Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD — is the final volume in the series. It is the longest revolt in this timeline, the most complex, the most geographically diverse, and the one that produced the last native Prince of Wales before the 20th century. It begins at Glyndyfrdwy in September 1400 with a proclamation and ends in the mountains of Gwynedd sometime after 1415 with a disappearance. In between is the most extraordinary twenty-one years in the whole of this eight-century timeline.

Map Layer: The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD

Interactive Map: A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

Published: People's Collection Wales · Tudor59 · 2026

A TIMELINE OF CONFLICT IN WALES

616 — 1421 AD

A Complete Historical Narrative Companion to the Interactive Map

VOLUME EIGHT

Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD

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Tudor59 · People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · 2026

Volume Eight

Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD

The Last Fire and the Endless Waiting

Every story in this series has been moving toward this one. From the massacre at Chester in 616 to the monks who prayed and were killed before the battle began. From Cadwallon's year of fury in Northumbria to Rhodri Mawr's two victories in a single year. From Gwenllian in the field below Kidwelly Castle to Llywelyn the Great taking Carmarthen. From the treaty at Montgomery to the hillside at Cilmeri. From the murder of Llywelyn Bren to the knife in Owain Lawgoch's back in a French siege camp. Every injustice, every defeat, every moment of resistance that was suppressed without being extinguished — all of it accumulated across eight centuries and settled finally into the man who stood at Glyndyfrdwy on 16 September 1400 and was proclaimed Prince of Wales.

Owain ap Gruffudd Fychan — Owain Glyndŵr — was not, on the surface, the obvious candidate for the last great Welsh revolt. He was in his mid-forties. He was a landed gentleman of the Welsh March, educated in English law at the Inns of Court in London, a man who had served in the English army in Scotland and France, a man who had legal disputes with his neighbours and went through the proper legal channels to resolve them. He was not a revolutionary. He was a man who had been wronged — by Reginald Grey, Lord of Ruthin, who had stolen his lands and whose influence at the English court had blocked every legal remedy — and who finally concluded that the legal channels were closed to him.

What happened next was not simply a revolt. It was a transformation. The man who raised his standard at Glyndyfrdwy in 1400 as a dispossessed Welsh gentleman became, within four years, the ruler of almost all Wales — holding his parliament at Machynlleth, receiving French ambassadors, corresponding with the King of Scotland and the Archbishop of Canterbury as a head of state, capturing Edward I's greatest castles and holding court in them. He was proclaimed Prince of Wales not once but formally, before witnesses, with foreign dignitaries present. He signed the Pennal Letter — one of the most extraordinary political documents in Welsh history — as a sovereign addressing an equal.

And then it fell apart. Slowly at first, then with increasing speed, the English recovery dismantled everything he had built. The castles were retaken. His allies died or surrendered. His family was captured and sent to the Tower. His son was taken. His wife died in English captivity. He retreated into the mountains that had always been the final Welsh refuge, and from the mountains he did not come back down.

He disappeared. Not in battle. Not in capture. Not in execution. He simply disappeared, and the mountains kept his secret, and Wales has been waiting for him ever since.

Y mab darogan — the son of prophecy. The man who will return when Wales needs him. The Welsh bards said he was not dead. They said he was sleeping. They said the mountains of Wales held him and would release him in Wales's hour of need. He has not yet returned. Wales is still waiting.

This is the last volume. Read it knowing that the whole of this series — eight centuries, eight volumes, over 160 locations on the map — has been building toward a man who vanished into the Welsh hills and was never found. That disappearance is not a defeat. It is the most Welsh ending imaginable. You cannot conquer what you cannot find. You cannot extinguish what refuses to show itself to be extinguished. Owain Glyndŵr's disappearance is the final act of a tradition of resistance that began at Chester in 616 and has never, in any fundamental sense, ended.

The Events · 1400–1421 AD

In Chronological Sequence

1400 AD — Owain Glyndŵr Proclaimed Prince of Wales: Glyndyfrdwy

Glyndyfrdwy, Dee valley, Denbighshire · 52.9833°N, 3.3667°W

On 16 September 1400 at the ancestral estate of Glyndyfrdwy in the Dee valley, in the hills above Corwen, Owain ap Gruffudd Fychan was proclaimed Prince of Wales by his supporters. The ceremony was not elaborate. The company was not large. What was declared that day at Glyndyfrdwy would within four years be recognised by France, negotiated with Scotland, and proclaimed before a formal parliament. But it began here, at a Welsh estate on a September morning, with a group of men who understood that what they were doing was either the beginning of something extraordinary or the beginning of their deaths.

The immediate cause was personal. Reginald Grey, Lord of Ruthin, had appropriated land that Owain claimed as his rightful inheritance, and had used his influence at the court of Henry IV to ensure that Owain's legal petitions went nowhere. When Owain petitioned Parliament, Grey's allies mocked him. The Speaker of the House of Commons reportedly said: what care we for barefoot Welsh dogs? It was the kind of contempt that had been building for a century — since Llywelyn Bren was murdered in Cardiff, since the Penal Laws reduced Welsh people to second-class legal status in their own country.

Four days after the proclamation Owain led his followers down from the Dee valley and raided Ruthin — Grey's town, Grey's market, Grey's symbol of the power that had been used against him. The revolt had begun not with a manifesto or a strategic plan but with a raid on a personal enemy's market town. In that combination of the personal and the national, of the specific grievance and the wider fury, the whole character of what followed was already present.

The English administration dismissed it initially as a local disturbance by a minor Welsh gentleman with a land dispute. They were wrong on a scale that would take them a decade to fully comprehend.

1400 AD — Ruthin Raided: The First Strike

Ruthin, Denbighshire · 53.1164°N, 3.3114°W

The raid on Ruthin was the first military act of the revolt. Owain and his followers came down from the Dee valley hills and struck the market town that was the administrative centre of Reginald Grey's lordship — burning, looting, sending the most direct possible message to the man who had stolen Owain's lands and blocked his legal remedies.

Ruthin was not taken as a military objective in any strategic sense. It was a statement. You have used your power against me. I have power too. The Welsh gentleman who had been dismissed in the English Parliament as a barefoot Welsh dog had come to your town with fire.

Within days of Ruthin, Owain's forces struck Denbigh, Rhuddlan, Flint, Hawarden, and Holt — a sweep through the north-east Welsh towns that demonstrated the reach of the initial uprising and alarmed the English administration enough to begin taking it seriously. Five towns in a week. The disturbance was not local. The disturbance was the beginning of something.

Henry IV marched to Wales in October 1400 with an army and found nothing to fight — the Welsh melted into the hills as they always had and waited for the English to go home. Henry went home. The revolt had survived its first English response. That survival mattered more than any engagement. A revolt that survives its first suppression has already proved something.

1401 AD — The Capture of Conwy Castle

Conwy Castle · 53.2797°N, 3.8309°W

On Good Friday 1401, while the garrison of Conwy Castle was at church, two brothers seized it. Rhys and Gwilym ap Tudur — cousins of Owain Glyndŵr, and ancestors of the Tudor dynasty that would one day rule England —

walked into Edward I's great castle on the Conwy estuary with a small force while the garrison was at prayer and took it.

The audacity of the operation is still startling six centuries later. Conwy Castle was one of the most formidable fortifications in Britain — the castle that had held Edward I when he was besieged in it during the revolt of 1294, the castle that sat on its rock above the river with walls fourteen feet thick and eight great towers. A handful of men walked in while the garrison was at church and locked the gates behind them.

They held it for three months. Three months in Edward I's greatest northern castle, sustained by the goodwill of the local Welsh community, negotiating from behind walls that no besieging force could breach by assault. When they finally agreed terms — honourable terms, safe conduct, no reprisals — they walked out of Conwy Castle having demonstrated that the revolt of Owain Glyndŵr could take, and hold, a royal castle.

The Tudur brothers. The ancestors of Henry VII, who would become the first Welsh king of England in 1485. Their roles in the Glyndŵr revolt are rarely mentioned in English histories of the Tudor dynasty. But Rhys and Gwilym ap Tudur were Owain Glyndŵr's men in the field, holding Conwy Castle on Good Friday 1401, and the dynasty they founded grew from the same Welsh soil as the revolt they served.

1401 AD — The Battle of Hyddgen

Western slopes of Pumlumon, Ceredigion/Powys border · 52.48523°N, 3.79805°W

The Battle of Hyddgen was Owain Glyndŵr's first major pitched victory — the engagement that transformed a local uprising into a national revolt and proved that Welsh forces under his command could defeat an English army in the open field.

Pumlumon — the great upland massif at the heart of Wales, the source of both the Severn and the Wye, the highest ground in the centre of the country — was Glyndŵr's chosen ground. He had perhaps 120 to 500 men. The force assembled against him — Anglo-Flemish, from the English-settled communities of south-west Wales — was significantly larger, possibly 1,500 strong.

The Welsh won. The details of the engagement are sparse in the chronicles but the outcome is clear: the Anglo-Flemish force was destroyed or routed, Glyndŵr's army survived and held the field, and the revolt acquired, for the first time, the credibility that only a battlefield victory can provide. A man who could beat an English force in the field was not a Welsh gentleman with a land dispute. He was a military commander. He was a prince.

Hyddgen sits in some of the most remote upland country in Wales — the great bog and moorland of the Pumlumon plateau, the kind of terrain that gives every advantage to forces that know it and every disadvantage to forces that do not. Stand on the high ground of Pumlumon on a clear day and you can see the whole of Wales spread below — the coast of Ceredigion to the west, the mountains of Snowdonia to the north, the hills of mid-Wales rolling away to the south and east. Glyndŵr chose this ground. He understood it. And on it, in the summer of 1401, he won.

1402 AD — The Battle of Bryn Glas

Near Knighton, Powys · 52.35°N, 3.05°W

Bryn Glas was the greatest Welsh military victory since Crug Mawr in 1136. On 22 June 1402, in the hill country above Knighton near the River Lugg, Owain Glyndŵr's forces ambushed and destroyed an English army under Sir Edmund Mortimer. Between 600 and 1,100 English were killed. Mortimer himself was captured.

The scale of the victory was extraordinary. An English army — not a garrison detachment or a border patrol but a substantial force assembled to suppress the revolt — was broken in the field and its commander taken prisoner. Mortimer was held and eventually ransomed, but the ransom was set at a figure that caused controversy at the English court, and in the negotiations that followed Mortimer converted. He married Owain's daughter. He joined the Welsh cause. The English commander captured at Bryn Glas became Owain Glyndŵr's son-in-law and ally.

Shakespeare used this battle in Henry IV Part 1. The Welsh women who came onto the battlefield after the fighting and mutilated the English dead — recorded with horror in English chronicles — appear in Shakespeare's play, filtered through Tudor-era anxiety about Welsh savagery. The detail was remembered for a century and a half

because it was shocking. War is always shocking. The specific shock of Bryn Glas was that the Welsh had won so completely that there were English dead for the women to reach.

Bryn Glas destabilised English politics for years. Henry IV's government was weakened. The Percys of Northumberland — already in conflict with the crown — began to move toward the alliance with Glyndŵr that would produce the Battle of Shrewsbury the following year. One Welsh victory in a field above Knighton, and the political consequences ran from Wales to Northumberland to the English Parliament.

1402 AD — The Capture of Reginald Grey, Lord of Ruthin

Near Ruthin, Denbighshire · 53.1164°N, 3.3114°W

The same year as Bryn Glas, Owain settled his most personal score. Reginald Grey — Lord of Ruthin, the man whose appropriation of Owain's lands and whose influence at court had closed every legal avenue and driven Owain to the proclamation at Glyndyfrdwy — was captured in an ambush near his own town.

The ransom was set at ten thousand marks. An enormous sum — a crippling figure that would take Grey years to raise and would leave him financially broken for the rest of his life. The land dispute that had started the revolt was answered in the most direct possible way: the man who had taken Owain's land was taken himself, held in Welsh captivity, and released only at a price that transferred wealth back in the direction that Grey's original theft had disrupted.

Owain did not kill Grey. He had the power to. He held him, ransomed him, and released him when the money was paid. That restraint was itself a political act — the behaviour of a prince dealing with an enemy as a matter of law and justice rather than revenge. The contrast with what English lords had done to Welsh prisoners across the centuries of this timeline — Llywelyn Bren murdered in Cardiff, Dafydd ap Gruffudd invented a new method of execution for, Owain Lawgoch assassinated in France — is not accidental. Owain Glyndŵr was making a statement about what kind of ruler he was.

1403 AD — The Battle of Shrewsbury

Shrewsbury, Shropshire · 52.7082°N, 2.7546°W

Owain Glyndŵr was not at Shrewsbury. That fact is central to understanding the battle and its significance for Wales.

Henry Hotspur Percy — son of the Earl of Northumberland, one of the most capable military commanders in England, the man who had helped put Henry IV on the throne — had allied with Owain Glyndŵr against the king he had helped create. Hotspur was marching south to link his forces with Owain's Welsh army. Had they combined, the joint force would have been formidable — English military expertise and numbers, Welsh terrain knowledge and popular support, a combined army that might have changed the course of English history.

Henry IV intercepted Hotspur at Shrewsbury on 21 July 1403 before the junction could be made. Hotspur was killed. His army was broken. The English rebellion collapsed without the Welsh reinforcement that had been its strategic foundation. Owain's forces, coming from the south, arrived too late.

Too late. Two words that carry the weight of an alternative history. Had Glyndŵr's forces arrived in time, had the junction been made, had the combined army faced Henry IV at Shrewsbury — the possibilities are endless and unresolvable. What is known is that they were too late, and Hotspur was killed, and the most powerful English ally Glyndŵr ever had was dead in a field outside Shrewsbury before the Welsh reached it.

Shrewsbury appears in this timeline for the third time: it was the site of the destruction of Llys Pengwern in 658, the city where Dafydd ap Gruffudd was executed in 1283, and now the battlefield where Owain Glyndŵr's best chance of an English ally died with Henry Hotspur. Wales and Shrewsbury have a long and painful relationship.

1403–1404 AD — The Battles of Campston Hill and Craig y Dorth

Campston Hill, near Abergavenny · 51.82°N, 3.0°W · Craig y Dorth, near Monmouth · 51.85°N, 2.75°W

In the south-east the revolt of Glyndŵr was fought across the Abergavenny and Monmouth borderlands in a series of engagements that showed the ebb and flow of the campaign at the local level. Two battles, close together in geography and time, tell the story of that ebb and flow with particular clarity.

At Campston Hill near Abergavenny the English under the young Earl of Warwick defeated Glyndŵr's forces — a check to Welsh ambitions in the south-east Marches, the kind of English recovery that reminded both sides that no ground in this revolt was permanently won or permanently lost. Warwick was learning his trade in Wales. He would go on to become one of the great English commanders of the 15th century, and Wales was his school.

But then at Craig y Dorth — the Rock of the Sword, between the areas of Penclawdd and Monmouth — Glyndŵr's men recovered and drove the English back to the gates of Monmouth itself. The Ordnance Survey maps of the area mark the site with the notation: Craig-y-dorth, Site of Battle AD 1404. One of the few Welsh battle sites with formal OS recognition on the historic mapping — the landscape itself remembering a Welsh victory that the history books rarely mention.

The two battles of Campston Hill and Craig y Dorth in the south-east illustrate the character of the Glyndŵr revolt at its peak: contested everywhere, won in some places and lost in others, never settled, the ground changing hands and changing back, the English unable to establish permanent control and the Welsh unable to hold what they took against the weight of English resources. This was total war across the whole of Wales, fought simultaneously in the north, the south, the east and the west.

1404 AD — Harlech Castle Taken: Glyndŵr's Capital

Harlech Castle, Gwynedd · 52.8603°N, 4.1103°W · Aberystwyth Castle · 52.4153°N, 4.0829°W

In 1404 Owain Glyndŵr did what no Welsh force had done since the conquest of 1282: he took Edward I's castles. Both of them. Harlech on its rock above Cardigan Bay, and Aberystwyth on its headland above the same bay to the south. The two western anchors of the iron ring, the fortifications that Edward had built specifically to make the conquest of Gwynedd permanent and irreversible, fell to Welsh arms in the same year.

Harlech became Glyndŵr's capital. The castle that Edward had built to dominate Gwynedd became the court of the last native Prince of Wales. His family moved in. His administration operated from it. French ambassadors were received there. The documents of his government were sealed there. The castle that was supposed to make Welsh independence impossible was housing the most serious Welsh independence movement since 1282.

The symbolism was not lost on anyone. Harlech Castle had been built by Master James of St George — Edward I's master castle builder, the greatest military architect of the medieval period — with one purpose: to ensure that Gwynedd could never be held by a Welsh force against an English one. It was concentric, with walls within walls, towers commanding every angle, a water gate from the sea ensuring supply without dependence on Welsh-controlled land. It was designed to be impregnable.

Owain took it. He held it for five years. The impregnable castle was held by the man it was built to exclude, and from within its walls he governed a Wales that was, for the first and last time since 1282, genuinely his.

1404 AD — The Parliament at Machynlleth and the Pennal Letter

Machynlleth, Montgomeryshire · 52.5833°N, 3.9167°W

In 1404 Owain Glyndŵr held a formal parliament at Machynlleth. He had held an earlier gathering at Machynlleth in 1402, but the 1404 parliament was something more: a formal convocation of Welsh representatives, attended by foreign ambassadors, at which Owain was crowned Prince of Wales in the presence of witnesses from France, Scotland and Castile. The last native Prince of Wales was crowned not in secret but publicly, formally, before an international audience.

From Machynlleth, or from the nearby village of Pennal, Owain sent one of the most extraordinary documents in Welsh history: the Pennal Letter. Addressed to Charles VI of France, the letter set out Owain's vision for an independent Wales with a clarity and ambition that has no parallel in the medieval Welsh record. He proposed a Welsh church independent of Canterbury and obedient to the Pope at Avignon. He proposed two Welsh

universities — one in the north and one in the south. He proposed the restoration of Welsh law. He proposed formal diplomatic recognition by France and by the Avignon papacy.

A head of state writing to an equal. A prince of Wales — crowned, formally recognised by France, operating from his capital at Harlech — setting out the institutional structure of the independent Welsh state he intended to build. The Pennal Letter is not a rebel manifesto. It is a programme of government. It is the most complete statement of what an independent Wales would have looked like under Owain Glyndŵr, and it was written at the moment when that independence seemed, briefly, achievable.

The letter still exists. It is held in the French national archives in Paris. A document written by a Welsh prince in 1404, proposing the institutional structure of an independent Welsh state, surviving in France six hundred years later. Wales does not have it. It should.

1405 AD — French Forces Land at Milford Haven

Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire · 51.7094°N, 5.03°W

In August 1405 a French fleet carrying between two and three thousand soldiers landed at Milford Haven — the great natural harbour on the south-west coast of Wales, the deepest natural harbour in Britain, the port through which Henry Tudor would land in 1485 on his way to Bosworth. French troops on Welsh soil, in alliance with the Prince of Wales, was the most significant foreign military intervention in Wales since the Norman conquest.

Owain met the French at Haverfordwest. Their combined army marched east through south Wales, into Carmarthenshire, through the landscape of Gwenllian and the Lord Rhys and Llandeilo, and then north and east into England itself. They reached Woodbury Hill near Worcester — within eight miles of the city of Worcester, deep in England, further east than any Welsh-led force had marched since Gruffudd ap Llywelyn burned Hereford in 1055.

Henry IV came out to meet them. The two armies faced each other across the valley near Worcester for eight days. No battle was fought. The French commanders, calculating the odds against facing a prepared English army on English ground with Welsh forces that were already tiring, chose to withdraw. Owain, who understood that a defeat in open battle would be catastrophic for the revolt, agreed. The combined army marched back to Wales.

Eight miles from Worcester. French and Welsh soldiers on English soil, within striking distance of a major English city, with the King of England watching from across a valley. It did not produce a decisive engagement. But the march to Worcester in 1405 was the furthest penetration of England by a Welsh-led force since 1055 — three hundred and fifty years. It showed what the French alliance could achieve at its peak and why the English court took the threat of that alliance seriously enough to invest heavily in buying French neutrality after 1406.

1405 AD — The Battle of Pwll Melyn and the Battle of Grosmont

Pwll Melyn, near Usk · 51.7080°N, 2.9060°W · Grosmont, Monmouthshire · 51.9153°N, 2.8660°W

The year of the French landing was also a year of serious Welsh losses in the south-east. While Owain was marching toward Worcester with his French allies, his son Gruffudd led a separate force in the south — and walked into disaster.

At Pwll Melyn near Usk, Gruffudd ap Owain's force was ambushed and destroyed by English forces. Gruffudd was captured. He was sent to the Tower of London. He died there. Owain's ablest son, the man who might have inherited the principality and continued the revolt, was gone before the year was out.

At Grosmont — the castle in the Golden Valley of Monmouthshire, one of the three castles of Gwent that stood on the Welsh border — a separate engagement produced another English victory. The young Prince Henry — the future Henry V, who was learning the art of war in the Welsh campaigns and would apply those lessons at Agincourt ten years later — commanded the English forces. The methods he developed in suppressing the Glyndŵr revolt were the methods that won Agincourt. Wales was Henry V's military education.

The losses at Pwll Melyn and Grosmont in 1405 did not break the revolt. Owain was still in the field. Harlech was still held. The French alliance was still active. But the deaths and captures of 1405 — Gruffudd in the Tower, the losses in the south-east — began the process of attrition that would eventually, slowly, bring the revolt down.

1405 AD — The Tripartite Indenture

Bangor, Gwynedd · 53.2274°N, 4.1292°W

At Bangor in 1405, in the cathedral city on the Menai Strait that Henry II had burned in 1211, Owain Glyndŵr met with Edmund Mortimer and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, and the three men signed the most audacious document of the entire revolt: the Tripartite Indenture.

The agreement proposed to divide Britain between them. Owain was to take Wales and a greatly expanded western territory — including a substantial part of what is now the English Midlands, roughly the region that old Welsh tradition held had been Brythonic territory before the Saxon conquest. Mortimer was to take the south of England. Percy was to take the north. Three men, in a cathedral city on the Menai Strait, proposing to divide the island of Britain between them as though it were already theirs to divide.

The agreement never took effect. Mortimer died during the siege of Harlech in 1409. Percy was defeated and killed at the Battle of Bramham Moor in 1408. The political coalition that the Tripartite Indenture represented dissolved before it could be acted upon. But the document itself is one of the most extraordinary things in the entire archive of Welsh history — three men in a room in Bangor, in 1405, proposing to remake the political map of Britain. They nearly had enough military force to try it. The document shows how close the revolt came, at its peak, to something genuinely transformative.

1408 AD — The Siege of Aberystwyth: The Tide Turns

Aberystwyth Castle · 52.4153°N, 4.0829°W

By 1407 the tide had turned. The French alliance had cooled — France was dealing with its own political crisis, the Armagnac-Burgundian civil war, and could not sustain the military commitment to Wales that the 1405 expedition had represented. English resources were being applied systematically to the recovery of Welsh castles. Prince Henry was conducting the campaigns with methodical professionalism.

Aberystwyth Castle — Owain's great western position, the castle on the headland above Cardigan Bay that had anchored the western end of his authority — fell after a prolonged siege in 1408. The siege was notable for the use of artillery — large cannon, primitive by later standards but capable of battering stone walls in a way that previous siege technology could not. Edward I's castles had been built to resist the best military technology of the 1280s. The technology of 1408 was different.

The fall of Aberystwyth was the beginning of the end. Not a sudden collapse — Harlech still held, Owain was still in the mountains, the revolt was not over — but the moment when the strategic balance shifted beyond recovery. The English had the resources, the technology, and the political will. The French were not coming back in force. The Welsh lords who had supported the revolt were calculating their futures under English administration. The revolt was contracting.

1409 AD — The Siege of Harlech: The Last Stand

Harlech Castle, Gwynedd · 52.8603°N, 4.1103°W

Harlech Castle fell in 1409. The castle that Owain had taken in 1404, that had been his capital and his court for five years, that had housed his family and his government and his dream of an independent Wales — fell to an English besieging force after a siege that exhausted the defenders beyond the point of resistance.

Edmund Mortimer — Owain's son-in-law, the English commander captured at Bryn Glas who had married Owain's daughter and joined the Welsh cause — died during the siege. Whether of starvation, disease, or wounds the chronicle does not specify. He died in Harlech while it was being taken from him.

Owain's wife Margaret was captured. His daughters were captured. His grandchildren were captured. The family of the Prince of Wales was taken and sent to London, where most of them died in captivity over the following years. His son Maredudd survived in hiding. His daughter Catrin died in the Tower. Margaret herself died in English custody. The family that had shared Owain's court at Harlech was destroyed by the fall of the castle.

Owain was not in Harlech when it fell. He was in the mountains. He escaped — as he had always escaped, as Welsh leaders had always escaped into the mountains when the field was lost. He was sixty years old, approximately, in 1409. He had been fighting for nine years. He had lost his son Gruffudd in the Tower, his son-

in-law Mortimer in the siege of Harlech, his wife and daughters to English captivity. He had seen his capital fall and his family taken. He went into the mountains and he did not come back down.

1415 AD — The Last Recorded Sighting

Welsh borderlands · 52.9°N, 3.8°W

In 1415 Henry V — newly crowned, preparing the campaign that would end at Agincourt — offered Owain Glyndŵr a pardon. A genuine offer. The war was over in any practical sense. The castles had all been recovered. The French alliance was dead. The Welsh lords who had supported the revolt had submitted or died. There was nothing left to fight with or for, in any military sense that an English king needed to take seriously.

Owain refused. The record of his refusal is the last record of Owain Glyndŵr as a living man making a decision. He was offered his life, his freedom, the restoration of some measure of his former status, and he said no. He would not accept a pardon for being what he was — the Prince of Wales, the man who had been proclaimed at Glyndyfrdwy, crowned at Machynlleth, received by France, and who had held Harlech for five years. To accept a pardon was to accept that he had been wrong. He had not been wrong.

After 1415 there is nothing. No sighting. No communication. No record of any kind. The mountains of Wales received him and kept him.

His son Maredudd accepted a royal pardon in 1421 — the date that historians conventionally use as the close of the revolt. Maredudd's acceptance was the legal end of the Glyndŵr uprising. But Owain himself never accepted it, never surrendered, never appeared before an English court to receive his pardon or his sentence. He simply was not there. He was gone.

1421 AD — Owain Glyndŵr: The Disappearance

The mountains of Wales · 52.9°N, 3.8°W

This is the last pin on the entire map. Not a battle. Not a death. A disappearance.

No one knows when Owain Glyndŵr died. No one knows where he died. No one knows where he is buried. There are traditions — a grave at Monnington-on-Wye in Herefordshire, where his daughter Alys lived with her husband John Scudamore; a grave at Corwen, near his ancestral estate on the Dee. None of them is certain. None of them can be verified. The mountains of Wales have kept his secret for six hundred years.

The Welsh bards, writing after his disappearance, said he was not dead. They said he was sleeping — under a hill, in a cave, in some undisclosed place in the Welsh landscape — waiting. Y mab darogan, the son of prophecy, the man who would return when Wales needed him. The tradition is very old in Welsh culture — the sleeping king who will wake when the need is greatest. It attached itself to Owain Glyndŵr because he gave it something none of the previous candidates could give it: a genuine, documented, historically verified disappearance. He did not die in battle. He was not captured. He was not executed. He went into the mountains and no one ever found him.

Six hundred years later Wales is still waiting. He has not returned. Perhaps he does not need to. Perhaps what he did — the twenty-one years of revolt, the parliament at Machynlleth, the French alliance, the Pennal Letter, the holding of Harlech for five years, the refusal of the pardon in 1415 — perhaps all of that is the return. Not a physical return but a permanent presence in the record, in the memory, in the identity of a people who needed to know that someone had tried with everything he had and had refused to stop trying even when everything was lost.

The map this document accompanies marks his disappearance with a pin in the mountains of Gwynedd. It is the right place for the map to end. Not at a battle, not at a death, but at an absence — at the place where a man walked into the hills and was not found, and has not been found, and perhaps was never meant to be found.

The map begins at Chester in 616 with a massacre on a riverbank and twelve hundred dead monks. It ends here, with a man who refused a pardon and walked into the mountains.

Between those two points are eight centuries, eight layers, over 160 locations, and the complete story of a people who were told, repeatedly and by overwhelming force, that they were finished — and who refused, repeatedly and by every means available to them, to be finished.

Wales is still here. The language is still spoken. The mountains are still there. Owain Glyndŵr is still in them, somewhere, sleeping.

Volume Eight Complete

Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD

Volume Eight covers 19 events across 21 years — the most concentrated, most intense, most geographically diverse layer in the series. From the proclamation at Glyndyfrdwy in September 1400 to the formal close of the revolt in 1421, the Glyndŵr uprising touched every part of Wales and several parts of England and France. It was the last war of Welsh independence before the 20th century gave Wales its Assembly, and it was fought with a political intelligence and military skill that the English administration never fully contained.

The interactive map layer Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD contains 19 placemarks. The final pin — the disappearance, in the mountains of Gwynedd — is the right place for the map to end.

The Complete Series

Eight volumes. Eight layers. Eight centuries. The complete narrative companion to A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD.

Volume One: Dark Ages · 616–799 AD — 25 events · The making of Wales through conflict

Volume Two: The Viking Age · 800–999 AD — 39 events · The two-front war, sea and land

Volume Three: The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD — 12 events · The only unified Wales, and its ending

Volume Four: Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD — 16 events · The iron ring and Gwenllian

Volume Five: Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD — 16 events · The closest Wales ever came

Volume Six: Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD — 15 events · The systematic destruction

Volume Seven: The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD — 7 events · The long patience

Volume Eight: Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD — 19 events · The last fire and the endless waiting

Total: 149 events narrated across 8 volumes, corresponding to the 164 pin locations on the interactive map. A complete historical companion with no precedent in Welsh heritage publishing — a layered digital map and a sequential narrative volume, designed to be used together, each one the key to the other.

The map is at: People's Collection Wales · Tudor59 · A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

This series was researched and written in Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire — the town where Gwenllian died below the castle in 1136, where the Lord Rhys took the castle in 1187, where Welsh forces fought in 1258, where this map was made and where this document was written. The ground beneath Kidwelly Castle is called Maes Gwenllian. It has been called that for nine hundred years. It will be called that for nine hundred more.

What Has Been Built

A Project Summary

A Timeline of Conflict in Wales 616–1421 AD

This document summarises a complete heritage project produced by Graham Tudor Emmanuel an independent digital heritage researcher based in Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire, working alone without institutional funding. The project has no precedent in Welsh heritage publishing. Nothing like it, combining these elements in this form, has been produced before.

The Interactive Map

The foundation of the project is a Google My Maps interactive digital map covering 805 years of Welsh conflict from the Battle of Chester in 616 AD to the disappearance of Owain Glyndŵr in 1421. The map is publicly accessible on any device — mobile, tablet or desktop — at the address below and through the QR code on the preceding page.

https://tinyurl.com/Conflicts-in-Wales-616-1421-AD

Total pins: 164 precisely researched locations

Map layers: Eight colour-coded layers, each corresponding to one volume in this series

Coverage: 805 years · 616 AD to 1421 AD

New pins added in 2026 revision: 20 locations identified through cross-referencing against the full documented record

Special feature: Offa's Dyke mapped as a continuous route line from Prestatyn to Chepstow

Access: Free, public, no registration required

Published: People's Collection Wales · Tudor59

The map was originally built with 144 pins across eight layers. The 2026 revision — carried out as part of this project — identified 20 confirmed gaps through direct comparison of the original KML data against the full documented record of Welsh conflict. The 20 new entries were added to their correct chronological positions and marked ★ NEW throughout the map. One misplaced pin was moved to its correct layer. The complete map was then rebuilt from scratch as a new KML file with clean, consistently named layers, eight distinct pin colours, and coordinated descriptions across every entry.

The KML File

A complete rebuilt KML data file was produced — Wales_Conflict_Timeline_Complete_164pins.kml — containing all 164 placemarks, the Offa's Dyke route line, and all eight layers with their colour coding. The file was built from scratch rather than patching the original, ensuring clean layer names, consistent pin title formatting, full pin descriptions, and correct coordinates throughout. The file is importable directly into Google My Maps as a single operation, producing a fully formed map without any further editing required.

The Eight-Volume Narrative Companion

Eight full narrative documents were written — one per map layer — forming a complete sequential historical companion to the interactive map. Each volume covers every event in its layer in full prose, written in a personal voice that places the reader on the ground at each location, explains what happened and why it mattered, and connects each event to the wider thread of Welsh history across the full 805 years.

Volume One: Dark Ages · 616–799 AD · 329 paragraphs · 25 events
Volume Two: The Viking Age · 800–999 AD · 403 paragraphs · 39 events
Volume Three: The Welsh Kings · 1000–1093 AD · 204 paragraphs · 12 events
Volume Four: Norman Resistance · 1094–1200 AD · 211 paragraphs · 16 events
Volume Five: Age of the Princes · 1200–1267 AD · 203 paragraphs · 16 events
Volume Six: Edward I and the Conquest · 1268–1295 AD · 198 paragraphs · 15 events
Volume Seven: The Last Revolts · 1296–1399 AD · 147 paragraphs · 7 events
Volume Eight: Owain Glyndŵr · 1400–1421 AD · 235 paragraphs · 19 events

Total paragraphs across all eight volumes: Approximately 1,930
Total events narrated: 149
Format: Georgia house style · Burgundy headings · Gold rules · 18mm margins · A4 portrait
Each volume produced as: A standalone Word document editable independently
Each volume closes with: Vivit Post Funera Virtus · Graham Tudor Emmanuel · Kidwelly · 2026

The series includes a formal series foreword in Volume One explaining the project and its relationship to the map, and a series conclusion in Volume Eight closing the 805-year narrative at Owain Glyndŵr's disappearance into the mountains of Gwynedd. The four framing documents — this introduction, the map page, and the closing summary — complete the published work.

What Makes This Different

Printed Welsh history books exist. Interactive maps exist. Narrative heritage guides exist. What does not exist — and has not existed before this project — is a work that combines all three as a deliberately integrated system: a precisely researched interactive map whose every pin corresponds to a named section in a sequential narrative companion, so that the map and the document are each the key to the other.

The reader who opens the map on their phone and taps a pin in Kidwelly in 1136 can turn to Volume Four of this series and read the full narrative of what happened at Maes Gwenllian — the field below the castle, the execution of Gwenllian, the battle cry of Dial Gwenllian that spread the revolt across Wales. The reader who works through Volume One and reaches the entry on Pont y Saeson in 630 AD can open the map, find the pin, and stand on that exact piece of ground in Monmouthshire.

The phygital handshake — the connection between physical place and digital record — is the core methodology of this researcher's work across all projects. This is its most complete expression to date: 164 physical locations, all accessible on the ground, all connected to a digital narrative, all free to access, all in the public domain.

The project was reviewed against the full documented record of Welsh conflict across the period. The gap analysis identified 20 missing events. All 20 were researched, written, and added. The methodology is the same methodology applied to war memorial research and parish record transcription — systematic, honest about uncertainty, committed to completeness without claiming false precision.

Institutional Context

Graham Tudor Emmanuel's heritage research methodology — Fifth Generation Memorial Research and Convergent Heritage Recovery — has been formally recognised by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, with research accessioned into the Coflein national database. His portfolio on People's Collection Wales stands at over 209 published works. His Google My Maps portfolio spans over many maps.

This project was produced entirely independently, without institutional funding, by a retired researcher working alone in Kidwelly. It is published freely on People's Collection Wales under Graham T Emmanuel profile for use by anyone with an interest in Welsh history — researchers, teachers, students, heritage professionals, and the Welsh public to whom this history belongs.

https://tinyurl.com/Graham-T-Emmanuel-Profile

The Project in Numbers

Interactive map pins: 164
Map layers: 8
New pins added: 20
Years covered: 805 (616 AD — 1421 AD)
Narrative volumes: 8
Total narrative paragraphs: approximately 1,930
Events narrated in full: 149
Framing documents: 3 (Introduction · Map Page · Project Summary)
Complete companion PDF: 1 merged volume
KML files produced: 2 (gap analysis file · complete rebuilt map)
Word documents produced: 11 (8 volumes + 3 framing pages)
Maps consulted: Annales Cambriae · Brut y Tywysogion · RCAHMW Coflein · OS historic mapping
Cost to access: Free
Precedent in Welsh heritage publishing: None

This is Welsh history. It belongs to the Welsh people.

It is here. It is free. It is yours.

Graham Tudor Emmanuel · Tudor59 · People's Collection Wales · Kidwelly · Carmarthenshire · 2026

https://tinyurl.com/Conflicts-in-Wales-616-1421-AD
