



FACTsheet 33

Princes of Gwynedd

If you like a bit of drama and intrigue, then no look no further than the stories of the lives of the princes of Gwynedd. This factsheet highlights key places to visit that are associated with the medieval dynasty in North Wales. You'll find information about the places and people associated with each of the sites at the individual locations.

Deganwy Castle

It's thought that Robert of Rhuddlan built the first castle on the rocky peak overlooking the mouth of the River Conwy in the 1080s. That castle was destroyed to prevent King John getting his hands on it. Llywelyn ap Iorwerth rebuilt the castle in 1213, but his sons destroyed it in 1245 to stop it being captured by Henry III.

However, the castle did end up being rebuilt by Henry III, but Llywelyn the Last (Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's grandson) captured it and demolished it in 1263. If you visit the site now, you can still see some remains of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's castle, including the base of the round tower and a section of curtain-wall, as well as the ruins of walls and gateways from the later reconstructions.



The stone head found at Deganwy Castle may be the likeness of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. This object is part of the National Museum of Wales collection.



Criccieth Castle

This castle is in a stunning location overlooking Cardigan Bay. It was originally built by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. Later, Llywelyn the Last (Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's grandson) enlarged the castle and may have added the outer wall. After Edward I conquered Gwynedd, his army altered one of the towers to accommodate large catapults.

Castell y Bere

Castell y Bere was built by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth in 1221, after a family dispute. Llywelyn wasn't happy about the way his son Gruffudd was ruling Meirionnydd and Arudwy, so he took the lands off him. He put Gruffudd in prison and built Castell y Bere for himself. After the death of Llywelyn the Last (Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's grandson), it was one of the last defences used by Dafydd ap Gruffudd (Llywelyn the Last's brother) against the advance of Edward I, in 1282.

Church of St Mary and St Nicholas Beaumaris

In the porch of this beautiful 14th century church, you'll find an effigy that has long been thought to depict Siwan (Joan) – the wife of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and illegitimate daughter of King John of England.

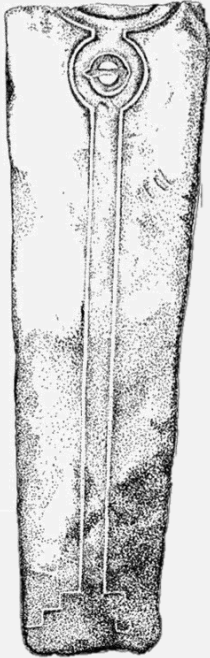


When Siwan died in 1237, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth founded a Franciscan friary at Llanfaes on Anglesey in her honour. It was there that she was buried. The friary disappeared, but it was thought that Siwan's coffin had survived and was moved to the church in Beaumaris.

Recent research has challenged this view, and the style of head-dress and decoration on the tomb suggests that it dates from the 1270s to 1280s. So who is it? The effigy may depict Eleanor de Montfort, wife of Llywelyn the Last; or perhaps Senana, wife of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's older son Gruffudd, and mother of Llywelyn the Last.

St Tudclud's Church

Penmachno



The original church on the site where St Tudclud's stands today, was reputedly the burial place of Iorwerth ab Owain Gwynedd (1145 – 1174), also known as Iorwerth Drwyndwn (broken nose, snubnose or flatnose). Iorwerth was the eldest legitimate son of Owain Gwynedd. It is said that he was overlooked as heir to the kingdom of Gwynedd because of his irregular facial features.

Iorwerth Drwyndwn was killed in battle at Pennant Melangell in Powys, during the wars deciding the succession following this death of his father. Iorwerth's son, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, would later go on to unite Wales and become one of the country's most successful leaders.

This medieval cross-marked gravestone stands inside the church as part of its magnificent collection of inscribed stones. It is said to be Iorwerth Drwyndwn's gravestone, however there is no evidence to support that claim.

Cymer Abbey



Cymer Abbey was founded in 1198 by Maredudd ap Cynan, cousin and ally of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. During Llywelyn's reign, the monks were expected to supply him with 'two colts of a superior breed' every year.

The dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII brought an end to this abbey, and a lot of the stone was used to build a house and farm on the land.

St Rhychwyn's Church *Llanrhychwyn, Llanrwst*

Nestling in the landscape, high on the hills above Gwydyr Forest, you'll find St Rhychwyn's Church – reportedly the oldest surviving church in Wales. It's thought that Rhychwyn, the brother of Celynin and son of wicked prince Helig, founded an original enclosure or church on this site in the 6th century.

The church is known locally as 'Llywelyn's Old Church', because people believe that Llywelyn ap Iorwerth worshipped here with his wife Siwan in the 12th century.



St Mary's Church *Trefriw*

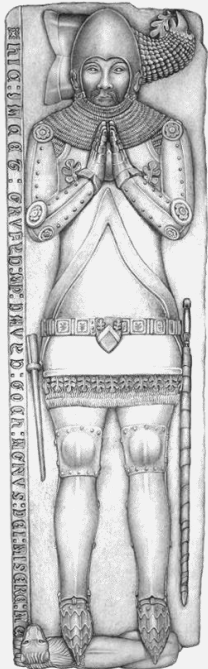
Legend has it that Llywelyn built the original church on the site of St Mary's for his wife Siwan, because she had grown tired of the long, uphill journey to worship in the church in Llanrhychwyn when they were staying at Llwelyn's hunting lodge in Trefriw.

The church you see today mainly dates from 1851. The 'Llywelyn window' was installed in 1920, commemorating the local legends that make the connection between the princes of Gwynedd and Trefriw.

Dolwyddelan Castle

It's thought that this 13th century castle was built by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. It would have been built to defend an important route into Snowdonia and to protect the livestock pastures that were a vital source of princely wealth.

Llywelyn the Last (Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's grandson) used Dolwyddelan as a fortress and made changes to the original fortifications. The castle was captured in 1283 by Edward I. Victorian restoration work added new floors and a roof to the tower. The west tower was probably added by Edward I, and it now lies in ruins.



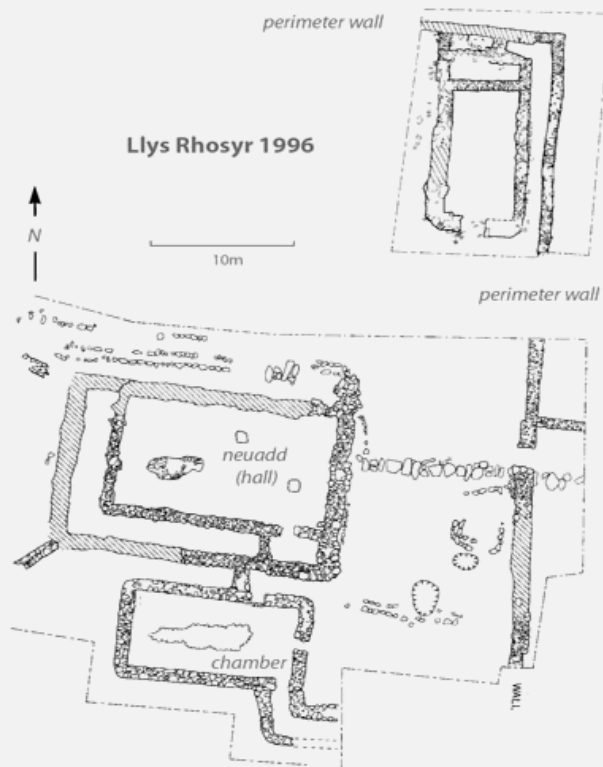
St Michael's Church *Betws-y-coed*

In the niche in this beautiful church, you'll find the effigy of Gruffudd ap Dafydd Goch. The effigy dates from around 1380. Gruffudd was possibly one of the most important people in the area in the 14th century. He was a landowner and together with his wife Margaret, he freely held half the township of Cwmlanerch. It's thought that Gruffudd fought for the English in the 100 Years War in France, under Edward the Black Prince.

Some early historians suggested that Gruffudd's father was the illegitimate son of Dafydd ap Gruffydd, grandson of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and younger brother of Llywelyn the Last. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support this. More recent genealogists suggest his father could have been Dafydd Goch of Penmachno.

Llys Rhosyr *Anglesey*

At Llys Rhosyr, near Newborough on Anglesey, there are the remains of a llys – one of the royal courts of the princes of Gwynedd. Excavations began at the Llys Rhosyr site in 1992, carried out by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. Gradually, the foundations of a series of halls enclosed by a wall, were uncovered.



“It was from halls of llysoedd such as Rhosyr that Gwynedd was governed. When the king was in attendance at the llys he might summon his councillors and other important men from the commote to meet him. Business would be done in the hall during the day. Llywelyn ap Iorwerth signed a charter at Rhosyr in 1237.

In the evening feasting and entertainment would take place around the great open hearth. Kilns, or ovens have been identified between the interior structures and the perimeter wall. If these are ovens then food for the great hall may have been cooked here. The preparation of the food, laid out on great platters in elaborate display, may have taken place in the room at the east end of the hall, provided with its own hearth.”

Gwynedd Archaeological Trust