

DENBIGHSHIRE

PEOPLE & PLACES

c.230,000 BC - AD 1700



INTRODUCTION

This publication traces the story of Denbighshire's past and present through its people. Its aim is to tempt the visitor to explore the region by highlighting its dramatic history as well as suggesting places to visit.

Although much of interest is included, this leaflet does not claim to cover all there is to see and do in the region. Local bookshops, libraries and Tourist Information Centres have more detailed information.

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1 THE FIRST DENBIGHSHIRE PEOPLE: ICE-AGE HUNTERS OF PONTNEWYDD C.230,000B.C.



Pontnewydd Cave, hominid tooth. By permission of the National Museum of Wales.

The first known inhabitants of Wales lived in Denbighshire. Their remains (much the oldest yet found in Wales and among the earliest in Britain) were excavated between 1978 and 1984 at Pontnewydd Cave, in the Elwy valley about 2 miles (3 km) north of Henllan. Dating from about 230,000B.C., they included teeth and bone fragments from at least three individuals - an adult and two children - along with many stone hand-axes, scrapers and spear-tips.

These earliest Denbighshire people belonged to a small band of hunters, wandering vast territories on the edge of the habitable world during an interval between Ice Ages: Pontnewydd is the north-westernmost site of its period, the early Palaeolithic or 'Old Stone Age'. Britain was then still joined to Europe in a single land mass, and the landscape round the cave was probably cold open tundra. From the cave-mouth (facing south-west, away from biting winds) the nomads could keep watch for the animals they hunted or hid from - bison, horses, rhinoceros, brown and cave bears and leopard-like cats.

Classified as 'early Neanderthals', the Pontnewydd people were much smaller and stockier than modern humans, with massive barrel-chests and powerful vice-like jaws, equipped with broad shovel-like teeth which they used as a second pair of hands. Their children developed more rapidly than ours (perhaps after year-long pregnancies), but they rarely lived to be much more than thirty. Evidence from the cave proves that they lit fires for warmth and protection, but we do not know whether they used spoken language: at any rate they had few neighbours, for there were probably never more than fifty people in all Wales at any one time.

An evolutionary dead-end, such transient Neanderthal visitors would be driven south by resurgent ice, and eventually superseded by the ancestors of modern humans - like those who two hundred thousand years later left traces in Ffynnon Beuno and Cae Gwyn caves near Tremeirchion. Not until after about 10,000B.C., when the glaciers finally retreated, did the continuous human habitation of Denbighshire really begin.



Pontnewydd Cave, hominid tooth. By permission of the National Museum of Wales.

2 TOMBS WITH A VIEW: THE BRONZE AGE PEOPLE OF BRENIG C.2,000-1,500B.C.



Boncyn Arian. © CPAT 86-c-65.

Throughout the Denbighshire uplands, prehistoric burial mounds and marker cairns crown summits and skyline ridges, carefully sited so as to be seen for miles around. The legacy of the Bronze Age people who raised them some four millennia ago, they form a complex network of sight-lines stretching over very long distances, visually linking scattered communities and (many archaeologists now believe) the 'sacred landscapes' they created.

At the head of Llyn Brenig, a 'drowned valley' reservoir amid the wild moorlands of Mynydd Hiraethog on Denbighshire's western fringe, one such sacred landscape has been dramatically recreated. A lonely and highly atmospheric (but well-signposted) Archaeological Trail links a series of Bronze Age ritual monuments, built between c.2,000B.C. and c.1,500B.C. by the people who lived in the now submerged valley below. Some five kilometres long, the trail includes not only large 'round barrow' burial mounds like Boncyn Arian ('the mound of silver'), but also two reconstructed circular 'temples', a large lakeside 'Ring Cairn', and an unusual and spectacular 'Platform Cairn', seemingly sited to give the widest possible views. The whole complex focuses on a prominent marker cairn, linking it in turn to a

chain of distant hilltop mounds stretching away to Snowdonia and the sea.

Archaeology has revealed many sober facts about this 'gallery of Bronze Age architecture'. Its centrepiece, the Ring Cairn with its circle of timber posts, was in use for more than five centuries; its burial mounds were raised over circles of stakes and hurdles; its builders used pottery from far away on the Shropshire borderlands. But the mysteries remain, and may never be solved. Why were only about twenty people - including babies as well as adults - buried here during five centuries? Who were these favoured few: the lineage of a chieftain, or the members of a cult? Why was charcoal carefully deposited within the Ring Cairn? Were a cremated baby's earbones deliberately buried separately beneath Boncyn Arian? Why, above all, did the Bronze Age people of Brenig devote so much labour to converting the head of their valley into a 'sacred landscape' for the dead?

PLACES TO VISIT

The Brenig Archaeological Trail also includes the earthworks of a medieval farmstead ('Hen Dinbych') and remains of later 'hafodau' (summer dwellings). From Denbigh, take the B4501 towards Cerrigydrudion, turning left after 7.2 miles (11.6 km) signposted 'Archaeological Trail Car Park'. A shorter walk including some of the monuments is also available: but the spectacular Platform Cairn is well worth extra effort. In any case walking boots are advisable.

The lakeside Visitor Centre and site museum (including models and reconstructions of the Bronze Age features) is about 3.5 miles (5.5 kms) further along the B4501: there are also signposted nature trails. Tel: 01490 420463.

3 WARRIORS AND FARMERS: IRON AGE PEOPLE OF THE CLWYDIAN HILLFORTS C. 1,000 B.C.-A.D. 43

The people of Iron Age Denbighshire lived in a far harsher world than their Bronze Age predecessors. A catastrophic deterioration in climate, by rendering much of the uplands unusable, had increased competition for the remaining farmland, and produced a divided, warlike society dominated by chieftains and warriors. Weapons - increasingly made of iron - and defence were now more important than 'sacred landscapes', and in place of burial mounds and ritual circles communities now built the fortified settlements called 'hillforts'.

Denbighshire, indeed, boasts some of the most spectacular hillforts in Wales: most notably the famous chain along the Clwydian Hills, watching over the fertile vale below. No less than six occur within 15 miles (22.5 km), from Moel Hiraddug near Dyserth in the north, via Moel y Gaer (Bodfari); the vast 52 acre (21 ha.) fort of Penycloddiau near Llangwyfan and Moel Arthur less than a mile away; to Moel y Gaer on the slopes of Moel Famau and powerful Foel Fenli above Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd.

Protected by their ditches and ramparts - originally reinforced by stone or timber walling - the people of these fortress villages lived in circular huts, whose outlines can still be traced after heather clearance. Excavations at nearby Moel y Gaer (Rhosemor) revealed that such huts might be up to 38 feet (11.5 metres) in diameter, with a ground area comparable to a modern bungalow.

Well planned and organized, these hillfort communities were doubtless controlled by tribal chieftains. Their people spoke a language recognizably akin to modern Welsh: they worshipped gods connected with water, sacrificing in bogs, pools and springs such prized possessions as the ornate iron firedog discovered at Capel Garmon (now in Conwy) or the splendid bronze shield mountings from Moel Hiraddug hillfort.

The warlike farmers of Iron Age Denbighshire clearly appreciated fine craftsmanship.

PLACES TO VISIT

Penycloddiau, Moel Arthur and Foel Fenli hillforts are all on Offa's Dyke Path. Moel Arthur is directly accessible from the car park immediately below. Turn right off the B5429 at the roundabout north of Llandyrnog; take the second minor road left, continuing to the top of the pass. From Moel Arthur it is a short (1.5 km) walk north to Penycloddiau. A much longer (6.5 km) walk south from the car park (beginning with a sharp climb) leads to the summit of Moel Famau and on to Foel Fenli.

Foel Fenli is also accessible from Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd: take the minor road off the main A494 Ruthin-Mold road just after the sharp hairpin bend in the village, park about a mile further on, and walk up Offa's Dyke path. Other hillforts worth visiting are Caer Drewyn, Corwen (enquire at local One-StopShop for route) and Moel y Gaer (Llangollen), accessible via a strenuous walk from the Horseshoe Pass.

For all these visits, walking boots, good weather and determination are required.



Moel Arthur. © Crown Copyright RCAHMW.

4 BATHERS AND BRONZE-SMITHS: ROMANS AND BRITONS AT PRESTATYN C.A.D. 120-160



Roman Baths, Prestatyn.

Denbighshire was the first part of Wales to experience the might of Rome, when in A.D.48 a Roman expeditionary force attacked the Deceangli - the British tribe of 'Tegeingl', the coastal lands between the Dee and the Clwyd rivers. Three decades later the invaders finally subdued the Ordovices - the fierce 'hammer-fighters' west of the Clwyd - and established a great legionary fortress at Chester. Modern travellers still follow the routes of Roman roads east and west of St. Asaph, and Roman forts may await discovery near Corwen, Ruthin and St. Asaph itself. But the most telling evidence of everyday life in Roman Denbighshire comes from the outskirts of Prestatyn, where a mixed community of Romans and Britons shared a little bath-house.

Begun in about A.D.120, the Prestatyn bathhouse was a miniature version of the 'saunas' found in every corner of the Roman Empire. Bathers started in the 'caldarium' ('hot room'), with underfloor heating supplied by a furnace: here they coated themselves with olive oil, then scraping it off (with the dirt) as they sweated in the steam. Next they relaxed in a 'tepid room', before moving on to the

'frigidarium' and plunging into a cold bath-pool.

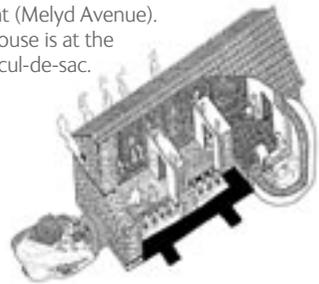
Tiles bearing the stamp of the 20th Legion, the garrison of Chester, show that the bath-house was built with military help: but few of its customers were soldiers. Among them must have been the British bronze-smiths from the workshops discovered nearby, along with a range of their products. These included many fine bronze brooches - some adorned with silver coating and multi-coloured enamels - as well as moulds for horse-harness ornaments. Perhaps travelling craftsmen, one of the smiths, had owned a large dog, found carefully buried beneath a workshop floor.

Other bathers doubtless came from the Roman lead-mines at nearby Meliden, or those further afield on Halkyn Mountain, near Flint. Others again may have been Roman or British sailors, for archaeologists believe that a Roman harbour once lay nearby, a convenient outlet not only for heavy lead ingots but also for the luxury goods ('A Present from Prestatyn?') made by local bronze-smiths.

PLACES TO VISIT

The foundations of the bath-house can be reached by taking the A547 out of Prestatyn towards Rhuddlan. Crossing the bridge just outside the town, take the second right (Melyd Avenue). The bath-house is at the end of the cul-de-sac.

Roman Baths,
Prestatyn.
© CPAT.



5 ROMAN EMPERORS TO WELSH PRINCES: KING ELISEG (C.750) AND HIS PILLAR AT VALLE CRUCIS



Eliseg's Pillar. © CADW.

During the four centuries which followed the collapse of Roman government after c.A.D.400, Wales emerged as a separate nation. But exactly how this happened is shrouded in an obscurity illuminated only by half-historical legends, or by scattered clues from archaeological finds and worn inscriptions. Near the road from Llangollen to the Horseshoe Pass, not far from the medieval abbey of Valle Crucis, stands one of the most precious of these clues - the Pillar of Eliseg.

Now a broken stump set on an ancient burial mound, the Pillar once stood some 20 feet (6.1 m) high, topped by the cross which gave its name - 'Valle Crucis', 'the vale of the cross' - to this beautiful valley. On its shaft is a Latin inscription, now scarcely traceable and already

fragmentary when it was copied down in 1696. It records that the Pillar was set up by Cyngen (d.854), the last independent King of Powys and southern Denbighshire, in memory of his great-grandfather King Eliseg. This Eliseg, the inscription declares, 'annexed the inheritance of Powys - laid waste for nine years - out of the hands of the English with fire and sword'. In other words, he drove out the Anglo-Saxon invaders who continually threatened the Welsh borderlands, probably in about A.D.750. His victories may have led indirectly to the construction of Offa's Dyke, the great border earthwork boundary a few miles to the east.

Still more vital to historians is the inscription's proclamation of Eliseg's ancestry, stretching back across the 'lost' centuries to the Emperor Magnus Maximus (d.A.D.388), one of the last Roman rulers of Britain, and to his son-in-law Vortigern, the Romano-British 'Great Lord' who allegedly first invited Hengist's Saxons into the land. The Pillar, however, records only that Vortigern was 'blessed by St. Germanus' (or Garmon), whose shrine stood a few miles to the north at Llanarmon-yn-Iâl, and who may have won a bloodless victory over the Saxons here in the Horseshoe Pass. Whether all this is actually true we may never know: what matters is that the Christian princes of early Wales believed themselves the true heirs of Rome.

PLACES TO VISIT

Eliseg's Pillar stands in a field to the right of the picturesque A542 road from Llangollen via the Horseshoe Pass to Ruthin. Valle Crucis Abbey (where parking is also available) is very well worth a visit, and the Pillar is only a short walk away.

6 'A RENOWNED BARON OF STRENGTH': ROBERT OF RHUDDLAN (C. 1040-1093), NORMAN ADVENTURER



Reconstruction of a motte and bailey at Twt Hill. © CADW.

Just upstream from the great stone castle of Rhuddlan stands an earlier fortress, the massive earthen mound called Twthill. Once topped by a timber keep-tower and protected by a stockaded enclosure, this was the stronghold of one of the most ruthless warriors ever to afflict North Wales – the Norman freebooter Robert of Rhuddlan.

Born of an aristocratic Norman family, Robert de Tilleul was nevertheless trained at the English court of King Edward the Confessor. After the Battle of Hastings, he took service with his equally ambitious cousin Hugh 'the Fat' (or 'Hugh the Wolf'), Norman Earl of Chester. Hugh gave him the dangerous task of defending and expanding the borders of his territory, operating from a new outpost fortress raised at Rhuddlan on the Clwyd crossing, that ancient flashpoint of Anglo-Welsh wars.

There, bemoaned a Welsh chronicler, 'he stationed horsemen and archers on foot, and they did so much damage as had never been seen since the world's beginning'. Norman castles and Norman knights were new and devastating weapons in Wales: Robert used them to shattering effect, sometimes in shifting alliances with discontented Welsh rulers. Gruffudd ap Cynan, the famous 'Welsh Viking', sought Robert's help

to gain the throne of Gwynedd, but then immediately turned to assail him at Rhuddlan, where Twthill's keep only just held out. A few years later, guided by Welsh allies through the Snowdonian passes, Robert retaliated by devastating the Llŷn Peninsula.

In a determined attempt to make himself independent ruler of North Wales, Robert steadily extended his territory from Rhuddlan westwards to Deganwy on the Conwy, where he raised a new fortress-base for further conquests. But there he met an adventurer's death. Disturbed from an afternoon nap by news of a Welsh seaborne attack, he charged unarmoured and with only one companion at the raiders. Within minutes he was 'stuck full of arrow like a hedgehog', and his severed head was impaled as a trophy atop a Welsh ship's mast. Thus passed an ambitious, proud and greedy swashbuckler, yet a warrior hailed even by his Welsh enemies as 'a renowned, valiant, baron of strength'.

PLACES TO VISIT

Robert's fortress of Twthill can be reached by a waymarked footpath from Rhuddlan Castle (well worth a visit in itself). The summit of Twthill provides good views of the river, the earthworks of a Norman settlement, and back towards the later castle and town.



The construction of the Motte at Hastings (1066) as seen in the Bayeux Tapestry. Robert of Rhuddlan's father was in charge of building work here. © CADW.

7 A TURBULENT PRINCE: DAFYDD AP GRUFFUDD, LAST WELSH LORD OF DENBIGH (C.1236-1283)



Denbigh Castle.

At dead of night on Palm Sunday eve 1282, Dafydd ap Gruffudd stormed into Hawarden Castle near Chester, snatching its English lord from his bed. Dafydd had been expected at Hawarden, but as a peaceful Easter guest: he had even sent a gift of salmon in advance. Until the moment of attack, moreover, he was a trusted ally of the English, who had made him Lord of Denbigh, Ruthin and Hope as a reward for his support against his own elder brother, Llywelyn (the Last) Prince of Wales. Nor, until that moment, did Llywelyn himself apparently know that Dafydd had - yet again - changed sides.

Dafydd's turbulent career, in fact, could scarcely be matched by the most imaginative fiction. As a child hostage in the Tower of London, he had probably seen his father plunge to his death while attempting to escape. Thereafter he had three times betrayed his brother Llywelyn, been restored to favour, and betrayed him again. Only after his attack on Hawarden sparked off King Edward I's decisive campaign to conquer Wales did Dafydd at last remain true to Llywelyn and the cause of Welsh independence.

When Llywelyn fell in battle in December 1282, Dafydd himself took the title of Prince of Wales: but within months he was a hunted fugitive. In June 1283 he was betrayed, wounded and captured 'by men of his own tongue' - perhaps his own followers - and sent in chains to Shrewsbury. There, in October, he was convicted by an English Parliament on four charges of treason, homicide, sacrilege (because of his Eastertide assault on Hawarden) and plotting King Edward's downfall. Accordingly he suffered fourfold execution, being dragged to the scaffold, half-hanged, disembowelled alive and then cut into quarters.

'A restless, discontented, shifty schemer'; 'true neither to the Welsh nor the English'; 'the ablest but most treacherous of Llywelyn's brothers': the verdicts of Welsh historians on Dafydd ap Gruffudd are equally harsh. Only the Dictionary of Welsh Biography has a good word to say for this last Welsh Lord of Denbigh, 'a man of exceptional courage and personal attractiveness'.

PLACES TO VISIT

Little survives to commemorate Prince Dafydd within modern Denbighshire: his castles at Denbigh and Ruthin were both spectacularly rebuilt by the English. Denbigh Castle open March to September, Monday to Friday 10am-5.30pm, Saturday and Sunday 9.30am-5.30pm. Daylight opening in the Winter months. Outside the district, however, there are considerable remains of the castle he constructed at Caergwrlle (or Hope Castle), the last purely Welsh castle ever built: freely accessible via a footpath from Caergwrlle village, some 5 miles north-west of Wrexham via the A541 to Mold. The remains of Hawarden Castle can also be seen in the grounds of the later house, Gladstone's home (open Summer Sundays only).

8 THE BARD OF LLECHRYD: IOLO GOCH (C. 1325- C. 1398)



St Asaph Cathedral.

I must avoid shepherds,
and order those ... on the road to keep
out of my way,
warn them fro afar, not to say 'boo' ...
I must avoid the mill
of Henllan, weak-roofed wizened hag
and its clap like a floppy sow ...
and its millrace, on a winter night,
and its stony road, and its ditch;
I must watch out for the trap-filled ford
of Glyn Meirchion and the hollow Coedfron;
I must beware of the deep narrow hollow road
with its rocky slope above the church,
an awful road to Denbigh Fair ...'

Translation by D Johnston, Gomer Press, 1993.

So mused the bard Iolo Goch in about 1380,
nervously contemplating a journey on a new
and untried horse from his home at Llechryd
near Henllan to Denbigh.

This graphic snapshot of medieval Denbighshire
life is one of many in the poems of Iolo Goch
(‘Red Iolo’), the premier Welsh poet of his time.
Probably born at Llechryd, where he spent most
of his life, he was educated as a chorister at St.
Asaph Cathedral, and always maintained close
links with its bishops and clerics - like Archdeacon
Ithel ap Robert, who gave him the new horse.

Some forty of his poems survive, many richly
tinged with humour and self-mockery: he often
calls himself ‘an old cripple’ (Welsh: cleiriach),
whose stubby beard repelled the girls. But he was
capable of scurrilous satires against the Chester
friar who dared to condemn priests’ girlfriends:

‘great ugly bald-scabby burdock
stiff-trousered seal full of cabbage’

and of a touching ode to a patient ploughman:

‘there would be no life, no world
without him’.

Yet above all Iolo was a ‘praise poet’, proclaiming
the nobility and generosity of his many rich
patrons. During his long life he journeyed
throughout Wales, receiving hospitality and
gifts in mansions and castles from Penmynydd
in Anglesey to Criccieth, Carmarthen and St.
David’s. The land he travelled was a peaceful one,
where Welsh and English lived harmoniously
together. Two of his poems, indeed, are addressed
to King Edward III and Roger Mortimer, Earl of
March and Denbigh: but most honour Welsh
clerics and aristocrats (Welsh: uchelwyr), foremost
among them Owain Glyndŵr (Ch.9), then living
in peaceful luxury at his ‘fair court’ of Sycharth
near Llansilin. Within a few years of Iolo’s death,
however, Sycharth was a plundered ruin, and the
pleasant Wales he described was a land at war.

PLACES TO VISIT

Henllan is a pleasant village with a medieval
church remodelled in Georgian and Victorian
times, as well as the late medieval, thatched
Llindir Inn reputed to be haunted. Enjoy
Medieval Denbighshire, a publication detailing
Denbighshire’s legacy of medieval remains is
available from libraries and Tourist Information
Centres locally.

9 'SOLE CHIEF OF WALES': OWAIN GLYNDŴR (C. 1359- C. 1417)

Owain Glyndŵr is without rival the most famous of Denbighshire's medieval people, and the story of his struggle for Welsh independence (1400-c.1415) has often been told. Yet details of Glyndŵr's personal life are harder to find, and even his birth-date is uncertain. 1349, 1354 and 1359 have all been argued, but undoubtedly he was (by medieval standards) well into middle age when he declared himself Prince of Wales in 1400, traditionally on Owain Glyndŵr's Mount (and the site of his home at Glyndyfrdwy) about 3 miles east of Corwen. This was probably also his birthplace, providing his familiar name of 'Owain Glyndyfrdwy' - Anglicised as 'Glendourdy', or just 'Glendower'.

But Owain ap Gruffudd - as contemporary Welshmen often called him - also had another home, in his rich family lands around Sycharth near Llansilin, scarcely a mile from the old Denbighshire border with Shropshire. Here the bard Iolo Goch (Ch.8) vividly portrayed him living before his revolt, in what - even allowing for poetic license - must have been a splendid mansion. 'Fair timber buildings on a green hill', including a glass-windowed chapel, were surrounded by orchards, a vineyard, mill, dovecote and fishponds, with peacocks in the gardens and deer in the park. Here (remarked an appreciative Iolo) unlimited wine, mead, and the best Shrewsbury ale were served: 'there will be no want, nor lack, nor hunger, nor ever thirst in Sycharth'. Owain's wife Margaret, 'the best woman of all women', presided over the hospitality, with her 'fine nestful of chieftains' - six sons and at least five daughters.

Iolo also recalled Owain's military exploits: how he charged into battle against the Scots with 'the red wing of the bird of Egypt' - probably a flamingo - as his helmet crest, shattering his lance and using its butt as a club. What interested the bard even more, however, was Glyndŵr's descent not only from the ancient princes of Powys, but

also the rulers of Deheubarth (south-west Wales) and the royal house of Gwynedd. Thus he was by right 'the sole chief of Wales' ('Un pen ar Gymru'), ideally qualified to lead the struggle for independence which ended with his mysterious disappearance in 1415. Thereafter, declared a Welsh chronicler darkly, 'very many say that he died; but the seers maintain he did not'.

PLACES TO VISIT

Owain Glyndŵr is well remembered in Corwen, which has a modern statue of him: above the north ('back') door of the parish church is a stone carved with a dagger-like cross, known as 'Glyndŵr's Dagger' and supposedly cut when the hero hurled his weapon from Pen-y-Pigyn hill behind the church.

Owain Glyndŵr's Mount (and the site of his home at Glyndyfrdwy) stands about 3 miles east of Corwen, by the main A5 to Llangollen, 4 mile east of Lliidiart-y-Parc. On private land, it can be viewed only from the road. The earthworks of Sycharth (also on private land) can be seen from a minor road which turns east off the road from Llansilin to Llangedwyn: the turning to this road is about 2 miles south of Llansilin. [Map ref. for Sycharth OS125 SJ132107]



Owain Glyndŵr's Mound, near Corwen.

10 RESCUER OF THE RED DRAGON: RHYS FAWR AP MAREDUDD (C. 1460-C. 1520)



The Arms of Rhys ap Maredudd.

At the crisis of the battle of Bosworth (1485), King Richard III and his household knights charged full-tilt into the little band of men around Henry Tudor, his rival for the throne. Richard himself bowled over Sir William Brandon, Henry's standard-bearer, and the green and white Tudor standard with the red Welsh dragon was toppling to the ground when it was seized by a Welshman of Henry's bodyguard - Rhys ap Maredudd of Denbighshire, known as Rhys Fawr ('Big Rhys'). Rhys stoutly defended the dragon banner, rallying Tudor's men until Sir William Stanley's force rode to their rescue. Then, as Richard's men fell or fled and the monarch's horse foundered in a bog, Rhys Fawr killed King Richard III with his halberd.

So ran the family tradition later set down by the Denbighshire bard Tudur Aled, though there is little documentary evidence to corroborate its details. A contemporary chronicler, however,

did record that Richard was slain by a Welshman's halberd: and Rhys's family certainly displayed an uprooted white rose with royal purple leaves - perhaps symbolising the death of the last Yorkist king - between the claws of the rampant lion in their heraldic arms.

The descendant of an ancient Welsh family, Rhys ap Maredudd came from Pentrefoelas in Mynydd Hiraethog, on the wild western boundary of Denbighshire. He certainly led a band of retainers to join Henry Tudor's march through Wales to Bosworth Field, but if the story of his exploits there is entirely true, it seems surprising that he received few direct rewards when Tudor became King Henry VII.

As the founder of a dynasty, however, Rhys was an undoubted success: for among his many descendants were the renowned Denbighshire gentry families of Prys, Wynn, Gethin and Vaughan, as well as many notable - if not always praiseworthy - Denbighshire characters. His son Robert - one of eleven children - became Cardinal Wolsey's personal chaplain; while among Robert's sixteen offspring was Elys Prys, the notorious 'Doctor Coch' ('Red Doctor'), who gained both wealth and hatred as a 'dissolver' of monasteries and the tyrannical agent of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. And Rhys's great-grandson Captain Thomas Prys - Elizabethan bard, pirate, soldier and wastrel - claimed to be the first man ever to smoke the new 'tobacco weed' in the streets of London.

PLACES TO VISIT

The remains of Rhys Fawr's monument can be seen in Ysbyty Ifan church, on the B4407 south of Pentrefoelas - the site of his now vanished home.

11 'THE MOST COMPLETE MAN': 'SIR' RICHARD CLOUGH OF DENBIGH, ANTWERP & BACHEGRAIG (C.1530-1570)



Portrait of Sir Richard Clough.

Among the many outstanding personalities produced by Tudor and Stuart Denbighshire - 'the Power House of Renaissance Wales' - few were more remarkable than Richard Clough. The fifth son of a Denbigh glover, he was educated as a chorister at Chester Cathedral (where his fine voice and quick intelligence soon attracted influential patrons), moved on to London, and made a youthful pilgrimage to Jerusalem - where he became an honorary 'Knight of the Holy Sepulchre', whence the 'Sir' sometimes attached to his name.

In his early twenties, Clough moved to Antwerp - the commercial capital of northern Europe - as 'factor' (or manager) for Sir Thomas Gresham, 'the Queen's Merchant Royal' and originator of the adage that 'Bad Money Drives Out Good'. Thus he became the leading loan-negotiator, supplier of European goods (including smuggled armaments), and gatherer of political intelligence for Queen Elizabeth's government. Though he had a passion for detailed reports ('he is very long and tedious in his writing', sighed Gresham) Clough was also a man of wide-ranging ideas: he was instrumental in founding the London Royal Exchange (ancestor of the Stock Exchange), and enthusiastically aided the Denbigh geographer Humphrey Llwyd (Ch.13) who called him 'the most complete man'.

Having grown (in the words of a later Denbigh saying) 'as rich as a Clough', Richard briefly returned home in 1566-7, to marry the equally remarkable Katheryn of Berain (Ch.12) and begin his 'prodigy' mansions of Bachegraig near Tremeirchion and Plas Clough near Denbigh: built in Antwerp style by Flemish craftsmen, these were the first brick houses in Wales. Then he returned to an increasingly war-torn Europe for further adventures - including arrest as a spy - only to die at Hamburg in 1570, aged scarcely forty. Clough's scheme for making the river Clwyd navigable thus remained unrealised, but he clearly never forgot his origins. His heart (and some say his right hand) were sent home in a silver casket, to be buried at a now unmarked spot within St. Marcella's parish church near Denbigh.

PLACES TO VISIT

Bachegraig (Bach-y-Graig). Though the main block of Clough's mansion has gone, substantial parts of it remain in use as a working farm: visitors can also walk a fascinating woodland nature trail in the grounds (small charge, apply at farmhouse). Bachegraig stands about 12 miles south-west of Tremeirchion, via a minor road (signposted Denbigh and Trefnant) turning west (right) off the B5429 Tremeirchion-Bodfari road. Park by the bridge over the river Clwyd: from there the house can be seen across the fields to the left, or reached by a marked track.

Plas Clough (private residence) with its Flemish stepped gables bearing the initials 'R.C.' (Richard Clough), can be glimpsed to the west (left) of the A525 Denbigh-St. Asaph road, about a mile north of Denbigh.

St. Marcella's (Whitchurch or Eglwys Wen) parish church, well worth a visit, is about a mile east of Denbigh town centre, via the A525 towards Ruthin and a minor road. Open first Saturday of each month 10am-noon, April-October, or by prior arrangement. Telephone 01745 812284 to arrange alternative opening times Rev. J. Smith.

12 'MAM CYMRU' - 'MOTHER OF WALES': KATHERYN OF BERAIN (1535-1591)



Katheryn of Berain by Adriaen Van Cronenburg. By kind permission of the National Museum of Wales.

Katheryn of Berain is said to have been the illegitimate great-granddaughter of King Henry VII, and thus the cousin of Queen Elizabeth - who gave her a corset and a pair of slippers. She is also said to have disposed of an unwanted lover by pouring molten lead into his ear, and then burying him in her orchard. These particular tales are almost certainly mythical: but the real-life career of this extraordinary Denbighshire lady was scarcely less remarkable.

The daughter of Tudur ap Robert Vychan of Berain near Henllan, and grand-daughter of the Breton Sir Roland Veleville - allegedly but not actually Henry VII's 'natural' son - Katheryn was a considerable heiress. She was also a famous beauty, though the somewhat calculating look of her portrait is borne out by her matrimonial manoeuvrings. Her first marriage (in 1557) was to John Salusbury, heir of the most powerful

contemporary Denbighshire family. When he died nine years later, she married the fabulously wealthy 'Sir' Richard Clough (Ch.11), who allegedly proposed on the way to John's funeral, thus narrowly beating Maurice Wynn of Gwydir, who had politely waited until after the ceremony. Wynn in fact became her third husband in 1573, when he himself already had fifteen children by two previous wives. Katheryn then arranged for one of her Wynn step-daughters (aged nine) to marry her eldest son (aged ten) by her first marriage. And ten years later, after Wynn's death, she betrothed her own infant daughter by him to young Simon Thelwall, whose father Edward Thelwall at the same time became Katheryn's own fourth and final husband.

With her six children (two by each of her first three husbands), at least sixteen step-children, thirty-two surviving blood grandchildren, and almost innumerable descendants, Katheryn well deserved her title of 'Mam Cymru' - the Mother of Wales. Though some (including her stepson Sir John Wynn) called her 'a Siren and a base Enchantress', many poorer folk praised her kindness and charity. 'Never was there a hungry man at her door', mourned the bard Rhisiart Phylip after her death, 'who did not receive a dinner sufficient for nine: it is right that she should be remembered'.

PLACES TO VISIT

Surprisingly, there is little to directly commemorate Katheryn of Berain: her grave at Llanefydd church (2.5 miles north-west of Henllan) is unmarked. Berain itself, between Henllan and Llanefydd, is a private house. An effigy of her first husband, John Salusbury, appears among the 'mourners' on his parents' fine tomb at St. Marcella's, Denbigh. For Bach-y-Graig (which Katheryn helped her second husband to build) see Ch.11.

13 'MOST UNIVERSALLY LEARNED': HUMPHREY LLWYD OF DENBIGH (1527-1568)



Monument for Humphrey Llwyd at St. Marcella's Church, Denbigh.

In St. Marcella's church near Denbigh - virtually the Westminster Abbey of Tudor Denbighshire - stands the fine Renaissance-Classical monument of Humphrey Llwyd: a man described by the Bible translator William Salesbury (see Ch.14) as 'the Welshman most universally learned in history, and most singularly skilled in rare subtleties'. Llwyd's contemporaries, indeed, could scarcely praise him enough as 'a noble learned man', 'a person of great eloquence', 'a sound philosopher and most noted antiquary'.

Physician, historian and pioneer geographer, musician and Member of Parliament - in fact the ideal Renaissance 'all-rounder' - Humphrey Llwyd (or Lhuyd) was born in 1527 at Old Foxhall, between Denbigh and Henllan. After studying medicine at Oxford, he became for fifteen years household physician to the Earl of Arundel, marrying the sister of Arundel's son-in-law, Lord Lumley - for whom he bought the books which later formed the basis of the British Museum Library. While living in the cultured Arundel-Lumley household, Llwyd himself also wrote voluminously, pouring out volumes on Welsh history and geography, translations of Welsh chronicles, and treatises on health and medical diagnosis - including a 'Judgement of Urines'.

In 1563 Humphrey returned to live at Denbigh Castle, becoming an alderman of the town and

also its Member of Parliament. As such he performed one of his greatest services to Wales, by steering through the Commons the act authorising the translation of the Bible and Book of Common Prayer into Welsh. But Llwyd's chief claim to the fame which (according to his personal motto) 'is more lasting than wealth', is his pioneering map of Wales. This was sent from Denbigh - where Llwyd lay dying, aged forty-one, of a fever caught in London - to the Antwerp publisher Ortelius, a contact made via Richard Clough (Ch.11). It appeared in 1573 in Ortelius' famous world atlas - *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* - the first map of Wales ever published.

PLACES TO VISIT

Llwyd's monument can be seen at St. Marcella's, Whitchurch, near Denbigh: for details of opening see Ch.11. Llwyd's family home at Old Foxhall (a private working farm) stands about a mile NW of Denbigh, off the B5382 Denbigh-Henllan road. Nearby are the spectacular ruins of Foxhall Newydd, a great Jacobean mansion which was never completed. Denbigh itself will repay a visit. The leaflet *Exploring Denbigh* describes the main features of interest and is available from the Library, Museum and Art Gallery in the town centre.



Llwyd's Map of Wales, 1573. This was the first map of Wales ever published. By kind permission of the National Library of Wales.

14 'THE GOSPEL IN OUR NATIVE TONGUE': THE ELIZABETHAN BIBLE TRANSLATORS



1588 Bible.

If the Bible had not been translated [into Welsh], the language would undoubtedly have been gravely weakened, might possibly have become extinct'. So writes Professor Glanmor Williams, historian of the Welsh Reformation, and few now doubt that the Elizabethan translations of the Bible and Prayer Book were crucial to the survival of the Welsh language. Denbighshire - and particularly the 'St. Asaph group' of scholars - played the leading role in this work.

During the Middle Ages, Latin had been the language of 'official' religion throughout Britain. And though the Tudor Protestant Reformation soon liberated Englishmen to worship and read the Bible in their own language, for most Welshmen the English words of the new translations were as opaque as the old Latin: for Welsh-speakers 'the Word of God' remained 'shackled in fetters'.

Thus declared William Salesbury of Llansannan (c.1520-c.1584), a pioneering and relentless agitator for Welsh translation and hence 'one of the greatest sons of Denbighshire'. The author (among many other works) of the first Welsh-English dictionary, Salesbury joined with Bishop Richard Davies (1501-81) of St. Asaph and Humphrey Llwyd (Ch.13) in successfully promoting the Act of Parliament which authorized translation in

1563. Four years later, in 1567, Salesbury and Davies published the first Welsh translation of the New Testament and Book of Common Prayer.

The translation of the Old Testament fell however to Dr William Morgan (1545-1604), later in turn Bishop of St. Asaph: he also revised the earlier New Testament, substituting everyday Welsh words for the scholarly language favoured by Salesbury. Morgan's prodigious labours were mainly carried out in 1578-87, while he was vicar of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, near Denbighshire's southern boundary. Among his helpers was Gabriel Goodman (1528-1601), the Ruthin-born Dean of Westminster, who lent him books and provided hospitality when he went to London to see his manuscript through the press. William Morgan's first Welsh translation of the complete Bible was published in the 'Armada Year' of 1588, to unbounded enthusiasm throughout Wales. 'That which was dark for us, you have filled with light', rejoiced the bard Owain Gwynedd, while an ecstatic Monmouthshire parson urged: 'To buy this - and be free from oppression - go sell your shirt, you Welshman'.

PLACES TO VISIT

The Victorian memorial to the Bible Translators stands outside St. Asaph Cathedral, which is well worth visiting in its own right. Open most days, daylight hours.

Gabriel Goodman is twice commemorated in St. Peter's Church, Ruthin - on the brass of his parents and by a strikingly coloured bust. Goodman's hospital, almshouses and old Grammar School form a pretty 'close' behind the church. (Church open April-September 9am-5pm) The leaflet Exploring Ruthin available from Tourist Information Centres gives further details of things to do and see in this picturesque medieval town.

15 THE ENTREPRENEURS: THE MYDDELTON FAMILY OF DENBIGH AND CHIRK



Sir Thomas Myddelton, 1586 - 1666, The National Trust, Chirk Castle.

Richard Clough (Ch.11), Humphrey Llwyd (Ch.13) and William Salesbury the Bible Translator (Ch.14) were all influential far beyond the boundaries of their native Denbighshire. But for solid commercial success and wide-ranging entrepreneurial enterprise, it would be hard to match the Myddelton family of Galch Hill and Gwaenyng near Denbigh.

Despite their adopted English surname, the Myddeltons claimed descent from the medieval Welsh nobleman Rhirid Flaidd ('Rhirid the Wolf'), whose wolf's head device they displayed on their family arms. These appear on a brass in St. Marcella's church, depicting Richard Myddelton (d.1575), Governor of Denbigh Castle, surrounded by serried ranks of seven daughters and nine sons. Of this talented brood, the most enterprising was Sir Hugh Myddelton (1560-1631). After apprenticeship to a London merchant, he became the friend and businesspartner of Sir Walter Raleigh, a Merchant Adventurer, and above all the promoter-engineer of the 'New River', a forty-mile long channel which brought fresh drinking water from Hertfordshire to the

rapidly-expanding city of London. Six times M.P. for Denbigh, Sir Hugh also helped to obtain the town's Elizabethan charter, and presented cups of silver from his Welsh 'Mines Royal' to both Denbigh and Ruthin.

Hugh's elder brother Sir Thomas Myddelton (1550-1631) was even more spectacularly successful as a London business-man: unlike Hugh's imaginative but not always lucrative projects, Thomas's ventures always made money. Banker, financier, and pioneer investor in the East India and Virginia Companies, Thomas was also a close associate of Queen Elizabeth's master-spy Sir Francis Walsingham, and a trusted government adviser. Though elected Lord Mayor of London in 1613, he maintained links with Denbighshire, purchasing Chirk Castle (still owned by his descendants) and financing Welsh religious literature, notably the first easily affordable Welsh Bible, 'Y Beibl Bach' ('Little Bible') of 1630.

Apart from the 'black sheep' brother William - a Roman Catholic convert and exiled conspirator against Queen Elizabeth - the Myddeltons leaned towards Puritanism. Together with their growing local influence, this exacerbated their long and sometime bloody feud with their Denbighshire rivals, the 'High Church' Salusburies of Llewenni and Salesburys of Rug. When Civil War between King and Parliament broke out, the rivals inevitably took opposite sides, bringing the Parliamentarian General Sir Thomas Myddelton II (the Lord Mayor's son) into direct conflict with the Royalist Colonel William Salesbury, 'Old Blue Stockings' Ch.16.

PLACES TO VISIT

For Denbigh, see Ch.13.
St. Marcella's Church, see Ch.11.
Chirk Castle open March-October 12 noon-5pm
Wednesday-Sunday, Garden open March-
October Wednesday-Sunday 10am-5pm.

16 'OLD BLUE STOCKINGS': COLONEL WILLIAM SALESBURY (1580-1660)



'Old Blue Stockings'. By kind permission of Nancy, Lady Bagot.

The face which stares squarely from William Salesbury's portrait leaves no doubt that he was, as an opponent complained, 'A very wilfull man'. When it was painted in 1632, he had already led a full and active life, serving during his twenties as a privateer in the West Indies aboard the 'Barque Wyloby' - seen in the top right hand roundel. He returned to unexpectedly inherit his family estates around Bachymbyd (between Ruthin and Llanrhaeadr) and Rug, near Corwen. He found them run down and in debt - even the mansions were mortgaged - and it took him thirty years of hard graft and frugal living to recover them.

A plain man, as his countrified clothes and his nickname 'Old Blue Stockings' declared, he was sustained by the devout piety proclaimed in the portrait's Welsh motto; 'A vynno dew dervid' - 'What God wills shall come to pass'. His few leisure hours were spent in writing religious verse, and among his first actions after recovering Rug was to build the lovely and virtually

unaltered chapel still to be seen there.

But the greatest test of Salesbury's 'wilfulness' was still to come when the portrait was painted. At the beginning of the Civil War in 1642, although by then into his sixties, he took command of Denbigh Castle - which he had repaired at his own expense - for King Charles I. There he received the King in 1645, treating him to two hours of 'plain speaking' which made Charles ruefully remark, 'Never did a prince hear so much truth at once'. And there, between April and September 1646, he held off a much superior force of Parliamentary attackers in an epic six-month siege.

With 'hearts as hard as the very foundations of the castle, being an unpierceable rock', Salesbury and his garrison defied cannon bombardments, attempts to cut off their water supply, and polite but increasingly exasperated demands for surrender. Only when he received a direct royal command did 'Old Blue Stockings' at last march out with the honours of war, from one of the very last fortresses in Britain to hold out for the King.

PLACES TO VISIT

Rug Chapel commissioned by 'Old Blue Stockings' in 1637. Rug opening times: April-September 10am-5pm Wednesday-Sunday. Last entry 4.30pm. Contact: 01490 412025. Denbigh, see Ch.13.



Rug Chapel. Photo: CADW.

17 ‘GRANDMOTHER SALESBURY’: A STUART FAMILY SAGA



Elizabeth (née Thelwall) wife of Charles Salesbury. By kind permission of Nancy, Lady Bagot.

If William Salesbury's portrait proclaims his 'wilfulness', the family group here surely conveys domestic contentment. Looking in her tall 'Welsh' hat and ermine cape rather like the classic 'Fairy Godmother', the old lady is Mrs. Elizabeth Salesbury, widow of Charles Salesbury of Bachymbyd, Colonel William's younger son. With her are her grandchildren, offspring of her daughter Jane and Sir Walter Bagot, third baronet of Blithfield in Staffordshire. The story behind this charming scene, however, might have inspired a Jane Austen novel, or even a modern 'soap'.

Its beginnings stemmed from the 'wilfulness' of Old Blue Stockings himself. Infuriated by his eldest son Owen - who had not only fought on the 'wrong' side in the Civil War but secretly married without his consent - the Colonel partially disinherited him, bequeathing Bachymbyd and the majority of his estates instead to his younger, Royalist, and more obedient son Charles. Jane, only surviving child of Charles and 'the old lady', was thus a considerable and much-pursued heiress. According to family tradition, young Walter Bagot met Jane - and loved her at first sight - when his spaniel strayed onto her land. But Stuart

heiresses could not marry merely for love, and nearly a year of hard business negotiations about a marriage settlement followed, between Walter's father Sir Edward and Jane's uncle, the 'old lady's' brother Eubule Thelwall. Rival suitors - including a widower Earl and 'Mr. Lewis of Glamorgan, with a great estate' - clouded the issue, and the 'old lady' remained suspicious not only of Bagot but also of her own brother Eubule, 'and perhaps of every man'. Then Jane's cousin William - son of the disinherited Owen - dropped a bombshell: Jane, he declared, was not an heiress at all. Her estates were rightfully his.

The couple were nevertheless married in July 1670 - in great secrecy, since William's 'loose relations, in their cups', were threatening to kidnap the bridegroom on his way to the ceremony. Then William, increasingly desperate, 'discovered' a deed 'proving' his rights - which turned out to be a forgery produced by a gang of London highwaymen. Only with William's death in 1677 was the matter settled, and 'old Mrs. Salesbury' - long reconciled to the marriage - came to stay with the couple. Perhaps the family group celebrates this happy ending. Certainly 'Grandmother Salesbury' is still remembered affectionately in the Bagot family for her Denbighshire hospitality.

**'Grandmother Salesbury
Lived at Bachymbyd
Kept a good table
Better than some did'.**

PLACES TO VISIT

Bachymbyd, rebuilt in 1666, is a private residence. But charmingly carved Elizabethan panels from Old Bachymbyd - Colonel Salesbury's house - can be seen around the altar of nearby Llanynys church, which is also well worth a visit for its striking medieval wall painting, monuments, and other notable features. Llanynys Church open most days, daylight hours. More details of Llanynys and other medieval remains can be found in the brochure *Enjoy Medieval Denbighshire* available locally.