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'On the placement of Edward I's Castles in North Wales: A reconsideration of the evidence for prior foundations on the sites of Flint, Rhuddlan, Conwy, Caernarfon and Harlech'

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2021

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When war broke out between Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, the prince of Wales and King Edward I of England in 1276, it led in 1277 to Edward dispatching three armies. One would leave from Montgomery, and another from Carmarthen, Edward led the third and largest from Chester allied with Llywelyn's dubious brother Dafydd.¹ Edward had his first line made up of woodcutters, who hewed a wide path through dense forest to allow Edward's 15,000 men to advance along the North Wales coast towards Llewelyn's natural fortress of Snowdonia. As they advanced, they set-up bases at Flint and Rhuddlan to guard their rear.² It is in these areas, where Edward built his first two castles in North Wales, that the first part (Chapter 2) of this study will concentrate. In the second campaign of 1282 Edward used the same tactics as the first war although on a larger scale, to subdue Gwynedd, which became the final part of conquering all of Wales. After which Edward built his most audacious buildings of his reign at Conwy and Caernarfon; both castles were started in 1283 along with Harlech further south.³ These three castles will make up the second part (Chapter 3) of this study. In these two sections the main research will centre around these five castles in North Wales and will critically examine the evidence of each site using the work from historians of the 17th century to the 21st century. It will also employ a number of primary sources in the pursuit of clarifying some of the theories put forward by some of these historians. The final

¹ J. Davies, N. Jenkins, M. Baines, & et. al, *The Edwardian Conquest, The Welsh academy encyclopedia of wales* (Cardiff, 2008).

² Peter Humphries, *Castles of Edward the First in Wales* (London, 1983), p.5.

³ Marc Morris, *Castle* (London, 2003), p.110.

part (Chapter 4) will bring all the evidence, put forward from the chosen historians, into a conclusion of the inconsistencies within the research for each of these sites.

Although the essay is focused on the castles at Flint, Rhuddlan, Conwy, Caernarfon, and Harlech it will not be an exercise in castle building. Nevertheless, these sites provide the foundations for the main body of this study. It will introduce historians from the past such as the 17th century antiquary William Camden who maintained in his book *Britannia. Abridgements*, that Flint castle was founded by Henry II.⁴ This theory was backed up by John Ogilby a 17th century geographer, translator and publisher.⁵ These theories will be compared to 20th century historians such as Arnold Taylor, who makes no mention of an existing castle at Flint when Edward fortified it.⁶ Taylor was responsible for the care of Welsh castles and he was also the authority on Edward I's castles in North Wales.⁷ Edward Parry wrote for the *Cambrian Mirror* in the 19th century in which he pronounced that Rhuddlan castle's foundations are Welsh.⁸ This is in contrast to John E Morris, in the 20th century, who maintains that the stone castle at Rhuddlan was Edwardian.⁹ Morris was regarded as an innovator in applying modern practises to studies of medieval history.¹⁰ In his book *Castle*, Marc Morris maintains that the foundations of Conwy Castle are in part, the bones of the Welsh princes' ancestors.¹¹ However, through analysis of the work carried out by Arnold Taylor the essay will show that this is not the case. Marc Morris' claims that the foundations of the castle at Caernarfon were built over Llywelyn ap Gruffydd's great hall will be investigated¹². The essay will reveal with the use of work carried out by Cadw and William Wyeth's study of motte towers, that in all likelihood this was not the case. At this

⁴ William Camden, Flintshire, *Britannia. Abridgements* (London, 1626). Camden's book *Britannia* was the first complete topographical survey of England, and Camden also founded a chair of history at the University of Oxford.

⁵ C. Withers, Ogilby, John in *Online Dictionary of National Biography* (2007). Available at <https://www-oxforddnb-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/978019861.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-20583?rskye=eX6SWh&result=2>, Accessed 5 April 2021. Ogilby became Charles II's cosmographer in 1671 and his surveys helped standardise the mile to 1760 yards.

⁶ Arnold. J. Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I* (London, 1986), p.18. Taylor was a medieval scholar, archaeologist and architectural historian, and one of the most famous Fellows of Magdalen College in the 20th century. From 1946 to 1972 he was Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments.

⁷ A. Saunders, Arnold Joseph Taylor 1911-2002 in *Proceedings of British Academy, 138 Biographical Memoirs of Fellows, V* (2007).

⁸ Edward Parry, *Cambrian Mirror* (Chester, 1843), P.26-7.

⁹ , p.145.

¹⁰ Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, Back cover.

¹¹ Morris, *Castle*, p.115.

¹² Morris, *Castle*, p.114-15.

point the essay will also explore the apparent use of Celtic mythology to explain the use of symbolism within the building of Caernarfon castle, with the aid of *The Mabinogion*. The essay will also explore why J. E. Morris claimed that Harlech castle was originally a Welsh fortress.¹³ It will use work from the Cadw handbook and Arnold Taylor's journal article, from *The English Historical Review* (1950) titled 'Master James of St George' to answer, if only in part, what led Morris to this assumption. There will also be an examination into the connection with the aforementioned Celtic mythology with Harlech. The essay will use the conclusion to put forward theories that may help answer the oversights by the chosen historians.

This dissertation seeks to re-evaluate discourse of the past with more up to date arguments supported with modern methods to show this can be important in the understanding of the chosen sites. It is also, as this essay will investigate, of great benefit for some of the modern dialogue to be reassessed against the past discourse.

¹³ Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, p.198.

Chapter 2

Flint and Rhuddlan

Flint castle is located on the banks of the River Dee approximately ten miles north west of Chester and is said to be the first of Edward I's castles that were built during his wars against Llywelyn ap Gruffydd.¹⁴ However, there is the question of who actually laid the foundations of this castle. William Camden, (1626) wrote that the market town of Flint is where Henry II laid the foundations, and Edward I built a strong castle.¹⁵ This is a point of view that was shared by Richard Blome (1677) in his findings half a century later, but either the market of the town has ceased to be, or this is where Blome disagreed with Camden, as his work declared Flint as a small town with no market.¹⁶ Two decades after Blome's work was published, John Ogilby also maintained that the castle at Flint was founded by Henry II, but Ogilby claimed it was finished by Edward II.¹⁷ The significance of these findings is that they all agree on who founded Flint castle, but disagree on further details, so one can take the view that they are not simply copying the other's work later on. Henry II ruled England from 1154-89, so if he was responsible for the castle at Flint it may have been commented on by writers or cited in chronicles from that era. One such collection was written by Gerald of Wales, who kept an itinerary of his journey through Wales in 1188 accompanying Archbishop Baldwin.¹⁸ When Gerald reached this area known as Tegeingl by the Welsh, his main comment was on the rich minerals of silver that were mined there. Nevertheless, Gerald mentioned Henry II in connection to this area, but only in the context of being overwhelmingly defeated here¹⁹.

¹⁴ Humphries, *Castles of Edward the First in Wales*, p.5.

¹⁵ Camden, *Flintshire, Britannia. Abridgements*.

¹⁶ Richard Blome, *Britannia* (London, 1677), p. 285-6.

¹⁷ John Ogilby, *Britannia* (London, 1698), p. 46.

¹⁸ Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (2006 [1982]), p. 5.

¹⁹ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerary Through Wales and The Description of Wales*, ed W. L. Williams (London, 1908), p. 129.

Tegeingl was part of what is today known as Flintshire and Denbighshire.²⁰ For instance, Rhuddlan and Prestatyn now in Denbighshire were part of Tegeingl as well as Flint. *The Chronicles of the Princes of Wales* refers to a conflict in Tegeingl in 1166, which is most likely the defeat mentioned above. The battle concluded with the castles at Rhuddlan and Prestatyn as well as one other being besieged by the Welsh, and all destroyed.²¹ The document does not name this other castle but does mention it previously in 1164 in connection with Henry II and Tegeingl.²² Myrddin ap Dafydd does, however, name this castle in his book *Battles for Wales*, (2017) he contends that it was Basingwerk along with Prestatyn and Rhuddlan that were destroyed by the Welsh at this time.²³ Nevertheless, John Hosler (2007) recorded in his book, about Henry II, that Owain Gwynedd attacked Henry's castle in Tegeingl, but he does not name it, yet further on he does refer to the castles at Rhuddlan and Basingwerk.²⁴ This is significant as by this time (1166) Basingwerk Abbey had been founded so therefore this supports the fact that the castle near it, would have been already designated with the same name, so this points to another castle in Tegeingl still unnamed. Therefore, if Camden, Bloom and Oglby's work is thought to be correct, then it can be assumed that they have labelled this castle in Tegeingl, Henry's Flint castle. However, when Edward chose this site, it was designated the camp near Basingwerk.²⁵ This shows that this site had no definite name attached to it before the summer of 1277.²⁶ If this were not the case it would have appeared in the King's rolls according to John Edwards.²⁷

There is also some contention over the origins of the name of the castle; it is said to derive from a distortion of the word 'fluent', which in-turn is an abbreviation of the Latin word 'fluentum'.²⁸ Old charters and documents connected to the town say that the castle is occasionally titled as nostrum castellum supra fluent, which translates as "our castle above

²⁰ Google-info.cn, Tegeingl (2020). Available at <https://amp.en.google-info.cn/37929902/1/tegeingl.html>. Accessed 10 April 2021.

²¹ Anon, *Brut y Tywysogion: The Chronicles of the Princes of Wales*, John Williams ed. (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 205,207.

²² Anon, *Brut y Tywysogion*, p.199. There is, however, a site one and a half miles west of Flint called Hen Blas, and appears to be the correct age to fit in with this narrative.

²³ Myrddin ap Dafydd, *Battles for Wales*, trans. by Susan Walton (Llanrwst, 2017), p.71.

²⁴ John Hosler, *Henry II: A Medieval Soldier at War, 1147-1189* (Boston, 2007), p. 53.

²⁵ *Calendar of Close Rolls, Edward I: Volume 1. 1272-1279* (London, 1900), p. 402.

²⁶ John. G. Edwards, The Name of Flint Castle, in *The English Historical Review* (1914), vol. 29, p. 316.

²⁷ Edwards, The Name of Flint Castle, p. 316.

²⁸ Samuel Lewis, Flint in *British History Online* (London, 1849), pp.338-356. Available at <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-dict/wales/pp338-356>, Accessed 28 February 2021.

the tide or flood, as three sides of the castle are washed by the high spring tides.²⁹ So, if this was correct, the name of the town can only have come from the castle being there. In his article *The Name of Flint Castle*, (1914) J. G. Edwards clarifies this, he states that although this explanation over the Latin word *fluentum* is the commonly accepted theory, it is without substance.³⁰ Edwards states that when Edward I began building his castle on 25 July 1277 there was no name for the area, therefore, he maintains the exchequer accounts show it was referred to as the camp close to Basingwerk, the abbey there being the nearest fixed point.³¹ A month later, however, is the first time it is referred to as the camp at the Flint near Basingwerk.³² Moreover, Edwards rationalises this by revealing that Flint in medieval English means rock, which describes the area on the banks of the River Dee that was chosen as the site on which to build the first castle of the first campaign.³³ Yet, it was not until 1278 that Master James of St George (the king's architect) appears at Rhuddlan.³⁴ This could answer the question of how unusual Flint is in design to the rest of Edward's castles, in-fact, according to John Kenyon in his book *The Medieval Castles of Wales* (2010), this type of design is seen nowhere else in Europe.³⁵ The castle has four towers at each corner, but the south east tower is separated from the rest of the castle by a drawbridge, known as the great tower and is like a keep surrounded by water. So, it could be assumed that this castle was started by an earlier architect, which suggests that Camden's work is correct. However, Nicola Coldstream challenges this point of view and names the town walls of Aigues-Mortes on the Mediterranean coast, to be a close parallel to Flint's design.³⁶ Similarly, Peter Humphries also contends that Flint castle is not that unique and points to a castle in Yverdon, Switzerland which is of a similar design.³⁷ This not only nullifies Kenyon's findings,

²⁹ Samuel Lewis, Flint.

³⁰ Edwards, *The Name of Flint Castle*, p. 315-16.

³¹ Edwards, *The Name of Flint Castle*, p. 316.

³² Edwards, *The Name of Flint Castle*, p. 216. *The Calendar of Close Rolls*, however, show the king to be at the camp near Basingwerk on the 25 August so it was not named Flint then.

³³ Edwards, *The Name of Flint Castle*, p. 217.

³⁴ Nicola Coldstream, *Architects, Advisors and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales* in *Architectural history* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 26. Cadw, *Rhuddlan castle* (2008), p. 2.

³⁵ John. R. Kenyon, *The Medieval Castles of Wales* (Cardiff, 2010), p. 47.

³⁶ Coldstream, *Architects, Advisors and Design at Edward I's Castle in Wales*, p. 23.

³⁷ Humphries, *Castles of Edward the First in Wales*, p. 29.

it also goes some way towards proving who helped lay the foundations for Flint, as Yverdon was one of the castles St George had previously worked on in the 1260s.³⁸

Rhuddlan castle was built with Flint castle to bring the region of Englefield (Tegeingl) under a lasting control.³⁹ Rhuddlan is located on the east bank of the river Clwyd approximately two miles from the North Wales coast. Its origins perhaps centre around the fact that it was the lowermost point at which the River Clwyd could be forded.⁴⁰ This area was surrendered by Edward's father Henry III to Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in 1267 under the terms of the treaty of Montgomery.⁴¹ As noted above there was already a castle in Rhuddlan, of the motte and bailey form, this was to change hands many times between the Welsh and the English until 1277.⁴² This site today is known as Twthill and lies approximately three hundred metres south west of Edward's stone castle.⁴³ This castle is the only one of Edward's castles in North Wales, not to be built near the coast, instead the River Clwyd, to the south west of the castle, was canalised and straightened in parts, to enable the sea going supply vessels to sail up the river to the castle dock.⁴⁴ This leads to the obvious question of why spend so much money and time on the canalising of the river, when the castle could have been built nearer the coast, at what is now the seaside town of Rhyl.

The original castle at Rhuddlan was probably still serviceable when Edward arrived there.⁴⁵ This appears to be backed up with the fact that the buildings within it were sold off, for eighteen shillings between 1279-80.⁴⁶ The castle was also an important border fortress to Henry II's campaigns in this part of Wales.⁴⁷ So, unlike Flint, Edward's troops would have had a defensible castle to retreat to if they came under attack. According to Thomas Pennant's 18th century writings, Edward was so confident of this site's significance in the conquest of Wales that he would make this the location to gather his troops for any further

³⁸ Humphries, *Castles of Edward the First in Wales*, p. 29.

³⁹ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Arnold Taylor, *Rhuddlan Castle* (Cadw, 2008), p. 1.

⁴¹ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 17

⁴² Taylor, *Rhuddlan Castle*, p. 1.

⁴³ Digimap, Available at <https://digimap.edina.ac.uk/roam/map/historic>. Accessed 14 February 2021.

⁴⁴ Kenyon, *The Medieval Castles of Wales*, p. 49.

⁴⁵ Taylor, *Rhuddlan Castle*, p.2.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 29.

⁴⁷ Samuel Lewis, Rhuddlan, *British History Online* (London, 1849), pp. 345-356. Available at <https://www.britishhistory.ac.uk/topographical-dict/wales/pp245-356>. Accessed 10 April 2021.

invasion.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Pennant was of the view that the new castle, built a little further downstream from the original (Twthill) was started in or around 1282.⁴⁹ However, Edward Parry writing in the *Cambrian Mirror* in the 19th century says that the castle was in use by the time of the capture of Dafydd ap Llywelyn in 1283. Conversely, Parry also seems to be under the impression that the walls and arches of Edward's stone castle were rebuilt from the foundations of the original.⁵⁰ This point of view was not shared by John E Morris, in the 20th century, who maintains that Rhuddlan was an entirely new, very costly, building that was in operation before 1282.⁵¹ Furthermore, Morris expresses that the castle's solid build was down to one man, James of St George, the king's master mason.⁵²

Although Morris' naming of James of St George as the chief architect of these Edwardian castles would lead to Arnold Taylor proving this over half a century later, Morris does not point to anybody else being in-charge at Rhuddlan.⁵³ Yet, the architect at the start of this project at Rhuddlan, according to Cadw's official handbook (2008), was a Master Bertram who had been in the service of Edward's father, Henry III since 1248. As a result, the castle's plan could be down to Master Bertram and King Edward.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Nicola Coldstream wrote in an article in 2003, that Master Bertram was in charge for a number of months before the arrival, at Rhuddlan in 1278, of James of St George.⁵⁵ The new architect James of St George, Coldstream deduces, would have received training from other masons such as Master Bertram or more likely, according to Coldstream, the master mason Robert of Beverley, keeper of the works at Westminster Abbey.⁵⁶ This, however, leaves a conundrum in the form of the design and foundation of Flint castle, as previously discussed it is a duplicate of a castle in Switzerland and that this Swiss castle is indeed the work of St George. Therefore, if this evidence stacks up, Flint must have been started later than presumed or been redesigned. Nonetheless, Taylor's work could hold the answer, as he maintains that it is probable that the camp at Flint was at first used as a sort of basic depot,

⁴⁸ Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Wales* (London, 1778), p. 11. Pennant was a Welsh naturalist, traveller writer and antiquarian.

⁴⁹ Pennant, *A Tour in Wales*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Edward Parry, *The Cambrian Mirror* (London, 1843), pp. 26-7.

⁵¹ Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, p. 145.

⁵² Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, p. 145.

⁵³ Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, p. 145.

⁵⁴ Cadw, *Rhuddlan Castle*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Coldstream, *Architects, Advisors and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales*, p. 26.

⁵⁶ Coldstream, *Architects, Advisors and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales*, p. 26.

for the different trades to wait to be sent where needed on other rudimentary sites, such as Rhuddlan.⁵⁷

By 1282 and the onset of Edward's second campaign in Wales, Taylor deems St George had become the man in charge of the king's works in Wales.⁵⁸ Taylor's deduction here is that, firstly with the use of the Exchequer accounts, of the time, he is able to prove that St George was paid more than other senior masons.⁵⁹ Secondly, when it came to the building of a new abbey for the monks at Aberconwy, it would only be fitting that the principal builder in the royal employ in North Wales would be in-charge of it.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 18.

⁵⁸ Arnold. J. Taylor, Master James of St George in *The English Historical Review* (Oxford, 1950), vol. 65, p. 441.

⁵⁹ Taylor, Master James of St George, pp. 438-9.

⁶⁰ Taylor, Master James of St George, pp. 440.

Chapter 3

Conwy, Caernarfon and Flint

Conwy castle is situated approximately a mile south of the coast washed by the Irish Sea, it was built on a promontory jutting out into the River Conwy and its tributary the Gyffin. Marc Morris states, in his book *Castle* (2003), that as well as being a frequent destination for Llywelyn ap Gruffydd's court there once stood a great Cistercian abbey in Aberconwy (Conwy). The abbey was founded by Llywelyn's grandfather, Llewelyn ap Iorwerth and was the burial place for the prince's ancestors.⁶¹ Edward flattened the buildings on the site including the abbey and furthermore, Morris maintains, Edward heartlessly built the castle directly over their bones to remove all traces of Llywelyn's forefathers.⁶² There appears to be no evidence to substantiate this claim. The fact remains that if this claim was true, then Edward was extremely fortunate that the perfect location to lay the foundations of his castle in Conwy, was also the site where the Welsh princes were buried. According to Arnold Taylor's studies:

'As far as is known there were only two significant groups of buildings on the site of the future town. One, the Cistercian abbey of St Mary, was the premier royal foundation of the northern princes, the burial-place of Llewelyn the Great and others of his line. The other, standing close by, was the princes' residence, or 'Hall of Llywelyn'.⁶³

This would have also been further incentive to build a castle here, as the buildings were pressed into service by the occupying forces, whilst fortifying the site, before being removed.⁶⁴ If one is to extrapolate the information given by Arnold Taylor in *The Welsh Castles of Edward I* (1986), this states that the position of the mill gate is south or south west of the abbey.⁶⁵ This in conjunction with the statement that the abbey was close to

⁶¹ Morris, *Castle*, p. 115.

⁶² Morris, *Castle*, p. 115.

⁶³ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 45.

⁶⁴ Humphries, *Castles of Edward the First in Wales*, p.35.

⁶⁵ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 46.

Llywelyn's hall all hints to the approximate location of the abbey (See fig 1 in Appendix). The outcome of this is that the castle stands at least 800 feet from the site of the abbey. There is also a study of the present-day church of St Mary, conducted by Harold Hughes at the end of the 19th century, in which he asserts that the church is in-part one of the conventual buildings of the abbey.⁶⁶ Therefore, not everything was flattened, and this would also point to the probability of any graves or tombs being within this area.

As for the actions of the king who, rather less cold-heartedly, went to lengths to rehouse the Cistercian monks of Aberconwy, he built a new monastery for them, eight miles up the Conwy valley.⁶⁷ This is arguably a better response than the English gave the cathedral at St Asaph, which was burnt by Edward's soldiers in response to assertions that the bishop there had supported the uprising. Similarly, a small Dominican friary at Rhuddlan and the Franciscan house at Beaumaris were ignored by the king.⁶⁸ Michael Senior claims in his book *A Time for Princes The Welsh Leaders who Forged a Nation 800-1282* (2017) that when the abbey at Aberconwy was uprooted and moved to Maenan, Llewellyn ap Iorwerth's tomb containing his coffin went too, and today the lower portion of the stone sarcophagus lies in the old church at Llanrwst.⁶⁹ This all goes, in some way, to prove that at Aberconwy, Edward had been less than unsympathetic. Moreover, Michael Fradley argues that the king's piety is not in question here, to which he adds "This is a man whose convictions during his crusades were assured".⁷⁰ However, further on Fradley declares that the king would not allow the church to get in its way, if it did not comply.⁷¹ This suggests that the king negotiated a deal with the Cistercian monks, which according to Arnold Taylor looks likely as the monks were at the site for six months before the move was granted.⁷² Further to the flattening of the buildings on this site, Cadw maintains that there is evidence that parts of the older building may have survived and had been incorporated into the town's curtain wall⁷³. If that was not the case a building had immediately replaced this one and it is extremely probable this is

⁶⁶ Harold Hughes, *The Architectural History of St. Mary's Church, Conway* in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* (London, 1895), vol. 12, p. 162-3.

⁶⁷ Jeremy. A. Ashbee, *Conwy Castle and Town Walls* (Cadw, 2015), p. 7.

⁶⁸ Michael Fradley, *Space and Structure at Caernarfon Castle* in *Medieval Archaeology* (2006), vol. 50, p. 176-7.

⁶⁹ Michael Senior, *A Time for Princes The Welsh Leaders Who Forged a Nation 800-1282* (Llanrwst, 2017), p. 95.

⁷⁰ Fradley, *Space and Structure at Caernarfon Castle*, p. 176.

⁷¹ Fradley, *Space and Structure at Caernarfon Castle*, p. 176.

⁷² Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 46.

⁷³ Ashbee, *Conwy Castle and Town Walls*, p. 61.

Llywelyn's hall and is remembered as such. This has led to the tower which stands to the eastern end of where this building once stood, being referred to as Llywelyn's tower.⁷⁴ This is far from the claim that all traces of the princes had been removed. The point here is if the majority of this information is taken in hand, it is in all likelihood, that the area where Edward chose to site Conwy castle was a barren piece of rock.

Caernarfon castle and town walls are situated on a peninsula created by the estuary of the Seiont, the Menai Strait and the Cadnant brook.⁷⁵ Today a road runs along the route once taken by the Cadnant. Caernarfon castle is the only Edwardian castle in this study to be built upon the foundations of another castle. This original castle dates back to the late 11th century, and was built by the Norman invaders, in the form of a motte and bailey with steep earthen banks.⁷⁶ The Norman outpost was short-lived, and the area went on to be a royal Welsh settlement until 1283.⁷⁷ When Edward founded his castle here, he incorporated the motte of the old castle into the upper ward, which survived in an adapted form until the late 19th century.⁷⁸ Similarly, Marc Morris declares:

Neither Caernarfon nor Conwy were built on virgin sites; both towns had been popular destinations for Llywelyn's court. Edward flattened these settlements, removing or destroying the great halls of the Welsh princes, and building his new castles in their place.⁷⁹

Llywelyn's hall at Conwy was, as has been discussed earlier, built near the Cistercian abbey and is remembered in part of the town wall's construction. Nevertheless, Cadw claims that, "In 1316 the timber-framed 'Hall of Llywelyn' part of the last Welsh prince's residence at Conwy, was dismantled and shipped to Caernarfon, where it was re-erected within the castle".⁸⁰ Although Cadw's handbook states this and Taylor is credited as the author, in his previous work, he does, however, contradict this. His earlier studies show that miscellaneous pieces of the timber from Llywelyn's hall were transported to Caernarfon, but

⁷⁴ Ashbee, *Conwy Castle and Town Walls*, p. 61.

⁷⁵ Arnold Taylor, *Caernarfon Castle and Town Walls* (Cadw, 2015), p. 7.

⁷⁶ Taylor, *Caernarfon Castle and Town Walls*, p.7.

⁷⁷ Fradley, *Space and Structure at Caernarfon Castle*, p. 165.

⁷⁸ Taylor, *Caernarfon Castle and Town Walls*, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Morris, *Castle*, p. 114-15.

⁸⁰ Taylor, *Caernarfon Castle and Town Walls*, p. 13.

he states that this took place in 1317 and it was from the prince's hall and buildings in Aberffraw on Anglesey and the 198 pieces of timber, that made up the load, cost £4 to ship to Caernarfon for general use only.⁸¹ Whatever the case here, the point is that Llywelyn was still being mentioned over three decades later, and which ever version is the correct one, it is in documents pertaining to this castle. While this information is not in relation to the foundations of the castle, it could prove that Llywelyn and therefore his ancestors had not been wiped off the face of the earth in 1283.

There also appears to be no evidence that the castle's foundations at Caernarfon, nor the town, were built on Llywelyn's great hall as per the statement, from Marc Morris, above. Indeed, a study carried out by William Wyeth on medieval motte towers states although evidence suggests that at some motte sites, the towers did house halls for receiving guests, this went out of fashion in the late middle ages in favour of greater privacy.⁸² In any case, these halls were not used for feasting as they did not contain the facilities to do so, on an extravagant scale, this took place in the great hall across the courtyard.⁸³ This is significant because it suggests that Llywelyn's great hall would have been in the bailey of this former castle. Moreover, the evidence at Caernarfon points to the possibility of the bailey's position being to the north-east of the motte in the present-day castle square.⁸⁴ This would not only place it outside the castle but also outside the town walls too (See fig 2 in Appendix).

Although this dissertation is primarily about the physical foundations of Edward's castles in North Wales, it may benefit this study to look into evidential foundations of a different kind. Those of the non-physical, from the realms of Celtic folklore which Edward appears to have embraced. The Roman fort of Segontium sits on the outskirts of the modern town and in Welsh tradition had stood since the time of the Roman emperor Magnus Maximus.⁸⁵ Moreover, it is more than possible that it is responsible for the story 'The Dream of the

⁸¹ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 94.

⁸² William Wyeth, Medieval Timber Motte Towers in *Medieval Archaeology* (2018), vol. 62, pp. 135-156. Available at <https://www-tandfonline-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1080/00766097.2018.1451594?scoll=top&needaccess=true>. Accessed 15 May 2021.

⁸³ Wyeth, Medieval Timber Motte Towers, pp. 135-156.

⁸⁴ Taylor, *Caernarfon Castle and Town Walls*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Marc Morris, *A Great and Terrible King Edward I and the Forging of Britain* (London, 2008), p. 191.

Emperor Maxen', a tale within *The Mabinogion*, a book of Celtic mythology and Arthurian romances.⁸⁶ Likewise, Peter Humphries provides this description:

This story which revolves around the personage of Macsen Wledig, tells of his journeying from Rome into the land of high mountains facing an island and seeing a great city with towers of many colours and a chair of ivory with two golden eagles thereon.⁸⁷

Humphries goes further to say that he feels that Edward was recreating this story in stone.⁸⁸ This is also the view of Arnold Taylor who states, "the castle that Edward now began to build... was plainly intended to give substance, to both the fulfilment of the tradition and the interpretation of the dream".⁸⁹ On the other hand, Marc Morris expresses that Edward's fathers, (Henry III) desire to delight his new twelve-year-old queen, Eleanor of Provence, who it is said to have had a penchant for all things Arthurian, led him to take her to Arthur's tomb in Glastonbury when she first arrived in England.⁹⁰ Although, today, Morris declares, it is known that the Arthurian legend is just that, he contends that through the assiduous work of contemporary scholars it has been proven that Arthur never existed.⁹¹ However, Edward could not have known this, Morris maintains, Arthur was as real in the thirteenth century as William the Conqueror or Richard the Lionheart.⁹² These convictions, one could suppose, must have been bolstered by his mother's adoration for all things Arthurian. That said, the question of the belief of Arthur by Edward is evident in a letter he sent to the pope in 1301, containing Arthurian material, to ratify his claim to Scotland.⁹³ Thus, the connection is easy to see, that when it came to building his castles of the second Welsh wars, especially at Caernarfon, the Arthurian legends could have been foremost in Edward's mind. In-fact Morris does state, "In certain cases, choosing the optimum strategic position for a castle also enabled Edward to make a political point. When it came to grandstanding, the king was

⁸⁶ Humphries, *Castles of Edward the First in Wales*, p. 42.

⁸⁷ Humphries, *Castles of Edward the First in Wales*, p. 42.

⁸⁸ Humphries, *Castles of Edward the First in Wales*, p. 42.

⁸⁹ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 78.

⁹⁰ Morris, *A Great and Terrible King Edward I and the Forging of Britain*, p. 164.

⁹¹ Morris, *A Great and Terrible King Edward I and the Forging of Britain*, p. 162.

⁹² Morris, *A Great and Terrible King Edward I and the Forging of Britain*, p. 162

⁹³ Richard. K. Morrison, *The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm in Late Medieval Castles*, ed. Robert Liddiard (Suffolk, 2016), p.360.

a showman, with a ruthless eye for detail".⁹⁴ Edward, it appears could be accused of over engineering his castles in Gwynedd, particularly Caernarfon, and it could be said this was his boyhood desire, spurred on by his mother's proclivities. One need only look at the symbolism within this castle to see this is more than a fortress.

Situated on what is today a high landlocked rock, Harlech castle once had the sea right up against the western side of the rock on which it was founded. To the north and east is the Snowdonia National Park, to the west Tremadog bay. It is one of three fortresses, including Caernarfon and Conwy above, built by James of St George on the orders of King Edward in 1283.⁹⁵ However, according to John E Morris in his book *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, this was a former Welsh stronghold extensively reconstructed to the Edwardian model.⁹⁶ Furthermore, he dates this work to 1285 and admits that explaining the high cost involved in the remodelling of Harlech was problematic.⁹⁷ Harlech, appears in 'The Second Branch of the Mabinogi' a tale in *The Mabinogion*, a book of Celtic mythology, also mentioned earlier, and the tale places the giant king of all of Britain, Bendigeidfran at his court at Harlech, sitting upon the rock of Harlech, above the sea.⁹⁸ The tale is of war and woe, with misdeeds and magic. Although this is a supernatural narrative set in the realms of fiction, it could be perceived it is employed, just as the *Iliad* is in Greek antiquity, to help flesh out the bones of Welsh history. That said it may also put light to the theory that there was a castle here before 1283. Nevertheless, Gerald of Wales passed through this area in 1188 to campaign for the crusades with Archbishop Baldwin.⁹⁹ They stayed in a modest church in the small village of Llanfair not far from Harlech, but Gerald makes no mention of a castle there.¹⁰⁰ According to Cadw:

Neither history nor archaeology furnish any evidence to suggest that Harlech itself had formerly had a castle of the princes. In Welsh mythology, however,

⁹⁴ Morris, *Castle*, p. 114.

⁹⁵ Arnold Taylor, *Harlech Castle*, (Cadw, 2015), pp. 5,7.

⁹⁶ Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, p. 198.

⁹⁷ Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I*, p. 195.

⁹⁸ Anon, *Mabinogion* trans. by Sioned Davies (Oxford, 2007), p. 22.

⁹⁹ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p.5.

¹⁰⁰ Gerald of Wales, *Itinerary Through Wales*, p. 114.

the place is associated with the legend of Branwen, the daughter of Llyr In the month of May 1283, Harlech emerges from the realms of folk tale and myth into the light of recorded fact.¹⁰¹

When Edward founded his castle on this virgin site, as the previous evidence suggests he would have been aware of the association with this myth and legend around not just Caernarfon, but Harlech too, and as with Caernarfon It appears he immersed himself into it. Therefore, it gives the impression that the creation of these castles, led to Edward re-creating a new Emperor Maximus or King Arthur. Both men it seems are related through the Emperor Constantine as the story goes.¹⁰² In 2009, Rachealle Sanford published her thesis titled 'Edward I and the Appropriation of Arthurian Legend', which indicates that there could be some truth in this observation. Sanford maintains that Edward intentionally manipulated the Arthurian legend because, as Sanford argues, Arthur must have been a driving force for the Welsh and even a symbol of their identity.¹⁰³ Therefore, Sanford continues, it suited Edward to utilise the Arthurian legend as an instrument of power, to be wielded against the Welsh when they stepped out of line.¹⁰⁴ This, however, makes the statement above regarding Maximus or Arthur just as likely, one could suppose, to have happened the other way round. The legend, as already observed with Caernarfon, possibly influenced the founding of Harlech.

Nevertheless, there is some contention over the architect at Harlech. It is Arnold Taylor's view that Master James of St George was the designer and in charge of all three castle sites of Conway, Caernarfon and Harlech.¹⁰⁵ However, Dr Douglas Simpson, according to Taylor, thinks this is not the case. Dr Simpson's impression is that "St George being the architect at Harlech is an old yarn".¹⁰⁶ Earlier the abbey at Aberconwy was cited as being removed and rebuilt at Maenan, this task was given to James of St George.¹⁰⁷ Taylor argues, as already discussed earlier, that this evidence suggests that only the chief master builder would be

¹⁰¹ Taylor, *Harlech Castle*, p. 5. Llyr is the sister of Bendigeidfran mentioned earlier.

¹⁰² Morrison, *The Architecture of Arthurian Enthusiasm*, p. 360.

¹⁰³ Rachealle. M. Sanford, *Edward I and the Appropriation of Arthurian Legend* (2009), p. 2-3. Available at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/43646315.pdf>. Accessed 18 May 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Sanford, *Edward I and the Appropriation of Arthurian Legend*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor, *Master James of St George*, p. 441.

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, *Master James of St George*, p. 433.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, *Master James of St George*, p. 440.

entrusted with something that was initiated under royal patronage.¹⁰⁸ Other clues can give an insight to the architect behind Harlech, but because of the lack of early records surviving for this castle, they would be in the form of looking at the close architectural similarities.¹⁰⁹ In the case of the castle at Beaumaris (Founded later in 1295), and Harlech they are both of the same concentric design and almost perfectly symmetrical.¹¹⁰ Viewed from above, the gatehouse at Harlech is almost identical in size and shape to both the north and south gatehouses at Beaumaris.¹¹¹ According to Taylor, St George was on site at Beaumaris in April 1295, to lay the foundations for this castle.¹¹² This goes some way to proving St George's position as the man in charge of the king's works in Wales. Beaumaris itself, was built in light of the uprising in 1294, where the main damage was the sacking of Caernarfon and the burning of anything combustible, which included a great many official records.¹¹³ This suggests a reason why Taylor, in his study of Harlech castle, points out that "It is not until 1285... that we have an explicit record of particular expenditure."¹¹⁴ Up until that point and from the laying of foundations at Harlech it looks as if, Taylor has relied upon piecemeal records from other sources.¹¹⁵ This is also endorsed by Peter Humphries, who states that few details are available for the first three seasons at Harlech.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, *Master James of St George*, p. 440.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, *Master James of St George*, p. 441.

¹¹⁰ Coldstream, *Architects, Advisors and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales*, p. 21.

¹¹¹ Kenyon, *The Medieval Castles of Wales*, p. 12,36. Show plan views of these castles.

¹¹² Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, 104.

¹¹³ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 85-86. Damage sustained to the castle at Caernarfon. Taylor, *Caernarfon Castle and Town Walls*, p. 13. Documents burned in fire set by Welsh rebels, therefore, records are missing in telling the stories of these buildings.

¹¹⁴ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 66.

¹¹⁵ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, p. 65-66. These pages contain a very short narrative for the first two years (up to 1285) and Taylor appears to be relying on records from different sources to make up for the lack of information to be found.

¹¹⁶ Humphries, *Castle of Edward the First in Wales*, p. 39.

Conclusion

When William Camden wrote his *Britannia. Abridgements*, at the beginning of the 17th century he believed that the foundations of Flint were the work of Henry II; this was also reflected by others writing on the subject later that century. This would not come as a surprise as the primary source records of this area appear to mention Henry's castle in Tegeingl without giving it a specific name. To add to this there were 28 new castles built in Wales during Henry II's reign, and at the same time older fortifications had been rebuilt.¹¹⁷ As for the uniqueness of Flint quoted by John Kenyon, one can only assume this to be an oversight, as Arnold Taylor had compared this castle as part of his work proving who was responsible for the design of Edward's castles in North Wales.¹¹⁸ Peter Humphries too put forward the suggestion that Yverdon was a forerunner to Flint. The naming of the castle also fits this era, as the aristocracy spoke French, according to John G Edwards at that time English was proliferating amongst the upper-classes and the word 'Flint', old English for rock, was just a simple translation of 'Roche' meaning rock which is what the castle was laid on.¹¹⁹ Rhuddlan, it appears was in a very strategic position, this is because it was at one time the only place where the river Clwyd could be forded. So, this site offered great potential to whoever controlled it. This could be the one of the motives that drove Edward to devote so much time and effort founding a new castle here and not nearer the coast. Another motive was the motte and bailey castle that already stood here, that could be pressed into service, whilst the stone castle was being built further down the River Clwyd. It would also serve as a staging point for a further invasion according to Thomas Pennant who also deemed that the stone castle was not founded until 1282. A view not shared by Edward Parry in the 19th century who stated it was in operation by 1283, however, he was of the notion that it was rebuilt upon Welsh foundations. John Morris, a 20th century pioneer of modern methodology in medieval history, declared that Rhuddlan castle was finished in 1282 and was the work of master mason James of St George.

¹¹⁷ Hosler, *Henry II: A Medieval Soldier at War, 1147-1189*, p. 180.

¹¹⁸ Coldstream, *Architects, Advisors and Design at Edward I's Castles in Wales*, p. 21.

¹¹⁹ Edwards, *The Name of Flint Castle*, p. 317.

In the case of Conwy castle there is no proof that Edward sited his castle over the bones of the Welsh princes, as cited by Marc Morris. In-fact through the work of Arnold Taylor, Cadw and Michael Fradley, the essay is able to go some way to prove this to be an oversight on Morris' part. On the other hand, Taylor points to a small discrepancy with the Latin word for castle 'castrum' which he says, in the earliest accounts for Conwy, is not limited to the castle proper but roughly to the whole site.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, Morris, a historian whose work focuses on the Middle Ages and has a published doctrine to his credit, would surely have picked up on this. Morris' assertion that the site at Aberconwy was flattened also looks like it was not that simple; it appears that part of the abbey's buildings survived in the form of St Mary's or at least in part. The hall of Llywelyn may have survived too, and even if it was flattened its legacy survived; this is a testament that helped his family name live on within the castle. Caernarfon, however, is different from the rest in this study; it was built upon part of an older castle and on a much grander scale with a great deal of symbolism from its foundations up. However, here too Morris' claims of the castle being built over the foundations of another of Llywelyn's great halls, seems to be an assertion that does not have proof to support it. With the research into motte towers by William Wyeth in conjunction with Cadw's investigation of the former castle within Caernarfon's foundations this study has shown that it is likely that Llywelyn's great hall was outside the boundaries of the town. When it comes to the connection to *The Mabinogion* and the fabled King Arthur's tales, who to Edward were real, Morris expresses that the use of this in founding Caernarfon castle, is, however, more than likely. On that note though, Edward was accused of grand standing by Marc Morris in his book *Castle* which accompanied his television series. The series was not just written by him, he also presented it too, and he may have embellished some of the facts in an attempt to attract attention. Harlech was thought to be a fortress of the Welsh princes by John. E. Morris in the earlier part of the 20th century, although with meticulous work by Arnold Taylor and Cadw, later in that century, it seems very unlikely. Nevertheless, the fact that Taylor and Peter Humphries state that the records for Harlech castle were lacking before 1285, help explain in some way why Morris reasoned this site was a former Welsh stronghold before that date. It would also be prudent to mention, as with Caernarfon castle, the part that Celtic mythology had played in citing a king's court at

¹²⁰ Taylor, *The Welsh Castles of Edward I*, P. 46.

Harlech well before Edward I founded his castle here. This dissertation has shown that when it comes to the discourse surrounding the foundations of these castles, historians from today can present inconsistencies as well as historians from the past. Arguably, as history continues to be re-written, this type of discourse will continue.

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Appendix

Fig 1:

IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Map of Conwy castle and town walls, showing where Aberconwy Abbey may have stood. Original map published by The Hambledon Press London, in *The Welsh Castles of Edward I* (Arnold Taylor), p. 51.

Fig 2:

IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Map of Caernarfon castle and town walls, showing where the Norman Bailey may have stood. Original map published by The Hambledon Press London, in *The Welsh Castles of Edward I* (Arnold Taylor), p. 88.

