

## The Impact of the Normans in North Wales

In 1066 William, Duke of Normandy and his army defeated the Anglo-Saxon army of Harold Godwinson at Hastings on the south coast of England. William was crowned King of England and his Norman army systematically subdued English resistance.

On the borders of Wales three Earldoms were established, with their headquarters in Chester, Shrewsbury and Hereford.

From these Earldoms the Normans tried to conquer Wales. In the 1070s and 1080s they had some success in North Wales, and built motte and bailey castles to defend the land they took. These castles had a mound of earth (motte) with a timber tower, and an earthen rampart with a palisade to defend an area called the bailey, where there were other buildings.



Death of Harold 1066 – Bayeux Tapestry

The Norman control of North Wales did not last for long as they were thrown out by the Welsh with help of the Vikings in the 1090s. The Battle of Aberlleiniog on Anglesey was one of the important battles in defeating the Normans.

The Battle of Aberlleiniog took place in 1098 when Gruffydd ap Cynan, who became king of Gwynedd, attacked the Norman castle of Aberlleiniog. This was defended by the Norman Earls Hugh of Chester and Hugh of Shrewsbury. The Viking King Magnus Barefoot of Norway, who was in the area with his navy, got involved. It was hard to say whose side King Magnus was on but he killed Earl Hugh of Shrewsbury and was a great help to the Welsh.

After that the Kings of England tried repeatedly to conquer Wales but none succeeded until the conquest of Wales by Edward I in 1283.

## Timeline for Medieval Gwynedd

AD 1066 – Battle of Hastings, William I becomes king of England

1086-1094 – Normans invade Gwynedd but are driven back by Gruffydd ap Cynan

1081-1137 – reign of Gruffydd ap Cynan

1137-1170 – reign of Gruffydd's son Owain Gwynedd. These two kings mark the high point of Welsh independence; monasteries were founded, churches built and social and economic life developed.

1195-1240 – reign of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth ("The Great"), expansion of the kingdom of Gwynedd

1255-1282 – reign of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd ("The Last")

1283 – Edward I of England conquers Wales

1283-1292 – Edwardian castles built in Gwynedd

# THE NORMANS

Long before the Normans gained control of Wales their influence was felt. Norman England was a rich and powerful kingdom and imported new ideas from Europe. The Princes of the kingdoms of Wales were not going to be left behind in the new technologies and social developments. The Normans built castles, first motte and bailey, then in stone castles, and the Welsh adopted these military technologies. Tomen y Rhodwydd, Llandegla, Denbighshire is an example of a motte and bailey castle built by a Welsh Prince. The Normans introduced a new style of architecture, which we know today as Romanesque, using semi-circular arches and grotesque animal carvings. This new style was adopted in Wales for the increasing number of new churches that were being built.

The Church was an international organisation and led the way in adopting new ideas. A system of parishes was developed, each with a church, and these were grouped into dioceses run by bishops, under the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury in England. The two dioceses in North Wales were centred at Bangor and St Asaph. Monasteries and abbeys were set up by the Welsh Princes but these were daughter houses of monasteries on the Continent and brought new regulations for the monks, new learning and new contacts.

## Seal of the Augustinian Abbey of Zonnebeke, Belgium



SEAL OF THE ABBEY OF THE AUSTIN CANONS OF SONNEBECA,  
IN THE DIOCESE OF YPRES.  
(Enlarged to twice natural size.)

This object is a seal matrix. That is a mould designed to make an image on wax. Red sealing wax would be melted and dropped onto a document to seal it, then the seal matrix would be pressed on the wax to leave the image. It was found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century somewhere in the parish of Bangor. An article on it was published in 1893 (see Historical Sources) and it was donated to Bangor museum. The seal matrix dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and belonged to an abbey, but not one in Wales. It came from the Augustinian Abbey of Zonnebeke or Sonnebeca in Belgium.

# THE NORMANS



Caernarfon Castle

## The Castles of Edward I

When Edward I finally succeeded in conquering Wales the impact of the Normans became much more immediate and oppressive. Large stone castles were built to dominate the land and new towns were established with walls to defend them, but these were towns for English merchants, the Welsh were not allowed to live in them. These stone castles became the new administrative centres.

They were designed to dominate the landscape and remind people who was now in control. They were very heavily defended in case the Welsh decided to fight back.

The castles took over from the system of Welsh royal courts that had administered the country and new Norman English laws were introduced, although Welsh Law could still be used in some cases until England and Wales were legally joined by the Act of Union in 1536.



Beaumaris Castle

## Pottery from Beaumaris Castle

When Beaumaris Castle was being cleared out to present it to the public in 1934 pottery and other objects were found. The medieval pottery had been broken into small fragments and many of these have a thick green glaze typical of the period. Many of the vessels were pitchers for holding water or other drinks, and some may have come from the south of France. One unusual pot (on display) has an “anthropomorphic spout”. This means that it has a person’s head on the spout of the jug. The head has a beard and very big ears decorated with dots.



*Anthropomorphic spout on a jug from Beaumaris Castle*

# THE NORMANS

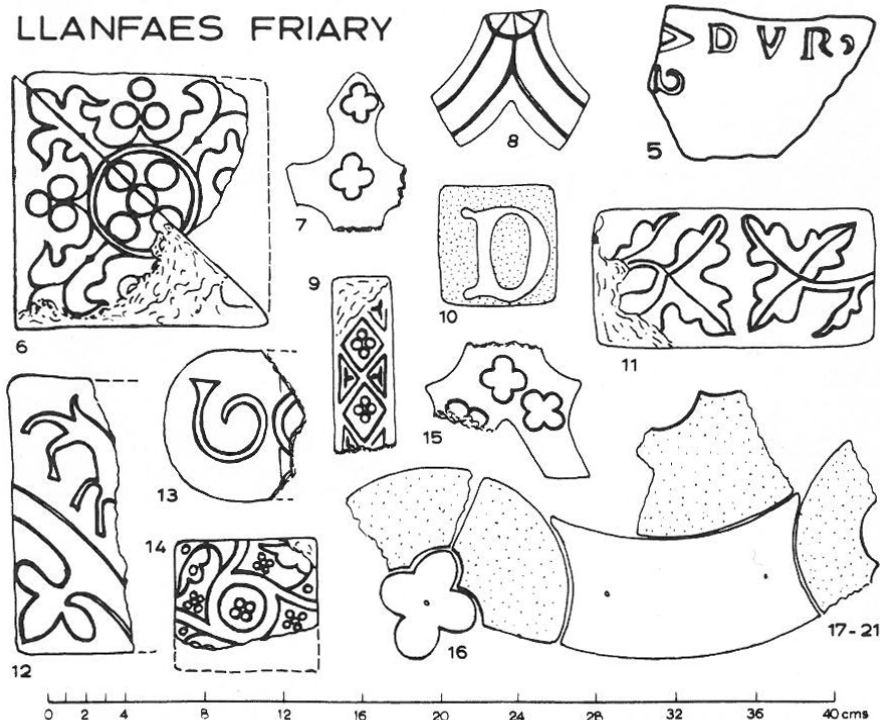
## Llanfaes

A good example of the impact of the Normans after the Edwardian Conquest can be found in the history of Llanfaes, Anglesey. Now there are only a few houses clustered around the church but this used to be an important place. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century Llanfaes had a royal court (*llys*), which was an administrative centre, a Franciscan friary and a rich church. A town developed, which was the leading commercial centre in the kingdom of Gwynedd and the main place for importing wine. In 1294 Edward I started to build his castle and town at Beaumaris, close to Llanfaes. The market and ferry was moved from Llanfaes to the new town, which could only be inhabited by the English. To remove the competition and threat of the town of Llanfaes all its people were moved to the opposite side of Anglesey where a new borough was built for them, which became the town of Newborough.

## The Llanfaes tiles

The Franciscan Friary was founded at Llanfaes by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in 1237. It was the first Franciscan friary in North Wales, and Princess Joan, the wife of Llywelyn, was buried there. In 1400 the Friary was burnt by the army of Henry IV because the friars supported Owen Glyndŵr and his rebellion, but it was re-established in 1414 by Henry V.

No remains of the friary survive but a house called the Friars was built there in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The owners of the house found many fragments of floor tiles, carved stones and some fragments of grave stones from the friary. The tiles have been donated to the museum.



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