

MEYSYDD BRWYDRO HANESYDDOL YNG NGHYMRU

Mae'r adroddiad canlynol, a gomisiynwyd gan Grŵp Llywio Meysydd Brwydro Cymru ac a ariennir gan Lywodraeth Cymru, yn ffurfio rhan o raglen archwilio fesul cam i daflu goleuni ar yr ystyriaeth o Gofrestr neu Restr o Feysydd Brwydro Hanesyddol yng Nghymru. Dechreuwyd gweithio ar hyn ym mis Rhagfyr 2007 dan gyfarwyddyd Cadw, gwasanaeth amgylchedd hanesyddol Llywodraeth Cymru, ac yr oedd yn dilyn cwblhau prosiect gan Gomisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru (RCAHMW) i bennu pa feysydd brwydro yng Nghymru a allai fod yn addas i'w nodi ar fapiau'r Arolwg Ordnans. Sefydlwyd y Grŵp Llywio Meysydd Brwydro, yn cynnwys aelodau o Cadw, Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru ac Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Cymru, a rhwng 2009 a 2014 comisiynwyd ymchwil ar 47 o frwydrau a gwarchaeau. Mae hyn yn bennaf yn cynnwys ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol, ac mewn 10 achos, gwaith maes heb fod yn ymyrryd a gwaith a oedd yn ymyrryd.

O ganlyniad i'r gwaith hwn mae **Rhestr o Feysydd Brwydro Hanesyddol yng Nghymru** (<http://meysyddbrwydro.cbhc.gov.uk/>) yn cael ei datblygu, dan arweiniad Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru ar ran Cadw. Bydd yn adnodd deongliadol, addysgol ac ymchwil ar-lein, yn anelu at gynyddu gwybodaeth a chodi ymwybyddiaeth o feysydd brwydro yng Nghymru, yn ogystal ag ysgogi ymchwil bellach. Gobeithir ei lansio yn ystod gwanwyn 2017.

HISTORIC BATTLEFIELDS IN WALES

The following report, commissioned by the Welsh Battlefields Steering Group and funded by Welsh Government, forms part of a phased programme of investigation undertaken to inform the consideration of a Register or Inventory of Historic Battlefields in Wales. Work on this began in December 2007 under the direction of the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Service (Cadw), and followed the completion of a Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) project to determine which battlefields in Wales might be suitable for depiction on Ordnance Survey mapping. The Battlefields Steering Group was established, drawing its membership from Cadw, RCAHMW and National Museum Wales, and between 2009 and 2014 research on 47 battles and sieges was commissioned. This principally comprised documentary and historical research, and in 10 cases both non-invasive and invasive fieldwork.

As a result of this work **The Inventory of Historic Battlefields in Wales** (<http://battlefields.rcahmw.gov.uk/>) is in development, led by the RCAHMW on behalf of Cadw. This will be an online interpretative, educational and research resource aimed at increasing knowledge and raising awareness of battlefields in Wales, as well as a prompt for further research. It is due to be launched in spring 2017.

Mae'r tabl isod yn rhestru'r brwydrau a'r gwarchaeau a ymchwiliwyd. Bydd adroddiadau ar gael i'w llwytho i lawr o'r Rhestr ar-ein yn ogystal ag o Coflein (<http://www.coflein.gov.uk/>), y gronfa ddata ar-lein ar gyfer Cofnod Henebion Cenedlaethol Cymru (NMRW).

The table below lists the battles and sieges researched. Reports will be available to download from the online Inventory as well as from Coflein (<http://www.coflein.gov.uk/>), the online database for the National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW).

ENW/NAME	DYDDIAD/ DATE	SIR HANESYDDOL/HI STORIC COUNTY	NPRN	YMCHWIL/RESEARCH
Aberllech	1096	Sir Frycheiniog Brecknockshire	404446	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)
Pont Cychod (Menai ac Ynys Môn) Bridge of Boats (Menai and Anglesey)	1282	Ynys Môn Anglesey	404319	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Bryn Derwin	1255	Sir Gaernarfon Caernarfonshire	402322	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2014) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013) Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2014)
Bryn Glas (Pillth)	1402	Sir Faesyfed Radnorshire	306352	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2012) Cloddfa (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2013)

				<p>Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2014)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p> <p>Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2012)</p> <p>Excavation (Archaeology Wales, 2013)</p> <p>Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2014)</p>
Campston Hill	1404	Sir Fynwy Monmouthshire	402328	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p>
Cilgerran	1258	Sir Benfro Pembrokeshire	405201	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)</p>
Coed Llathan	1257	Sir Gaerfyrddin Carmarthenshire	403587	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013)</p> <p>Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2014)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)</p> <p>Non-invasive fieldwork</p>

				(Archaeology Wales, 2014)
Castell Coety (gwarchae) /Coity Castle (siege)	1404-05	Morgannwg Glamorgan	545701	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Coleshill	1157	Sir y Fflint Flintshire	402325	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (2009) Documentary and historical research (2009)
Craig y Dorth	1404	Sir Fynwy Monmouthshire	402327	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2014) Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009) Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2014)
Crug Mawr	1136	Sir Aberteifi Cardiganshire	402323	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)
Castell Cymaron (gwarchaeau) / Cymaron Castle (sieges)	1144 1179 1195	Sir Faesyfed Radnorshire	545328	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)

	1215			
Cymerau	1257	Sir Gaerfyrddin Carmarthenshire	404717	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2014) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013) Non-invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2014)
Castell Dinbych (gwarchae)/ Denbigh Castle (siege)	1282	Sir Ddinbych Denbighshire	545687	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Castell Dinbych (gwarchae)/ Denbigh Castle (siege)	1294-5	Sir Ddinbych Denbighshire	545613	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Castell Dinbych (gwarchae)/ Denbigh Castle (siege)	1460	Sir Ddinbych Denbighshire	545718	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Castell Dinbych (gwarchae)/ Denbigh Castle (siege)	1468	Sir Ddinbych Denbighshire	545720	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Castell Dinbych (gwarchae)/ Denbigh	1646	Sir Ddinbych	545789	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013)

Castle (siege)		Denbighshire		Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Castell Dryslwyn (gwarchae) / Dryslwyn Castle (siege)	1287	Sir Gaerfyrddin Carmarthenshire	545605	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)
Carregwastad - Abergwaun (ymosodiad) / Carregwastad Point – Fishguard (invasion)	1797	Sir Benfro Pembrokeshire	308824	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)
Gŵyr/ Gower	1136	Morgannwg Glamorgan	404856	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)
Grosmont	1405	Sir Fynwy Monmouthshire	402333	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2012) Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009) Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2012)
Hyddgen	1401	Sir Drefaldwyn Montgomeryshire	402310	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical

				research (Chapman, 2013)
Pont Irfon (Llanganten) / Irfon Bridge /	1282	Sir Frycheiniog Brecknockshire	403411	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Cydweli / Kidwelly	1258	Sir Gaerfyrddin Carmarthenshire	404729	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)
Castell Talacharn (gwarchae) / Laugharne Castle (sieges)	1189 1215 1257-8 1644	Sir Gaerfyrddin	545245 545341 545436 545746	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)
Maes Gwenllian	1136	Sir Gaerfyrddin Carmarthenshire	402324	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2012) Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009) Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2012)
Maes Moydog	1295	Sir Drefaldwyn	403416	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013)

		Montgomeryshire		<p>Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2014)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)</p> <p>Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2014)</p>
Trefaldwyn / Montgomery	1644	Sir Drefaldwyn Montgomeryshire	405168	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)</p>
Mynydd Carn	1081	Sir Benfro Pembrokeshire	300319	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p>
Castell Newydd Emlyn (gwarchae) / Newcastle Emlyn (siege)	1287-8	Sir Gaerfyrddin Carmarthenshire	545606	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)</p>
Castell Newydd Emlyn (gwarchae) / Newcastle Emlyn	1645	Sir Gaerfyrddin Carmarthenshire	545768	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)</p>
Gwrthryfel y Siartwyr, Casnewydd / Newport Chartist Uprising	1839	Sir Fynwy Monmouthshire	405003	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p>

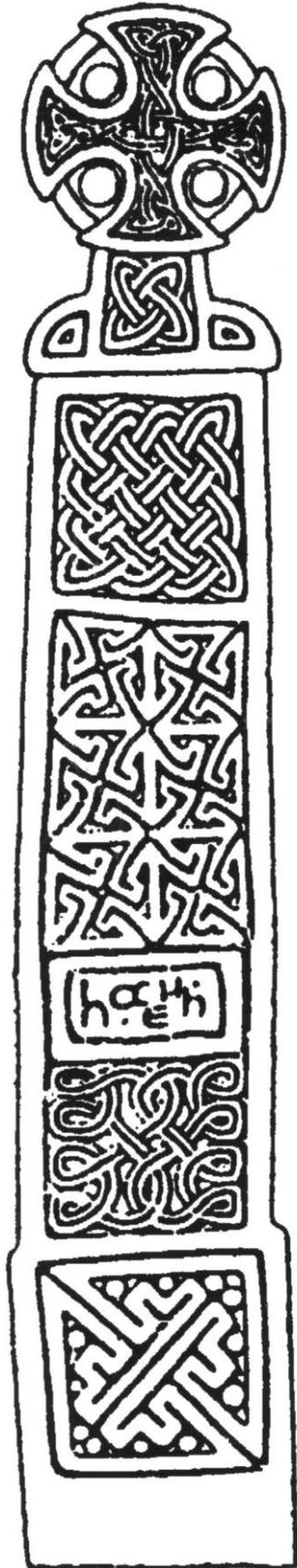
Paincastle	1198	Sir Faesyfed Radnorshire	402326	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2012) Cloddfa (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009) Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2012) Excavation (Archaeology Wales, 2013)
Pennal	1472/4	Meirionnydd Merioneth	403495	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Pentraeth	1170	Ynys Môn Anglesey	404315	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)
Pwllgwdig	1078	Sir Benfro Pembrokeshire	405188	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)
Pwll Melyn	1405	Sir Fynwy Monmouthshire	402320	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd

				<p>(Archaeoleg Cymru, 2014)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p> <p>Non-invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2014)</p>
Castell Rhaglan (gwarchae) / Raglan Castle (siege)	1646	Sir Fynwy Monmouthshire	545797	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)</p>
Sain Ffagan / St Fagans	1648	Morgannwg Glamorgan	307776	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p> <p>Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2012)</p> <p>Gwaith ymchwil heb fod yn ymyrryd ac a oedd yn ymyrryd (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2013)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p> <p>Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2012)</p> <p>Non-invasive and invasive fieldwork (Archaeology Wales, 2013)</p>
Twthill	1461	Sir Gaernarfon Caernarfonshire	403421	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p> <p>Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)</p>

				2009)
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Grŵp Llywio Meysydd Brwydro, Hydref 2016

Battlefields Steering Group, October 2016



Welsh Battlefields Historical Research:

Coleshill (1157)

(Order Number IJ/017430: November 2009)

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Battle Name: Coleshill (late July-early August 1157)

Site of Battle

The site of the battle of Coleshill remains uncertain, the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25 inch map of 1873 and subsequent maps of the area mark the battle site in a field immediately SW of Coleshill Farm, the site of which is now occupied by the Aber Park Industrial Estate. However this identification has been disputed and another possible site for the battlefield has been suggested in the vicinity of Ewloe Green, W of Hawarden.

1. Summary

Historical Context of Battle

The battle of Coleshill represents the single major engagement fought during Henry II's campaign in North Wales. The object of the campaign was to check the advances of Owain Gwynedd, prince of Gwynedd, in north-east Wales, specifically in the *cantref* of Tegeingl or Englefield (the district stretching east of the River Clwyd to the Dee estuary), which had been largely under Anglo-Norman control for several generations. Owain had secured control over most of Tegeingl following a decisive victory over Madog ap Maredudd, prince of Powys at Coleshill in 1150 and his position was further strengthened by the death of Ranulf earl of Chester three years later.¹

The expedition to North Wales may be viewed as one of a series of campaigns waged by Henry II following his accession to establish his overlordship in Wales and the Marches, during 1155 he had waged a successful campaign against the Marcher lords in Herefordshire and Shropshire, retaking the castles of Bridgnorth, Wigmore and Cleobury, while in 1158, he launched an expedition to South Wales against Rhys ap Gruffudd prince of Deheubarth.²

2. Narrative of Battle

Prelude to the Battle

No information has been found to establish the exact day on which the battle was fought, although it appears likely that the battle was fought at some point during late July or early August of 1157. It is not altogether easy to establish when and where the battle was fought and information regarding the movements of the English and Welsh forces prior to the engagement is similarly limited.

¹ For accounts of Owain Gwynedd's activities in north-east Wales in the early 1150s, see J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the earliest times to the Edwardian Conquest*, 2 vols (London 1939), II, 494-5 and R.R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford 2000), 48-50.

² R.R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford 2000), 52.

Henry II's expedition to Wales is presumed to have occurred following a royal council held at Northampton on 17 July 1157, when, according to Lloyd, 'measures against Owain Gwynedd were finally resolved upon'.³ It appears more likely that Henry II's preparations were actually set in motion some time before this date; the well-informed contemporary chronicle of Robert de Torigni mentions that 'around the feast of St John the Baptist (24 June), King Henry prepared a great expedition, so that throughout the whole of England two knights were to equip a third, to assault the Welsh by land and sea'.⁴

Robert de Torigni's testimony implies that this was a substantial expedition, ambitiously planned with land-based and seaborne components, and his account of Henry II's preparations can be confirmed by references to expenditure recorded in the Pipe Roll for 1157-8. The scale of the expedition is confirmed by Henry II's utilisation of the feudal levy, although it is significant that the King, instead of resorting to the traditional expedient of raising the entire body of knights to serve their legal term of forty days, only raised one third of the host (presumably for a threefold term of service).⁵ Evidence for preparations associated with the seaborne part of the expedition is indicated by a reference in the account of the Pipe Roll for 1157-8 to a payment of £4 to Roger the Constable (of Winchester) for hiring a ship to carry the King's supplies (*corredium Regis*) to Pembroke'.⁶

The principal objective of the seaborne expedition, which was apparently led by Henry fitz Henry, lord of Narberth (illegitimate son of Henry I by Nest of Pembroke) and Robert fitz Stephen of Cardigan, is unclear. It has been suggested by Lloyd and other authors that the fleet was originally intended to support the advance of the main force (led by the King himself) presumably by landing at Deganwy or Rhuddlan, however the seaborne force appears to have landed in Anglesey and plundered the surrounding district, subsequently being routed by the local inhabitants.⁷

Following the council of Northampton (17 July 1157), it is presumed that Henry II proceeded to Chester - a date in late July/early August appears most likely. The King appears to have been accompanied by a substantial force, described by the majority of the English and Welsh monastic chronicles as an immense army. Several of the chronicles report that the English army encamped outside Chester, the 'B' text of the *Annales Cambriae* and the RBH version of the Brut both state that the encampment was situated in the open field of Chester, while the *Brenheinned y Saeson* states that the encampment was situated in the marsh of Chester.⁸ Powel's version of the Brut

³ J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the earliest times to the Edwardian Conquest*, 2 vols (London 1939), II, 496.

⁴ P.M. Remfry, *Annales Cambriae: A Translation of Harleian MS 3859, PRO E 164/1, Cottonian Domitian A.1 Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3514 and MS Exchequer DB Neath PRO E 164/1* (Shrewsbury 2007), 87.

⁵ *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett, 4 vols (London 1889), IV, 193

⁶ *Pipe Roll 3 Henry II*, 108

⁷ *Brut y Tywysogion: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1973), 135-6

⁸ P.M. Remfry, *Annales Cambriae* (Shrewsbury 2007), 87. *Brut y Tywysogion: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1973), 135-6; *Brenhinedd y Saeson*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1971), 158-9

specifically locates the encampment at Saltney Marsh, W of Chester, which may have been influenced by the description of the locale in the Brenheinedd.⁹

The movements of Owain Gwynedd and his army prior to the battle are more consistently attested by the chronicle sources. The 'B' text of the *Annales Cambriae* and the *Brut y Tywysogion* essentially all agree on the fact that Owain, together with his sons Dafydd and Cynan, assembled a substantial army, encamped at 'Dinas Basing' and established earthwork fortifications (described in the *Annales* as a castle and by the RBH and Peniarth MS 20 versions of the *Brut* as a ditch or ditches) there to await the advance of the King's forces.¹⁰ The location of Owain's fortified position at 'Dinas Basing', however, remains uncertain, some scholars have placed it in the vicinity of Basingwerk Abbey near Holywell while it has also been tentatively identified with the defended enclosure at Hen Blas.¹¹

The Battle and its Aftermath

Accounts of the battle are given in both Welsh and English monastic annals and in Gerald of Wales's *Itinerary*, all of which vary in detail and emphasis. In spite of these variations, it is nevertheless possible to determine the principal events of the battle although it is difficult to establish precise details as to chronology and the location of the events described.

The fullest description of the battle, contained in the RBH text of the *Brut*, states that Henry II, on hearing of the location of Owain's forces, 'divided his host and sent many knights and barons beyond number with a strong multitude along the shore. And the King himself unperturbed and armed forces most ready to fight along with him, advanced through the wood that was between them and the place where Owain was'.¹² The account in the Peniarth MS, although it does not explicitly refer to the division of Henry II's forces, agrees with the RBH account in most respects, with the important exception that it specifically states that King Henry and his portion of the army 'came through the wood which was between them, which was called the wood of Hawarden (*coed Pennardlaoc*)'.¹³

The 'B' text of the *Annales Cambriae* provides a slightly different account, stating that 'the King with diligence acted cunningly, he pressed on along the shore road towards Owain's entrenchment but before reaching it he turned aside'.¹⁴ From these accounts it would appear likely that the main body of the army advanced along the shoreline of the Dee towards Owain's fortified position at 'Dinas Basing', while

⁹ D. Powel, *Historie of Cambria* (London 1811), 150

¹⁰ P.M. Remfry, *Annales Cambriae* (Shrewsbury 2007), 87. *Brut y Tywysogion: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1973), 135-6; *Brut y Tywysogion: Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1952), 58-9

¹¹ D.J. C. King, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 2 no. 4 (1965), 367-73; J.G. Edwards, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill: Some Further Reflections', *Welsh Historical Review*, Vol. 3 no. 3 (1967), 251-63

¹² *Brut y Tywysogion: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1973), 135-6

¹³ *Brut y Tywysogion: Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1952), 58-9

¹⁴ P.M. Remfry, *Annales Cambriae* (Shrewsbury 2007), 87

Henry II advanced with a smaller portion of his army through woodland which lay between them and Owain's fortification, presumably to outflank it.

The English chronicle sources do not provide as detailed a description of the movements of the English army, although both William of Newburgh and Gerald of Wales make reference to Henry II's advance through woodland (which Gerald refers to as 'the wood of Coleshill'). It is clear from the majority of the chronicle accounts that Henry II was ambushed by the Welsh during his advance through this area of woodland; the precise location of the ambush, however, remains an issue of considerable uncertainty.

The narratives of the battle contained in the RBH and Peniarth MS versions of the *Brut* and the 'B' text of the *Annales Cambriae* all agree that Henry's forces were ambushed by Dafydd and Cynan the sons of Owain Gwynedd and suffered heavy losses. The text of the RBH states that 'Cynan and Dafydd, sons of Owain, encountered him in the wild wood and gave the King a severe battle. And after many of the King's men had been slain, it was with difficulty that he escaped back to the plain'.¹⁵ The 'B' text of the *Annales* contains a slightly different version of events, stating that Cynan and Dafydd 'with those guarding against this, gave a sharp battle, and many of the King's men were killed, those who pressed on escaping death'.¹⁶

The account in the *Brenhinedd y Saeson*, though briefer, is markedly different from that given in other versions of the *Brut*, stating that 'against them came Dafydd ap Owain, and he pursued them as far as the strand of Chester, slaughtering them murderously'.¹⁷ This reference to a pursuit as far as the shore of the Dee is of considerable interest as it appears to be corroborated by a source independent of the *Brut* and contemporary with the events described, namely an elegy composed by Cynddelw on the death of the bard Bleddyn Fardd of Powys.¹⁸

The most detailed contemporary English source for the battle, namely William of Newburgh's *History of English Affairs*, largely corroborates the Welsh chronicle accounts of Henry II and part of his army being ambushed in woodland by the Welsh.¹⁹ It describes how 'the King, entering their confines after much opposition, through the nature and difficulties of the country, met with a very inauspicious commencement to his plans, for a portion of the army, proceeding incautiously through a wooded and marshy district, was much endangered by falling into an ambush, which the enemy had laid for him on his route'.

William adds further details about the losses inflicted upon Henry's forces, specifically mentioning the death of two eminent nobles - Eustace fitz John,

¹⁵ *Brut y Tywysogion: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1973), 135-6

¹⁶ P.M. Remfry, *Annales Cambriae* (Shrewsbury 2007), 87

¹⁷ *Brenhinedd y Saeson*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1971), 158-9

¹⁸ Printed with discussion in G.R. Gruffydd, 'A Welsh poet falls at the battle of Coleshill, 1157: Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr's elegy for Bleddyn Fardd of Powys', *Flintshire Society Journal*, Vol. 36 (2003), 52-58

¹⁹ *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett, 4 vols (London 1889), I, 105-9

constable of Chester (described as ‘a great and aged person, highly renowned for wealth and wisdom, among the noblest chiefs of England’) and Robert de Courcy, who ‘with many others unfortunately perished’. William further relates how ‘those who has escaped the danger, supposing that the King had fallen among the rest (though by the favour of God, he had forced his way through and was now in safety), related his death to the troops, as they approached, and hastening to the defile induced a large portion of the army, ingloriously to fly, insomuch that Henry of Essex, a man of the highest distinction, and hereditary standard-bearer to the king, throwing down the royal banner by which the army was to be animated, took to flight, and proclaimed to all he met that the king was dead.’

William’s account of how reports of Henry’s supposed death induced Henry of Essex, the King’s standard bearer and part of the English army to flee in disorder is confirmed by several contemporary chroniclers, including Gervase of Canterbury and Robert de Torigni.²⁰ Further details about the ambush are supplied by a slightly later account in Jocelin of Brakelond’s *Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds* (compiled c.1210), which is of considerable value as its source was apparently none other than Henry of Essex himself.²¹ Jocelin relates that Henry ‘had falsely cast away the standard of the King in the difficult passage of Coleshill, and had cried out in a loud voice that the King was dead, causing those who were coming to his defence to turn and flee’. At this point Jocelin adds material which does not appear in William of Newburgh’s account, stating that ‘this (the King’s death) indeed would have come to pass, had not Roger Earl of Clare, a man of famous birth and yet more famous in the field of war, hastened betimes with his men of Clare and raised the King’s standard to rally and hearten the whole host’.

Precise details of Henry II’s movements following the ambush are unclear; the RBH and the Peniarth MS 20 texts of the *Brut* both state that the King and his remaining forces escaped to the open country, but precisely where is unclear. However, the ‘B’ text of the *Annales* and the RBH and Peniarth MS 20 versions of the *Brut* all appear to agree that Henry’s contingent had emerged from the woodland either on the rear or flank of Owain’s entrenched position.²² The RBH text states that ‘and when Owain heard that the King was coming against him from the rear side and saw the knights approaching from the other side, and with them a mighty host under arms, he left that place and retreated as far as the place that was called Cil Owain.’²³

The ‘B’ text of the *Annales Cambriae* and the Peniarth MS 20 and RBH texts of the *Brut* all concur that Henry II subsequently appears to have rejoined the main force and continued along the coast to Rhuddlan, while Owain appears to have retreated southwards to the vicinity of St Asaph, ‘harrassing the King by day and night’, first retreating to Cilowen (presumably identifiable with the settlement located 2km to

²⁰ J.E. Lloyd, *History of Wales*, 2 vols (London 1939), II, 497; *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols (London, 1879-80), I, 165

²¹ *The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond*, ed. & trans. H.E. Butler (London 1949), 69-70

²² P.M. Remfry, *Annales Cambriae* (Shrewsbury 2007), 87. *Brut y Tywysogion: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1973), 135-6; *Brut y Tywysogion: Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1952), 58-9

²³ *Brut y Tywysogion: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1973), 135-6

the S of Llanfair Talhaiarn) then proceeding to 'Tal Llwyn Pinna' (identifiable with Bryn y pin Farm S of Bodelwyddan).²⁴

Troops and Casualties

None of the English or Welsh annalists provide precise details regarding the respective size of Henry II or Owain's forces, although both are described as being of considerable size. The fact that Henry II summoned one third of the entire feudal host would appear to lend weight to the chronicle descriptions of the English army as 'mighty' and 'immense'; further evidence for the composition of the English forces is provided by a reference in the account of William fitz Alan sheriff of Shropshire in the Pipe Roll for 1157-58, relating to a payment of 47s to a contingent of royal archers 'in exercitu', almost certainly referring to Henry II's expedition to Wales.²⁵ Henry's forces were further augmented by a contingent of troops led by Madog ap Maredudd of Powys, the presence of which is attested by the 'C' text of the *Annales Cambriae* and the evidence of an elegy composed by the Welsh bard Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr, commemorating one Bleddyn Farrd, a court poet to Madog ap Maredudd who fell during the battle.²⁶

It is noticeable that the Welsh chronicle sources specifically describe the composition of the main body of the English force which advanced along the shore of the Dee as consisting of 'many earls and barons' accompanied by 'a strong force fully equipped'. Unfortunately the portion of the army led by the King himself is much less clearly described by the Welsh chronicles, the Peniarth MS 20 version of the *Brut* refers to it as consisting of 'armed forces most ready to fight' while the RBH text describes 'an innumerable armed host, fearless and ready for battle'.²⁷

The composition of Henry's flanking force has been a subject of speculation by modern scholars; Lloyd's account describes how Henry 'plunged himself, with a body of light armed troops, into the thick of the forest', while a more recent study by J.D. Hosler suggests that 'the force led into the woods by Henry was primarily infantry'.²⁸ There is, however, insufficient documentary evidence to support either of these assumptions. Moreover, it is clear from William of Newburgh and Jocelin de Brakelond's account of the Welsh ambush that the King was accompanied by at least four nobles of the first rank, which suggests that his detachment consisted, at least in part, of heavily armed, mounted knights rather than merely lightly armed skirmishers.²⁹

²⁴ *Brut y Tywysogion: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1973), 135-6; *Brut y Tywysogion: Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1952), 58-9

²⁵ *Pipe Roll 3 Hen II*, 89. 'Et in liberatione archiarorum Regis in exercitu – 47s'

²⁶ G.R. Gruffydd, 'A Welsh poet falls at the battle of Coleshill, 1157: Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr's elegy for Bleddyn Farrd of Powys', *Flintshire Society Journal*, Vol. 36 (2003), 52-58

²⁷ *Brut y Tywysogion: Red Book of Hergest Version*, ed. & trans. T. Jones (Cardiff 1973), 135-6

²⁸ J.D. Hosler, 'Henry II's Military Campaigns in Wales', *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, Vol. 2, ed. B.S. Bachrach et al. (2004), 63-4

²⁹ A point emphasised in D.J. Cathcart King, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill', *Welsh History Review* Vol. 2 (1964-5), 372.

Henry of Essex was the King's constable and standard bearer and a prominent figure at Henry's court during the first three years of his reign, a position which he appears to have rapidly lost following rumours of his conduct during the Welsh expedition, finally resulting in a formal accusation of cowardice and treason by Robert de Montfort and his defeat in judicial combat in 1163 after which he took the monastic habit at Reading.³⁰

Roger de Clare, Earl of Hertford, was a leading magnate with extensive landed interests in Wales and the Marches, who subsequently played a significant role in the campaign to re-conquer Ceredigion in 1158-9.³¹ The two barons who are recorded by William of Newburgh as having been slain in the ambush, Robert de Courci and Eustace fitz John, were also men of the first rank; Robert de Courci served as steward in the household of the Empress Matilda and Henry II while Eustace fitz John (c.1100-1157) held extensive estates in Yorkshire and Northumberland and inherited the barony of Halton (Cheshire) and the constableness of Chester by marriage to Agnes, daughter of William fitz Nigel.³²

Regrettably, there is little information from either the English or Welsh chronicle sources concerning the size or composition of the forces commanded by Owain Gwynedd and his sons. From the references in the various texts of the Brut to a 'mighty host' it would appear that Owain had assembled a substantial force, which also appears to have been divided into two portions, the main part of which, under Owain's leadership, was based at his fortified position at Dinas Basing while another portion, under the command of his sons Cynan and Dafydd was apparently stationed in woodland protecting Owain's flank.

The majority of the English and Welsh chronicle sources appear to agree that the ambush of Henry II's detachment by the Welsh resulted in heavy casualties for the English forces with several prominent nobles being slain, although no specific numbers are given. No information is available on the number of Welsh casualties suffered during the battle.

3. Assessment

Battle Location:

As previous scholars have recognized, there are two key problems to be addressed in establishing the movements of the English and Welsh forces and the location of the principal battle site, the first being the location of Owain's fortified position at Dinas

³⁰ For an account of Henry of Essex's career, see E. Amt, *The Accession of Henry II in England: royal government restored 1149-1159* (Woodbridge, 1993), 73-74

³¹ J.E. Lloyd, *History of Wales*, 2 vols (London 1939), II, 506

³² For a brief biography of Robert de Courci see H.A. Cronne & R.H.C. Davis (eds.) *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum Vol. III Regesta Regis Stephani ac Mathildis imperatricis* (Oxford 1968), xxx. For biographical details of Eustace fitz John, see K.S.B. Keats Rohan, *Domesday Descendants: A prosopography of persons occurring in English documents 1066-1166, II, Pipe Rolls to Cartae Baronum* (Woodbridge, 2002), 918-9.

Basing, the second being the location of the ambush of Henry II's forces by the sons of Owain Gwynedd.

The Site of 'Dinas Basing'

It was originally assumed by Lloyd and Cathcart-King that 'Dinas Basing' referred to a site in the vicinity of the ruins of Basingwerk Priory at Greenfield near Holywell,³³ which would agree with the evidence for Owain having encamped in a fortified position to meet the English force approaching along the coast road from Chester towards Rhuddlan, and there is evidence of a modest earthwork motte (Bryn-y-Castell) established on a naturally defensible site at Holywell, approximately 1km SW of the Priory site which could possibly be interpreted as the site of 'Dinas Basing', although this identification has been questioned, on the basis that this motte is more likely to have been associated with Holywell.³⁴

Indeed, it has been convincingly argued that, although the monastic community of Basingwerk was in existence by c.1131, it did not come into occupation of the Greenfield site until shortly after Henry II's campaign of 1157 and that while the monks certainly occupied a place called 'Basingwerk' prior to 1157, the original 'Basingwerk' was almost certainly not situated at Greenfield and, in fact, was more likely to have been situated somewhere in the vicinity of Coleshill.³⁵

A plausible candidate for the location of Dinas Basing is represented by the earthworks of Hen Blas (NGR SJ 222 734), another naturally defensible site located on the spur of two streams, commanding what is aptly described by King as the 'almost impassable ravine' of the Nant-y-Ferm extending NE and coming to an end only some 300m from the present shoreline. The earthwork remains consist of an inner enclosure defined by steep natural slopes except to the W, where it is separated by a ditch from a larger outer enclosure also defended by a ditch to the W. The origins of the fortification are uncertain; the promontory site suggests an Iron Age origin although it could well have been the site of an early medieval *llys* or princely residence.

Archaeological investigations during the mid-late 1950s revealed the remains of a stone chapel dating from late 11th-early 12th century situated within the outer enclosure.³⁶ A small motte and bailey castle was established there at an unspecified point in the 12th century, with evidence for a later phase of activity represented by stone buildings dated to the 13th-late 14th century.

³³ J.E. Lloyd, *History of Wales*, 2 vols (London 1939), II, 497; D.J. C. King, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 2 no. 4 (1965), 367

³⁴ D.J.C. King *Castellarium Anglicanum*, 2 vols (London 1983), II, 559

³⁵ J.G. Edwards, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill: Some Further Reflections', *Welsh Historical Review*, Vol. 3 no. 3 (1967), 254-6 G. Lloyd, 'Excavations at Hen Blas, Coleshill Fawr near Flint', *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 18 (1960), 55-60 (including an important contribution by A. Taylor)

³⁶ G.B. Leach, 'Excavations at Hen Blas, Coleshill Fawr near Flint', *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 17 (1957), 1-15; G. Lloyd, 'Excavations at Hen Blas, Coleshill Fawr near Flint', *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 18 (1960), 13-60.

It should be noted that no archaeological evidence was found to indicate a specific phase of hurried fortification of the site as suggested by the chronicle sources, nor was any evidence found indicative of activity which might be associated with an attack or siege, although the limited extent of the investigations undertaken by Leach in the mid 1950s should be taken into account. There is nevertheless potential for further investigation of the Hen Blas site to determine whether a more precise phasing for the outer enclosure and the motte and bailey castle could be established.

While the identification of Hen Blas with 'Dinas Basing', the original site of the Priory of Basingwerk, is certainly feasible, it has not been possible, based on the available documentary and cartographic sources, to confirm this identification, consequently the site of Owain's 'entrenchments remains undetermined.

The Site of Ambush of Henry II's Forces

The location of the ambush of Henry II's forces by the sons of Owain Gwynedd has been an issue of considerable scholarly discussion. The English and Welsh chronicle sources largely agree that the detachment of the army led by King Henry was attacked by the Welsh in dense woodland, while three authorities, namely Gerald of Wales, William of Newburgh and Jocelin de Brakelond are more specific in their description of the locale of the ambush, describing it as taking place in a narrow, heavily wooded defile or pass.³⁷

However there is considerable divergence between the various chronicle sources as to the precise location of this heavily wooded pass where Henry's forces were ambushed. The Chronicle of Jocelin de Brakelond describes the ambush as taking place 'in the difficult passage of Coleshill' while the Itinerary of Gerald of Wales provides more detail, describing how, after spending the previous night at Basingwerk Abbey and riding across an extensive quicksand (presumably referring to the route along the shoreline of the Dee estuary) 'on our right we passed the forest of Coleshill, the hill of coal (where) in our own time Henry II, King of the English, was badly mauled when he made his first assault on Wales'.³⁸ Gerald again refers to the 'wood of Coleshill' as being the site of the ambush in a later part of the same chapter, describing the story of a young Welshman who had been killed 'while passing through the King's army' and whose body was guarded by his dog from the attacks of dogs, wolves and birds of prey.

Some scholars have taken Coleshill to refer specifically to the vill of Coleshill, W of Flint, the earliest being the late 16th century antiquarian David Powel who describes the battle as taking place 'not far from Flynt'.³⁹ This would appear to account for the siting of the battle on the OS 1st edition map in the vicinity of Coleshill Farm, presumed to have been the manorial centre of the vill of Coleshill; a similar location

³⁷ Giraldus Cambrensis, Opera, ed. Dimock, VI, 137

³⁸ Giraldus Cambrensis, Opera, ed. Dimock, VI, 138

³⁹ D. Powel, *Historie of Cambria* (London 1811.), 151

was also suggested by D.J.C. King, in his article on 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill'.⁴⁰

However, as J.G. Edwards observed in his rejoinder to King's article, the name Coleshill not only related to the vill but also to a *commote* or district within the cantref of Tegeingl. The extent of the medieval forest of Coleshill is difficult to determine precisely, it may well have been roughly coterminous with the *commote* of Coleshill, encompassing a substantial area to the S of the Dee Estuary, extending from Holywell as far SE as Hawarden.⁴¹ Assuming this to be the case, then it appears that the allusion to Coleshill in Gerald of Wales, Jocelin de Brakelond and the *Annales Cestriensis* could just as well refer to a much broader area rather than a particular location NW of Flint. However, it would seem from the accounts given by Gerald, Jocelin and William of Newburgh that the ambush took place in a narrow defile or pass located somewhere within this once extensive tract of woodland.

Another, entirely different location for the ambush site has been suggested by the historians J.E. Lloyd and J.G. Edwards based on the evidence of the Peniarth MS 20 text of the Brut, which specifically refers to King Henry and his portion of the army coming 'through the wood which was between them (and Owain's fortified position), which was called the wood of Hawarden (*koed Pennardlaoc*)'.⁴² Based on the reference to the wood of Hawarden, Edwards located the scene of the Welsh ambush to the locality of Ewloe, approximately 2km NW of Hawarden; certainly there are a number of place names in both Ewloe and Hawarden which have traditional associations with the battle, most notably Trueman's Hill, which was traditionally reputed to be 'a fortification to prevent Henry II from advancing by this pass into Wales'.⁴³

Moreover two poems composed by the Welsh bard Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr appear to place the scene of the battle in the locality of Hawarden. The first, written on the death of the poet Bleddyn Fardd of Powys in battle at Coleshill specifically describes how 'there has been slain a youth of flawless verse (it is no fault to honour him) *below the court of Pennardd (oddys llaw llys Bennardd)*', while the other, composed 'in praise of Owain Gwynedd' refers to how the poet saw the English 'killed splendidly' at the rampart of Hawarden (*rhag Pennardd*). Both poems would appear to locate the battle close to Hawarden Castle; the present fortress appears to have originated as a motte and bailey castle in the 12th century although the existing masonry castle dates from the late 13th century.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ D.J. C. King, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 2 no. 4 (1965), 367

⁴¹ J.G. Edwards, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill: Some Further Reflections', *Welsh Historical Review*, Vol. 3 no. 3 (1967), 259-61

⁴² J.E. Lloyd, *History of Wales* 2 vols (London, 1939), II, 497; J.G. Edwards, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill: Some Further Reflections', *Welsh Historical Review*, Vol. 3 no. 3 (1967), 258-9

⁴³ H.W. Owen, *The Place Names of East Flintshire* (Cardiff 1994), 69; RCAHMW, *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Flintshire* (London 1912) no. 106

⁴⁴ G.R. Gruffydd, 'A Welsh poet falls at the battle of Coleshill, 1157: Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr's elegy for Bleddyn Fardd of Powys', *Flintshire Society Journal*, Vol. 36 (2003), 57-8. For the text of Cynddelw's poem 'In Praise of Owain Gwynedd' see R. Andrews (ed.), *Welsh Court Poems* (Cardiff, 2008) the text of the poem is given on pp. 3-4 (the section describing the battle is contained in l. 60-5) with commentary on pp. 51-5.

While the references in these two poems would seem to refer to a specific location somewhere in the vicinity of Hawarden, the reference to the 'coed Pennardlaoc' in the Peniarth MS 20 text of the *Brut* must be regarded with some caution. The late 18th century antiquarian Thomas Pennant interpreted it as being synonymous with 'Coed Eulo' (Ewloe Wood); however it is entirely possible, as H. Wyn Owen has observed in his study of Place Names of East Flintshire, that it could denote a much larger area, the extent of which is difficult to establish.⁴⁵ It is possible, indeed, that the 'coed Pennardlaoc' mentioned in the Peniarth MS 20 text of the *Brut* could be identical to the 'wood of Coleshill' mentioned in the English chronicle sources.

Another problem in accepting Hawarden as the site of the ambush, as King pointed out subsequently, relates to its considerable distance from Owain's defended position at 'Dinas Basing', which would seem most likely to be located somewhere between Holywell and Flint, close to the coast road (*via littorea*) to Rhuddlan extending along the shore of the Dee along which the main bulk of the English army are said to have advanced, whether at Basingwerk, Holywell or Hen Blas near Bagillt.⁴⁶

The Welsh chronicle sources all state that the ambush occurred as a result of Henry II's forces advancing through dense woodland which lay between them and Owain's hastily raised fortification, and that Owain subsequently withdrew when he learnt that Henry II's troops had emerged either on the flank or to the rear of his position. Consequently, it may be inferred that the woodland where the ambush took place was probably located somewhere reasonably close to the fortification at 'Dinas Basing'. If the site of the ambush was indeed at Ewloe or Hawarden, then this would suggest that Owain's defended position was somewhere in this area. However, this would appear to be too far away from the Dee estuary to have formed an effective obstacle to a force advancing along the coast road from Chester although it cannot be entirely ruled out.

Having reviewed the conflicting evidence for the location of the battle, it is clear that there remains a great deal of uncertainty regarding the site of Owain's fortified position at 'Dinas Basing' and the 'heavily wooded pass' where Henry II and his troops were ambushed. However it is reasonable to assume that 'Dinas Basing' was located somewhere relatively close to the coast road from Chester to Rhuddlan as the 'B' text of the *Annales Cambriae*, the Peniarth MS 20 and RBH versions of the *Brut* clearly indicate that the purpose of Owain's earthwork fortifications was provide a defensive position from which he intended to give battle to the English forces advancing along the shore of the Dee. If the defended enclosure of Hen Blas, as Edwards plausibly suggested, represents the site of 'Dinas Basing', then it is possible that Henry II may have attempted to outflank Owain's fortification by advancing along the wooded valley of the Nant-y-Flint to the SW, although no

⁴⁵ T. Pennant, *Tours in Wales*, ed. J. Rhys, 3 vols (London 1883), I, 115; H.W. Owen, *The Place Names of East Flintshire* (Cardiff 1994), 62-3

⁴⁶ D.J. C. King, 'The Defence of Wales 1067-1283', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, Vol. 126 (1977), 7-8

evidence of place names directly associated with the battle has been derived from the Holywell tithe map and apportionment of 1841.

Discussion of Primary Sources

Details of the battle, the events preceding it and its subsequent aftermath primarily consist of references in English and Welsh monastic annals, most of which were compiled in the 13th century with the exception of references in several mid-late 12th century annals, the earliest being Robert of Torigni's *Chronicle* followed by William of Newburgh's *History of English Affairs*, Gervase of Canterbury's *Chronicle* and Jocelin de Brakelond's *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, the latter being of particular significance as Jocelin apparently relied on the testimony of Henry of Essex who had been Henry II's standard bearer during the battle.⁴⁷ A brief but valuable passage describing the location of the battle 'in a heavily wooded pass at Coleshill' appears in Gerald of Wales's *Itinerarium Cambriae* (compiled in about 1191). The battle is also mentioned briefly in the Annals of St Werburgh's Abbey at Chester (*Annales Cestriensis*), compiled in the late 14th-early 15th century.⁴⁸

The events of the battle are described at length in the 'B' text of the *Annales Cambriae*, the majority of which appears to have been compiled at Strata Florida at some point between 1255 and 1264,⁴⁹ and the Peniarth MS 20, Red Book of Hergest (RBH) and Breinhenedd y Saeson texts of the *Brut y Tywysogion*, the existing manuscripts of which are 14th-15th century date but appear to be derived from an original Latin chronicle, also probably compiled at Strata Florida in the mid to late 13th century. The accounts of the battle in the Peniarth MS 20 and RBH texts of the Brut and the 'B' text of the *Annales Cambriae* show close similarities, suggesting that they are derived from a common source which appears to have been particularly well informed concerning the activities of the English and Welsh forces during the battle.

Apart from the chronicle sources, there are two other accounts of the battle that are of particular importance, consisting of two poems composed by Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr (fl. c. 1155-1200) who served as a bard in the court of Madog ap Maredudd prince of Powys (d.1160), namely a panegyric 'In Praise of Owain Gwynedd' (dating from c.1157-67) and an elegy for Bleddyn Fardd, a bard of Powys who fell in the battle of Coleshill.⁵⁰ Further evidence of the military preparations of the English forces is contained in the Pipe Rolls for 1156-58.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond*, ed. & trans. H.E. Butler (London 1949), 69-70

⁴⁸ *Annales Cestrienses or Chronicle of the Abbey of St Werburg at Chester*, ed. R.C. Christie, Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society Vol. 17 (Manchester 1887)

⁴⁹ The original manuscript of the 'B' text is contained in NA E164/1. P.M. Remfry, *Annales Cambriae* (Shrewsbury 2007), 16-26 contains a useful discussion of the origins of the 'B' chronicle.

⁵⁰ G.R. Gruffydd, 'A Welsh poet falls at the battle of Coleshill, 1157: Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr's elegy for Bleddyn Farrd of Powys', *Flintshire Society Journal*, Vol. 36 (2003), 52-58; For Cynddelw's poem 'In Praise of Owain Gwynedd' see R. Andrews (ed.), *Welsh Court Poems* (Cardiff, 2008); the text of the poem is given on pp. 3-4 with commentary on pp. 51-5.

⁵¹ *The Great Rolls of the Pipe for the second, third and fourth years of the reign of King Henry the Second*, ed. J. Hunter (London 1844). Also see references cited in J.E. Lloyd, *History of Wales*, 2 vols (London 1939), II, 497-8

Discussion of Secondary Sources

There is a fairly sizeable body of secondary literature relating to the battle of Coleshill, both in terms of antiquarian descriptions and modern scholarly accounts. The earliest antiquarian account of the battle, in Powel's 'Historie of Cambria', published in 1584, appears to have utilised various texts of the Brut and several English chronicles, in particular the account in William of Newburgh, but also adds details that appear to have been derived from other sources.⁵² The late 18th century antiquarian Thomas Pennant, in his *History of the Parish of Holywell* and his *Tours in Wales*, includes some important observations relating to sites traditionally associated with the battle.⁵³

Apart from a brief discussion of the evidence for the battle site contained in Egerton Phillimore's footnotes to his edition of Owen's Pembrokehire and in two DNB articles by T.F. Tout on Owain Gwynedd and his son Dafydd, the first detailed modern scholarly account of the battle is contained in Lloyd's *History of Wales*. Lloyd's initial view expressed in his *History* was that 'no precise indication of the site is at present possible' although (following a suggestion by Phillimore) he did venture the probable identification of the 'Koet Kennadlaoc' as given in the notoriously inaccurate Rolls Edition of the Brut as a misreading of 'Coed Pennardd Alaog' (ie. the wood of Hawarden).⁵⁴ Following the publication of a modern critical edition of the Peniarth MS. 20 of the Brut, the correct rendering of 'Coed Pennardlaoc' was established and Lloyd subsequently expressed a less qualified view in his entries on Dafydd ap Owain Gwynedd that the ambush of Henry II took place 'in the woods of Hawarden'.⁵⁵

Further scholarly debate concerning the chronology of Henry II's campaign and the location of the battle site was engendered by an important article by D.J.C. King on 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill' which identified the location of the main scene of fighting immediately to the NW of Flint, essentially in the vicinity of present-day Coleshill Farm.⁵⁶

However, Cathcart King's reconstruction of the campaign and his location of the battle site were seriously challenged by J. Goronwy Edwards in his paper on 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill: Some Further Reflections'.⁵⁷ Edwards focused on the problems presented by the various texts of the Welsh chronicles and in particular, Cathcart King's failure to consider the reference in the Peniarth MS 20 text of the

⁵² D. Powel, *Historie of Cambria* (London 1811.), 151

⁵³ T. Pennant, *A History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell* (London 1796); T. Pennant, *Tours in Wales*, ed. J. Rhys, 3 vols (London 1883)

⁵⁴ J.E. Lloyd, *History of Wales*, 2 vols (London 1939), II, 497-99

⁵⁵ J.G. Edwards, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill: Some Further Reflections', *Welsh Historical Review*, Vol. 3 no. 3 (1967), 259-60

⁵⁶ D.J. C. King, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 2 no. 4 (1965), 367-73

⁵⁷ J.G. Edwards, 'Henry II and the Fight at Coleshill: Some Further Reflections', *Welsh Historical Review*, Vol. 3 no. 3 (1967), 251-63

Brut to the 'koed Pennardlaoc' and the evidence suggesting a possible location for the Welsh encampment of 'Dinas Basing' at Hen Blas rather than the site of the monastery of Basingwerk. Edwards' article remains the most comprehensive and measured treatment of the documentary evidence although his identification of the site of the ambush of Henry II's forces at Ewloe Green near Hawarden is open to dispute.

King presented a slightly modified version of his interpretation of the battle, while maintaining his location of the main action at Coleshill, in a paper delivered to the Cambrian Archaeological Association in 1977.⁵⁸ A recent study of Henry II's campaigns in Wales by J.D. Hosler contains a useful reassessment of the tactics employed by Henry II during the 1157 campaign but does not engage in a detailed discussion of the evidence for the location of Owain's fortified position or the ambush of the King's troops by Cynan and Dafydd ap Owain Gwynedd.⁵⁹

Archaeology and Historic Terrain

Due to the difficulties in establishing the precise locations for Owain Gwynedd's fortification at 'Dinas Basing' and the ambush of Henry II's detachment, variously described as having taken place in the wood of Coleshill or 'Pennardlaoc' (Hawarden), it is difficult to draw firm conclusions regarding the potential of any particular site (specifically in terms of battlefield archaeology).

Two possible locations for the site of Dinas Basing have been suggested; the first being Bryn-y-Castell, a heavily overgrown mound overlooking St Winefride's Well at Holywell (NGR SJ 1857 7630) which awaits detailed archaeological investigation, although the RCAHMW Inventory for Flintshire identifies it with the castle of 'Treffynnawn' (Holywell) built by the earl of Chester in 1209.⁶⁰

The earthworks of the defended enclosure at Hen Blas (NGR SJ 2216 7345), approximately 1km SW of Bagillt, were excavated in the mid 1950s. The remains of a small, stone-built church were identified within the outer enclosure and it was plausibly suggested that this might represent 'Dinas Basing', the original site of the abbey of Basingwerk before it was re-established at Greenfield, NE of Holywell in the late 1150s. There is potential for further investigation to determine whether there is any evidence for occupation or re-fortification of the site in the late 1150s. The traditional site of the battle marked on the OS 1st edition map at Coleshill Farm is now occupied by a modern industrial estate and has been heavily landscaped, consequently the potential for the survival of buried archaeological remains relating the battlefield in this particular area appears to be limited.

Assessment of the Historic Significance of the Battle:

⁵⁸ D.J. C. King, 'The Defence of Wales 1067-1283', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, Vol. 126 (1977), 1-16

⁵⁹ J.D. Hosler, 'Henry II's Military Campaigns in Wales', *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, Vol. 2, ed. B.S. Bachrach et al. (2004), 53-72

⁶⁰ RCAHMW, *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Flintshire* (London 1912), no. 123

The result of the battle and its overall significance in the context of Henry II's campaign against Owain Gwynedd has been the subject of some scholarly debate. J.E. Lloyd, in his account of the battle, stresses the inexperience of Henry II; however the available documentary evidence suggests that Henry's expedition to North Wales was a meticulously planned campaign, with a substantial land-based force supported by a seaborne expedition.

Henry's attempt to outflank Owain's fortifications has also been re-evaluated by more recent writers, while J.E. Lloyd viewed it as evidence of the King's 'youthful heedlessness', King and Hosler both interpreted it as an audacious manoeuvre by a competent commander to outflank a strongly defended position.

Although Henry's manoeuvre resulted in a 'severe battle' (as described in the RBH text of the Brut) with his detachment suffering heavy losses, he nevertheless appears to have succeeded in outflanking Owain's position and forcing the Welsh to retreat. Moreover, while the seaborne expedition appears to have resulted in failure in Anglesey, the bulk of the English army remained intact, subsequently securing possession of Rhuddlan, the strategic objective of the campaign. The English campaign in North Wales in 1157 can therefore be viewed, in many respects, as a success, although it did not prove to be a lasting victory, as Owain Gwynedd would subsequently regain control of Tegeingl between 1165 and 1167.

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