

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/ HISTORIC 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)

				<p>Cloddfa (Archaeoleg Cymru, 2013)</p> <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 (Archaeology Wales, 2014)</p>
Castell Coety (gwarchae) /Coity	1404-05	Morgannwg	545701	<p>Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013)</p>

Castle (siege)		Glamorgan		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 1215	Sir Faesyfed Radnorshire	545328	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)
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 Castle (siege)	1646	Sir Ddinbych Denbighshire	545789	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) 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 Montgomeryshire	403416	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)
Trefaldwyn / Montgomery	1644	Sir Drefaldwyn Montgomeryshire	405168	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Gildas Research, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Gildas Research, 2013)
Mynydd Carn	1081	Sir Benfro Pembrokeshire	300319	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)
Castell Newydd Emlyn (gwarchae) / Newcastle Emlyn (siege)	1287-8	Sir Gaerfyrddin Carmarthenshire	545606	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical

				research (Chapman, 2013)
Castell Newydd Emlyn (gwarchae) / Newcastle Emlyn	1645	Sir Gaerfyrddin Carmarthenshire	545768	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Chapman, 2013) Documentary and historical research (Chapman, 2013)
Gwrthryfel y Siartwyr, Casnewydd / Newport Chartist Uprising	1839	Sir Fynwy Monmouthshire	405003	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol (Border Archaeology, 2009) Documentary and historical research (Border Achaeology, 2009)
Painscastle	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	405188	Ymchwil ddogfennol a hanesyddol

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

		Caernarfonshire		Documentary and historical research (Border Archaeology, 2009)
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Grŵp Llywio Meysydd Brwydro, Hydref 2016

Battlefields Steering Group, October 2016

WELSH BATTLEFIELDS HISTORICAL AND DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

Irfon Bridge – 11 December 1282

County: Powys (formerly Brecknockshire)

Community: Cilmeri

NGR: SO030515

NPRN: 403411

Report Author: Dr Adam Chapman

Date: February 2013



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Irfon Bridge (11 December 1282)

Introduction

The battle of Irfon Bridge was the decisive engagement determining the direction of the history of medieval Wales. Regardless of the nature of the engagement between the forces of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, prince of Wales and English forces on the Wye Valley near Builth, its importance comes from the fact that at the end of the battle, Llywelyn was dead. With it the possibility of an independent Wales was lost. We should be careful with the term however: what Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, prince of Gwynedd, had in mind would not have necessarily encompassed what contemporaries would have considered a coherent state and what modern observers would think of as a nation state. Arguably, this possibility had been killed off by Llywelyn's defeat by Edward I of England in 1277, but the death of Llywelyn concluded the issue until it was brought back to life, briefly, by Owain Glyndŵr in the first decade of the fifteenth century.

The battle's importance is well recognised in contemporary chronicles and annals but these accounts provide only a limited picture of the preliminaries to the battle, its location, its course and how Llywelyn ap Gruffudd of Gwynedd came to be killed. Unfortunately, there is no wholly reliable narrative of the battle or much in the way of detail in the sources allowing us to build a picture. In the end only two details are *certain*: the date and the result. On 11 December 1282, somewhere near the town of Builth, very definitely within '*le pays de Builth*' (the land of Builth) and very probably at Irfon Bridge, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's army was heavily defeated by English forces and either at this battle or nearby, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, accompanied by a relatively small number of others, was killed, probably towards the end of the day. Where his death occurred is a matter of speculation: the site marked by the modern monument is plausible, but historical evidence to confirm it is lacking. Why and how Llywelyn was separated from his army, the size and scale of that army and the identity of his killer are matters of opinion and informed speculation. Llywelyn was certainly at Cilmeri on the day in question but we cannot be certain that he was killed there although tradition relating to such a seismic event in Welsh history should be taken extremely seriously.

The position of English forces is better understood but many questions remain. They were probably led by John Giffard and the victory they won was comprehensive, but the way in which victory was won and the size of the forces that achieved it are open to question.

Context

The thirteenth century in Europe was pivotal in shaping ideas of royal power, authority and kingship. In France, the reign of Louis IX (1226-1270) – venerated as Saint Louis after 1297 – redefined the rites surrounding kingship within France. The French crown exerted a hitherto unprecedented dominance over the affairs of its great lords through the exercise of law and royal justice. One of the French crown's chief lords, the duke of Aquitaine, was also king of England and French developments in royal power were to have wide-reaching practical consequences. Sincere flattery was due to the French kings by imitation: in England, Scotland and in the principalities of Wales the person and personal authority of the king or prince assumed a new importance.

The balance of power in Anglo-Welsh relations was determined by the sword, the bow and the spear, but in the thirteenth century, in Gwynedd in particular, the expanding formality of royal authority had these power relationships defined by diplomatic treaties and their terms confirmed, to an increasing extent, in terms of money. In Edward I, England had a ruler determined to discover the extent of his rights and, having identified them, to exploit them to the full. This was expressed through law: he held inquisitions into the English, Welsh and Gascon laws and customs and used their findings to amend, control and contradict. As David Stephenson has shown, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd sought to extend their reach through formal as well as military means; the two often hand in hand and essential to this was the creation of a new elite who owed their land and position to the Prince rather than to their kindred.¹ A rapid process of political change in which new offices in the Prince's court had emerged and old ones took on different roles, stone castles were built and large armies assembled.

Llywelyn ap Gruffudd managed to bring unity to Gwynedd and with it, military success and expansion of a distinctly feudal character. Llywelyn's aims, expressed in the terms of the Treaty of Montgomery following his victory over Henry III's forces in 1267 were expressed in feudal terms: the native rulers of Wales were to do homage to Llywelyn and he in turn would do homage to the English crown. It remains a matter of debate as to how achievable Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's aspirations were. His financial resources were sorely stretched and, as a conqueror of much of Wales, his political power was subject to defections and English influence. The difficulty Llywelyn faced after

¹ D. Stephenson, *The Governance of Gwynedd* (Cardiff, 1984) and 'From Llywelyn ap Gruffudd to Edward I: Expansionist Rulers and Welsh Society in Thirteenth-Century Gwynedd' in D. Williams and J. Kenyon, *The Impact of the Edwardian Castles in Wales* (Oxford, 2010), 9-15.

the accession of Edward I in 1272 is best expressed by the late Rees Davies: 'Edward I's imperious, even imperial, concept of the nature of overlordship could not be squared with Llywelyn's concept of a native principality of Wales. Collision was well-nigh inevitable. And so was victory for the one, defeat for the other.'²

Prelude

The conflict between Edward and Llywelyn had first been sparked following Llywelyn's failure to do homage to Edward in August 1275. This had eventually led to war and defeat. Peace on Edward's terms reversed Llywelyn's territorial gains, re-established Llywelyn's brothers and made the prince himself no better than one of Edward's own tenants-in-chief, an equal to the earls of Gloucester or Hereford, rather than a man of independent royal dignity. Further conflict was inevitable. The events of the winter of 1282 are far from straightforward to reconstruct. Edward had invaded Wales following the rebellion of Llywelyn's brother, Dafydd. Dafydd, as a result of the Treaty of Aberconwy in 1277, became Edward's vassal and thus his rebellion, which drew his brother in its wake, was against the king, his lord. By mid-October, Edward's forces had held Anglesey for several months and were pressing upon Gwynedd from the south. The king himself was making inroads into the north east of Wales and Llywelyn's magnates were conspiring against their prince: negotiations between Llywelyn and John Pecham, the archbishop of Canterbury had taken place and failed in late October and the first days of November. On St Leonard's day, 6 November, an English force under Luke de Tany had crossed the Menai Straits by a bridge constructed by Edward's engineers and been destroyed by a combination of the Welsh defenders and, by one means or another, the failure of the bridge to support their retreat resulting in heavy casualties. Although this was undoubtedly a setback for the English, it changed relatively little in strategic terms. While Edward could not press home his advantage as he might have wished, he had the advantage of superior resources: of men; of supplies; of time.

On 24 November and 6 December orders to recruit fresh infantry were issued, and Edward's armies in all quarters were reinforced. Llywelyn's response was unexpected. In November, he led his army out of Snowdonia into the central Marches and then to Builth. As the continuation of the *Brut y Tywysogion* had it: 'Llywelyn ap Gruffudd left his brother Dafydd guarding Gwynedd and he himself took his host to gain possession of Powys and Builth.'³

² Davies, *The Age of Conquest*, 330

³ *Brut y Tywysogion*, Peniarth MS 20, 228.

The determination of Edward I to exact victory and his military success in the north of Wales compelled Llywelyn to attempt to open a new front. In this, Davies noted, the middle March had much to recommend it: it was an area where the death of Roger Mortimer on 26 October 1282 had created a vacuum of lordship. Local communities and their leaders, such as Rhys ap Gruffudd of Builth, had to be cultivated to ensure their continued resistance to English forces. It was also significant that in this area, both Llywelyn and his grandfather had established ties of loyalty and service which might now stand Llywelyn in good stead. It is possible, moreover, that Llywelyn was drawn to the Wye valley by a treacherous invitation from Roger Mortimer's sons, an invitation made more plausible – if not necessarily more trustworthy – by the deal Llywelyn had struck with their father a year earlier. More pragmatically, in the north of Wales, Llywelyn was pressed by Edward's forces and, increasingly, by difficulties in his own camp. Breaking out and securing support and allies beyond Gwynedd was essential albeit fraught with risk.

The key question of the prelude to the battle is not so much why Llywelyn led his forces away from Gwynedd, but why he led them towards Builth. This is also the most problematic. Neither Lloyd, nor Llywelyn's most recent and authoritative biographer, Jenkin Beverley Smith managed to come to a clear conclusion.

Primary Sources

We are almost entirely dependent for our understanding of the events which led to Llywelyn's death upon chronicles, records, usually maintained by monastic writers reliant on second hand accounts, correspondence and the reports of eye-witnesses. These could be coloured with the prejudices of the writer, altered to incorporate classical allusions and influenced by external factors such as the presence of a patron or benefactor. In this case, the death of Llywelyn was of such moment, and the circumstances so confused, even to contemporaries, many of the chroniclers and annalists shared their own theories with the reader. All are subject in this case to the benefit of hindsight: when they were written Llywelyn's ambitions were ended and his principality destroyed.

Aside from the continuation of the Welsh Annals, the *Brut y Tywysogion*, such an important event appears in just about every contemporary monastic account in England and in correspondence between the king, royal officials and churchmen. In addition, there are details of the English army's movements in the surviving financial accounts. That said, the movement of forces so far distant from the king are not their primary concern, the accounts give far more precise and consistent

information on the movement of supplies and equipment rather than the advances of troops. More confusing still is that the dates given in association with payments are those on which the expenditure was authorised rather than those on which it was incurred. As Michael Prestwich has noted, the very unreliability of medieval news reporting is highlighted by comparison of the various chronicle accounts of Llywelyn's death and this has stymied all attempts at a clear and coherent reconstruction of the events which surrounded it.

The generally accepted narrative account has been that of Walter of Guisborough, since this was used by Morris, Lloyd, in his pioneering attempt to solve the problems raised by accounts of this battle, and more recently by David Stephenson and, with reservations, by Michael Prestwich. Prestwich's reservations were founded upon doubts raised by Llinos Beverley Smith who noted, among other things, the marked similarities between Guisborough's accounts of the battles of Irfon Bridge (1282) and Stirling Bridge (1297). The reservations are important and as such, the Yorkshire chronicler's account, composed some years after the events under discussion here should be treated with caution, not least because it accords reasonably closely with other, independent, accounts of Stirling Bridge. Llinos Beverley Smith also raised the importance of the account contained within several East Anglian chronicles notably that maintained at Peterborough but also the Hagnaby chronicle which contains a detailed and informative account of the rebellion of 1294-5. Jenkin Beverley Smith has speculated that this may be related to the fate of Llywelyn's daughter, Gwenllian, who was placed in the Gilbertine house of nuns at Sempringham, Norfolk though the surviving annals of this house make only scant mention of the events in Wales of 1282.⁴

Later Accounts

Antiquarian accounts are especially problematic so far as this battle is concerned. As Beverley Smith notes in his study of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the difficulty with many traditional accounts of this battle, is that they conflate earlier traditions Both David Powel and Humphrey Llwyd state that Llywelyn was 'betrayed by the men of Builth', an assertion which relates to another tradition entirely. Inevitably, there are a host of traditions associated with the battle and more particularly, Llywelyn's death; the majority of these are unattested before the sixteenth century unfortunately. Historical analysis has found this no easier. Sir John Lloyd made the first thorough attempt to establish the facts surrounding these events, considering the date of Llywelyn's death, its circumstances and the

⁴ Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*, 564.

recurring question of treachery relating to it. Despite the difficulties with Lloyd's work, it is his approach to the sources that has informed those that followed him.⁵

Location

Although the general location – somewhere in the vicinity of Builth, probably on the banks of the river Irfon – is accepted as accurate, the specific details are less than clear. Possibly the best indications of the arrangement of forces comes in the continuation of the *Brut y Tywysogion* and in the letter from Roger Lestrangle written in the immediate aftermath of the battle.⁶ The Brut suggests that Llywelyn took his forces to Powys and Builth and that he proceeded as far as Llanganten. The latter is a minor settlement comprising a church and an adjacent house, lying on the south bank of the Chewfri river some 2km to the west of Builth Wells.⁷ Although theoretically a settlement in its own right, the church is now commonly thought of as Cilmeri. From there, the continuation of the *Brut* states that he sent men to take the homage of the men of Brycheiniog. From this it is possible that his forces, with higher ground behind them to the north and west occupied the slopes which formed a promontory between the rivers Wye and Irfon. The confluence of these rivers is close by the town of Builth and from this, Beverley Smith suggests, we can suggest that Llywelyn's forces were on one side of the river and the English forces on the other. This accords with Lestrangle's report after the battle that Llywelyn's forces had come to 'the Marches of Builth and Elfael'. On the extremely limited evidence available we should accept this suggestion: Lestrangle seems not to have been present at the battle: credit for the victory is given to John Giffard and Edmund Mortimer, but he can only have been informed by those who were. The shame for later commentators is that the beyond the bones of the news, the rest of the facts were to be delivered by Lestrangle's messenger verbally. Lestrangle does state, however, that he was writing 'in the land of Builth' (*en le pays de Buellt*) and the *Brut* can only have been informed by first hand testimony. Whatever actually occurred, the general location seems reasonably certain.

⁵ J.E. Lloyd, 'The Death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd', *BBCS* (1931),

⁶ *Brut y Tywysogion*, *Peniarth MS 20*, 228 and *Pen20 Tr.* 120.

⁷ A summary of the settlement's known history and archaeology is given here:
<http://www.cpat.org.uk/ycom/breck/llanganten.pdf>

These two accounts may be substantiated to an extent by the Peterborough chronicler who states that Llywelyn came to Roger Mortimer's land of Gwerthrynion (Woryemon) between the Cistercian Abbey of Cwm-hir and the villa called Ynlanmake (which Beverley Smith suggests may be Llanfair, that is, Builth).⁸ Other accounts, including that of the annals of the monk of Dunstable, describe Llywelyn's men holding the hills above the river Irfon, not far from Builth.⁹ If this were the case, there is some possibility that their defensive position was improved by precautions taken in 1277 to control access to the lordship of Builth from the north and west. These took the form of ditches dug at three points: Cefn-y-Bedd, now Cilmeri (the name Cefn-y-Bedd – behind the grave – was current in 1277 so unrelated to the death of Llywelyn), the present village and railway station of Cilmeri; 'Coedely' [possibly Coed Elai]; Retheresger [possibly Rhydyresgair]. No obvious trace of these earthworks appear to be known today.¹⁰

Narrative

Even in simple terms, the course of the battle is difficult to establish. Certainly there was a battle and Llywelyn and many of his elite who were with him were killed. These bald facts are given in a letter from Roger Lestrage: 'Llywelyn ap Gruffudd is dead, his army defeated, and all the flower of his army dead.'¹¹ So far as the outcome of the war was concerned, these were the details that were significant but they tell us nothing of the way in which the battle was conducted. The chronicles which offer some of this information, however, are not in agreement and suggest multiple options which have proven all but impossible to reconcile with one another. The most commonly accepted account, although it is not without its problems, is that of Walter of Guisborough. Guisborough's chronicle was compiled some years after 1282 in the north of England. Although this is a far from uncommon issue with medieval chronicles the difficulty here is the similarity with the same chronicler's description of the battle of Stirling Bridge in September 1297.

Guisborough's Account of Irfon Bridge

Morris bases his account on Guisborough's, almost word for word. In this account, Llywelyn was away from his army attempting to secure the homage of the men of Brycheiniog or, alternatively, having been lured away by persons whose identity cannot be satisfactorily determined:

⁸ Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*, 562, n. 176.

⁹ *AnnDunst.*, 292.

¹⁰ Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*, 562, n. 176 citing TNA E 372/124 and 571, n. 206 citing TNA E 101/485/21.

¹¹ *Cal. Anc. Corr. Wales*, 83-4.

‘...a Welshman pointed out to the English a ford, by which some of them crossed the Irfon and proceeded to secure Orewin bridge from the rear. The whole [English] army then crossed, and ascended to the heights beyond. The Welsh, taken by surprise, and having no orders in the absence of their prince, stood their ground manfully, and shot down upon the English, but shaken by the archers who were interlaced with the heavy cavalry, then attacked in the rear by some of the cavalry who worked round and pushed higher up the slope behind them, they broke and fled.

Morris refers to Guisborough’s description of the arrangement of the English host (*per sagittarios nostros qui inter equestres innixi errant*/by our archers who were supported between the mounted men) as evidence that this was the ordinary arrangement of Edwardian armies, but there is little other evidence to substantiate this.

Guisborough’s Account of Stirling Bridge (1297) is similar in several respects: at Stirling Bridge, the defenders had the advantage of being positioned across a river from their opponents who had the difficulty of forcing a heavily defended bridge. At Stirling, as on the Irfon, it was pointed out to the English by one of the ‘enemy’ – a newly defected Scot at Stirling, a ‘Welshman’ at Irfon Bridge – that there was a convenient ford nearby which could be negotiated and the defenders therefore attacked from the flank or the rear.¹² These may be regarded as circumstantial and possibly unimportant: Guisborough gives a position for the battle, on the banks of the Irfon which is perfectly consistent with that given by other sources, notably the *Brut y Tywysogion* and the Peterborough chronicle.¹³ The location given is plausible and concurs with other accounts, but his account of the *course* of the battle, however, should be treated with caution.

Other accounts

Whether part of the battle, or an associated action, this is another area where the surviving narratives have proven difficult, if not impossible to reconcile. The general thrust of the narrative however, is broadly similar. By some means or another, the prince became separated from the main body of his army and an engagement on a major scale followed shortly afterwards.

¹² Ll. Beverley Smith, ‘The Death of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd; the narratives reconsidered’ *WHR*, 11 (1982-3), 200-13.

¹³ Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*, 564

- The *Brut y Tywysogion* states that the prince came to Llanganten and that Llywelyn sent his men with his steward to take the homage of the men of Brycheiniog leaving ‘but a few men with him... And then Roger Mortimer and Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, and with them the king’s host, came upon them without warning.’¹⁴ There seems to be some confusion here; it is more likely that it two sons of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn were involved. Roger Mortimer was the younger, his father having died (26 September 1282) but may be a confusion with his brother Edmund.
- The Chester and Osney Annals suggest that the prince was left with only a small band of men. Thomas Wykes’s later compilation ascribes the death of Llywelyn to the hand of Edmund Mortimer.¹⁵
- The elegy to the Prince by Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch, bewailed, very specifically, the ‘killing of the eighteen’ – presumably the elite of Llywelyn’s *teulu*, his household, probably forming his bodyguard.
- A group of East Anglian chronicles, from Bury St Edmunds, Peterborough, that of Robert Mannyng of Bourne, Lincolnshire, and particularly the Hagnaby chronicle challenge Guisborough’s account. This states that Llywelyn came to Builth at the instance of Edmund Mortimer so that he might Llywelyn might take his homage and that of his men. Mortimer conspired with others to capture Llywelyn and to put him to death. When the prince came at the appointed place and time, virtually unarmed, he was attacked. There was a fierce battle during which heavy casualties were inflicted on both sides until the prince’s army was virtually destroyed leaving Llywelyn alone with a single servant. They were pursued from the battlefield by two of their enemies to a wood There they were found and after another fight, the prince fell, calling out and revealing his identity. This account has no clear reference to a river, a bridge or ford.
- The Peterborough Chronicle tells of Llywelyn coming with a great army and a battle in which the Welsh suffered heavy losses, Llywelyn himself being killed ‘about the hour of vespers’
- The Dunstable Annalist stated that Llywelyn came to the lands of Roger Mortimer the younger to take his homage and that of his men and that this was a deception. He also gives the time of Llywelyn’s death as ‘after sunset’ (*post solis occasum*).¹⁶

¹⁴ *Brut y Tywysogion, Peniarth MS 20*, 120

¹⁵ *Annales Monastici* iv, 291. The Osney Annals which Wykes’ work is based upon makes no mention of Mortimer. Both are in error with regard to the date, however, ascribing the events to 21 December.

¹⁶ *AnnDunst.* 292

- The Worcester Chronicler, whose account appears incomplete, implies that Llywelyn was killed (though the verb is not present) by Edmund Mortimer and implicates his brothers, Roger, William and Geoffrey with their relative, Roger Mortimer of Richard's Castle.¹⁷

The conflicts in these accounts do not lend themselves to a clear conclusion as to the narrative of the battle. It seems that there was a battle, in the course of which, Llywelyn's forces were beaten with heavy casualties. Llywelyn, for whatever reason, was away from the army and was killed, probably late in the day in the company of a small number of others.

Troops and Casualties

The forces present in the locality on the English side can be established with a degree of accuracy. The garrisons of Montgomery and Oswestry were captained by Roger Lestrage, the two sons of Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, the three sons of Roger Mortimer (Roger, Edmund and Geoffrey), John Lestrage, Peter Corbet (who held the lordship of Caus, Shropshire), Reginald FitzPeter, Ralph Basset of Drayton, Simon Basset of Sapcote, Andrew de Astley and 'all the power of the March of Wales' as identified by the Peterborough chronicler.¹⁸ The important feature of these men is that they many held lands in the middle March or in the border counties. This perhaps adds some substance to the charge of conspiracy, possibly among these Marcher lords all veterans of the earlier wars against Llywelyn and most can be shown to have been in Wales at the time in question.

Edward I issued an order of 30 October to, among others, Peter Corbet, Gruffudd ap Gwenwynwyn, John Lestrage, Robert de Mortimer and Reginald FitzPeter to assist Roger Lestrage and the garrisons of Whitchurch, Oswestry and Montgomery while Ralph Basset had departed for Wales by November 1282.

The question of who killed Llywelyn is another with no clear answer. According to Guisborough the perpetrator was Stephen de Frankton. He is known to have been a man of Shropshire with close personal ties and previous military service with Roger Lestrage, the English commander in the area. Details of his service in 1282 is not known, but it is on record that he served with Lestrage in Yorkshire in 1274-5; that he led the men of Ellesmere in Lestrage's contingent in 1287 and had been killed by 1295.¹⁹ The other candidate was named by Robert Mannyng of Bourne in Lincolnshire

¹⁷ *Annales de Wigornia*, 484-5

¹⁸ *ChronPeterbrug.*, 173.

¹⁹ Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*, 566, n. 191.

writing in the early fourteenth century. Mannyng was associated with Sempringham where Llywelyn's daughter, Gwladus, was cloistered which may account for his interest. After describing how Lestrage had found Llywelyn in a wood he relates that, 'Sir Robert Body, a knight whose sword cut best of all, promptly dismounted and cut off Llywelyn's head.' Body was also associated with Lestrage. His estates lay in Shropshire and Lestrage himself bestowed property in his lordship of Ellesmere on Body who was also part of Lestrage's retinue at Castell y Bere in April 1283.²⁰ Which of the two men it was is unanswerable, but the fact that both were personally associated with Lestrage suggests that was a company of his men who encountered and killed Llywelyn.

The Welsh participants are more difficult to assess. Clearly Llywelyn had with him a significant force but we are reliant on the assessment of chronicles for their numbers. The Dunstable Annals state that with Llywelyn were killed three of his magnates and 2000 foot soldiers.²¹ Three 'men of substance' are known to have been killed in the battle. One of them was Llywelyn ap Gruffudd Fychan (Llywelyn ap Gruffudd ap Madog) of Powys Fadog, the second Rhys ap Gruffudd 'who was steward of all the prince's lands', who can possibly be identified with the man who served as Llywelyn's steward in his marcher possessions before 1277. The third, 'Almafan', described as lord of 'Lampadervar' [Llanbadarn Fawr] has defied identification.²²

Aftermath

Roger Lestrage broadcast the news in a report to Edward I: 'Know, sir, ... that Llywelyn ap Gruffudd is dead, his army broken, and all the flower of his men killed.'²³ This bald statement undersells the significance of the moment and, in itself, says little about the battle. Arguably, Llywelyn's war was all but lost in Gwynedd; his death merely confirmed it and the manner of it was of relatively limited importance. This is not, of course, how it appeared at the time or how it has been represented since.

Conclusions

Any narrative we impose upon these sources is, at best, informed speculation: there are enough hints to suit almost any theory which might be developed. Certainty is not to be had. There are very few 'facts' that can be verified. The available sources simply present too many contradictions and as

²⁰ Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*, 566-7.

²¹ *AnnDunst.*, 292.

²² *ChronPetroburg*, 57-8 and Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*, 565, n. 182.

²³ *Cal. Anc. Corr.* 83-4.

earlier historians have established, the *only* detail which is entirely uncontroversial is the date, 11 December, 1282.

Location: Only Walter of Guisborough provides a definite location and his account must be treated with a certain amount of circumspection. He suggests that it was by the river at or in the vicinity of Irfon Bridge. That said, the two letters from Roger Lestrage confirm that Llywelyn and his forces were in the vicinity of Builth at the time while the continuation of the *Brut y Tywysogion* gives a clear direction of travel and an identifiable place at which Llywelyn's forces were on the day in question which accords with Guisborough's location. On the balance of probabilities, the contemporary perspective of the letters and the Welsh perspective of the *Brut* lend significant support to Guisborough. If we are to accept Guisborough's narrative unchallenged, the armies moved over a relatively large area.

Narrative: The course of the battle is so problematic that no unambiguously acceptable narrative is possible. It seems probable that there was a significant engagement between Welsh and English forces with large casualties despite the fact that this is not mentioned in all the chronicle sources. The majority of the evidence suggests that Llywelyn was killed away from this main battle though where, by whose hand, at what time – though the suggestion that it was late in the day has much to recommend it – and by what circumstances Llywelyn became separated from his forces cannot be established beyond doubt. Based on the evidence that is currently available, and despite the ambiguities in the accounts of Llywelyn's death, we may suggest that the key action with all its consequences for Wales occurred away from the main battlefield. This is reflected in the site of the monument at Cilmeri which by tradition marks the spot. The evidence is not nearly precise enough to sustain or to contradict this site. The site of the death of Llywelyn may well have been away from the main battlefield, but whether it was anywhere near the monument that commemorates the event is equally a matter of supposition. The previous name of Cilmeri, Cefn-y-Bedd, was current before the death of Llywelyn and the 'Llywelyn' place names in the area are unattested before the nineteenth century.²⁴

Motivation: What brought Llywelyn to Builth in the first place is equally beyond our resources to discern. The suggestion of betrayal and treachery is too prevalent in the source material to be ignored. Circumstantial evidence and the records of several chroniclers suggest that it was at least

²⁴ Melville Richards Placename archive, consulted 05 Jan 2013. The first reference to 'Cwm Llywelyn' is from G. Nicholson, *Cambrian Traveller's Guide* (1813), 231.

widely believed by contemporaries that Edmund Mortimer played a significant hand in drawing Llywelyn toward Builth though it is clear that he had other good reasons for bringing his forces in that direction. The testimony of John Pecham, archbishop of Canterbury who recorded the discovery of a letter bearing false names and misleading information as well as Llywelyn's privy seal seems damning but is not conclusive.

Conclusions/Significance

There is no doubt that Irfon Bridge was a significant, pivotal event in the history of medieval Wales. Its consequences shaped the political settlement which held sway until the Acts of Union in 1536 and which, although there was decay in their effectiveness towards the end of the middle ages, were not successfully challenged. As such, the site of the battle is of great significance. The difficulty in determining the nature of the engagement and establishing the course of the battle and the precise circumstances of Llywelyn's death is immense.

In the end, we can be certain of only one fact about this battle: at the end of 11 December 1282, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was dead, killed by English hands. While the date and key outcome are unambiguous, all other matters are subject to a degree of doubt and supposition. The location is perhaps the least dubious of these issues. We can be content that the battle occurred in the vicinity of Builth and certainly within the lordship; this is attested by several independent contemporary accounts. Similarly, there are several accounts which are in agreement about the direction from which Llywelyn and his forces approached. Beverley Smith's postulation of the position of Llywelyn's forces is plausible based on the available evidence and can be accepted as the most likely location. The difficulty with understanding the course of events of the battle is that only Guisborough provides a clear narrative and that this cannot be treated without severe reservations owing to the similarity with the same author's treatment of the battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297. Clearly there was a battle, however, at which Llywelyn's forces were clearly and soundly beaten taking severe losses. The balance of the available narratives suggests very strongly that Llywelyn was not present at the battle though the reasons for his absence – though he was not far away – are obscure and probably impossible to satisfactorily unravel. These suggest that the death of Llywelyn was in the course of a secondary action, the location of which is not given in the historical evidence. The evidence does

however provide two possible names for Llywelyn's killer; Stephen Frankton and Robert Body. Both men can be attested historically and are likely to have been among English forces at the time but each is only mentioned in a single source while several sources name Edmund Mortimer as being responsible for Llywelyn's death, none make a convincing case for him giving the death blow. The suspicion that has been attached to his motives and his actions remains. The intriguing, but gnomic reference in a letter from archbishop Pecham referring to the possession of a 'treasonable letter' bearing false names and, more difficult to explain, the Prince's Privy seal is a detail which asks persistent questions which are, once again, impossible to answer.²⁵

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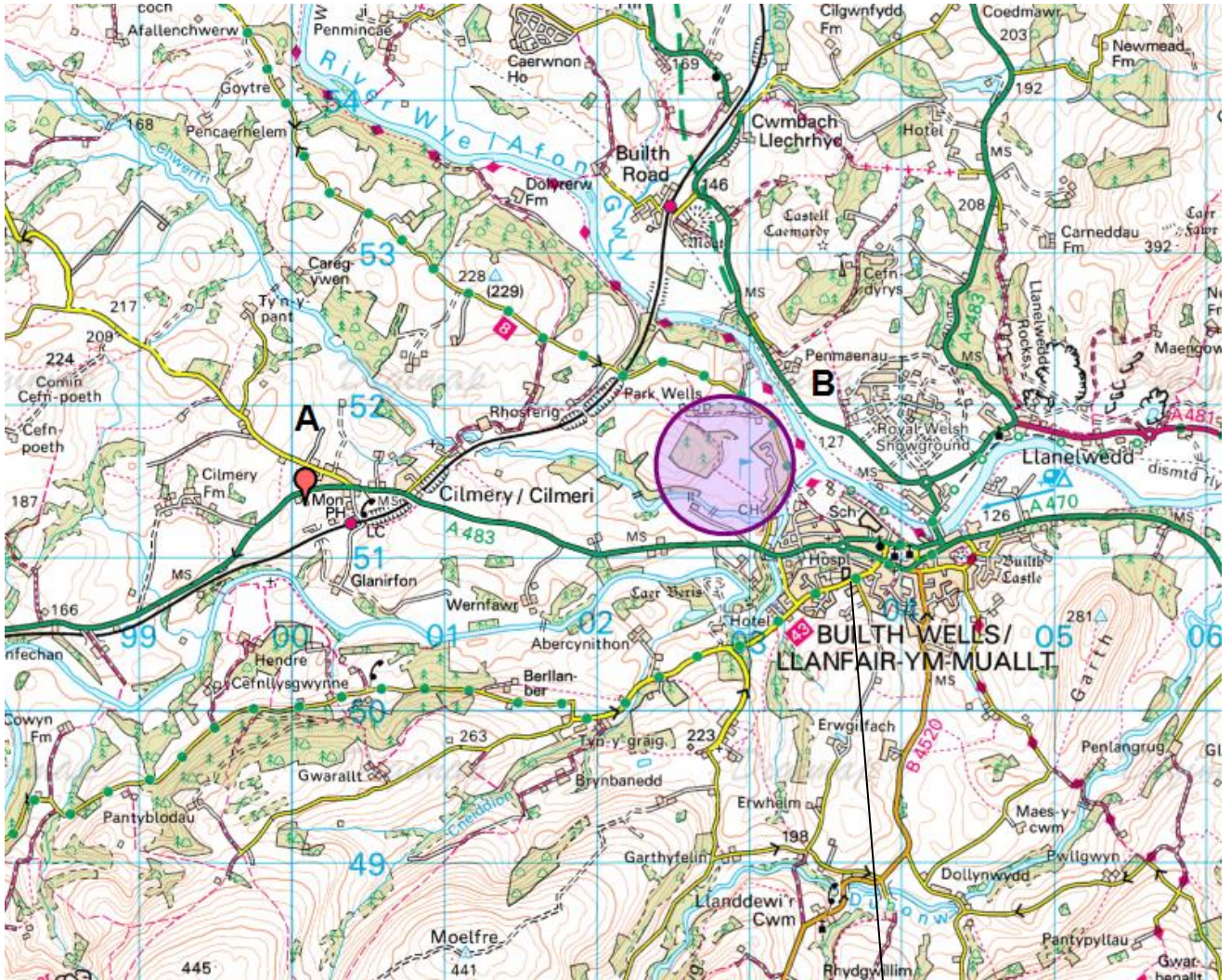
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A – Indicates the monument [NPRN 32562] to the death of Llywelyn at the northern end of Cwm Llywelyn (associated with Fynnon Llywelyn and from that spring, Nant Llywelyn, a short tributary of the Irfon. The spot fell was marked in 1902 by a stone obelisk, but this was replaced in 1956 by a block of granite (from Trefor Quarry in Llywelyn's native Caernarfonshire) ebbded in a plinth set on a low mound.

B – indicates the possible position of Llywelyn's forces prior to the battle of Irfon Bridge on a south east facing slope overlooking Builth. Owing to the difficulties in trusting Guisborough's account of the battle, the position of English forces remains a matter of conjecture, but it seems likely that they faced Llywelyn's troops across the river.