

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

## In the footsteps of princes: conservation and national identity

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The Cambrian Archaeological Association was founded in 1846 to ‘examine, preserve and illustrate the ancient monuments and remains of the history, language, manners, customs, arts, and industries of Wales’.<sup>1</sup> These aims, encompassing the very essence of what characterises Wales and its people, have formed a guiding inspiration throughout my life and first of all I must thank the Association for all it has done for me. I joined as a schoolgirl, introduced by my great aunts, Anne and Irene Rees. Cambrians of long and loyal standing, they ensured that I attended summer meetings and talked to luminaries such as Arnold Taylor, David Cathcart King, Clifford Perks, Raleigh Radford, A. H. A. Hogg, Peter Grimes and Leslie Alcock. After such exposure to the remarkable group that constituted the Cambrian Archaeological Association in the 1960s, what else could any reasonable person do but seek a career in archaeology? During my work as an Inspector of Ancient Monuments for what is now Cadw, Welsh Government, I became profoundly interested in the preservation and conservation of the Welsh historic environment, and, throughout, my membership of the Cambrians served to stimulate my interest in and respect for our monuments and the people who cared for them.

Inspectors of Ancient Monuments are usually generalists, responsible for conserving a wide range of monuments. Though this can sometimes be seen as somewhat more technical than intellectual, practical rather than cerebral, we do have to understand fully what we are conserving and why we are doing it so that we choose techniques appropriate to the individual monument; and such is the prevalence of historic sites in Wales, we must, of course, prioritise and select on a rational basis those sites we should conserve.

The legislation within which we work gives us a wide scope—Cadw can designate for protection any site that appears to the Secretary of State, or now Welsh Government ministers, to be an ancient monument of national importance.<sup>2</sup> Non-statutory criteria<sup>3</sup> give further guidance, but legislation, guidance and precedence has tended to prioritise the architectural or archaeological importance of an extant physical structure. Cultural and historical association can be taken into account, but they are not the primary emphasis of protection and this can, in some instances, lead to difficulties.

When we consider what constitutes national identity—what makes a nation proud, assured and confident—it is striking how often historic monuments are adopted as symbols of nationhood. When concepts of nationhood are being formalised, or re-emerge after periods of struggle, historic monuments can be useful as tangible symbols of identity. It has been interesting to watch the three Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia embrace monuments as symbols of national identity since independence. Vilnius Castle is a case in point. Little in the way of impressive architecture survives save a single tower overlooking the town. But such is the history of this site, its symbolism was greater than its physical presence and it was to this castle that the Lithuanian army marched to erect their flag symbolising the fact that Lithuania was again truly Lithuanian in 1919 to mark the end of the Soviet occupation; in 1939 after



Fig. 1. Map showing sites included in the initial Welsh Cultural Heritage Initiative (Welsh Government Strategic Capital Investment Fund, or SCIF project). Dinas Emrys was added subsequent to the main project. © Crown copyright: Cadw – Welsh Government.

the removal of the Poles; and then again in 1988 when for the second time the USSR's hold on the country disappeared. The Russians had realised its significance and both in the nineteenth century and after the war spent considerable sums on rebuilding and conservation, knowing they would never be forgiven for letting it collapse, but subtly using it to legitimise their occupancy. The Lithuanians now have continued to conserve the buildings and have established the museum where the castle's symbolic importance is underlined; a model of the castle, interpreted as a symbol of kingship, greets the visitor on arrival.

Historical fact, fiction, legend and myth can, of course, be amassed and combined to create a story of a nation that can be reassessed at later dates to tell a very different story or the same story with a very different slant. How important, then, that the components of these stories, documents, artefacts and monuments, survive as pristine and uncontaminated as possible. This, arguably, is easier to achieve with ancient monuments. Artefacts and documents need continued specialist conservation and good storage conditions and are vulnerable to damp, fire, lack of resources. Ancient monuments can look after themselves, you might think. To some extent this is true. But this can lead to neglect, misinterpretation and sometimes deterioration of features of our nation's history that, I would argue, we cannot afford to lose.

The monuments that most inspire us as symbols of national identity tend to be those connected to the early medieval period, when, after the demise of Roman government in Wales, there developed geographically and culturally distinct kingdoms with methods of government, administration and law that still have a resonance in today's political structures. Such monuments are different from cultural monuments—such as Carnac in Brittany, Pentre Ifan in Wales—which have come to symbolise the Breton and Welsh culture and historic environment, but perhaps not their national identity. It seems that we, the inhabitants of a nation, have to have some link with the adopted monuments as nationhood emerges, the places where heroes lived or heroic resistance took place, whether this was victorious or a place of tragedy and defeat. In Wales, they belong to the period of the pre-Norman rulers whose strongholds 'shift and transform as we gaze, half obscured by the mists of mythology';<sup>4</sup> to the period of the pre-Edwardian princes, whose homes, better documented, nonetheless were subject to attack, destruction and rebuilding by different hands, with dizzying frequency; and to the period of the post-Conquest Wales of Owain

Glyndŵr, when Wales was a divided nation administratively dwelt in by two peoples with two different sets of aspirations. They belong to that period before the birth of the nation as we know it, when Wales arguably first appears as a concept and when the struggle against the English crown or, frequently, against the personal, parochial ambitions of regional Welsh princes, led gradually toward the formation of Welsh ideals and identity.

The story of the conservation of the great strongholds of the Welsh princes—Dinefwr, Dryslwyn, Dolforwyn, Cricieth and Dinas Brân—was a tempting subject for this address. I was lucky enough to have been involved in the conservation of many of them, taking my place in the third quarter of the twentieth century of the history of conservation of the monuments of Wales. Critics of government policy had perhaps some justification when they accused the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works of favouring the castles of Norman-English build. The early conservation of castles such as Caernarfon in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century was the subject of Richard Avent's presidential address in 2006<sup>5</sup> and it was indeed the scale and splendour of these sites, as well as the fact that they had continued to be in government hands into the modern age, that led our predecessors to focus their efforts on them. By the 1980s, however, this was long past and attention had turned to the native princes' castles at Dinefwr, Dryslwyn, Dolforwyn and Dinas Brân. Despite their being generally less awe inspiring architecturally and frequently resting in private hands, their construction and scale put them safely into the category of greater sites requiring state ownership or conservation programmes to keep their stonework in good heart. Acquisition and conservation of these princely sites was an important facet of government policy in the later twentieth century.

By 2010, however, a category of monuments that could so easily be described as 'lesser sites' but whose importance to national identity far outweighed their physical presence had still not received adequate attention. Thus it was that, during my later years as Inspector, I grappled with the problem of how to deal with the conservation of smaller, quieter monuments of medieval and early medieval date, easily overlooked because of their small scale and remoteness but which harked back to this period all-important to us as we trace the emergence of the feeling of Welshness. On the one hand, these sites were deserving of our care however inconspicuous; additionally, it was surely our responsibility to care for and understand them, putting them in their correct place in our narrative and guarding them against any tendency to simplify or even manipulate them to suit modern agenda. This was easier to declare than to implement. The monuments in question were unassuming, sometimes difficult to find, in private ownership and often in parlous condition. Conservation projects through grant aid to privately owned sites had, in the past, emphasised the more spectacular, better preserved and more accessible and had offered only part grant aid (usually 50 per cent of costs) to the private owner. The sites we were now concerned with did not fall into this category and it was unrealistic to expect significant financial contribution toward often considerable conservation costs from any other quarter.

The solution to this problem came from an unexpected source: a combination of Welsh rain and an enlightened and creative quest for financial support from Welsh Government outside normal Cadw budgets. It also started, as had another better known revolution in Welsh history, at Glyndyfrdwy.

History does not relate what the weather was like on 16 September 1400 when Owain Glyndŵr proclaimed himself Prince of Wales at his manor at Glyndyfrdwy, near Corwen, thereby throwing Wales into a rebellion that lasted some seven years and caused terror amongst English rulers, led to hasty repairs of castles previously in decline and fostered an emergence of a Welsh national awareness and pride that ultimately led to Owain being adopted as a great national icon. Remote his manor was, and indeed still is, an enclave of native Welsh rule, an area 'where time, as it were, had stood still', as Rhys Davies describes it, 'an anomalous memorial of an earlier age'.<sup>6</sup> 'Where better', he asks, 'to foster memories of former glories? Where better to plot a revolt?'



Fig. 2.

**2a** (top left) effigy of the Lord Rhys, St David's Cathedral; **2b** (bottom left) carved stone head, thought to be Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (the Great), found at Deganwy castle; **2c** (right) statue of Owain Glyndŵr, Cardiff City Hall. © Crown copyright: Cadw – Welsh Government.

We do not even know where Owain chose to stand to utter this proclamation—was it prominently on the top of the motte, the site of a castle already 300 years old and belonging to his lordly predecessors, or in the hall of what we assume to be his manor house just adjacent, or perhaps solemnised, as some have suggested, at Corwen church? We do, however, know only too well what were the weather conditions 601

years later on the night of 6 November 2001 when, after weeks of heavy rainfall, a landslip immediately beneath the mound threatened to send the whole castle site down the slope over the Llangollen Light Railway line and into the river Dee. It only held together due to the work Cadw had previously undertaken on the motte to repair sheep scrapes and rabbit holes, during which we had covered the entire earthwork with a consolidating geotextile. The motte was undercut significantly but repair work did not happen immediately; this was a privately owned, rather unexciting looking grass-covered mound with no public right of access and the costs of supporting the geologically unstable subsoil right down to the river were considerable. Nonetheless, neither I nor Cadw's director relished the prospect of public censure when, sooner or later, as we knew would inevitably happen, the side of this iconic monument gave way. It took some years of reasoned persuasion before the difficulties were overcome and the Welsh Cultural Heritage Initiative, more commonly called the SCIF project after its winningly entitled funding source, the Welsh Government Strategic Capital Investment Fund, was born.

The funding was awarded for the conservation and interpretation of sites of importance to Welsh national identity and it was expected that there would be immediate public benefit through access arrangements. Eleven monuments that met these criteria were selected, sites such as the other great Owain Glyndŵr manor at Sycharth, Llansilin, the castle of Deganwy, at Conwy, a stronghold of the princes of Gwynedd, and, of course, Glyndyfrdwy itself. The names of the sites (Fig. 1) are familiar enough to readers of Welsh history but far less well known to those who wished to visit them due to their relative inaccessibility and poor condition. They fell into three groups connected with different Welsh families, those belonging to the southern Welsh princes of Deheubarth, those of the princes of Gwynedd, and those associated with Owain Glyndŵr (Fig. 2).

The *llysoedd*, from which the early medieval princes of Gwynedd governed their kingdom, have long been known by name but have proved difficult to identify on the ground and hence to explore archaeologically. Two of these enigmatic sites were explored and received conservation work during the project. Abergwyngregyn, near Llandudno, thought to be the *llys* of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and the birthplace of his daughter, the famous Gwenllïan, had been tested by small-scale excavations in 1993 but now the opportunity was taken to enlarge the excavations dramatically to reveal at the base of the castle mound, probably founded by the Norman Hugh d'Avranches, earl of Chester, the foundations of a large thirteenth- or fourteenth-century hall some 11 metres by 8 metres, embellished with wings at either end (Fig. 3a).<sup>7</sup> Its architecture, size and the artefacts within it show that it was evidently a high status building; clearly we cannot prove that this is the site of the *llys* but it was certainly an important contemporary building. The excavations were much visited by local people and used for an extensive educational programme, a facet of the project that was planned from the start as we sought to engage with people over as large an age range, geographical area and socio-economic grouping as possible.

The *llys* of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd at Llys Rhosyr on the south-west Anglesey coast similarly had been excavated in the 1990s (Fig. 3b), here by Neil Johnstone for the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust,<sup>8</sup> but subsequently the low-lying masonry remains had suffered from flooding and weed cover. Unlike Aber, its approximate position had always been known—in the eighteenth century, Henry Rowlands refers to the 'sand covered rectangular ruins of the former *llys*' though by the twentieth century nothing was left visible. Sand blow had always been a problem—300 acres from the demesne lands were lost in 1332. However, it was in its time an important seat of administration, with a fair and market established before the conquest, and with demesne lands of some 600 acres. The project allowed further excavation and a reconsolidation of the footings of the thirteenth- to fourteenth-century building enhanced with interpretation to assist the hapless visitor in comprehending the ruins and appreciating how they may once have looked. In addition, the National Museum of Wales is embarking on a reconstruction of this building at the National History Museum at St Fagans, thereby enhancing the comprehensive range of their collection of historic buildings.



Fig. 3.

**3a** (top) masonry building revealed by excavation at Abergwynnegrregyn, Llandudno. © Snowdonia National Park Authority. **3b** (bottom) foundations of Llys Rhosyr, Anglesey. © Crown copyright: Cadw – Welsh Government.



Fig. 4. Tomen y Mur castle mound, Maentwrog, before (*above*) and during (*below*) conservation.  
© Snowdonia National Park Authority.

Another of these early sites, the Roman fort at Tomen y Mur near Maentwrog, has a strong mythological association with early Welsh history. The story of Lleu, Blodeuwedd and Gronw from the fourth branch of the *Mabinogi* is set here, but it was the later castle mound on the western side of the fort (Fig. 4), probably established by the Norman William Rufus, which was here the subject of the conservation. It had suffered terribly from over-grazing leaving an unstable and ever-widening scar. This was conserved by a complex system of filling with a solid timber frame, an earthen fill and returfing, protecting the new turf from sheep with brash until the sward had taken and the scar healed. Remote though this site undoubtedly is, it is accessible due to the input of Snowdonia National Park, and it is hoped that this conservation work will enhance its appeal.

The very name of Dinas Emrys, near Beddgelert, is redolent of myth and romance. It harks back to the sixth century AD, when, Nennius tells us, Vortigern, fleeing from the Saxon invaders, attempted to build a fortress on this crag, but was thwarted by the nightly collapse of each day's construction.<sup>9</sup> A magical boy, Ambrosius, or Emrys, son of a consul of the Roman people, told him that he was fruitlessly trying to build on a lake in which two vessels would be found. The vessels, of course, held the two legendary sleeping dragons, one white, which he interpreted as symbolising the Saxons, the other the red dragon of the Welsh, who, on awakening, fought until the white dragon was driven away. Savory's excavations in the 1950s established that there was, on this multi-period site with origins in the Iron Age and Roman period, indeed a pond apparently dug in the sixth century and that high-status imported pottery and glass including a sherd of pottery with the Christian chi-ro symbol confirmed some presence here at the date of the legend. Some at least of the defensive ramparts on the site may date to this period too. Despite this apparent corroboration, Savory warns against a too literal acceptance of the legend, probably a combination of several myths, placed at Dinas Emrys to make a good story. Nonetheless, the pond, now much altered by a medieval cistern excavated within it, remains one of the main visible features along with a rectilinear stone tower, likely to belong to the period of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, while the defensive lines of earth and stone with their entrance gates are perfectly discernible though only, perhaps, to those who are equipped with plans and some archaeological understanding.

The crag is owned by the National Trust who, with joint funding from the SCIF project, was enabled to undertake consolidation of the tower, employing clay bonding to mimic the original construction technique. A new path, hugging the contour around the hill, was established, more enticing to the potential visitor than the previous scramble through the boulders and thorn bushes. Vegetation control will be an on-going challenge here and the site is sensitive with little earth cover over the bedrock. It is fortunate that it belongs to the National Trust with a nearby property, Craflwyn, offering car parking, interpretation and an education centre for visitors and local children as well as acting as a meeting point for the volunteers who do so much to create the paths, put up interpretation, undertake vegetation clearance and monitor and repair visitor erosion. For the first time this difficult site is accessible, albeit to the intrepid, but imparting its own brand of historically-based romance as well as exhibiting the now more discernible archaeological features.

It is rare that an opportunity arises to study and conserve over an intense two-year campaign an entire castle that has never before received any conservation treatment. Such a site was Deganwy (Fig. 5), the twin peaked, medieval stronghold that safeguarded the entrance to *Pura Wallia*, the traditional lands of the princes of Gwynedd. Here, too, we encounter a history stretching back to the sixth century as the court of Maelgwyn Gwynedd, an important character in the annals of north-west Wales but reviled as a drunken tyrant by Gildas. Roman coins and some defensive lines of walling discovered on the site hint at earlier occupation perhaps dating to the later centuries BC, but Alcock's excavations in the 1960s indeed confirmed sixth-century occupation, and high status occupation at that, with the discovery of sherds of east Mediterranean wine amphorae despite the fact that no clear remains of early medieval buildings were discovered.<sup>10</sup>



Deganwy endured a tortured history of building and destruction on three separate occasions, making the sorting out of the extant building remains very complex. The early fortification, we are told in the *Annales Cambriae*, was destroyed by the Saxons in 822 but the Norman Robert of Rhuddlan established a castle here in the eleventh century, of which Alcock found no remains at all. Legend has it that Robert failed to hold it when he was pursuing a small raiding party of Welshmen, which, even at this early stage in its history, makes clear the fatal flaw of the site—it was very susceptible to siege, defensible in the short term but impossible to supply or escape from once surrounded by enemy forces. In 1191, Gerald of Wales describes it as a ‘noble structure’ in Welsh hands, but, before 1210, once the superior forces of the English king John threatened a siege, it was razed to the ground by its Welsh inhabitants to stop it being captured and defended against them. Llywelyn ap Iorwerth then recaptured and rebuilt the castle in the early thirteenth century but, again, after his sons inherited and saw the superior English forces threaten, Dafydd ap Llywelyn razed it to the ground in 1241 to stop it falling into English hands. Henry III in his turn rebuilt the castle on a significant scale and cost only for it to be captured and demolished by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1263 with an interesting thoroughness perhaps hinting that he saw it more as a symbol of English rule rather than a stronghold of his Welsh predecessors. Twenty years later, Edward I, challenging the growing power of Llywelyn, chased across the country towards the fastness of Gwynedd and he and his soldiers, like so many before, camped and shivered amongst the ruins of his father’s abandoned castle. Traditional stronghold this might be, but, after a desultory attempt at reconstruction and repair, Edward, rightly obsessed with the problems of succour and supply in an alien land, sensibly decided against rebuilding on the same site. He constructed his new, mighty castle on the side of the sea, way below, at Conwy and Deganwy was left to the sheep and sea birds.

It is hardly surprising that after so much demolition and rebuilding, the scant remains of the masonry castle are difficult to disentangle and indeed the masonry we consolidated almost certainly formed part of the castle of Henry III. This illustrates the complex history of the relationships between Welsh princes and English kings that is so characteristic a feature of medieval Welsh history. Deganwy encapsulates a particular phase of conflict; and its conservation was no mean feat. Its condition was dire, and merely surveying it was a matter of some difficulty, as was scaffolding and supply of materials, for which helicopters were employed to lift heavy equipment before conservation work could even commence. Considerable rock stabilisation was required with steel anchors drilled through the high cliffs of unstable rock to safeguard the masonry and the new permissive paths below, organised with the private owners to allow public access. Survey, some small-scale excavation and vegetation clearance to expose the largely collapsed line of the curtain wall, and conservation allowed us then to understand the form of the castle well enough to interpret it with reconstruction drawings, showing Henry’s twin towered gate, the donjon in the centre of the western peak defended by mural towers and a curtain wall, and an apsidal tower on the east.

The beautiful monastic ruin of Cwmhir Abbey (Fig. 6), in remote Radnorshire, is perhaps the place that best illustrates the ethos of the Cistercians, so quiet and peaceful is the *cwm hir* or long valley in which it was situated. The monastery was always regarded as a particularly Welsh site with leanings towards the native cause whenever conflict arose—as it often did in this border region. Sadly its strongest connection is as the traditional burial site of Llywelyn, the last prince of Wales, brought here, we are told, after the skirmish with English forces at Cilmeri. The privately owned ruins, analysed by Radford,<sup>11</sup> had already been conserved in a previous exercise<sup>12</sup> but the site suffered from lack of interpretation and had no formal access arrangements. The project allowed the conversion of part of the private farm buildings into an interpretation centre, the creation of a car park, and arrangements for access for all both to the ruins and to the church where a grave slab to Mabli, found on the site in early excavations, is displayed.

The second group of monuments to benefit from the project comprised those connected with Owain Glyndŵr. Owain was a border man with extensive estates in north-east Wales; he was both an educated



Fig. 5.  
Deganwy castle, Llandudno,  
during (*top and middle*) and  
after (*bottom*) conservation.  
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Welsh Government.



Fig. 6. Abbey Cwmhir church, Radnorshire. © Crown copyright: Cadw – Welsh Government.

lawyer who had trained in London and had had considerable military experience. His uprising, triggered by a relatively inconsequential local dispute with Reginald Grey, lord of neighbouring Ruthin and Dyffryn Clwyd, sent nervous tremors throughout England as he sought support for his campaign for Welsh independence throughout Wales and further afield—notably from fellow Celts in Scotland and Ireland and the duchy of Brittany who sent forces to assist in the siege of Kidwelly Castle, and, in 1403, defeated the English in the Channel and devastated Jersey, Guernsey and Plymouth.

Owain is in some ways an unlikely hero; in the end his campaign just petered out and his place of death and burial remains unknown. But he rooted his political philosophy in Welsh mythology and history citing his Celtic ancestry to appeal to his would-be supporters—not for nothing did Shakespeare describe him as a semi-magical character able to ‘call spirits from the vasty deep’<sup>13</sup>—and he became a national legend soon after his death. More recently he has come to be regarded as the father of modern Welsh nationalism; in 2003 he came second in a poll of 100 Welsh Heroes, a statue has been erected in his honour at Corwen, local people and visitors alike walk Glyndŵr’s Way as the mid Wales Long Distance Path is named, and there are frequent calls for 16 September to become a Welsh national holiday.

Despite this popular sentiment, Owain’s manor at Glyndyfrdwy was in a parlous condition (Fig. 7). The landslip below the motte, threatening to bring the whole site down into the river Dee, required sophisticated engineering work to anchor the rock slope together to prevent the unstable geology from failing. Complex and expensive though this was, as the trigger point for the whole project it was a particularly important component. Some 90, 12-metre long, rock anchors were drilled into the slope of sand and gravel that tended to collapse into the drilled holes before the steel anchors could be put into position. The whole slope was then covered with a geotextile and grassed over, making the intervention



Fig. 7. Owain Glyndŵr's Mount, Glyndyfrdwy, after (*above*) and during (*below*) conservation.  
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completely invisible—as the best conservation work always is. Interpretation was provided and access arrangements put in place. Sadly the site does not lend itself to car parking and is still uncomfortable to visit, requiring a dash across the A5 from an informal lay-by opposite. However, visitors can walk from Carrog station, on the same side of the road, when they travel on the Llangollen Light Railway.

A necessary component of all the projects described above was the initial geophysical survey work undertaken prior to conservation. Depending on a variety of matters including the underlying geology, this can be useful or completely unhelpful. At Sycharth, Owain's main residence, some ten miles across the hills to the south-east of Glyndyfrdwy, it proved to be especially productive; resistivity revealed the rectilinear building on top of the motte excavated by Douglas Hague in the 1960s,<sup>14</sup> while laser survey showed different depths of archaeology (Fig. 8a), hinting at a dovecote, and buildings in the outer ward as well as the building on the top. This suggested that below-ground survival of features was good but the earthworks, which now comprise the visible remains of the historic residence were suffering from a multitude of different agencies—overgrazing and stock poaching, vegetation growth that engulfed parts of the site rendering them invisible, and the undermining of roots of the oaks that lined the side of the ditch, threatening their stability and hence the integrity of the outer bank.

The famous poem by the Welsh bard Iolo Goch written in praise of Glyndŵr's residence rhapsodises about the beautiful water-filled moat surrounding the house,<sup>15</sup> and conservation instincts urged its retention. However, the water, undermining the roots of the oaks and attracting stock and consequently stock trample, was the main agent of the serious erosion that threatened the stability of the monument (Figs 8–9). Accordingly, a new drainage system was installed on the line of an existing but ineffective pipe to reduce the level of the water, a membrane was laid over the base of the eroding ditch which was then covered with a gravel fill, and the sides of the motte and bank were protected from cattle trample with a permeable geotextile. This resulted in a stable and comprehensive grass cover and water-free environment. Additionally, as the main criticism of the few visitors that were able to find the site concerned the lack of available car parking, a car park was designed and built with the co-operation of the owners and tenant. Interpretation was centred there rather than intruding on the earthworks themselves. New access routes to the site were provided but the old route retained for less physically mobile visitors. The geophysics aided the reconstruction drawing, with the dovecote and buildings in the bailey forming an essential part of the interpretation.

Interpretation was regarded from the outset as an important component of the project, and it was decided that it was most realistic to create hubs for interpretation at suitable centres of population whence the visitor could be encouraged to go to the individual sites. The small scale and remote situation of several of the monuments themselves made them unsuitable for telling the larger story of these pivotal moments in Welsh history and making them better known to the people of Wales and the world. Hubs for the Princes of Gwynedd group were at Conwy and Beddgelert, while the Owain Glyndŵr hub was at the so-called Parliament House in Machynlleth. Though constructed later than the era of Owain Glyndŵr, the building is associated with him by tradition and was conveniently positioned. The building itself needed substantial repair to roof and masonry, but the main work was concentrated on the interior where Urquhart's murals of 1912–14 were cleaned—they tell the story of the Battle of Mynydd Hyddgen (Fig. 10), Owain's first decisive victory in the field in June 1401. Interactive screen-based interpretation, a video, panels and artefacts were installed to tell the story of Glyndŵr's uprising. The building had been given to the community by Lord Davies of Llandinam in 1912 and is run by Trustees and staffed by local volunteers, an essential strand in this project on several of the sites.

The princes of the south-west, lords of Deheubarth, were the third strand of the project. Their celebrated castles of Dinefwr and Dryslwyn had long been in State care and it was one of my joys as an Inspector to work on Dinefwr throughout the entire programme of conservation there. That castle is

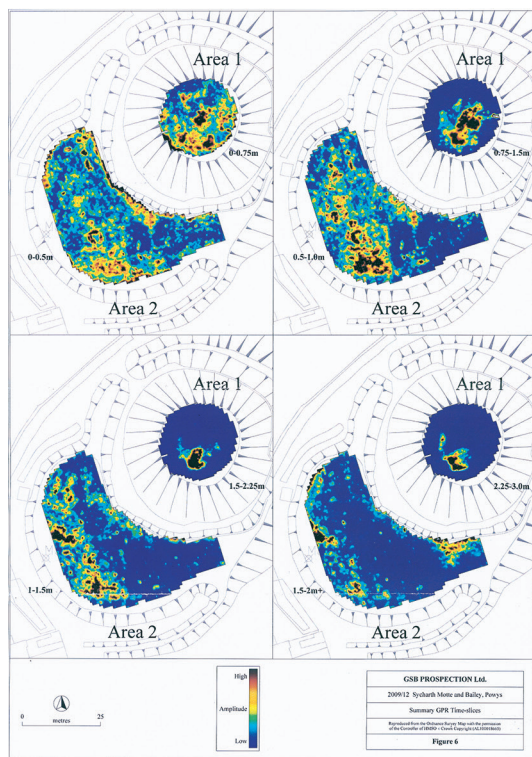


Fig. 8.  
**8a** (above) Owain Glyndŵr’s manor at Sycharth, Llansilin, suffering from erosion. **8b** (left) geophysical survey. © Crown copyright: Cadw – Welsh Government.

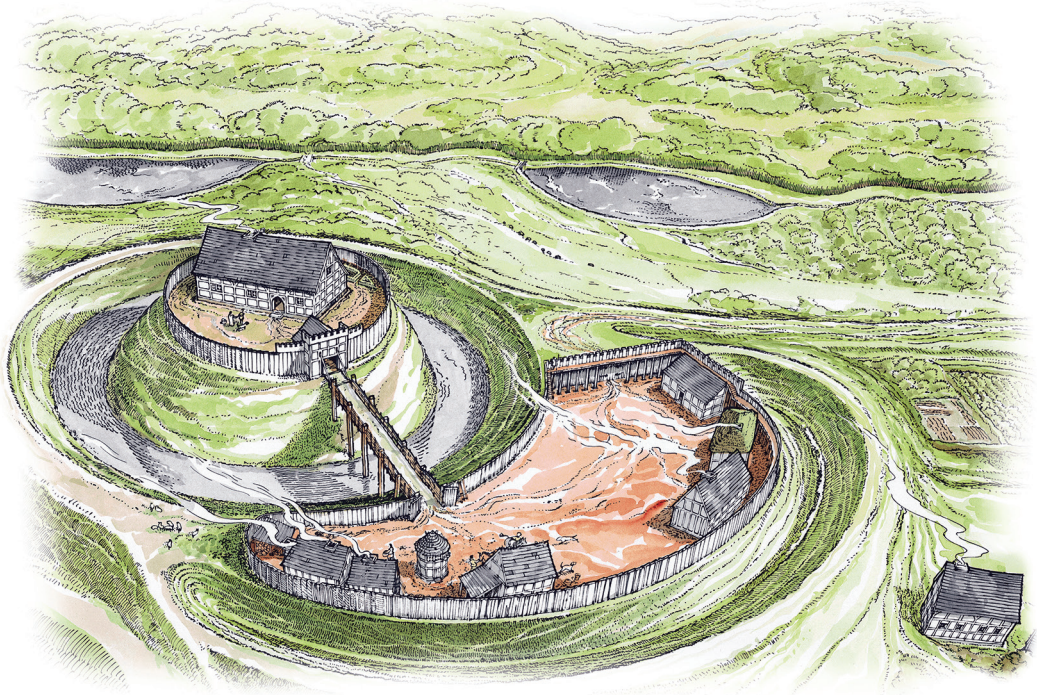


Fig. 9.

**9a** (top) conservation in action at Sycharth. **9b** (bottom) reconstruction drawing of Glyndŵr's manor.

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Fig.10. Murals by Urquhart at the Parliament House, Machynlleth after conservation.

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inextricably linked with the great Rhys ap Gruffudd, the Lord Rhys as he was known, pragmatic, wise and far-sighted, looking out towards Europe as well as inward toward his subjects and their love of song, music and poetry. The castle at Nevern (Fig. 11) was one of his lesser strongholds. Owned by the local community council, it had already received enthusiastic clearance and informal access was allowed, but the conservation challenges remained extreme. Famously equipped with two castle mounds, the site was enigmatic in its plan. The small sections of visible masonry were in poor condition and the earthworks were completely overgrown.

The foundation of Nevern<sup>16</sup> appears to have been established by Robert fitzMartin during the initial Anglo-Norman conquest of Pembrokeshire around 1108 and the main, western earthwork probably comprises the remains of this early twelfth-century castle. After the battle of Crug Mawr, in 1136 the Welsh captured the stronghold and after 1156 the Lord Rhys was in control of the area. In 1171, he was made Justiciar, having reached an accommodation with the English king Henry II; as part of this agreement he may have had to give Nevern back to the fitzMartins, and Nevern may have been largely deserted at this period. However, taking advantage of the death of Henry and the departure of Robert's son William on crusade in 1189, the Lord Rhys retook Nevern; as was so often the case his occupancy was fraught with disputes with his sons, and the luckless Rhys was actually imprisoned at Nevern, we are told, in 1194. His son Hywel Sais slighted the castle in 1195 to prevent it from falling into Anglo-Norman hands, after which it disappears from records, probably rendered useless by the construction of the new castle at Newport.





Fig. 11. Nevern castle, Pembrokeshire, during conservation.  
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Fig. 12.  
**12a** (above) Strata Florida abbey, west door. **12b** (below) decorated tiles after conservation. © Crown copyright: Cadw – Welsh Government.

Nevern, though short-lived, is interesting as it shows the transition from an early twelfth-century earth and timber castle into stone in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Much of the castle construction seems to belong to the fitzMartin period and it remains uncertain as to how much building the Lord Rhys himself undertook. The construction technique employed was that of clay bonding the poor quality local stone, as at Dinas Emrys; here too the historic technique was emulated during the consolidation of the round tower on the motte, making the friable structure better able to resist exposure to the weather by a capping of turf. The work on this site, as at Abergwyngregyn, required excavation to reveal the ground plan and uncover the masonry remains to facilitate conservation as well as our understanding of this complex site. Chris Caple was funded to explore the relationship between the main motte and bailey and the inner castle with its tower and hall, the nature of the defences and the buildings in the bailey; excavations have continued on site (currently to 2014) as a research project extending the original remit of the project with remarkable results in terms of the scale and number of buildings hitherto unsuspected.

The Cisterian abbey of Strata Florida (Fig. 12) has long been in the care of Welsh Government, an atmospheric site strongly associated with Welsh nationhood and culture, the burial places of princes. It was the obvious choice as the interpretation hub for the south-western princes, and the opportunity was taken to improve the conservation and interpretation at the abbey; the well known tiles in the chapels were conserved and the visitor centre refurbished with a new interactive exhibition including displays of conserved artefacts, information panels and touchscreen displays. Outside a new event and interpretation area has been established to encourage visitor engagement and an interpretive floor map created to illustrate the wide extent of the abbey lands.

The Cultural Heritage project, then, succeeded in its aim of conserving a group of monuments that hitherto had proved difficult to reach. It also helped to raise awareness of these sites so important within Welsh history and our concepts of nationhood. Conservation, however, is never a single exercise. If these monuments are to remain in good heart, we must be flexible enough to continue to create opportunities to care for monuments which are important but not easy to deal with. The project cost £2.9 million, £2 million of which came from the special single grant from Welsh Government with the rest coming from Cadw's own resources and those of other authorities, notably Snowdonia National Park and the National Trust. Local groups and volunteers, who put in time, money and effort to make this project viable were all-important and will remain essential especially in terms of the sustainability of the work undertaken. How future maintenance will be assured, however, remains uncertain.

2013 saw the centenary of the UK Ancient Monuments legislation that first allowed the State to undertake or facilitate conservation programmes.<sup>17</sup> This same year saw the completion of this conservation project that has shown that a monument can be more than it appears; monuments which contribute to Welsh national identity do have a special claim on our time and effort, and deserve respect and a disinterested conservation hand that allows them to take their place in our nation's history. They may be 'lesser' sites, sometimes quite inconspicuous, but it is hoped that this project has reinforced appreciation of their importance allowing them to have a greater presence both on our consciousness and on our landscape, to have a safer and more accessible future, returned, as it were, to people so that they may better appreciate them and the part they have played in shaping Wales. Members of the Cambrian Archaeological Association have a role here in continuing to visit sites, in showing interest, supporting research and excavation and in expressing expectation of excellence in conservation. The present writer, reiterating the hope expressed by our founding fathers that 'we have struck a chord in the hearts of Welsh antiquaries . . . and that by describing the antiquities of our dear native land, we shall meet with the lasting support and sympathy of all',<sup>18</sup> trusts that, through conservation work such as that described above, we can as a nation long continue to walk our landscape, following in the footsteps of princes.

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## NOTES

1. Cambrian Archaeological Association web site, <[www.orchardweb.co.uk/cambrians](http://www.orchardweb.co.uk/cambrians)>, About Us.
2. Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. A new Heritage Bill for Wales is currently being prepared for presentation to Welsh Assembly ministers in 2015.
3. 'The National Assembly for Wales criteria for scheduling ancient monuments', pp. 13–14, in *Ancient Monuments in Wales. What is Scheduling?*, available online at <<http://www.cadw.wales.gov.uk>>.
4. R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1.
5. J. R. Avent, Presidential Address, 'The restoration of castles in Wales as ruins: philosophy and practice', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 156 (2007), 1–24.
6. Davies op. cit. (note 4), 1.
7. J. G. Roberts, 'A walk with tywysog and taeg (prince and serf) in medieval Aber', *Heritage in Wales*, Cadw Welsh Government, issue 47, winter 2010, 12–16; it is available on the internet. J. G. Roberts, 'The archaeological dig at Abergwyngregyn 2010–2011: a preliminary report', *Aber Heritage Valley Partnership Newsletter* No. 8.
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9. The story is told in J. A. Giles (ed. and tr.), *Nennius History of the Britons Historia Brittonum*, paras 40–42. For excavations see H. N. Savory, 'Excavations at Dinas Emrys, Beddgelert (Caern.), 1954–56', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 109 (1960), 13–77.
10. L. Alcock, 'Excavations at Degannwy Castle, Caernarfonshire, 1961–6', *Archaeological Journal* 124 (1967), 190–201. The report gives an outline of the documentary history of the site.
11. C. A. R. Radford, 'The Cistercian abbey of Cwmhir, Radnorshire', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 131 (1982), 71.
12. S. E. Rees, N.W. Jones and R. J. Silvester, 'Conservation and investigation at Cwmhir Abbey, Powys', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 154 (2005), 133–51.
13. William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part One*.
14. D. B. Hague, and C. Warhurst, 'Excavations at Sycharth Castle, Denbighshire, 1962–63', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 115 (1966), 108–127. The results of the excavation have been

- reassessed in R. Higham and P. Barker, *Timber Castles* (London: Batsford, 1992), 300–1, and further archival information given in S. G. Smith, ‘The Absence of these Diabolical Machines’ or Semolina, Sugar and Misplaced Suitcases – Excavations at Sycharth Castle 50 years on’, 11 October 11, 2014, *Medieval Parks, Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, available online at <<https://medievalparksgardensanddesignedlandscapes.wordpress.com/>>.
15. D. R. Johnston (ed.), *Gwaith Iolo Goch* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), xx.
  16. Caple, C., 2014. ‘Nevern Castle Excavations. Interim Report 2014, Summer Excavations (2014)’, available online at <<https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/archaeology/>>.
  17. Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Amendment Act 1913 recognised for the first time that there are physical remains of the nation’s history which are so special and so significant that the state has a duty to ensure their continued survival.
  18. *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 1 (1846), editorial.

