

Pennard Castle then and now

a brief essay

by Nat Kane

Cymru is well known for its castles, being home to 600¹. Tourists across the globe travel to the Celtic nations, and England, to see the glorious wonders of the historical stone constructs, and spend their money on souvenirs which is generating wealth for the local areas and nations the Castles reside in. In Gŵyr, the peninsular, the countryside, and the city of Abertawe, there are no exceptions. The existence of the castles of Gŵyr is however bitter-sweet, being a result of the Norman colonization of Cymru. The Norman castles of Gŵyr are as follows; Lougher, Oystermouth, Pennard, Penmaen, Penrice, Swansea, and Weobley.

The surrealism of the castles.

In modern Cymru, the castles are viewed fondly across the nation, whilst concurrently being a lasting symbol of the loss of Cymry ancestors that fought with and against the Normans so valiantly. It must be noted that it was significantly more complicated than Anglo-Normans vs the Celts, Celtic princes such as Llewelyn Ap Iorwerth, Llewelyn Fawr, married an English princess, and his children married into the family of the lords of Gŵyr². Both sides fought with and against each other, Cymru was not yet a nation, not like we would recognize it now. The country folk from Kernow, Cymru up to Cumbria on the left of the map were all referred to, and referred to themselves as Cymry, though the regions, the kingdoms, were all severed politically, and they had very little input into what the Princes of Cymru did or did not do, yet they were the people who bared the price for such decisions.

The Celtic rulers were at odds with each other and this was the case post-Roman occupation, up to the last battle against Anglo-colonisation. With that being said, there is still wealth extraction of resources from Cymru to England, through taxation of railroad projects for England³, to natural resources like water and metals for the English government and crown, therefore it is still essentially a colony.

In a surreal situation, the castles now act as one of the few barriers the people of Cymru have to combat poverty, with the country being extremely shunned by the political union that only seems to serve one nation, poverty is a high occurrence amongst the citizens of the nation, tourism, private education, crafts like artisan food and drinks, and agriculture seem to be the only shields against the ripple effect of historic and current Anglo-Norman supremacy within Cymru.

Pennard Castle, truth and fiction

Pennard Castle was erected in the early 12th century, commissioned by the Le Breos family, formerly Briouze, of Briouze-Saint-Gervais, in South Normandy. They raised many castles as marcher Lords, a

¹ How Many Castles Are There In Wales? - Discover Cymru – Wales, <<https://discovercymru.co.uk//castles-in-wales/>> [Accessed 12/05/2023].

² Thomas, Ann Marie. 2017. Medieval Gower Stories (Swansea: Alina Publishing Swansea), pp. 1-30.

³ 'Wales is paying for HS2 but it will harm our economy - we must receive the £5 billion we are owed..' NationCymru electronic news article, 12/Feb/2020, < <https://nation.cymru/opinion/wales-is-paying-for-hs2-but-it-will-harm-our-economy-we-must-receive-the-5-billion-we-are-owed/>> [Accessed 12/05/2023]

duty bestowed for their loyalty to an unfavourable Norman King, though Pennard did not last the test of time.

It is a splendid pastime to read Fairytales, to watch fictional movies loosely based on historic folklore from different cultures, for children and adults alike, and Pennard Castle is not exempt from this phenomenon. Greatly respected authors of historic and fictional mythology and Fairytales have printed the tale of Pennard Castle, one, in particular, being the world-renowned, W. Jenkyn Thomas⁴. In his book *'The Welsh Fairy Book'*, Jenkyn recounts the lore of Pennard Castle, the story of why it is in ruins. Y Tylwyth Teg, (the fair folk), Norman lords, and cultural ignorance of a privileged person in regards to the land they now rule over. However, science has something to say about the real reason this Castle was in ruins considerably before any castle should be. The tale tells us that the Lord of the Castle upset the local Tylwyth Teg, they called sand from supposedly Ireland and blew the Castle over. The truth of it is, there was a storm in the sea, and the wind blew the sand onto the land, which directly damaged the Castle⁵, and the local settlement, which was later abandoned. Though a person who practices Swyngyfaredd in Cymru, with a relationship with the Tylwyth Teg would argue that WAS their work, which I completely see the logic of, though it would be circumstantial. The Gŵyr, and south Cymru, all have sand dunes littered across the coastlines, it is a common factor in the geology of the country.

Figure 11 Pennard Castle, (Wikipedia.com)



The Braose's may have rebuilt Pennard as a replacement for their castle at nearby Penmaen which was abandoned at around the same time due to encroaching sand dunes.

Pennard Castle also began to suffer from sand dune encroachment and the castle and its settlement

⁴ Biography Wales. [n.d.]. 'THOMAS, WILLIAM JENKYN (1870 - 1959), Schoolmaster and Author | Dictionary of Welsh Biography', *Biography.wales* <<https://biography.wales/article/s2-THOM-JEN-1870>> [accessed 12 May 2023]

⁵ "Pennard Castle -Castellogy." <<https://castellogy.com/sites/sites-wales/pennard-castle>>, [Accessed 12/05/2023]

⁶ Ceridwen, and geograph.org.uk. 2009. *Pennard Castle* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennard_Castle#/media/File:Castell_Pennard_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1307870.jpg> [accessed 12 May 2023].

were gradually abandoned. A survey in 1650 described the fortification as being “desolate and ruinous” and surrounded by sand. By 1741⁷.

As the website Catellology.com states, Pennard’s sand issues may not of been the first time this problem had arisen for the family.

Happy endings

Though this conclusion’s summary headline might be an over-exaggeration, in comparison to what the Castles represented to the common folk in those times, and what they mean to modern people is far more privileged, therefore it is logical to assume those alive then would see those alive now as happier. The Castles act as reminders of why the Cymry have social and political hardship now, they still represent good days out, they bring tourism, and are a lifeline in an anxiety-inducing political environment. That is not to say Colonization of any area, culture, or nation can or has had happy endings, it is imperative we understand that people across the world have been, and still are, facing high societal and institutional oppression still to this day. If oppressed or suppressed people see a value in something that came from that experience, that is not intended to justify, or exonerate any sins done with those said tools, or their introducers.

⁷ “Pennard Castle – Catellology”.

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