



Motte at Aberlleiniog D2

The earthworks here constitute a classic motte and bailey castle, the military symbol of the Norman conquest. Moreover historical records confirm that it was built by Hugh of Avranches, Earl of Chester in 1090 when he swept through north Wales in a bid to extend his earldom. It is a great mound over 9m high surrounded by a ditch with a smaller defended area, the bailey on the south side. It is set above the river at the head of a small inlet some 500m from the sea. A natural mound at the entrance to the creek may be an ancillary defence of approximately the same date since the sides seem to have been artificially scarped.

The Norman campaign was initially successful, but in 1098 their forces were driven back by Gruffudd ap Cynan and Magnus Barefoot, King of Norway and the Welsh took possession of the castle.

In the 11th century the motte would have been crowned by a wooden keep. The date of the present stone structure is very debatable. It looks like a toy castle or a folly and indeed the walls are surprisingly thin. But it must date from before 1646 when the site played a mysterious role in the Civil War.

Medieval parallels can be found for this simple shell keep with three corner towers, a garderobe overhang (now gone but recorded in the 19th century) and a simple entrance, but the difficulty is to find a context. There is no record of Welsh involvement, Llanfaes *llys* is one and a half miles away, and after Edward built Beaumaris would a nearby rival have been tolerated?

The northern corner tower with battlements was converted to a summerhouse in the 19th century but after that the castle was left to revert to nature until a few years ago, with the walls in danger of imminent collapse, work was put in hand to stabilise and display the structure.



Penmon D2

The Augustinian Priory at Penmon has a history which covers the whole Christian experience of the island. Traditionally founded in the 6th century by St Seiriol, his monastery has gone but two of the high crosses which marked its boundaries remain; the church was rebuilt in stone by Gruffudd ap Cynan in the 12th century; in the 13th century the 'Celtic' monastery adopted the Augustinian rule and a communal refectory and dormitory was built. Finally in 1537 the Priory was dissolved by order of Henry VIII and its lands taken over by the Bulkeley family who created a deer park and built an elegant dovecote. The Prior's house, between the church and the monk's refectory, was rebuilt for secular use. The church throughout this time remained a place of worship for the parish.

Penmon Well

Water is crucial to any settlement and the presence of this clear spring emerging from under the limestone cliff must have attracted St Seiriol when he came to establish his first monastery. However the present buildings around the well owe more to the 18th century fashion for spas than to medieval piety.

The cool clear water of the spring is gathered into a square pool around which the sick or supplicants could sit; the water flows out through a covered pipe under an open forecourt where more seats are provided; from here the water runs down to the monastic fishpond. Above and beside the forecourt are the foundations of another building built against the rock face. The walling of this structure is not unlike the early round huts and it used to be claimed that this was St Seiriol's hermitage, but it is actually rectangular and brick can be seen in the back wall. It, too, belongs to the refurbishment of the well chamber in 1710 recorded on a slate slab on the east wall.





Penmon church and Menai Strait

A view of Penmon church from the north looking over the Menai Strait to the royal *llys* at Abergwyngregyn. This view shows the high roofed nave and the central tower, both built in the 12th century. On the left is the unusually long chancel. In the 13th century when the monastery adopted community living under the Augustinian rule a monks' choir was needed, but the lay parishioners already had the right to worship in the nave, so the chancel had to be enlarged to accommodate all the monks. In 1855 this part of the church, now the main parish church, was rebuilt on the old foundations.

A new radical re-assessment by David Longley of the building sequence at Penmon suggests that the chancel might have been the site of the primary single-celled 12th century church, to which a western tower was added; with the present nave being added later further to the west; followed by the transepts, linked through new north and south arches. The theory is based on comparisons with the building history of the church on Ynys Seiriol (Puffin Island) and the extra width of the chancel, suggesting that it was built outside the pre-existing earliest church



Penmon south transept

The south doorway to the nave, the chancel arch and this arch leading to the south transept are richly decorated. The chequer pattern and hounds-tooth mouldings are familiar from Norman churches in England but the details of the sculpture here show that the inspiration lay westward, in the Romanesque of Ireland. In the mid 12th century the Welsh court had close links with Ireland, the home of Gruffudd ap Cynan's mother and craftsmen would have moved freely across the Irish Sea.

The cross standing in the centre of the transept belongs to the earlier monastery and was found in the 13th century refectory, during restoration work, re-used as a lintel (hence the loss of the left arm). It is one of at least four tall crosses that would have stood at the boundaries of the monastic enclosure. The geometric decoration belongs to the 10th century and reflects a mixture of Viking, Irish and northern English styles, the product of a school of sculpture found across north Wales and Cheshire. The striking plait decoration on the back of the 'Deer Park Cross' is a pattern popular on crosses of the Isle of Man where Viking elements were particularly strong.



Penmon landscape

The main monastic centre was linked in its early years to a hermitage on the island. This photograph shows the relationship between the two and also the swirling currents of the sound which make this short passage a dangerous one, marked by a light and an eerie bell.

The two big quarries on either side of the point are part of the 19th century industrialisation of the medieval monastic landscape which had been turned over to deer and hunting by the Bulkeley family when they gained possession of the land in the 16th century. *(David Longley/GAT)*



Llaniestyn Font D2

Penmon is the only near-complete 12th century church in Anglesey but fragments of characteristic decorated stone can be seen built into many later church walls and a remarkable series of early fonts has survived in the island. The exact date of the robust rustic decoration on these bowls is open to debate. Some may be as early as the 10th century but most are judged to belong to the reign of Gruffudd ap Cynan when stone churches began to be built across the land. This one is in Llaniestyn church, an early foundation rebuilt in the 13th century and again in the 19th. Happily it has survived through all these changes.