

# The Edwardian Conquest and its Military Consolidation

*Ifor Rowlands*

The term ‘the Edwardian Conquest of Wales’ correctly identifies the central role of Edward I but obscures the fact that parts of Wales were under English rule before his accession and that the military subjugation of the remainder involved three campaigns of a different kind and order. Llywelyn ap Gruffudd’s refusal, as Edward saw it, to perform *homage* challenged royal overlordship in the most blatant fashion, and in 1276 a punitive expedition was launched to purge the contumacy of this disobedient *vassal* (B.1). In the event, Llywelyn’s principality was almost destroyed and the balance of power was decisively shifted in the Crown’s favour. Confronted in 1282 by a national rebellion against the new disposition in Wales, Edward determined upon the disinheritance of Llywelyn, his dynasty and confederates: a ‘just war’ against a faithless people was to become a war of conquest (B.2). Where the armies of 1277 had halted, those of 1283 pressed on until the already fragile independence of the Welsh was finally extinguished. A third campaign to put down widespread revolts in 1294–5 demonstrated that any attempt to revive it was doomed to failure.

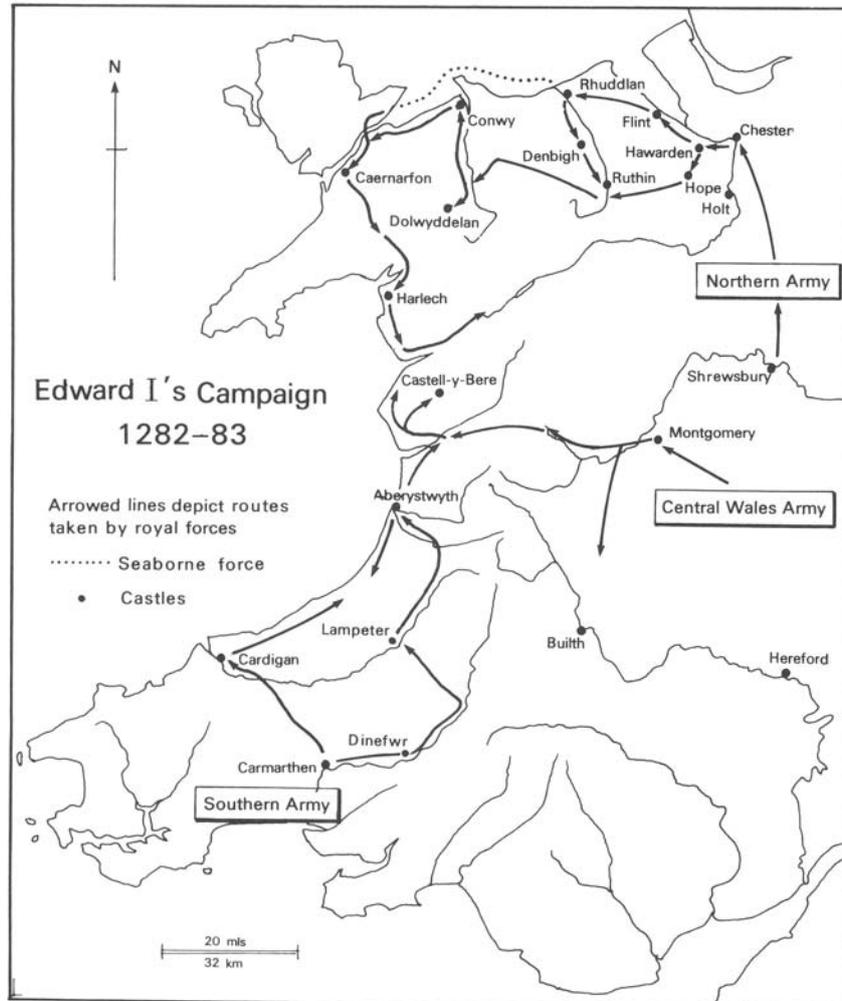
B.1

B.2

Edward’s Welsh wars, like most contemporary campaigns, were wars of manoeuvre and attrition in which the aim was not to bring the enemy to battle but to despoil his lands, terrorize his tenantry and methodically reduce his castles. While cavalry composed of household troops and magnate retinues were essential for swift raids, reconnaissance and for the protection of columns of foot on the march, a key role was now assigned to specialists such as garrison troops, crossbowmen and engineers. Moreover the pace of a campaign was, in large measure, determined by the slow-moving infantry and by the *siege train*, baggage and other impedimenta which often gave an army the appearance of a market town on the move. Above all, a sustained war of movement, in which troops were dispersed for raiding and concentrated for siege, required the establishment and protection of supply lines and *entrepôts*.

Its mountainous terrain, inhospitable climate and heavily wooded approaches made Wales a difficult theatre for large-scale operations. The invader’s ability to ‘live off the land’ was limited and his supply lines might be perilously extended. However, border towns, Marcher castles and royal outposts at Cardigan and Carmarthen — both on tidal waters — could provide bases for initial stockpiling and English naval capability gave them a decisive logistical advantage; Welsh deficiencies in this area were to cost them dear. On land, English armies faced a highly mobile, because lightly armed, infantry whose favoured tactics were ambushes and guerrilla strikes although some native retinues did boast heavy cavalry and siege engines; surprise and speed had to be matched by vigilance and the capacity to concentrate troops swiftly at the point of need. Welsh castles of stone were few in number and, although some incorporated in a modest way the latest advances in design, they

generally presented few problems to English siege armies — in no field were the discrepancies in resources so manifest. Once the Crown had decided to put a large army into the field, its vastly superior resources in manpower,, money and materials and its efficient commissariat should ensure victory unless, as had happened in the past, its advance ground to a halt through inadequate provisioning, physical exhaustion or a commander’s military timidity.



The war proclaimed in November 1276 did not really gather momentum until the following spring but early gains were made in the critical area of the Middle March by lords such as *Humphrey de Bohun* and Ralph de Tosney who now enjoyed royal support in the recovery of lost territory. The more elaborate and more laboriously assembled royal offensive involved the coordinated advance of three armies from commands at Chester, Montgomery and Carmarthen. The central and southern armies were to contain Llywelyn within Snowdonia by securing the upper Severn and subduing his allies in Deheubarth. They encountered but little opposition as, one by one, the Welsh castles capitulated — Dolforwyn, after a week’s siege, in April 1277. By early June, the fortresses of the Tywi valley had fallen into English hands and the occupation of Llanbadarn on 25 July marked the end of Welsh resistance in Deheubarth. Llywelyn’s southern *homagers* with almost

indecent haste sought the 'king's peace' and, as they did so, his principality began to disintegrate (B.3). Even so the northern army, charged with a frontal assault upon the lordship of Snowdon itself, proceeded with great caution. The area of the middle Dee and northern Powys was cleared of hostile elements before Edward's arrival at Chester on 15 July. Thence, his advance to the mouth of the Conwy hinged on the new castle-bases he built at Flint and Rhuddlan — both capable of being supplied by sea. Assured of supplies and fall-back positions, he struck out in late August at the soft underbelly of Llywelyn's defences by sending an amphibious force to the island granary of Anglesey. This landing on his northern flank, the loss of essential summer crops and the defection of his allies persuaded Llywelyn to capitulate (B.4).

B.3

B.4

If this nine-month war had cruelly exposed the military ineffectiveness and political irresolution of Llywelyn and his allies, it had with equal clarity revealed the formidable strengths of his opponent. Edward's firm resolve and vastly greater resources were channelled into the war effort by a household administration that proved to be an admirably flexible instrument for both financial supervision and military co-ordination. Access to Italian credit provided ready cash to pay for the men and war materials culled from England, France, Wales and Ireland. Hundreds of axemen had been deployed in the essential task of clearing wide passes through wooded country but even these numbers were dwarfed by the infantry contingents that Edward had assembled — at one stage, as many as 15,000 foot were on his payroll. Chiefly bowmen, these had been recruited from the border counties, from Welsh communities within the March or demanded of Welsh loyalists. Problems of pay and supply and a high rate of desertion reduced their number and effectiveness but their sheer mass must have shaken enemy morale. At sea, Edward's flotilla had not only disembarked a major force on the Anglesey beaches but would have played a key role in enforcing his embargo upon the movement of goods into Wales (B.5). Finally, the active support of Llywelyn's Welsh enemies — the lord of southern Powys and *Dafydd ap Gruffudd* not the least amongst them — proved doubly valuable: militarily, because Edward could concentrate his resources for an assault upon Snowdonia and, politically, because he could be seen as an enforcer of rights denied by Llywelyn to his own *vassals* (B.6).

B.5

B.6

Losing face but keeping his title, Llywelyn was henceforth to be confined to Snowdonia and Anglesey, his truncated principality encircled by vastly enlarged Crown lands (especially so in Deheubarth) and by pliant native lordships. This confinement was as much military as political — Llywelyn's isolation was secured by an extensive castle-building programme in the occupied territories. Royal money was committed to the repair of former Welsh fortresses such as Carreg Cennen, Dinefwr and Dinas Brân and such lordship castles as Hawarden, but the greatest sum was lavished upon the construction of formidable stone castles on new sites at Flint, Rhuddlan and Aberystwyth and on the addition of masonry defences to the existing site at Builth. These four incorporated all that was best in contemporary military architecture: high and immensely thick *curtain walling* used in combination with projecting mural towers. Fighting platforms at wall-top level and arrow loops set in curtain and tower enabled the garrison to bring a heavy concentration of firepower to bear both from above and across the flanks.

Tower and curtain could thus be used to cover an entire site by integrating two or more enclosures or wards longitudinally or side by side, thus presenting a series of obstacles to the enemy; when an inner and more formidably defended circuit was enclosed by an outer ring of defences, the resulting *concentric* plan made these obstacles virtually insurmountable. The entrance was protected by placing it between two exceptionally strong projecting towers and great ingenuity was devoted to the defence of the massive *gatehouses* thus created.

Edward's own involvement in the construction of his new Welsh castles was constant and detailed but an equally important contribution was made by his Savoyard architects and masons, most notably Master James of St George, whose influence can be detected in overall design, architectural detail and building technique (B.7). Wherever possible, these castles were built on coastal sites and, at Rhuddlan, the River Clwyd was diverted to link the castle to the sea. Work at the four sites was set in motion in the summer of 1277 and carried on with such speed that it was almost complete by 1282. This achievement was a triumph of organization, as huge quantities of materials had to be transported by land and sea for distribution to the building sites and a large labour force — as many as 3,000 men at one stage — had to be recruited, supplied and paid. The £30,000 expended on these works exceeded the cost of the war itself and was a measure of the King's commitment to the new order in Wales.

**B.7**

Yet this new order was deeply flawed. Partial conquest and containment had created a potentially explosive mixture. Those Welsh lords who had escaped disinheritance were increasingly frustrated by their political subordination; unconquered, they asserted their rights only to find them challenged or circumscribed by the Crown. Welsh communities in the occupied territories increasingly resented the high-handedness of royal officials and their insensitive disregard for native law and custom (B.8). Llywelyn, who must have felt the humiliation more keenly than most, held his hand but could clearly see that Welsh independence would in time be nullified by unqualified acceptance of Edward's interpretation of his overlordship. Central to that concept was jurisdictional control which meant in essence that even Prince Llywelyn might be peremptorily summoned like any less exalted (B.9). His dignity was not easily assuaged by the King's exaggerated punctiliousness, rather was it the more affronted — as in the Arwystli dispute — by the latter's ill-concealed partisanship. Tension between Welsh and English crystallized into a conflict of laws in which law was seen as a badge of national identity (B.10). Llywelyn, who had the most to lose, was reluctant to turn it into a conflict of arms: others were not and in the spring of 1282 an assault by his brother Dafydd upon Hawarden triggered off a series of revolts throughout much of Wales. Llywelyn's unique claim to Welsh leadership ensured his participation — a national rebellion thus became 'Llywelyn's war'.

**B.8**

**B.9**

**B.10**

A number of castles, including Aberystwyth, were taken but early gains were not pressed home and the element of surprise was soon dissipated. With his key fortresses still holding out, Edward began to mobilize all available resources (B.11). Military commands were soon established at Chester,

**B.11**

Montgomery and Carmarthen and, from the latter, two armies were assembled for the task of retaking the castles of mid and south-west Wales and mopping up pockets of Welsh resistance before converging upon Snowdonia to support the major thrust by the third army along the northern littoral. Here, Edward's advance was cautious, methodical and relentless. The reduction of the Four Cantreds (accomplished by mid-October) would enable his army to link up with the force sent to Anglesey and engaged, since late August, in building a bridge of boats across the Menai (B.12). The King's advance was, however, halted by two unwelcome initiatives — the one diplomatic, the other military. Archbishop Pecham's autumn negotiations with the Welsh were doubtless inspired by Christian charity but they were not productive. The Welsh presented him with a catalogue of grievances which listed the abuses perpetrated by English officials and, above all, insisted on their vulnerability when unprotected by their own native laws and customs (B.13). Edward, on his part, made it clear that the price of peace was the extinction of Llywelyn's principality and the disinheritance of his dynasty (B.14). In the mean time, and without the King's permission, the English force in Anglesey attempted a crossing of the Menai Straits but it was repulsed with heavy losses. Edward, his mind now set on a winter campaign, patiently built up his forces; Llywelyn, in an attempt to disperse this concentration of enemy troops closing in on Snowdonia, struck southwards towards Builth. This break-out, though strategically sound, proved disastrous, for on 11 December 1282, he was killed in an engagement with a Marcher contingent within a mile or so of Edward's new castle there (B.15).

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To the bards his death, like a calamity of nature, was of almost cosmic significance (B.16). In military terms it settled the outcome of the war. In the month that followed, the Conwy was crossed, Dolwyddelan was taken and English forces were transported across the Menai making possible an advance via Caernarfon to Harlech. By 14 January the southern army had retaken Aberystwyth, having in the previous summer cleared the Tywi valley of insurgents. The last vestige of organized resistance was snuffed out in April when the central army took Castell y Bere from which *Dafydd ap Gruffudd* had sought to continue the unavailing struggle. Two months later this unconvincing patriot was delivered up to the English by his own countrymen (B.17). In July Edward disbanded his field army — the task of conquest had, it seemed, been accomplished.

B.16

B.17

The second war, like the first, had been won not by brilliant feats of generalship or decisive battles but by the efficient garnering and intelligent deployment of resources. Welsh resistance was ground down by the patient amassing of men and material: in one sense, Welsh independence did not as much perish in a clash of arms as suffocate in a welter of parchment. The humdrum, unspectacular but vitally essential work was done as much by Edward's administrators as by his soldiers. Once more provisions were purveyed from the Crown's wide dominions and transported to the points of distribution (B.18). Once more household troops and magnate retinues were afforded by large numbers of infantry with as many as 3–4,000 attached to each army (B.19). Everything in 1282–3 was done on a larger scale: as many as 1,500 Gascon crossbowmen were on the king's payroll and his fleet had increased to forty vessels more. With the armies having been kept in the field

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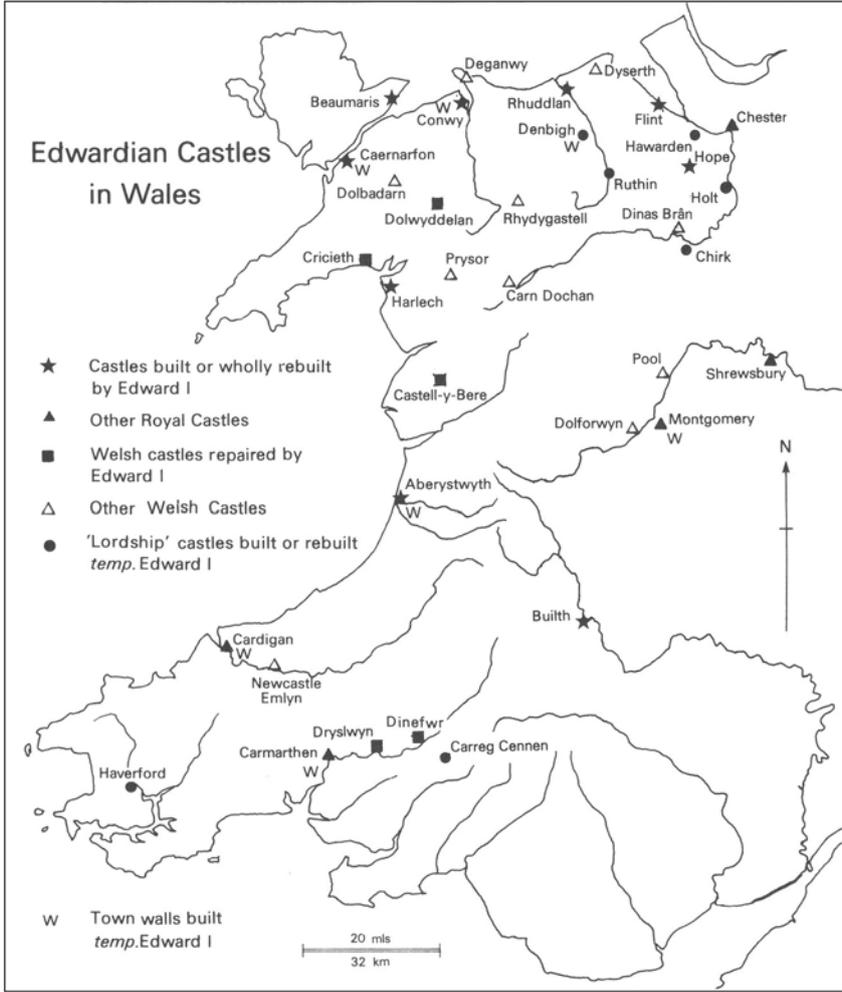
B.19

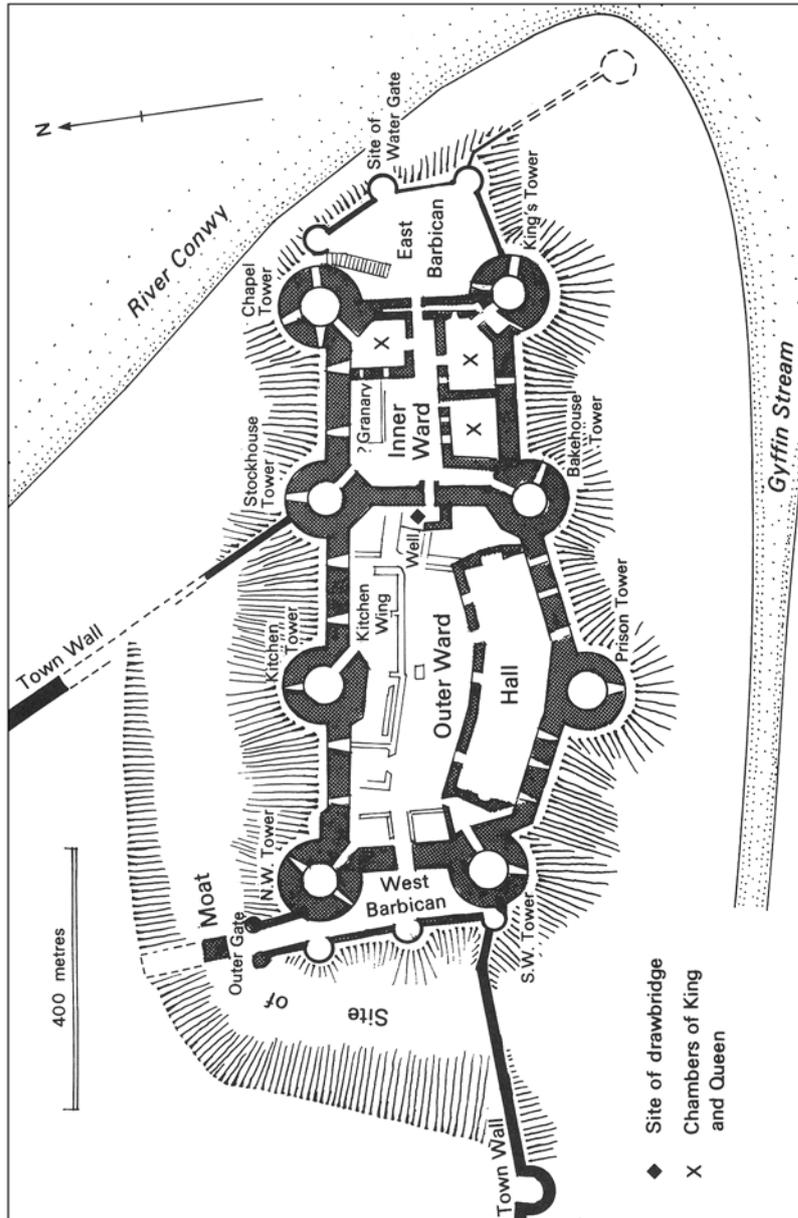
for a much longer time, the total cost of some £150,000 dwarfed that incurred in 1276–7 — it was the price Edward was prepared to pay to put an end to ‘the malice of the Welsh’.

This chivalric triumph was celebrated by an ‘Arthurian’ tournament at Nefyn and Welsh defeat by the transference to Westminster of the *Croes Naid* and Llywelyn’s coronet. Host-ages were taken from the vanquished and the suspect, and very few of the princely dynasties survived the débâcle. The conquest was to be further consolidated by a castle-building programme even more extensive than that inaugurated in 1277 and one which had been planned as early as the spring of 1282 (B.20). Any future rebellion was to be contained by an inner circle of castles which would suck in the enemy’s assaults until a large army could be put into the field. Welsh castles such as Cricieth and Castell y Bere were repaired and new Marcher strongholds were built at Denbigh and Holt, but the greatest commitment was to the construction of massive royal castles at Conwy (begun in March 1283) and at Harlech and Caernarfon (begun in June 1283). Summonses were sent to almost every county in England for woodcutters, carpenters, masons and diggers until as many as 4,000 men laboured at the three sites in B.21 1283–4 (B.21). Material and money were transported from England, France and Ireland in huge quantities — indeed, the latter dominion paid for more than half the building costs over the next five years. Urged on by the King, the works were carried on with such urgency that Conwy was virtually completed by late 1287, Harlech by 1289 and at Caernarfon — the grandest of all — two-thirds of the work had been accomplished by 1292. All these castles exhibited the skill of James of St George, now Master of the King’s Works in Wales, in the application of architectural technique to a chosen site. All were characterized by solidity of construction, immense thickness of wall and tower and great sophistication of defences. At Caernarfon — the Roman Segontium — traditional associations with the imperial past were given architectural expression by its banded walls and polygonal towers modelled on those of Rome’s successor state at Constantinople. Its high turrets and the stone eagles that once crowned its largest tower made Caernarfon the secular cathedral of the conquest. The symbolism was two-edged — the Eagles’ Lair (*Eryri* in Welsh) was now in English hands.

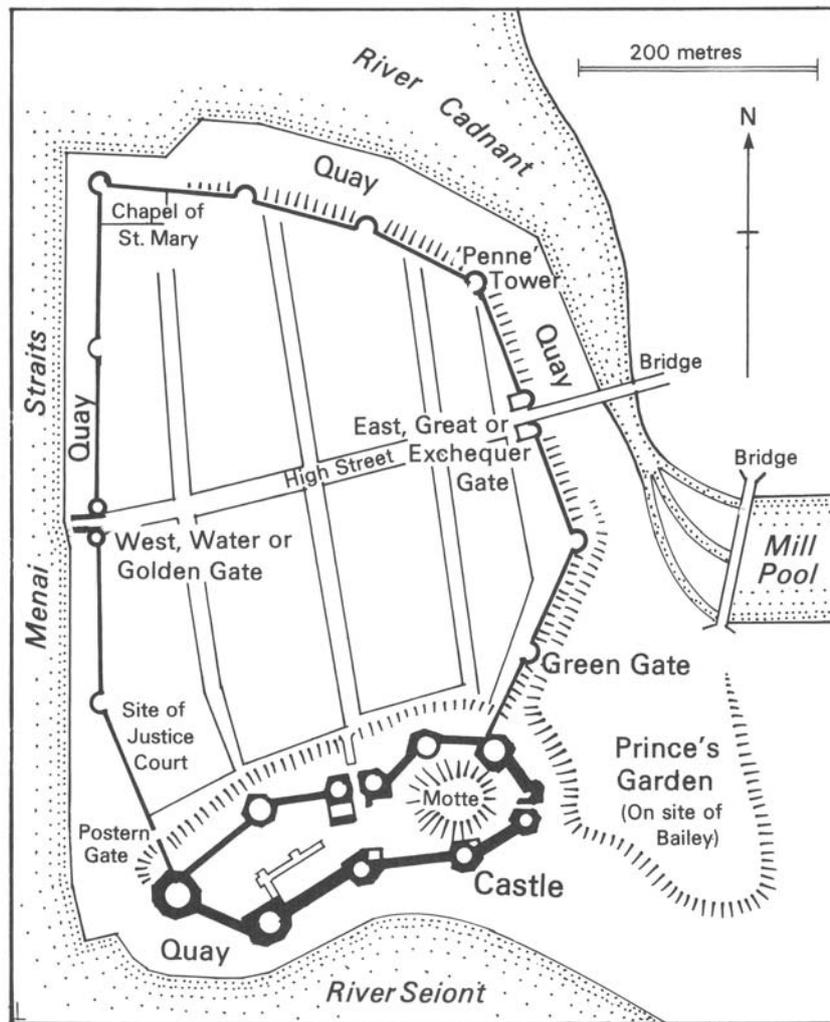
B.20

B.21





Plan of Conwy Castle.



Caernarfon Castle and town.

By 1301 some £80,000 had been spent on the King's works in Wales. This huge sum not only included the cost of a new castle at Beaumaris (begun after the Welsh revolt of 1294–5) but also defences for the plantation boroughs which Edward founded in 1277 (Flint, Rhuddlan and Aberystwyth) and in 1282–3 (Conwy, Caernarfon and Harlech). Physically attached to their castles and exclusively the preserve of privileged and non-native settlers, these fortified towns had their part to play in the military consolidation of the conquest. The *burgesses*, subject to the jurisdiction of the castle constable, were responsible for the town's defence (B.22). They formed essential support units to the substantial garrisons now established (B.23). The *bastide* character of these new towns was most evident in their defences and especially so when these — as at Conwy and Caerddarfon — were comprised of stout walls, mural towers and *gatehouses*. These garrisons and *burgesses* (not a few of whom were war veterans) formed the cutting-edge of a new wave of colonial settlement.

B.22

B.23

Their vigilance and preparedness was soon tested. In 1277–8 a revolt by *Rhys ap Maredudd* — a disaffected collaborator of the wars — was swiftly crushed but not before an army of over 25,000 men had been mobilized. More serious, because more widespread, was the rising which broke out in 1294–5

as a violent backlash against military occupation, fiscal exploitation and oppressive officialdom. Under-strength garrisons were besieged, others were isolated and Caernarfon itself was taken. The colonial regime wobbled under the impact but, as the key fortresses held out, Edward had time to assemble a huge army which included at one stage more than 35,000 foot. The lost castles were retaken and the others relieved and by March 1295 Welsh stamina had been exhausted. Edward's castle-building programme had proved its worth. So much so that it was now extended to include a new castle at Beaumaris in Anglesey. The urgency with which the work there was undertaken reflected continuing official concern about the volatility of affairs in Wales (B.24).

**B.24**

Even so Edward's last demonstration of military might on Welsh soil had proved sufficient. Three campaigns within twenty years had deprived the Welsh of their natural leaders, drained them of resources and destroyed their capacity for resistance. An economically under-resourced, militarily backward and politically divided people — ever a volatile element within the *Plantaganet* dominions — had been ground to submission by an infinitely more powerful neighbour. The conquest did bring peace, or rather what might pass for peace in a still-troubled and divided land, but it was a peace which lasted for more than a century though periodically punctuated by outbreaks of disorder such as occurred in the 1340s. Then, nervous English colonists looked back with nostalgia to the days of 'Edward the Conqueror' and to 'the Conquest' which was that monarch's greatest military achievement (B.25). The durability of that achievement was however to depend in large measure upon the civilian governance that the same victorious king imposed upon the vanquished people.

**B.25**



Caernarfon Castle. (Source: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments. Crown Copyright.)



The Theodosian Wall of Constantinople. (Source Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments. Crown Copyright.)

## Sources

- B.1** . . . It is agreed by the common counsel of all the aforesaid prelates, barons and others that the king shall not hear the aforesaid petition of Llywelyn, and shall not admit his excuses . . . but that he shall go against Llywelyn as his rebel and disturber of his peace and that all those who hold of the king in chief and owe him service shall be summoned to be at Worcester at Midsummer next with horses and arms ... to set out with the king into Wales against Llywelyn . . .
- (17 November 1276. Decision of a Great Council held at Westminster. *Calendar of Close Rolls 1272–9*, pp. 360–1.)
- B.2** . . . the king proposes . . . to put an end finally to the matter he has now commenced of putting down the malice of the Welsh, as Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and other Welshmen, his accomplices, have so many times disturbed the peace of the realm in the king's time and the time of his progenitors and they persist in their resumed rebellion and the king conceives it to be more convenient and suitable that he and the inhabitants of his realm should be burdened on this occasion with labours and expenses in order to put down wholly their malice for the common good . . .
- (24 November 1282. A letter sent to the sheriffs of England. *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*, pp. 275–6.)
- B.3** . . . And then *Rhys ap Maredudd* ap Rhys and Rhys Wyndod, nephew of the prince, made a pact with Pain de Chaworth. And Llywelyn, brother of Rhys Wyndod, and Hywel ap Rhys Gryg left their land and went to Llywelyn. And Rhys (Fychan ap Rhys) ap Maelgwn went to *Roger de Mortimer*, his kinsman, and promised in his hand submission to the king. And last of all Deheubarth, there submitted to the English the two sons of Maredudd ab Owain, Gruffudd and Cynan, and Llywelyn ab Owain, their nephew. And then Pain, and with him a mighty host, came to subjugate three *commotes* above the Aeron — Nanhuniog and Mefenydd and *Cwmwd Perfedd*.
- (1277. T. Jones (ed.), *Bruty Tywysogyon or the Chronicle of the Princes, Peniarth MS 20 Version*, Cardiff, 1952, p.118.)
- B.4** And about the beginning of autumn the king sent many of his host in ships to burn Anglesey and to carry off much of its corn. After that the prince came, about the Calends of Winter, to Rhuddlan to the king and made peace with him. And the king invited him to London at Christmas; and he went at the invitation. And in London he tendered his *homage* to the king on Christmas day. And after staying there a fortnight he returned again.
- (1277. Jones, *Bruty Tywysogyon, Peniarth MS 20 Version*, p.119.)
- B.5** And the king from now inhibits . . . that throughout England, Ireland and Gascony it shall be inhibited that from henceforth no one shall communicate with Llywelyn or his aiders . . . and that no one shall take into their land, or permit to be taken thither through their land or power,

by land or by sea, victuals, horses, arms or other things that may be useful to men in any way.

(17 November 1276. Decision taken at a Great Council held at Westminster. *Calendar of Close Rolls 1272–9*, p. 361.)

- B.6** *Dafydd ap Gruffudd* demanded of the messenger, and still continues to demand, that payment of wages be made to his two horsemen and all his footmen, as to other knights and footmen. And the Earl of Warwick, who was greatly disturbed on this account, fearing lest *Dafydd* might withdraw from the king's service with his men unless he was satisfied, ordered the writer to pay the men of the aforesaid *Dafydd* . . .

(About 4 April 1277. Letter of Ralph de Basages, a royal clerk, to Edward I. Edwards, *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence concerning Wales*, p.67.)

- B.7** 8 April. To Master James *Ingeniator* in payment of his wages for  
17 days up to the present..... 17s.  
To the same James going into Wales to oversee the works of  
the castles there, for his wages and expenses from now until  
Sunday next after St John *ante Portam Latinam* for

29 days..... 5 8s

- 20 May. To the same for his wages for 3 months following when  
he was out of court visiting the castles of Flint and  
Rhuddlan..... £8. 8s.

(1278. Extracts from a royal household (Wardrobe) account. A. J. Taylor, 'Master James of St George', *English Historical Review*, LXV (1950), pp. 433–4.)

- B.8** Because of these grievances and the other things which the said Reginald did to us and his threats to behead any envoys we might send to the court of the lord king to seek justice, because we have endured many other losses and suffered many injuries — when we used to send envoys to the lord king's court they were not permitted, and did not dare, to enter — we have, on account of these complaints, deemed ourselves free from the oath we took before God to the lord king.

(November 1282. Grievances of the men of Rhos against Reginald de Grey, Justiciar of Chester. C. T. Martin, *Registrum Epistolarum fratris Johannis Peckham, Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis*, II, p. 451.)

- B.9** The king does not understand and is unable to understand the article of the peace concluded between him and Llywelyn of which Llywelyn's letters make mention, to wit concerning the hearing and determining of pleas and controversies in the Marches of Wales and in Wales, in any other way than it was always usual and accustomed in the times of his predecessors and in his own time, nor can it be elicited from the wording of the peace otherwise than that controversies and contentions in the Marches ought to be heard and determined according to the laws of the Marches and those arising in Wales ought to be heard and determined according to the Welsh laws at certain days and places that

he shall cause to be prefixed to the parties. Therefore Llywelyn shall come before the king's justices in those parts at days and places that they shall make known to him to do and receive what justice shall dictate according to the laws aforesaid . . .

(14 July 1279. Letter of Edward I to Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*, p. 175.)

- B.10** And the aforesaid Prince Llywelyn declared that the fact that each province under the lord king's dominion — the Gascons in Gascony, the Scots in Scotland, the Irish in Ireland and the English in England — has its own laws and customs, according to the mode and usage of those parts in which they are situate, amplified rather than diminished the Crown. In the same wise he seeks to have his own Welsh law and to be able to proceed by it, especially as the lord king had of his own free will in the peace made between them, granted their own law to him ajid to all Welshmen. As a matter of common right the Welsh, like these other nations subject to the king's governance, ought to have their own laws and customs according to their race (Latin: *linguam*).

(1279. J. Conway Davies, *The Welsh Assize Roll, 1277–84*, p. 266.)

- B.11** Begs to be excused from sending her the aid which he promised for her war in Provence because he needs all his resources for the war which Llywelyn and his brother Dafydd are waging against him in Wales. Roger de Clifford has been taken prisoner, many of his men have been slain, and one of the king's castles in that region is occupied; wherefore the whole army is needed to put down that rebellion.

(8 April 1282. Letter of Edward I to Queen Margaret of France. Edwards, *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence*, p. 56.)

- B.12** To all the king's barons and subjects of the Cinque Ports in his garrison in Anglesey. Writ of aid in favour of Luke de Tany whom the king is sending in garrison and defence of those parts and to provide and make a bridge there and order to cause him to have cords and anchors necessary for the construction of the bridge as he shall direct.

(18 August 1282. *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*, p. 235.)

- B.13** They assert that just as all Christians have their laws and customs in their own lands — even as the Jews in England have their laws — they themselves and their predecessors had, in their own territories, their own and immutable laws and customs until the English took their laws away from them after the last war.

(November 1282. Complaints of the sons of Maredudd ab Owain to John Pecham. Martin, *Registrum Epistolarum*, II, P.454.)

- B.14** These are to be conveyed to the king in secret: firstly, the king's barons believe his will to be this, namely, that if the lord Llywelyn were to submit himself to the king's grace, the king would honourably provide him with land worth £1,000 sterling ... in any place in England but only if the aforesaid Llywelyn were to place the lord king in absolute, free and perpetual possession of Snowdonia.

(November 1282. Part of the terms proposed to Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. Martin, *Registrum Epistolarum*, II, p.467.)

- B.15** Sire,  
Know that the stout men whom you assigned to my command fought against Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in the region of Builth on the Friday next after the feast of St Nicholas and that Llywelyn ap Gruffudd is dead, his army vanquished and the whole flower of his army killed, as the bearer of this letter will tell you and have credence in what he will tell you on my part.

(Immediately after 11 December 1282. J. E. Morris, 'Two Documents relating to the Conquest of Wales', *English Historical Review*, XIV, p. 507.)

- B.16** Poni welwch-chwi'r haul yn hwylaw-'r awyr?

Poni welwch-chwi'r sŷr wedi' r syrthiaw?

Poni chredwch-chwi i Dduw, ddyniadon ynyfyd?

Poni welwch-chwi'r byd wedi' r bydiaw?

Och hyd atat-ti, Dduw, na ddaw — mor dros dir!

(See you not the sun hurtling the sky?

See you not that the stars have fallen?

Have you no belief in God, foolish men?

See you not that the world's ending?

Ah God, that the sea would cover the land!)

(Gruffudd ap yr Ynad Coch's lament upon the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. T. Parry, *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*, pp.47–8 and G. Jones, *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse in English*, pp.32–3.)

- B.17** The tongue of man can scarcely recount the evil deeds committed by the Welsh upon the king's progenitors and him by invasions of the realm from time within memory . . . but God, wishing, as it seems, to put an end to these evil proceedings has, after the prince had been slain, destined David, as the last survivor of the family of traitors aforesaid, to the king's prison after he had been captured by men of his own race.

(28 June 1283. Letter of Edward I to the earls and barons of England. *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*, p. 281.)

- B.18** William Bagot is appointed to provide the king in the counties of Gloucester, Salop and Stafford with corn for the king's armies of Wales and to ordain that all corn that can be bought in those counties in any fairs and markets shall be carried to Shrewsbury, Montgomery and Oswestry for the munition of the said armies coming thither.

(2 June 1282. General notification to the king's officials and subjects. *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*, p.224.)

**B.19** Writ of aid in favour of Richard de Bosco, his knight, whom the king is sending to those parts to make provision of 2,500 footmen by election and to conduct them to the king at Montgomery, so that they shall be there in the *quinzaine* of Easter next at the latest, ready to set out in person with the king for the parts of Meirionnydd against the Welsh rebels.

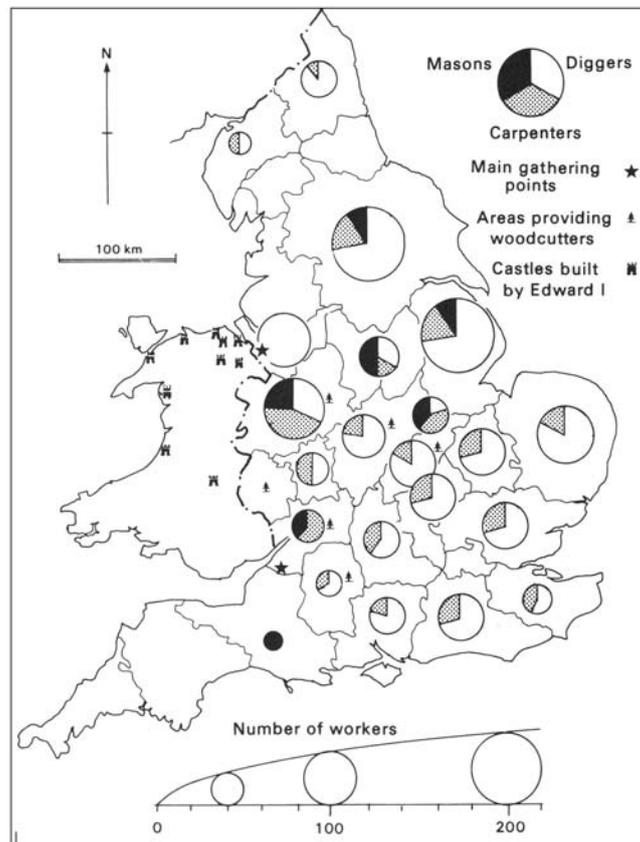
(21 March 1283. Letter to the sheriff of Salop and Stafford. *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*, p.280.)

	Wood Cutters	Diggers		Carpenters		Masons		Totals		All
		a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	
Bucks/Beds		50	0	20	0	0	0	70	0	70
Cambs/Hunts		50	0	20	0	0	0	70	0	70
Cheshire		0	100	0	0	0	0	0	100	100
Cumberland		10	0	10	0	0	0	20	0	20
Derby/Notts	*	20	0	10	0	0	30	30	30	60
Essex/Herts		50	0	20	0	0	0	70	0	70
Gloucester	*	0	0	0	25	15	0	15	25	40
Hampshire		40	0	10	0	0	0	50	0	50
Hereford	*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kent		20	0	15	0	0	0	35	0	35
Lincolnshire		150	0	40	0	0	20	190	20	210
Norfolk/Suffolk		100	0	20	0	0	0	120	0	120
Northants		100	0	20	0	0	0	120	0	120
Northumberland		40	0	10	0	0	0	50	0	50
Oxford/Berks		30	0	20	0	0	0	50	0	50
Rutland		10	0	10	10	0	20	20	30	50
Salop/Staffs	*	40	0	15	40	0	30	55	70	125
Somerset/Dorset		0	0	0	0	15	0	0	15	15
Surrey/Sussex		50	0	20	0	0	0	70	0	70
Warwick/Leics	*	50	0	15	0	0	0	65	0	65
Wiltshire	*	20	0	10	0	0	0	30	0	30
Worcestershire		20	0	20	0	0	0	40	0	40
Yorkshire		150	0	40	0	0	20	190	20	210
Totals		1000	100	345	75	30	120	1360	310	1670

\*woodcutters supplied (numbers not specified) by county but 1600 in total  
 a workers impressed in 1282  
 b workers impressed in 1283

Fifteen masons from Somerset and fifteen from Gloucestershire gathered at Bristol to build Aberystwyth castle. All other workers gathered at Chester to construct the North Wales castles and the castle at Builth.

The impressment of men for the King's works in Wales, 1282–3.



The impressment of men for the King's works in Wales 1282–3. (see table opposite).

**B.20** N.B. to seek 300 (500) carpenters from the counties to be sent to Chester so that they are there by a fortnight after Whitsun. Urgent.

Also the maximum number of 1,000–2,000 diggers to be at Chester by the same date. Carpenters and diggers are to be distrained by constables. One captain constable to be over the carpenters. Control of the diggers to be left to your discretion, provided that whoever is sent to seek them is their chief leader and other constables are appointed under him. Urgent.

Also N.B. to ask for salt meat from Gascony.

(About mid-April 1282. Minutes of a meeting of royal officials. A. J. Taylor, 'Castlebuilding in Wales in the later thirteenth century: the prelude to construction', E.M. Jope (ed.), *Studies in building History*, p. 112.)

**B.21** Order to cause provision to be made of 40 carpenters and 150 diggers in his *bailiwick* and to cause them to be conducted to the king at Chester by one of the *sheriff's* men, so that they shall be there in the octaves of Holy Trinity next, to do the king's order and that the person so conducting may be answerable to the king for their bodies there, as the king needs carpenters and diggers for his works in Wales. The *sheriff* shall cause them to have their wages from the day when they commence their journey until they arrive at Chester when the king shall cause them to have their wages.

(15 April 1282. Letter to the Sheriff of York. *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*, pp.247–8.)

**B.22** That is to say that each of the *burgesses* . . . or the heirs and assigns of each of them being Englishmen, shall find an armed man in the aforesaid town of Denbigh for the guard and defence of the aforesaid town of Denbigh for each *burgage* and *curtilage* beforenamed . . . And if any of the aforesaid *burgesses* . . . shall fail to guard or defend the said town of Denbigh by himself or an armed man . . . it shall be lawful for us or our heirs . . . to seize and retain in our hands . . . each *burgage* and *curtilage* in respect of which the above-mentioned service was not performed.

(Between 1295 and 1305. Charter of Henry de Lacy for Denbigh. A. Ballard and J. Tait, *British Borough Charters, 1212–1307*, pp.114–15.)

**B.23** The king has committed to John de Havering during; pleasure his castle of Caernarfon, with the armour and all things forming the munition of the castle, and has granted him 200 marks yearly for the custody, to be received by the hands of the Chamberlain, on condition that he shall have continuously in garrison there, in addition to himself and his household and at his cost, 40 fencible men of whom 15 shall be crossbowmen, one artiller, a carpenter, a mason and a smith, and of the others shall be made janitors, watchmen and other necessary ministers in the castle.

(21 October 1284. *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*, p.291.)

**B.24** Sirs,  
As our lord the king has commanded us, by letters of the *Exchequer*, to let you have a clear picture of all aspects of the state of the works at Beaumaris, so that you may be able to lay down the level of work for this coming season . . . we write to inform you that the work . . . is very costly and we need a great deal of money . . . As to how things are in the land of Wiles, we still cannot be any too sure. But, as you well know, Welshmen are Welshmen, and you need to understand them properly; if, which God forbid, there is war with France and Scotland, we shall need to watch them all the more closely.

(27 February 1296. Report of Master James of St George and Walter of Winchester. J. G. Edwards, 'Edward I's Castle-building in Wales', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XXXII(1946), pp. 80–1 and

translated in A. J. Taylor, *The King's Works in Wales 1277–1330*, pp. 398–9.)

**B.25** They desire to inform the prince that his Englishmen residing in boroughs . . . were never since the conquest in such perilous plight as they are now. The prince's grandfather, Edward the conqueror of Wales, established towns and castles there, caused them to be inhabited by Englishmen, and gave them various *franchises* by his charter.

(Shortly after 14 February 1345. Letter from the community of Rhuddlan to Edward, Prince of Wales. Edwards, *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence*, pp. 231–2.)

## Debating the Evidence

It is a truism that war is the forcing-ground of innovation in many fields. This can be said of science and technology and, in medieval times, of architecture and engineering too. Edward I's wars in Wales appear to have forced another kind of growth — documentary records. The wars of 1277 and 1282–3 presented massive logistical problems and the efforts required to overcome them demanded enormous expense and a frenetic pace of work. The heightened level of government activity and the great financial responsibilities undertaken by the Crown and its official made effective record-keeping vital. The body of official records, preserved largely in parchment rolls, which record royal decisions and account for government expenditure must be seen in the light of Edward I's awareness, recorded in Document B.2, that the 1282 campaign was to be a once-and-for-all effort to settle the 'Welsh question'.

### Source B.1

What evidence does this document offer about *feudal* military organization? Is this response to the challenge posed by Llywelyn in 1276 represented as the personal reaction of his *feudal* overlord?

### Source B.2

Is there any element of 'case-making' in this letter to the *sheriffs* of the shires? Why would their role be vital in any campaign? How does the King justify the large-scale expenditure being undertaken for the 1282 campaign in Wales? What might have prompted the King to issue such a letter to his *sheriffs* — his main channel of communication with the shires?

### Source B.3

If Rowlands has referred to the 'indecent haste' with which the west Wales lords made their accommodations with the Crown in 1277. Which of the following factors would you rate most highly as contributing to the collapse:

- dynastic rivalries between the descendants of the Lord Rhys;
- the proximity of west Wales to powerful Marcher lordships;
- resentment and suspicion of Gwynedd's pre-eminence?

Why would the affairs of Deheubarth be likely to loom large in the chronicle *Brut y Tywysogyon*? As a monastic chronicle associated with St Davids and Cistercian houses at Whitland, Strata Florida and Cwm-hir, what kind of distinctive features might be expected of it?

### **Source B.4**

How might an autumn raid on the isle of Anglesey be likely to have a dramatic effect on Gwynedd? Does this extract suggest or assume cause and effect in this instance?

### **Source B.5**

What modern terminology might be appropriate to describe the King's strategy as outlined in this record?

### **Source B.6**

Does the author of the article attribute the concern for *Ddfydd ap Gruffudd's* position reflected in this document to:

- a) Dafydd's importance as a military asset;
- b) Dafydd's personal political support in Wales;
- c) Dafydd's value as a symbol of Llywelyn's breach of *feudal* obligations?

### **Source B.7**

Is there anything in this record which appears to attach either a higher importance or a greater difficulty to Master James's work in Wales than to his previous duties? How else might the relationship between Savoyard military architecture and the Edwardian castles in Wales have come to light if no records had survived concerning Master James and his work?

### **Source B.8**

What crucial part of *feudal* relationship between *vassal* and Crown did the men of Rhos consider to have been abrogated by Reginald de Grey's activities?

### **Sources B.9 and B.10**

How might Llywelyn's claim that the persistence of differing national laws and customs within the king's realms 'amplified rather than diminished the Crown' be explained? Of what much later political concept is this pluralistic view redolent, bearing in mind the fact that the terms used by Llywelyn were '*natioms*' for provinces and '*imperium*' for dominion?

### **Source B.9**

How far does Edward I's statement in this letter give a clear definition of the jurisdiction to be observed in disputes between a Welsh lord and a *Marcher lora*?

## Source B.11

This letter is cited as evidence of Edward's efforts to muster his forces for action. What broader conclusion might also be drawn from it about the impact of the 1282 war?

## Source B.12

What conclusion can be drawn from this document about Edward I's proposed strategy?

## Source B.13

What, other than a legalistic argument about jurisdiction of laws, might be discerned in this statement?

## Source B.14

How might Edward I's objectives as *feudal* overlord be fulfilled by the proposal outlined here? On what grounds, other than personal devotion to Gwynedd, was Llywelyn's response to such a proposal likely to be negative?

## Source B.15

What is the relative importance of this terse document compared with the more detailed accounts to be found in several other chronicles?

## Source B.16

Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch (son of the Red Justice), in addition to being a court bard, was probably a member of the *curial* or official class that had developed in the fledgling principality of Gwynedd since about 1200.

## Source B.17

What is there about this document, different though it is from the bard's lament above, which in any way parallels it?

## Sources B.18, B.19, B.20, B.21

What light does this series of documents throw upon the demands of successful medieval generalship?

## Source B.22

Of what broader medieval structure might defensive arrangements for this Edwardian borough appear to be a microcosm?

## Source B.23

Should John de Havering's 200 marks a year be seen as an outright 'salary' for his custody of Caernarfon Castle? Mr Rowlands has described the castle, or '*bastide*', boroughs as the 'cutting-edge of a new colonial settlement'. What are the characteristics that can be cited as evidence of their colonial nature?

## Source B.24

Master James seems to have been worried about the future in the aftermath of Madog's rebellion. What evidence can Beaumaris Castle itself offer as to the validity of his long-term fears for north Wales?

The document is a Latin manuscript, likely a payment record, tied with a ribbon. The ribbon has a label that reads: "Paying for the work done at Beaumaris Castle in the year 1316-17". The text on the page is organized into several sections, each with a heading and a list of items followed by their values. The sections are:

- Com**: A list of items including "Carnes de capris", "Carnes de ovibus", "Carnes de capris", "Carnes de ovibus".
- Cabre**: A list of items including "Cabre de hircinis", "Cabre de hircinis".
- Pat**: A list of items including "Pat de hircinis", "Pat de hircinis".
- Capre**: A list of items including "Capre de hircinis", "Capre de hircinis".

Payments to building workers at Caernarfon Castle, 1316–17. (Source: *Public Record Office*.)

## Source B.25

This letter is one of several that emanated from the north Wales boroughs after the murder of Henry de Shaldeford, the royal minister in north Wales, by Welshmen on 14 February 1345. Other instances of attacks by the Welsh on English *burgesses* and officials are rehearsed. Are the reflections on the boroughs' early years contained in these letters valid as evidence of their real state throughout the period from the 1280s to the Glyndŵr revolt in 1400?

## Discussion

In one respect at least the historian of the Edwardian conquest of Wales is exceptionally fortunate. He has far more ample and precise documentation than for any earlier war in the history of medieval Europe. During the thirteenth century England became a truly bureaucratic country, in other words a state dominated by clerks and the written word. Every governmental command was written down (B.18–B.21) and detailed accounts kept of every item of expense (B.7). The historian is the beneficiary of this cult of written evidence. It means that he can give his account of Edward I's Welsh campaigns much more precision and a much richer texture than for any earlier royal expeditions. You might have noticed that many of the sources (B.2, B.9, B.12, B.17–B.19, B.21) come from the *Calendar of Welsh Rolls*. That is in itself of great significance. From 1277 Edward I decided that Wales was sufficiently important to have its own separate chancery rolls; that is a measure of the significance he attached to Wales. Edward also initiated major searches of earlier records relating to Wales in order to bolster his case and to show that he was in the right (as he saw it).

Such a wealth of documentation can, paradoxically, in itself be a danger. The historian relies on evidence. If the evidence is overwhelmingly English in its provenance, is he in danger of telling the story too much from an English angle? This is particularly true about the military aspect of the conquest where there is no Welsh parallel to the detailed English instructions on raising troops (B.1, B.19), commercial blockades (B.5), military strategy (B.12), supplies (B.18) and craftsmen (B.20, B.21). We also tend to see the aftermath of conquest largely through English eyes, as in the foundation charters of boroughs (B.22) or the nervous twitches of commanders and English settlers (B.24, B.25).

Fortunately, the balance can be rectified to some degree, as the sources show. The native Welsh chronicle (B.3, B.4) gives us a brief glimpse of the Welsh view of events. You will notice (B.4) how it interprets Llywelyn's visit to London after his defeat in 1277 as an 'invitation'. Would you regard this as an example of euphemism, just as suspected criminals nowadays are said 'to be helping the police with their inquiries'? Significantly the native Welsh chronicle is effectively abandoned after 1282; there was simply no Welsh story to tell. You can see why in the famous quotation from the elegy on Llywelyn (B.16). Poetry, especially conventional court poetry, is a notoriously difficult source for the historian, but do you think that it reaches parts of the historical memory which other sources cannot reach? Perhaps the most valuable insights we have into the Welsh side of the story are provided in the communal statements (B.8, B.13) and in Llywelyn's own declaration (B.10). Such statements must, of course, be treated with caution, but you might ask yourself how they help the historian to build up a more balanced picture of the issues behind the conquest. How would you balance Edward I's view of 'the evil deeds committed by the Welsh' (B.17) against the Welsh assertion that the English 'took their laws away from them' (B.13)? Do you get some insight from these sources into the English state propaganda machine at work (B.1, B.2, B.9)? Part of the fascination of this subject, as the sources show, is that the documentation, while, as always, less — and less well-balanced — than

the historian would wish it to be, is sufficiently rich and diverse to allow us to see the issues in the round, rather than taking up a polarized pro-English or pro-Welsh position.