

Tywi Time Line

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Archaeology & History In The Tywi Valley

The timespan of human activity within the Tywi study area stretches back to before the end of the last Ice Age when Palaeolithic people hunted deer on a tundra-like landscape. The valley was carved out by the retreating glaciers and as the climate warmed up, forests emerged and humans returned, in the period referred to as the Mesolithic. From around 6000 years ago the Neolithic period was characterised by farming. An extensive Neolithic occupation site comprising numerous pits and post-holes, with finds of burnt bone, flints and charcoal, has been recorded at Cwmifor. A polished stone axe (PRN862) was found at Dinefwr Castle in 1876, and another in 1913 in a field below the town known as Cae Crug Mawr, at the edge of the Tywi floodplain. It is in this period that the earliest archaeological monuments including a chambered tomb near Bethlehem, Llangadog were built.



Neolithic Chambered tomb near Bethlehem

The Bronze Age (2200BC-700BC)

Possible evidence of human activity during the Bronze Age period is in the form of the mound Cae Crug Mawr, which is thought to be a Bronze Age round barrow or burial mound (PRN903). Bronze Age people in Wales created burial sites, in the form of hilltop cairns and barrows, where the cremated remains of the dead were interred usually within ceramic urns, good examples can be seen at Trichrug and Tair Cairn Isaf and Uchaf, Llandeilo. A possible Bronze Age hammerhead (PRN905), made of quartzite stone, was found in a pool below Dinefwr Castle in 1918 and is now kept at Carmarthen Museum.



Bronze Age round barrow

The Iron Age (700BC -AD70)

This period is noted as the age of Celtic tribes and warrior bands that made warfare a way of life. The chieftains and warriors were supported by a farming population probably living in scattered farmsteads. The Iron Age hillfort at Garn Goch dominates the boundary between the Dematae and Silures tribal areas. To the north of both areas the main, and possibly more numerous tribes were Ordovices.



Garn Goch hillforts

Roman (AD 70 - 410)

It is generally accepted that the Roman conquest of west Wales occurred as part of the Flavian campaigns of AD74 and 75. The military presence was virtually withdrawn around AD120 (Davies, 2000).

Roads were constructed to enable the rapid deployment of military troops and supplies between established forts and two large forts, one partly overlying the other, were built at Dinefwr Park.

Roman finds have been discovered throughout the Tywi valley but, with the possible exception of Llys Brychan near Bethlehem, no extensive Roman villas have been unearthed.



Reconstruction of Llandeilo Roman Fort by Neil Ludlow

Early Medieval (The Dark Ages or the the "Age of the Saints") AD 410-1066

West Wales was divided into small kingdoms or *gwledydd*, of which Ystrad Tywi was one such *gwlad* with a possible political centre at Dinefwr. Within each *gwlad* there were smaller estates called *maenorau*, created for economic and political administration. Each of the *maenorau* was further divided into townships or *trefi*, which were areas in which the majority of the population lived in scattered farmsteads.

Viking raids between the 9th and 11th centuries hastened political ties with England for defensive reasons, bringing the Celtic church out of isolation. Llangadog is a good example of a pre-Conquest ecclesiastical settlement of medieval *llanau*, or radial field systems.

Medieval (1066 - 1536)

The Tywi Valley was on the frontline of the power struggle between the Welsh princes and the Anglo-Norman invaders with possible medieval battle sites located by names such as 'Rhyd-y-Saeson' near Llangadog. Early in the 12th century the first Welsh castles were built and towns, or *maerdref*, grew up around the court or *llys* in each commote, such as at Dryslwyn and Dinefwr, leading to a growth of trade.

The constant division of hereditary lands inevitably led to smaller, scattered parcels of land and a law was passed to allow the buying and selling of these lands. By the later medieval period wealthy individuals were able to acquire large estates, which would then be sub-divided into tenant farms.



Dinefwr Castle

Post-medieval

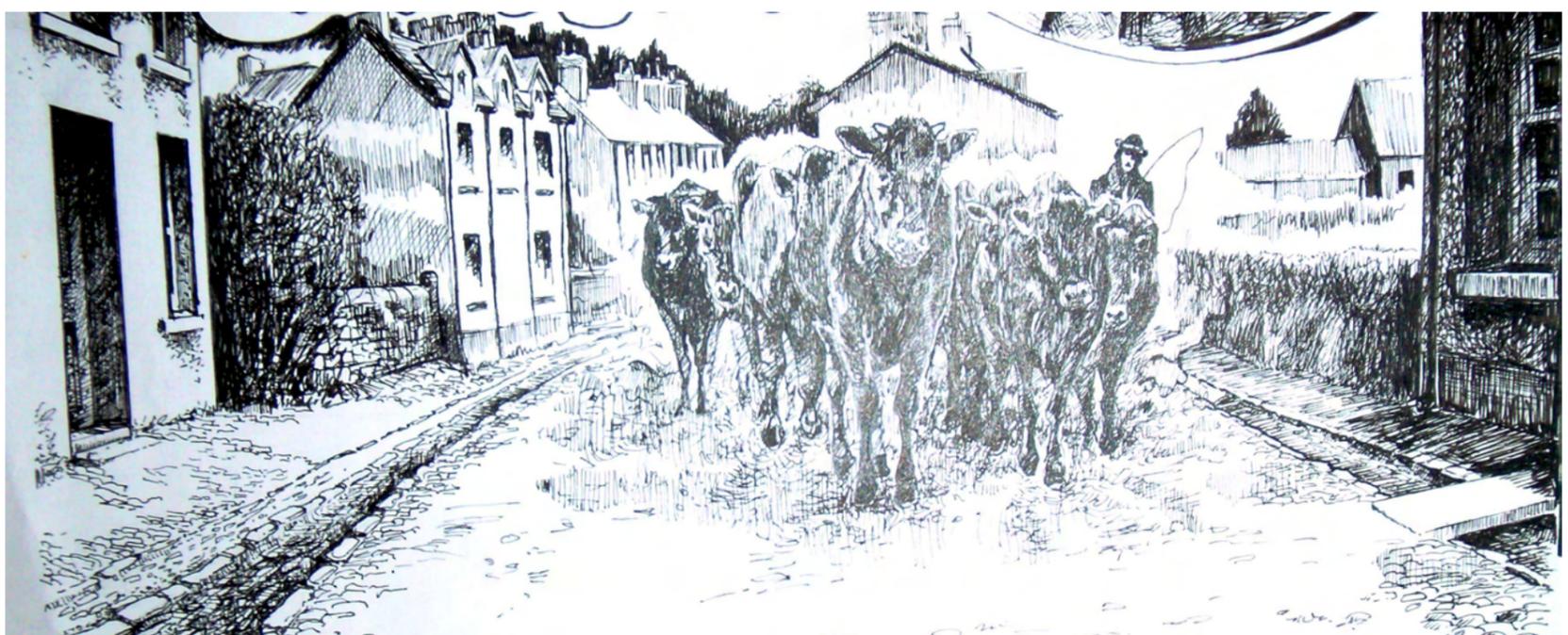
16th + 17th Century

Only four towns are depicted within Dinefwr on Christopher Saxton's *Map of Carmarthenshire*, produced in 1578 - Llandeilo, Llandovery, Llangadog and Newton and parish churches at Llangathen, Llanfihangel Aberbythych and Llandyfeisant. Following the Acts of Union (1536-43) and the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1538), the leading gentry were able to acquire land and large estates were created, including those of the Rices at Dinefwr, the Dyers at Aberglasney and the Joneses at Abermarlais. In 1689 with the Act of Toleration it was no longer an offence not to conform to the established church. The first chapels in Wales were built in this period.

18th Century

In 1763 a petition was sent to the House of Commons to bring a Bill to repair this "High Road" - which the A40 mostly follows today. Some trusts charged extortionate tolls to use these roads and the money was not spent on repair. This additional financial burden imposed on poor farming communities led to the formation of gangs, the *Merched Beca* - Rebecca's Daughters whose purpose was to destroy the tollgates.

Between the 18th-19th century livestock droving was an important part of the Welsh economy, with drovers taking livestock from West Wales to the English cities, particularly London. This growing trade with London led to a number of Drover's banks being set up. The Black Ox Bank in Llandovery, founded in 1799 had a black ox on its notes to symbolise its links with the Drovers. The first bank in Llandeilo was at no.1 Bank Terrace and opened in 1842.



Cattle Droving

Early 19th Century

Development of industrial buildings linked with the agricultural economy, such as woollen mills, tanneries and saw mills (Hughes, 2006) as well as small scale quarry sites providing materials for local construction in the area. Llandeilo develops as a market town. The present stone bridge over the Tywi was built in 1848 and the National School (PRN8731) was built during the 1850s.

Late 19th Century

In 1858 LNWR main West Wales railway opened as the 'Vale of Towy Line', by the Llanelli Railway and Dock Company, 1851 - nearly 80% of worshippers in Wales were non-conformists (religious census)

The 20th Century

The early 20th century

The Welsh Church Act in 1914 allowed the creation of the Church of Wales.

Llandeilo entered its heyday as a market town. New commercial banks opened, each of the main nonconformist denominations had built or rebuilt large chapels and a police station, school and post office served the townspeople.

Businesses flourished during the 1930s, including an electrical and plumbing shop (PRN50296) and the Ammanford Co-operative Society (PRN50264)

First World War

During the First World War many of Llandeilo's menfolk went off to fight in the trenches, some never returning. A war memorial was erected in the chancel of St Teilo's church, situated on the east wall.



Sergeant WO Stephens wounded in the battle of Loos in 1915

Image provided by Miss A Stephens

The Second World War

British Army Military Hospital (PRN50282) was based in Newton House. Later in the war, it became an American Army hospital, complete with a group of Nissen huts on the lawns outside the mansion. After D-day, the huts became a Prisoner of War camp (PRN50283) for German officers. The Americans also had a camp (PRN50281) based at the old Dynevor Church Hall, with a field kitchen and large petrol dump in the fields where Dynevor Avenue now stands.

Near the White Hart, the Womens Land Army had a camp (PRN50284), which was converted into temporary housing for homeless people after the war, as were the Nissen huts outside Newton House - "Tin Town."

The Tywi Valley area welcomed countless refugee children into the area.



Llangathen Home Guard 1940

Llangathen Home Guard

Image provided by Gweneira Davies and David Tom Rees.

For more information on the Second World War in Carmarthenshire please refer to Carmarthenshire County Museum Abergwili. Email: museums@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

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