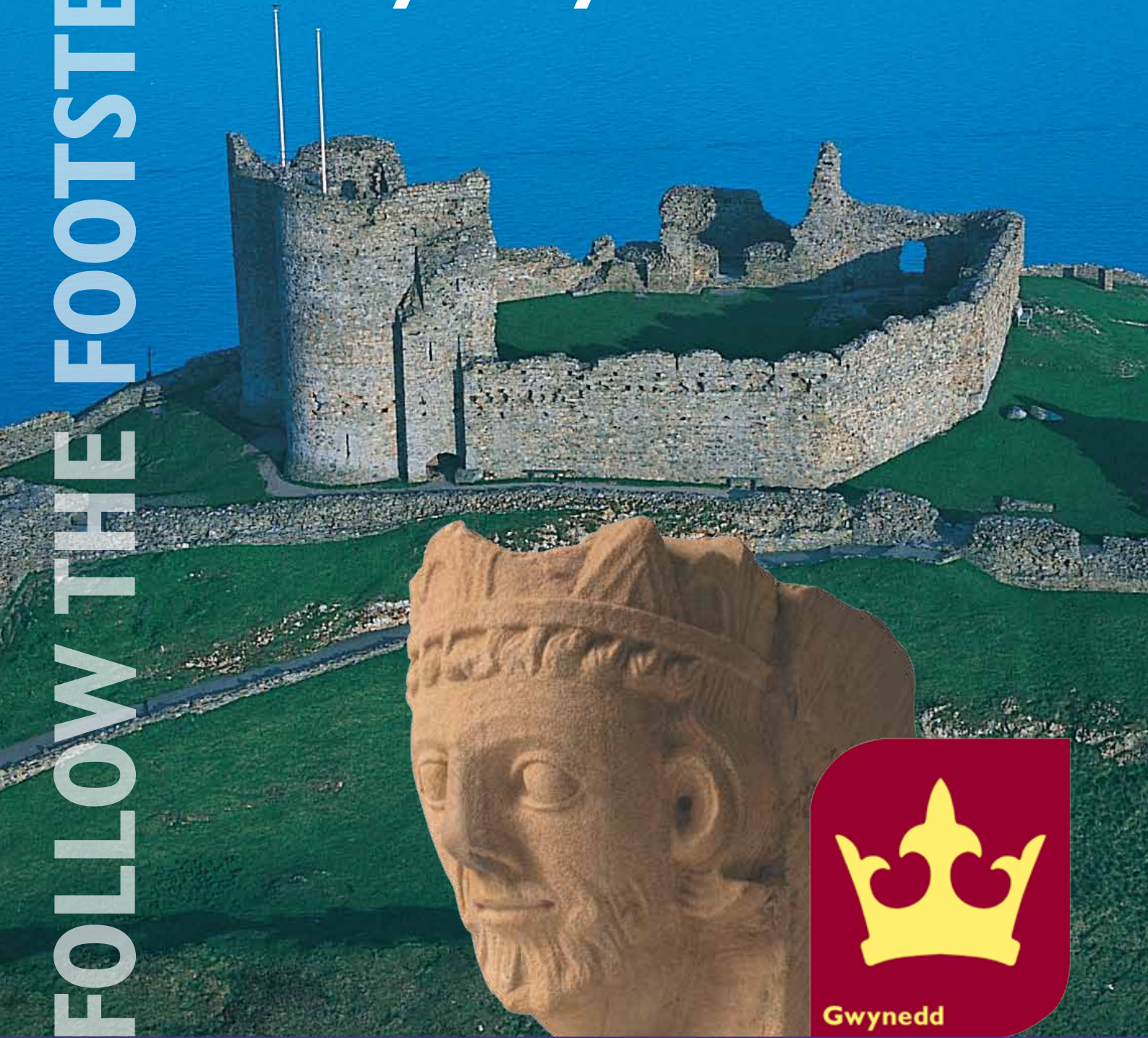


FOLLOW THE FOOTSTEPS

# Heroes and Heroines of Wales

## Llywelyn the Great



 Cadw



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Medieval Wales was divided into independent kingdoms ruled by princes. Each vied to gain power over the other, whilst also defending themselves from Anglo-Norman lords and the English king. Our story is centred on Gwynedd in north-west Wales, the most remote and mountainous of the Welsh kingdoms.

# Llywelyn the Great

The powerful prince who united Wales



'Llywelyn the Great', one of the most powerful Welsh princes

Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, known as 'Llywelyn the Great' was one of the most famous and powerful of the Princes of Gwynedd. He was a brave warrior, but also a shrewd diplomat. By the time of his death, Llywelyn had united most of native Wales under his rule.

**D**uring his reign, Llywelyn built a chain of imposing castles to defend the borders of Gwynedd and the heartland of Snowdonia. Many of the ruins can still be seen today. He was also a generous patron of the church and the poets.

## Making peace with England

Llywelyn became ruler of Gwynedd around 1200, and one of his first moves was to make a treaty with King John of England. This was the first written agreement between an English king and a Welsh ruler. Llywelyn swore loyalty to the king, and in return was allowed to keep the territory he had gained in Wales.

The alliance with England was strengthened in 1205 when Llywelyn married Joan, the daughter of King John.



King John of England



The heartland of Snowdonia where the prince ruled

## Back to battle

The peace between the two countries lasted for about ten years. But then John became concerned about Llywelyn's fast-growing power. He decided to invade Wales and take Llywelyn's lands from him. John's huge army swept across Gwynedd in 1211, and Llywelyn was forced to surrender. Joan was sent to negotiate terms with King John, her father. Llywelyn was spared, but he had to give up much of his land.

The following year, Llywelyn formed an alliance with other Welsh princes, and won back the land he had lost to England. By 1216, Llywelyn was the most powerful ruler in Wales.

Following King John's death, Llywelyn continued fighting with his successor, Henry III. They made peace in 1234 which lasted until Llywelyn's death.

## Betrayal and forgiveness

Llywelyn and Joan had one son, Dafydd ap Llywelyn, and at least four daughters. But their marriage came into crisis



Llywelyn built a chain of imposing castles, including Castell y Bere



Dolbadarn Castle

in 1230, when Joan was accused of having an affair with a powerful English lord, William de Braose. Llywelyn imprisoned Joan for 12 months, and had William de Braose hanged. But Llywelyn later forgave Joan and took her back as his wife.

### Final separation but story lives on

When Joan died in 1237, Llywelyn was grief-stricken. She had been a great support and strength to him. Llywelyn had her buried at a place called Llanfaes on the isle of Anglesey, which he could see across the water from his court at Abergwyngregyn. He founded a friary there in her memory. Llywelyn spent his final days at Aberconwy Abbey, where he died in 1240. By now, he was prince of Wales in all but name.

The story of Llywelyn and Joan lives on in the play Siwan (Welsh for Joan) written by Saunders Lewis, which is still acted in theatres across the country.

### The face of a prince

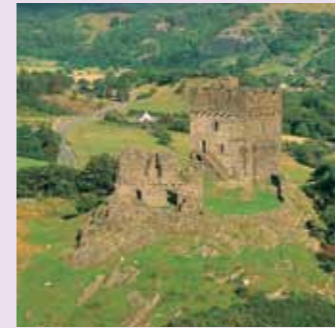
In 1966, a 13th-century carved stone head was discovered amongst the ruins of Deganwy Castle, near Conwy. It's believed to be the face of the Llywelyn the Great. There is a replica of the stone head in the visitor centre at Criccieth Castle. The original is held by Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales.



Joan's coffin lid at Beaumaris Church

# Follow the footsteps

You've read the story of Llywelyn the Great, now visit some of the great castles he built.



Dolwyddelan Castle

## Dolwyddelan Castle

Llywelyn ap Iorwerth was said to have been born near here. He later built the castle to defend a major route into Snowdonia. Now in ruins, the castle gives spectacular views over the surrounding mountains.

- Explore the ruins – can you work out where other rooms were?
- Climb to the top of the keep and look out. Imagine you're defending the mountain pass from invaders.



A carved stone head, thought to represent Llywelyn the Great

## Dolbadarn Castle

The castle with its massive round-towered keep was probably built by Llywelyn early in the 13th century. It was perfectly placed to defend the Llanberis Pass, an important route through Snowdonia.

- Climb the steps into the keep. Notice the slits in the walls – where archers could fire at the enemy without being shot themselves.
- Can you find two chutes at the bottom of the tower? This is where the waste from the castle's toilets emptied out!

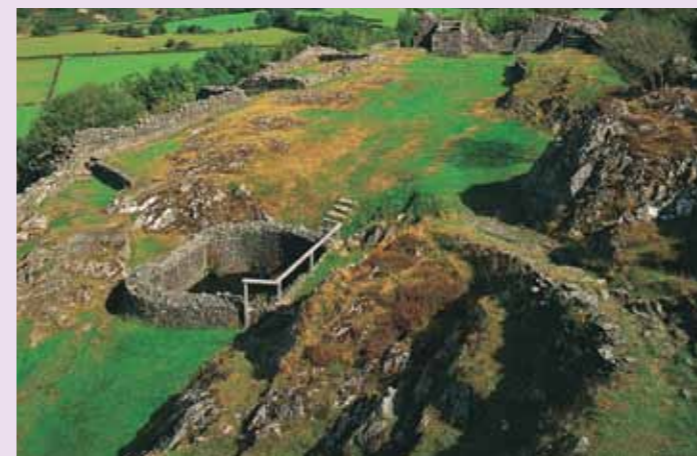


Criccieth Castle

## Criccieth Castle

Perched on a headland with the sea crashing below, the castle is thought to have been built by Llywelyn in 1230. The massive gatehouse dominates the landscape, and must have been an intimidating sight for any attackers. Many Welsh princes and English kings fought to own the castle, and it changed hands many times.

- Find the arrow slits and battlements that protected the castle. Would you feel safe inside?
- Look for the murder holes above the gate passage – designed so that soldiers could pour rocks or hot ashes onto attackers.



Castell y Bere

## Castell y Bere

These ruins were once part of a lavish fortress built by Llywelyn to guard the valley. Today they are the ideal place to take in the breath-taking views of the mountain, Cadair Idris.

- Explore the ruins and see if you can piece together how the castle once looked.
- Look up at Cadair Idris (meaning the 'Chair of Idris'). It's said to be named after a giant who used the mountain as an enormous armchair while he sat and gazed at the stars.

Visit [www.cadw.wales.gov.uk](http://www.cadw.wales.gov.uk) to explore the sites.