

**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF SAINTS AND SHEEP: ARCHAEOLOGICAL,
ANTHROPOLOGICAL, AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS OF
BARDSEY ISLAND AND THE NORTH WALES PILGRIM'S WAY**

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

During the medieval period, Bardsey Island (*Ynys Enlli*) became a prominent and unique pilgrimage destination in North Wales. Compared to the other major shrines in the country, Bardsey stands out in several respects. The island and the many traditions connected to it continue to have deeply-felt cultural resonance among the Welsh people. This thesis examines why Bardsey developed into a pilgrimage destination in the Middle Ages and played a significant role in Welsh ecclesiastical history. Located off the Llŷn Peninsula and across one of the most dangerous sea crossings in Britain, Bardsey provides an ideal case study to examine a unique pilgrimage destination and the peninsular route-ways leading to it. The results of this project contribute broadly to the fields of medieval archaeology and pilgrimage studies by utilizing an interdisciplinary approach of archaeological evidence, anthropological theories, Celtic hagiography, and phenomenology.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Emily Ryan Stanton received her MA in Archaeology from Cornell University in 2017. She received her Bachelor's with Honors in Classics and Anthropology from Austin College in 2014. She enjoys interdisciplinary research and hopes to pursue a PhD in Medieval Studies and Archaeology. In her spare time, she writes poetry, enjoys watching BBC America, participates in her local fencing club, and continues to hone her Welsh language skills.

There is an island there is no going
to but in a small boat the way
the saints went, travelling the gallery
of the frightened faces of
the long-drowned, munching the gravel
of its beaches.

- R.S. Thomas, "Pilgrimages"

...neud uchel gwendon gwyndir Enlli

"...white waves make loud the holy land of Enlli"

- Bleddyn Fardd (fl. 1268-1283), trans. C. Evans



Figure 1: The cross commemorating the 20,000 saints buried on Bardsey Island. The inscription reads: "Respect the remains of 20,000 saints buried near this spot."

To all the saints, pilgrims, and scholars of *Ynys Enlli*

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PREFACE

Bardsey (*Ynys Enlli*) is a small island of 444 acres off the coast of North Wales. During the medieval period, Bardsey developed into a unique Christian pilgrimage destination. According to tradition, St. Cadfan founded a monastery on Bardsey in 516 AD. The other main pilgrimage centers of Wales – St. David’s Cathedral, Pennant St. Melangell, and St. Winifride’s at Holywell – have saintly shrines. Yet, Bardsey lacks an archaeologically known shrine dedicated to its founding saint, Cadfan. Thus, Bardsey is unique among the Welsh centers of pilgrimage. Furthermore, the sea crossing to the island is notoriously difficult and dangerous.

For centuries, Bardsey has fascinated scholars. Yet, most studies and popular literature about the island emphasize its traditional stories, which range from Arthurian legends to tales of the Celtic saints. Consequently, studies often overlook investigating *why* Bardsey became a pilgrimage destination. The island presents a special case study. On the one hand, it meets some of the criteria outlined in the literature for a canonical pilgrimage destination, but on the other hand it is unique and surprising in several respects. Despite not fulfilling all the normal criteria, Bardsey emerged as a noted pilgrimage destination in the Middle Ages. This thesis attempts to address the questions of how and why. I use an interdisciplinary perspective combining anthropological theories of pilgrimage, archaeological evidence from recent surveys on Bardsey, and phenomenological explorations of the North Wales Pilgrim’s Way.

Pilgrimage routes constitute distinct types of archaeological sites – a sequence of sites linked together as an archaeological unit. Stretching for long distances over changing topography, they are often marked by a variety of monuments. Both the route-ways and the monuments marking them are intimately tied to the overall purpose of the pathways – experiential journeys to a particular destination. Excavations of pilgrimage sites and routes are not necessarily required,

thus allowing for repeated visits and experiences of the same area. This pilot study focuses on the last 50 miles of the North Wales Pilgrim's Way along the Llŷn Peninsula from Clynog Fawr to Bardsey Island. Having travelled this distance in June 2016 with modern Welsh pilgrims, I include a section on the continuing relevance of Bardsey in modern Wales.

CHAPTER 1

YNYS ENLLI – “THE ISLAND OF THE RIPTIDES”

*June 18, 2016 – The first thing you notice about Bardsey is the mountain.*¹

1.1 THE ISLAND – OVERVIEW

Bardsey Island, called *Ynys Enlli* in Welsh, lies across the infamously dangerous waters of Bardsey Sound two miles off the Llŷn Peninsula in North Wales.² The island is small in size, 1.5 miles long and 0.5 miles across. Rising to 548 feet, Bardsey Mountain, *Mynydd Enlli*, gives the island its whale-like shape and distinctive topography. This mountain acts as a windbreak sheltering the houses, buildings, and medieval ruins of St. Mary’s Abbey from the worst of the powerful winds. Sheep, cattle, and horses graze on the patchwork of fertile fields on the western plain. The southern end of the island narrows to an isthmus before spreading out to a peninsula where Bardsey Lighthouse (1823) stands.

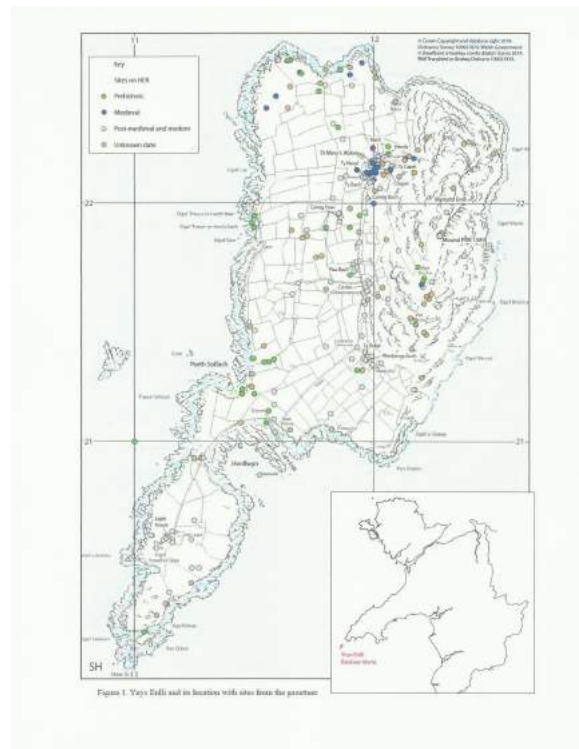


Figure 2: Bardsey’s location and archaeological sites. Reproduced from Kenney & Hopewell: 2015, 58

The island's archaeological record is long and varied; a recent survey mapped 233 sites.³ Mesolithic flint scatters comprise the earliest evidence of the island's habitation. Two Bronze Age cremation burials lie on Henllwyn Beach, while prehistoric or Roman-era roundhouses sit on the western slopes of the mountain.⁴ These roundhouses may be a local variation of Iron Age mainland forts.⁵ While Bardsey's prehistory is a topic for more archaeological investigation and scholarly discussion, I focus primarily on the island's history from the Age of Saints (c. 450-650 AD) through the medieval period when Bardsey acquired its reputation as a center of pilgrimage and the burial place of 20,000 saints. I also include a section on Bardsey's modern relevance – the island is still home to a working community and continues to draw pilgrims to its shores.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The main questions I will address in this thesis are

1. What role did Bardsey play in Welsh ecclesiastical history?
2. Why did Bardsey develop into a pilgrimage destination in the Middle Ages?
3. Why do pilgrims travel to Bardsey today?

While previous research and popular literature about Bardsey focus on its many legends and stories, I have opted to answer these questions from a different perspective – an interdisciplinary approach combining anthropological theories on pilgrimage, archaeological evidence both on the Llŷn Peninsula and Bardsey, and phenomenological explorations of the current North Wales Pilgrim's Way (*Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru*, hereafter TPGC).

Throughout this project, the anthropological concept of liminality is an overarching theme applied to both the island itself and to the pilgrims who travelled there. As defined by the Turners, liminality (Latin *limen*, “threshold”) is the “state and process of mid-transition in a rite of passage” – a state of being neither here nor there.⁶ Since the 1978 publication of the Turners' work, numerous scholars have proposed critiques and expansions on the liminality of pilgrimage.

I apply these theories to demonstrate how Bardsey presents a paradox: it both exemplifies and contradicts the conventional image of a Western pilgrimage destination. Pilgrimage studies present opportunities for theoretical engagement and for interactions with material culture. The material culture discussed here consists of the medieval monuments – holy wells, inscribed stones, and Celtic chapels – that served as possible route markers for a pilgrimage path. In conjunction with my own experiences as a “pilgrim” hiking the TPGC, I discuss the theories of phenomenology, landscape-as-monument, and “islandness.” My project concludes with a discussion of the modern relevance of Bardsey to the Welsh people and to the many pilgrims who journey to the island today.



Figure 3: My fellow TPGC pilgrims and I leaving Bardsey Island, June 2016

1.3 CONTRIBUTIONS

Despite its importance to several major world religions including Christianity, “pilgrimage has been surprisingly neglected by historians and social scientists.”⁷ This case study of Bardsey enlarges our understanding of the forms and reasons for pilgrimage and demonstrates how the concept of liminality changes in different time periods. Additionally, this project integrates phenomenological approaches to pilgrimage and digital mapping in GoogleMaps as

complementary ways of experiencing past and present landscapes. It is my hope that this map can be of use to scholars or to those unable to make a pilgrimage through the Llŷn to Bardsey. Traditions, historical “facts,” and archaeological evidence do not always align, but all of these elements deserve consideration in piecing together a multi-disciplinary narrative of pilgrimage to Bardsey, the little island at the western edge of Wales.



Figure 4: Clockwise - head-stones from the late 1700's, ruins of a stone farm house from the 1700's, Bardsey lighthouse from 1823, and a stone cottage and a memorial cross from the Victorian era.

REFERENCES

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- ¹ Each chapter will begin with a quote from my personal journal recording my travels in North Wales in June 2016.
- ² The name Bardsey is Norse in derivation, composed of the element *Bardr*, either a personal name or referencing “bards,” and the suffix *-ey*, “island.” The Welsh refer to it as Ynys Enlli, or simply Enlli. Three different derivations have been proposed for the island’s Welsh name: 1. Ynys Benlli, named for Fenlli, a giant or mythical king of Powys, 2. ynys (island) and en (intensifying prefix) + lli (the current), and 3. ynys yn y llif, “the island in the current” see Fisher: 1926, 341-2, Roberts: 2008, 13-14, and Evans: 2008, 7.
- ³ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 14.
- ⁴ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 51 and Arnold: 2001, 96.
- ⁵ Forde-Johnson: 1976, 1-3, and 96. Rather than building external walls, as these may not have been deemed necessary, the builders of the Bardsey huts utilized the island’s natural topography.
- ⁶ Turner and Turner: 1978, 249.
- ⁷ Turner and Turner: 1978, 1.

CHAPTER 2

THE ISLAND AND THE MAINLAND

June 18, 2016 – From my vantage point atop Bardsey Mountain, the simultaneous closeness yet remoteness of the mainland was beautifully apparent. I wondered if the early saints had reached the island almost by accident...

2.1 THE LIMINALITY OF BARDSEY – BETWEEN SEA AND SKY

According to the geographer Hecataeus of Miletus (c. 550 BC – c. 476 BC), Britain and Ireland were beyond the limits of the world although “they had actually been known to travelers for sometime.”¹ A 1st century BC Greco-Roman anchor fragment was discovered near Porth Felen, a cove sited almost directly across the Sound from Bardsey Island.² In the 2nd century AD, Ptolemy mapped the general outlines of Britain and Ireland; the Llŷn Peninsula is clearly visible.³

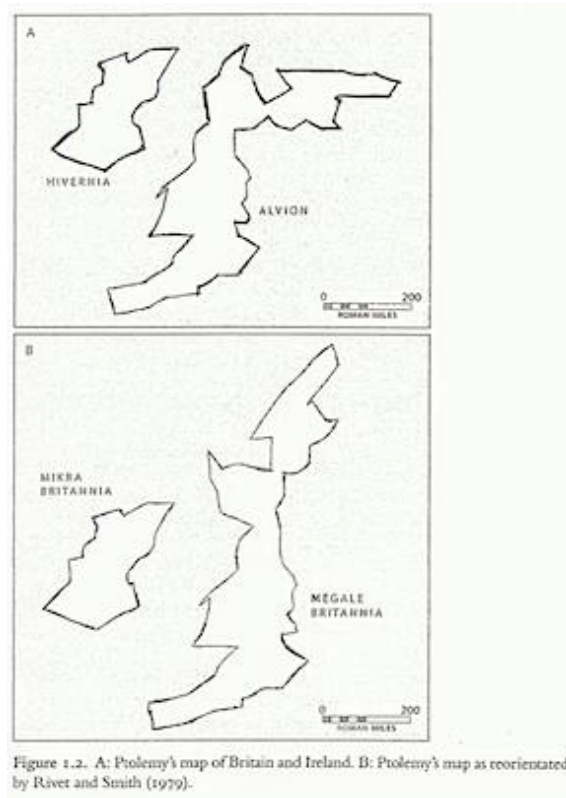


Figure 5: Ptolemy's Map of Britain and Ireland. Reproduced from Bradley: 2001, 5

The narrow Llŷn peninsula points directly to Bardsey. It is likely that the topography of the Llŷn effectively funneled the early saints and travelers to the island. Had Bardsey been located elsewhere, it may not have developed into such a prominent pilgrimage destination, or accrued the same saintly associations.

Bardsey is a liminal place, located geographically at the edge of Wales and conceptually at the farthest edges of the classical and medieval worlds. In geographical terms, islands are bounded places, surrounded on all sides by water with “nice sharp edges, so that it is clear to the researcher where the boundaries are.”⁴ Yet the “boundaries” of Bardsey are hazy. The “islandness” of Bardsey is a changeable *ideological and physical* concept since the island is simultaneously connected to and isolated from the mainland by Bardsey Sound. Transport by boat has formed a critical link between Bardsey and the mainland for centuries.⁵ However, the linkage with the Llŷn is dictated by the perilous conditions of the Sound. Consequently, access or lack thereof adds to the island’s liminality.

As with many holy islands in Britain and Ireland, Bardsey lies to the west, the region of the setting sun and the place of the souls of the departed – the Isles of the Blessed.⁶ The island’s physical location, cultural history, and folklore have combined to make it a unique place of pilgrimage. Before Bardsey became a pilgrimage destination in the Middle Ages, the island acted as a haven for hermits and wandering Celtic saints. What better place for the liminal activities of hermetic settlement and pilgrimage than the remote island of Bardsey?

2.2 BARDSEY AND ITS FOUNDING SAINTS

The period from c. 450 to 650 AD is known as the Age of Saints. *Sanctus* (saint) at this time did not necessarily denote a canonized figure so much as an educated Christian person who

spread the teachings of the Bible in post-Roman Britain. “In Britain, almost all the islands round the coast have traditions of the saints of this period.”⁷ Bardsey is no exception.



Figure 6: Map of the main holy islands of Britain and Ireland

Celtic holy men and women were wanderers, travelling the land or drifting with the tides, until they received a heavenly sign to settle in a certain place. Like the hermits of Egypt and Syria, these saints sought a place apart from society. According to tradition, Saint Cadfan founded Bardsey’s religious community c. 516. There are *no* churches in the Llŷn dedicated to Cadfan specifically. However, the names of his companions, like St. Lleuddad, survive in place-names and churches, both in the Llŷn and on Bardsey itself.⁸ It is likely that St. Cadfan was an historical individual since he is listed in the *Bonedd y Saint*, a collection of 13th century documents recording the saintly genealogies – “St. Cadfan in [Ynys] Enlli....”⁹ St. Lleuddad also appears in the *Bonedd* as Cadfan’s successor as abbot of Bardsey; on his death-bed, Lleuddad supposedly requested privileges for the island from an angel. The story is recorded in the 16th century *Buchedd Llewddog Sant* (Life of St. Lleuddad) –

First, that his canons should die from eldest to eldest, whilst they kept the commandments of God. Secondly, that the soul of any person buried within that island should *not go to hell*.¹⁰

Earlier writings, including the 12th century works of Gerald of Wales provide hints of this tradition –

Giraldus Cambrensis in his *Journey through Wales* of 1191 tells us, ‘beyond [the Llŷn], there is a small island inhabited by very religious monks called Caelibes or Colidei. This island...has this wonderful peculiarity that the oldest people die first, because diseases are uncommon, and scarcely any die except from extreme old age.’¹¹

By distancing themselves from the rest of society, these saints occupied a liminal place – a place conceptually and physically on the threshold between the wilderness and civilization. Saints accrued more power and authority by being *outside* of society. Since the saints invariably attracted followers, the boundary between the wilderness and society wavered. Thus the authority and legitimizing liminality of holy people changed, and they were forced to move elsewhere.¹²

Because of their great sanctity and purity of life, the saints of the Llŷn and Bardsey supposedly had access to divine power and favor. Consequently, they were regarded as mediators between ordinary people and God. Owing to this “otherworldly” power, saints were viewed as not entirely human; they were outside and above society.¹³ Bardsey Island, floating off the end of the Llŷn, must have seemed like an ideal wilderness for these holy people to commune with God in solitude. However, the liminality of Bardsey changed with the establishment of the monastic orders.

2.3 THE EARLY RELIGIOUS ORDERS OF BARDSEY

The monastic community of remote Bardsey Island may have begun as a haven for hermits. However, with the establishment of the monastic orders, Bardsey entered into a web of relations with the mainland. Consequently, “as the history of monasticism has shown, the orders become decreasingly liminal as they enter into manifold relations with the environing economic and political milieus.”¹⁴

Gerald of Wales' 1191 account provides one of the first definitive mentions of a religious community on Bardsey. Although he did not visit the island, Gerald had heard of the “very religious monks” who dwelt there, whom he called the Caelibes or Colidei. The name of these monks is actually Irish – the Culdees, or *céili Dé* (“Servants of God”), an ascetic and hermitical movement that started in 8th or 9th century Ireland.¹⁵ Thus Gerald’s account indicates an established order of Celtic monks on the island by the late 12th century. However, the very earliest credible evidence for the monks of Bardsey comes from the *Brut Y Tywysogyon* (Chronicle of the Princes), an annalistic description of events in Wales. I cite the Peniarth edition of the text, the earliest surviving version of the chronicle, written around 1330. The text records how, in the year 1011 or 1012, “Eadric and Ubis, the Saxons, ravaged [St. David’s]. And Iarddur, the Monk from Bardsey, died.”¹⁶



Figure 7: Peniarth MS 20, p. 77. The bottom of the right hand column reads *ac y bu varw yarddur vanach o enlli*. A marginal note gives “Hearndrud” for the monk’s name. Used with permission of the National Library of Wales.

The old Celtic monastery on Bardsey, to which Iarddur probably belonged, did not exist in isolation. By the 8th century,

[an] extensive network of monastic sites had become established in Wales...usually known as *clasau*...These were eclectic ecclesiastical settlements often not following a formal monastic order...and probably headed by an abbot.¹⁷

Dating to the early 6th century, two inscribed memorial stones now in St. Hywyn's, Aberdaron, provide evidence of pre-8th century religious communities on the mainland across the Sound from Bardsey. Both inscribed stones were found in the headwaters of a river roughly two miles from St. Hywyn's.¹⁸ In 1698, Welsh antiquarian Edward Lhuyd recorded these monuments at a site called *Capel (chapel) Berach* or *Cappell Yverach*.¹⁹ In the summer of 1992, the stones were moved to St. Hywyn's and placed in their present location in the north aisle, "a spot in olden times reserved for the resting place of the founder of the church."²⁰



Figure 8: 6th century memorial stones of "Veracius" (L) and "Senacus" (R), St. Hywyn's
 Figure 9: The author next to the memorial stones

The place-name *Capel Berach* or *Cappell Yverach* is likely derived from the name of the priest Veracius, whose monument bears the inscription: *Veracius / p(res)b(yte)r / hic / iacit* – "Veracius the priest lies here."²¹ The other monument reads – *Senacus / pr(e)sb(yster) / hic iacit / cvm / mvltitv/ dinem / fratrum* – "Senacus the priest lies here with a multitude of the brethren."²²

In sum, these 6th century inscribed stones indicate religious communities existing on the mainland during the same century in which Bardsey's abbey was supposedly founded. Monuments and artifacts, such as these stones, are loaded with *meanings* that can change over

time and context. Memorials, especially those of burial, are “technologies of remembrance” – the artifacts used to create narratives of memory and construct connections to the inherited, invented, or imagined past.²³ Sainly relics play much the same roles.

2.4 RELICS AND STORIES OF THE SAINTS

An edict of the second Council of Nicaea (787) stated that relics must be present to consecrate a church. Afterwards, the real or “invented” relics of saints and martyrs were brought to various churches as legitimizing foundations for these sacred buildings.²⁴ Many churches, such as St. Beuno’s in Clynnog Fawr, house inscribed stones connected by tradition to the saint’s burial place near the church environs.



Figure 10: St. Beuno’s, Clynnog Fawr, with grave chapel at far left

The years around 1120 are particularly important for Bardsey’s contribution to Welsh ecclesiastical history. The 11th and 12th centuries saw conflicts about the primacy of churches, not only between England and France, but also in the regionally prominent churches in Wales –

St. David’s was in conflict and competition not only with Canterbury, but also with other churches within and without Wales. The conflict between St. David’s and the newly established diocese of Llandaff, which claimed to be the greatest in Wales, is well-known.²⁵

What role does Bardsey play in this friction between Welsh churches? Rhygyfarch’s Latin *vita* of Saint David does not mention Bardsey, though it does elevate David above Saint Dyfrig, who

was claimed by Llandaff Church. According to the 12th century *Liber Landavensis* (The Book of Llandaff), in May and June of 1120, the relics of St. Dyfrig (Dubricius) and Elgar the Hermit were transferred from Bardsey Island to Llandaff as legitimizing relics.²⁶

St. Dyfrig was elected to serve as Bishop in Southern Britain, but later retired to Bardsey Island and died there c. 612. Bishop Urban removed Dyfrig's relics to Llandaff Church in 1120.²⁷ Elgar the Hermit was a young Englishman captured by pirates and taken to Ireland where he was pressed into service as a slave. Years later, he left Ireland and was shipwrecked on Bardsey. After living with Bardsey's community of monks for seven years, Elgar lived alone on the island as a hermit; after his death, his teeth were moved from Bardsey with the relics of St. Dyfrig to Llandaff Church.²⁸ The legend of Bardsey as the burial place of a multitude of saints was evidently established by c. 1132, when the *Liber Landavensis* was written. By acquiring relics from the island of the saints, Llandaff could lay claim to something that Saint David's lacked. The stories of Elgar and Dyfrig "[add] legitimacy to the relic-cult of Dubricus (sic) and the claims of Llandaf (sic)."²⁹

In Britain, Latin *Lives* of the saints were often written to strengthen the position of a cult or church in response to particular circumstances and crises. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the Welsh Church was undergoing an identity crisis:

The church in Wales up till the Norman period had in large measure preserved its independence, and in comparative isolation had developed a character of its own. The control and authority of Canterbury had not been generally recognized. In the west [of Wales] especially...it was still probably non-diocesan, 'Celtic,' and tribal in organization and outlook.³⁰

In response to increasing interference from Canterbury, a proliferation of writings of the *Lives* of the Celtic saints occurred at this time – “the *Vitae* and later Welsh *Bucheddau* are ‘nationalistic’ propaganda from start to finish.”³¹ Stories of the saints were thought of as sacred biographies

based on history.³² The text of these sacred biographies effectively “fossilized” the fluid qualities of the oral traditions on which they were based. In the 12th century, the Vatican increasingly relied on textual evidence for canonization; texts gained an official status that the oral tradition could not rival – in essence the text itself became a relic.³³

As the source of saintly relics, Bardsey Island’s “power” did not go unnoticed by political figures of the time. The Irish-Welsh prince Gruffydd ap Cynan bequeathed 10 shillings to Bardsey’s abbey in 1137.³⁴ Even the English kings recognized the power of these Celtic holy men. In 1284, Edward I, having finally subdued the Welsh princes, made a triumphal tour of Wales that included a “pilgrimage” to Bardsey. Edward and his entourage visited St. Mary’s Abbey and stayed on the island for three days; the English nobles donated money to the Abbey, including 19 pence from Queen Eleanor’s purse.³⁵ Chitty’s colleagues noted the money donated to Bardsey would equate to at least £5000 (in 1999).³⁶

2.5 THE AUGUSTINIANS

The church leaders at Canterbury and Rome did not fully recognize the old Celtic orders of monks on Bardsey, though they knew of their existence.³⁷ By around 1200, the Celtic abbey on Bardsey was re-founded as the Augustinian Priory of St. Mary’s, the last religious order on Bardsey before the Dissolution in 1537. Similar re-foundations occurred with the Celtic monasteries of Penmon, Beddgelert, Puffin Island, and St. Tudwal’s Island.³⁸ Although Haddan postulated that Bardsey’s abbey was actually Benedictine, these foundations were more prominent in South Wales than in the North.³⁹ The medieval ruins of the Abbey Tower on Bardsey date to the 13th century thus making it very likely Augustinian.



Figure 11: The 13th century Abbey Tower, a 19th century cross, and Victorian farmhouse on Bardsey

It has been suggested that the Augustinian re-foundations, particularly on Bardsey, had been “probably instigated or at least supported by Llywelyn Fawr, [Prince of Gwynedd].”⁴⁰ Perhaps, owing to the changing religious and cultural climate of the time, the Welsh princes decided to re-found Bardsey’s Celtic monastery to offer more protection and recognition of the site. Especially in the case of Bardsey, the significance of place deserves more discussion.

The abbeys of Bardsey, Beddgelert, Penmon, Puffin Island, and St. Tudwal’s Island are invariably small and in remote locations. That three of them are on islands recalls the tradition of the early saints and hermits seeking a liminal place apart. The re-foundations of these monastic houses as Augustinian priories are particularly interesting events in Welsh ecclesiastical history.

Stöber and Austin note that the Augustinians

more than any other religious group in the area, were the guardians of the old, pre-Norman monastic tradition....The choice of a monastery’s location is never accidental, but we cannot be absolutely certain what it was that drove the [Augustinians] to occupy these earlier religious sites....Was it a conscious attempt to continue an ancient, native tradition, and thereby enhance the sympathies of their princely benefactors, and, perhaps, the local population?...Or was this more driven...by the convenience of making use of existing physical structures? Or was it the enhanced religious significance of their own new foundations on account of the previous religious significance of [the site]?⁴¹

These questions apply particularly well to Bardsey. The size and remoteness of the island, as well as the dangerous Sound, would inhibit the construction of massive religious buildings. Thus, there was little impetus to construct large cathedrals in comparison to the great Cathedral of St. David's. That an older religious structure (the Celtic monastery?) was already on the island was certainly convenient. Above all, the religious significance and perceptions of Bardsey itself – the burial place of 20,000 saints, and a source of relics – must have played a large part in the decision to re-found the monastery as an Augustinian abbey.

After this re-foundation, the relationship between the island and Aberdaron on the mainland changed. In 1252, an agreement was signed

between the abbot and convent of Enlli and the secular canons of Aberdaron...in summary, the secular canons of Aberdaron retained control over a small *clasdir*, an area around Aberdaron, and a few hamlets. The holdings of the Augustinian Priory on Enlli...in contrast included fairly extensive holdings on the [Llŷn] and also the receipt of tithes from [an] area including from the church at Aberdaron.⁴²

The liminality of the island had changed yet again.

2.6 THE DISSOLUTION AND AFTERMATH

The island's liminality continued to fluctuate in its later medieval history. A handful of records from the late 13th through early 16th centuries make mention of Bardsey's connections with the mainland. Scant literary sources, however, are not necessarily evidence of inactivity.

Approximate Date	Event on Bardsey
1291	Sale of rabbits and rabbit skins listed as source of income for the monks - <i>Taxatio</i> of Pope Nicholas VI
c. 1305	Possible construction/restoration of buildings - Grant for Bardsey to take timber from the woods of Merioneth
1346	Robber J. Bannebury raids the island with 30 men in two boats

Table 1: Events on Bardsey before the 1500's, compiled from Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 12

The year of the Dissolution, 1537, marks the end of the monastic orders on Bardsey. After breaking with the Roman Catholic Church, Henry VIII instituted sweeping reforms to wipe out Catholic practices including pilgrimages. Even the Augustinian Abbey on Bardsey was targeted and damaged. The buildings and the Abbey's mainland properties were sold off or leased to various "gentlemen." A survey of the island from 1547 painted a picture of desolation – the bells and glass of the defaced church had been taken, and there were no inhabitants of the island except rabbits.⁴³ The Abbey Tower was left to fall into ruin.



Figure 12: Ruins of St. Mary's Abbey Tower, Bardsey Island

Eventually, in 1553, the island passed into the possession of Sir John Wyn of Bodfel (d.1576) as a reward for his services in battle in 1549.⁴⁴ Like other landowners of the period, Sir John sponsored smugglers. Bardsey, the liminal island in the treacherous currents, became a haven for pirates. Sir John stored smuggled goods in the ruins of the old Abbey. Bardsey maintained its piratical connections until at least 1659.⁴⁵ After the Dissolution, Bardsey began to fade into the historical background, but the island was never entirely forgotten and the traditions endured.

2.7 ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE MONKS

The legends and stories of Bardsey's monastic history gain further credence when they are backed by archaeological evidence. Unfortunately, we can piece together only a fragmented narrative given the scant evidence that survives. The visible ruins of the 13th century Abbey Tower mark the principal area of the Augustinian St. Mary's Abbey. Although the full expanse of the abbey is not known, it has been suggested that a small pond on the island might have originated as a medieval fishpond for the monks.⁴⁶

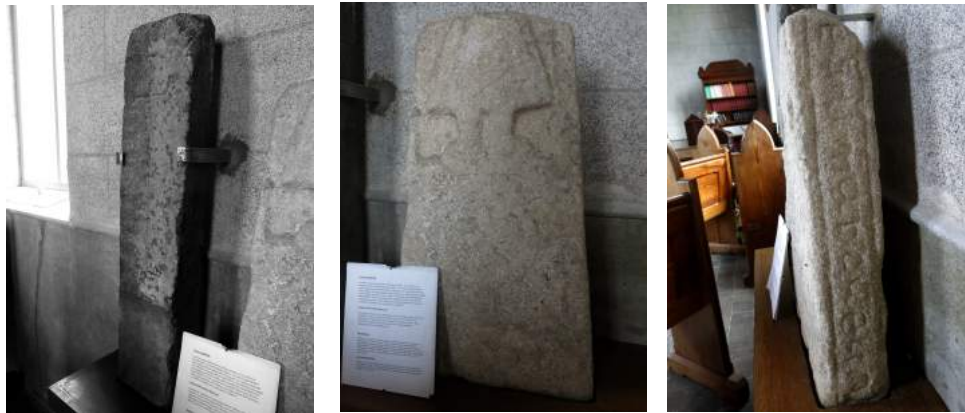


Figure 13: Possible medieval fishpond on Bardsey

In all five cases where pre-existing monastic houses were re-founded as Augustinian priories in North Wales, “it is the Culdee [monastic] element and not the [physical] *clas* that was replaced.”⁴⁷ Thus, the buildings remained, but the religious attitudes of their inhabitants changed. Since the Augustinian Order emphasized sharing all things in common, the old separate cells of the Celtic hermits and monks may have been replaced. Although it is not known where these were once located, the prehistoric/Roman roundhouses on Bardsey Mountain could have once been used as individual monastic cells.

According to a commonly cited oral tradition, human remains are buried all over the island; however, the archaeological evidence thus far does not match this assertion.⁴⁸ Currently housed in Bardsey's Victorian non-conformist chapel are two memorial stones that provide evidence of

medieval burial. Since they are not carved from locally available material, the stone types of these markers indicate deliberate transport to the island.⁴⁹



Figures 14-16: (L) 7th – 9th century cross-carved stone, (Center) 10th – 11th century broken cross-shaft with lower half of clothed figure, (R) Vertical inscription on the side of the broken cross-shaft. The most likely reading is ESILLMARGUENO

Other evidence of medieval burial comes from an adult male skeleton from “Grave 25,” found during the excavations beneath Ty Newydd, an early 19th century house on Bardsey. This particular skeleton was dated with some precision because of the Anglo-Saxon coin, minted c. 973, found in its mouth.⁵⁰ Since these coins are rare in Wales, Arnold draws parallels to a “group of ‘pagan Norse’ graves at Peel, Isle of Man” and cautions that there “is no reason to believe that the person was non-Christian because of the use of the coin, but equally there is no reason to believe he was Christian either.”⁵¹ Thirty other cist-type graves were found during the excavations of Ty Newydd, as well as under the road near the Abbey Tower. Owing to the fragmentary condition of the skeletons, a precise date range has not been proposed, but Wysocki noted that “there is no strong evidence...of any great age in this material;” but “when the majority are undated there is a danger of assuming that cist graves belong to a specific time period.”⁵² Thus, these burials could date to between the 13th century (Augustinian monks or medieval pilgrims?) and the 18th century before Ty Newydd was built c. 1700.

Although Gerald of Wales noted that there was an ecclesiastical building on the island in the 12th century, the results of Arnold's excavations and Kenney and Hopewell's survey report do not indicate an archaeologically known 6th century monastery or shrine located on Bardsey. In contrast to the *clas* of Clynnog Fawr on the mainland, which has 7th century foundations for its Grave Chapel of Saint Beuno, there is not yet archaeological evidence on Bardsey to ground the tradition of St. Cadfan's monastery or shrine in historical fact.



Figure 17: "Enlli-001" Image credit: Tony Jones, Golau Llŷn Light

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- ¹ Bradley: 2007, 2.
- ² Cunliffe: 1991, 19 and 440. See also Boon: 1977, 239. “The [anchor] stock was found 30 m offshore at a depth of 15 m, near the east corner of the small, rocky cove known as Porth Felen, at the tip of the Llŷn peninsula of North Wales. Bardsey Sound is a dangerous water, against which strangers are particularly warned in the old *West Coast of England Pilot*.”
- ³ Bradley: 2007, 2.
- ⁴ Barrowclough: 2010, 28.
- ⁵ See Newman: 2011, 97-188 for a discussion of the types of boats and ships used in the Middle Ages.
- ⁶ Fisher: 1926, 348. A medieval Welsh expression for sunset was “*yr haul yn myned yn ei haddef*” the sun going into its dwelling...”
- ⁷ Chadwick: 1963, 145.
- ⁸ Evans: 2008, 77. On the island, the place-name *Gerddi Lleuddad* (Lleuddad’s Gardens) attests to the continuing attachment to these early saints. The older generation of Bardsey inhabitants “spoke of Cadfan and Lleuddad as easily and affectionately as if they had been favourite uncles.”
- ⁹ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 9-10.
- ¹⁰ *Buchedd Lleuddog Sant*, Llanstephan MSS, 34 quoted in Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 10. Emphasis added.
- ¹¹ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 10. See also Chitty: 1992, Part One, 37, and Haddan: 1869.
- ¹² Adler, in Tomasi and Swatos: 2002.
- ¹³ Brown: 1971, 91.
- ¹⁴ Turner and Turner: 1978, 4.
- ¹⁵ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 11 and Arnold: 1998, 103.
- ¹⁶ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 11 and Arnold: 1998, 102. The translation of the last line is my own.
- ¹⁷ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 11. See also Chitty: 1992, 13-14.
- ¹⁸ St. Hywyn’s, Aberdaron.
- ¹⁹ Edwards: 2013, Vol. III, 241.
- ²⁰ Roberts: 2008, 28.
- ²¹ Edwards: 2013, Vol. III, 241.
- ²² Edwards: 2013, Vol. III, 244. “The use of *cvm* with the accusative...rather than with the ablative *mvltitvdine*, is a good example of the uncertain grasp of Latin case-endings in spoken Latin in the sub-Roman period.” For more discussion of both memorials, see CISP code ADARN at: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/cisp/database/>
- ²³ Williams: 2006, 21. See also Danielsson’s “Walking Down Memory Lane” in Williams: 2015.
- ²⁴ Mendham: 1850. For a shorter summary, see Adair and Brown: 1978, 10.
- ²⁵ Evans: 1988, xxxviii.
- ²⁶ Sharpe, n. 102, in Evans and Wooding: 2007.
- ²⁷ “Epitome of the History of Britain,” 614-616, in Rees: 1853. “Dubricius...being first numbered among the saints” could be read in two ways: either he was the first of all the saints to be buried on Bardsey, though this seems less likely, or that he was supposed to be the greatest of the saints buried on the island.
- ²⁸ Translation from Jankulak and Wooding 2010, 43-47, in Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 10. “The *Life of St Elgar* is examined in some detail by Jankulak and Wooding (2010, 15-47). They consider the *Life* to be ‘more historical than not’ and set between 1081 and 1106.”
- ²⁹ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 10.
- ³⁰ Evans: 1988, xx. The Church in Wales – *Yr Eglwys yng Nghymru* – still retains a measure of independence, as it maintains its own variety of Anglicanism. In Bardsey’s non-conformist chapel, all the prayer books are bilingual in Welsh and English.
- ³¹ Lloyd, personal communication.

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- ³² Heffernan: 1998, 39. See also Bradley: 1999, 2. From these hagiographies we often have a “picture of spiritual Power Rangers charging around performing spectacular miracles and founding hundreds of churches.”
- ³³ Summarized from Heffernan: 1998, 24-25, and 34.
- ³⁴ Jones: 1910, 157, in Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 10.
- ³⁵ This paragraph is summarized from Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 11. They cite Mary Chitty’s two books, available only in Wales, as one of their sources for their summary.
- ³⁶ Chitty: 2000, 36.
- ³⁷ Haddan: 1869, 364 – 374.
- ³⁸ Stöber and Austin, 40-42 in Burton and Stöber: 2013.
- ³⁹ Haddan: 1869, 480 and Burton 21-22 in Burton and Stöber: 2013.
- ⁴⁰ Pierce: 1963, 77 in Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 11.
- ⁴¹ Stöber and Austin, 40-41 in Burton and Stöber: 2013.
- ⁴² Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 11.
- ⁴³ “...there was a Monastery or smal priory the church hows and steple wherof ben defaced having neyther, belles, leade, iron nor glas remaying upon the same And there is no habytacou in the said Ile. The same Ile ys plenteously stored with conyes to the number of 400 cople or more by est[imation] of the country and in seasonable tyme may be taken yearly by est[imation] 800 puffins. The same Ile hath no pasture, arable or medow ground within yt by reason of the grete plenty of conyes whiche Destroy thyncrease thereof but ys a mete ground to kepe by est[imation] gots 100 and shepe 300.....The same hath a faire springe of fresh water within yt but no kind of woodes or under woods be growynge upon the same.” Quoted in Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 13.
- ⁴⁴ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 12. For a Welsh language historical summary of the Pirates of Wales, see Meirion: 2005.
- ⁴⁵ “Because it is an island, it is a very convenient place for sea raiders.” Meirion: 2005, 34. Trans. Stanton.
- ⁴⁶ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 21 and Arnold: 1998, 104.
- ⁴⁷ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 11.
- ⁴⁸ Arnold: 1998, 100.
- ⁴⁹ Edwards: 2013, Vol. III, 257 and 259. For more discussion of the broken cross shaft, see: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/cisp/database/site/bards.html>. The CISP database records only the stones bearing inscriptions.
- ⁵⁰ Arnold: 1998, 101 and Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 20.
- ⁵¹ Arnold: 1998, 101.
- ⁵² Wysocki, in Arnold: 1998, 119 and Arnold: 1998, 101.

CHAPTER 3

THE PARADOXICAL PILGRIMAGE DESTINATION

June 20, 2016 – A certain Welsh proverb came to mind in discussing Bardsey’s uniqueness among the main Welsh pilgrimage centers with my Nant Gwrtheyrn classmates: ‘Y mae dafad ddu ym mhob praidd,’ There’s a black sheep in every flock.

3.1 CONVENTIONAL PILGRIMAGE SITE FEATURES

As the archaeology of medieval Bardsey demonstrates, the island was never truly isolated. The island’s liminality waxed and waned throughout its history, as did the liminal status of the holy men who dwelt there and the pilgrims who journeyed there. Yet, Bardsey lacks many of the defining features of a typical Christian pilgrimage destination such as a cathedral. Consequently, this chapter explores what compensating virtues Bardsey possessed.

Typically, pilgrimage destinations are specific places sanctified by their association with a divine figure or other holy person such as a saint. The venerated figure usually has some kind of physical shrine, the material focus of the pilgrimage site and the repository of the sacred power that figure possessed. When pilgrims visit the shrine, they come into contact with this sacred power. Often, pilgrimage sites offer “souvenirs,” such as small vials of holy water or lead pilgrimage badges depicting the venerated saint, allowing the pilgrim to take “back some part of the charisma of the holy place.”¹ These objects act as physical, tangible reminders of the sacred journey and even function as advertisements.² In sum, typical pilgrimage sites have a physical religious building or shrine, offer some kind of sacred “souvenir” and are sited in a fixed geographic place containing special connections to a holy or divine figure. How do sites attain the status of a pilgrimage destination?

3.2 SPIRITUAL MAGNETISM

Wales is home to four popular pilgrimage destinations – St. David’s, Pennant St. Melangell, St. Winifride at Holywell, and Bardsey Island. Many commonalities exist between them since

[all] four [sites] are dedicated to saints with their own [histories] and [mythologies]. The associations of the *locality* with the saint, together with the holiness and aura attached to the saint’s life, have created a sacred place, a particular geographical locus where the saint can be remembered.³

These sites in their specific landscape settings reinforce how *place* is integral to commemorative significance; had they been elsewhere, they would probably not possess the same associations.

Like Melangell’s shrine in the Berwyn Mountains, “[Bardsey’s] sense of holiness is undoubtedly enhanced by its remoteness and inaccessibility.”⁴ Difficulty of access is both a key theme and a problematic aspect in Bardsey’s development as a pilgrimage center.

As a pilgrimage destination, Bardsey offers an excellent example of “spiritual magnetism,” “the power of a pilgrimage shrine to attract devotees...[deriving] from human concepts and values, via historical, geographical, social, and other forces that coalesce in a sacred center.”⁵

Pilgrimage destinations acquire spiritual magnetism through four factors. As evidenced by the table below, Bardsey has these qualities in abundance.⁶

Spiritual Magnetism Factor	Examples on Bardsey
Miraculous Cures	Direct admittance into heaven
Apparitions of Supernatural Beings	“Presence” of the 20,000 saints; angel appearing to St. Lleuddad
Sacred Geography	Saintly sites and monuments; Bardsey Mountain
Difficulty of Access	Liminality; dangers of crossing the Sound

Table 2: Preston’s “spiritual magnetism” factors applied to Bardsey



Figure 18: ...*neud uchel gwendon gwyndir Enlli*
“...white waves make loud the holy land of Enlli”

3.3 THE PARADOX THAT IS BARDSEY

No simple answer exists to the question “why Bardsey.” While Bardsey clearly demonstrates Preston’s four spiritual magnetism factors, it also both supports and refutes aspects of other anthropological approaches to pilgrimage. The Turners’ classic approach notes that “the point of [pilgrimage] is to get out, go forth, to a far holy place approved by all.”⁷ Owing to Bardsey’s physical location and traditional stories, this statement certainly rings true. In this regard, Bardsey is a canonical pilgrimage destination. Similarly, at its most basic, making pilgrimage to the island offers an example of the quintessential form of voluntary liminality, undergoing a long, difficult journey “in order to intensify the pilgrim’s attachment to his own religion.”⁸

However, the Turners emphasize the importance of a physical shrine as the climactic experience of the sacred journey. Often located in a complex of sacred architecture, the central shrine itself is the locus of sacred power for a pilgrimage site.⁹ The four Welsh pilgrimage sites are spatially defined, three of them by their architecture. Medieval Bardsey, however, had relatively little architecture and, in marked contrast to the other sites, has no known physical shrine to its patron saint, Cadfan.

Recently, John Eade and Michael Sallnow critiqued the Turners' approach to religious pilgrimage by disputing the importance of shrines. Their 1991 book, *Contesting the Sacred*, postulates that a shrine in and of itself does not inherently hold sacred power in contrast to conventional beliefs.¹⁰ Instead a shrine's sacredness stems from the beliefs of those who visit it and therefore "[offers] a variety of clients what each of them desires."¹¹ In short, sacredness is imparted to an object or place by the beliefs of the pilgrims who travel there. Sacredness comes from without, not from within.

Bardsey has no known physical shrine to act as the "locus of the sacred" and therefore supports Eade and Sallnow's theory in this regard. However, the notion of imparted sacredness does not have to apply only to a shrine; it could be extrapolated to the entire island of Bardsey. Bardsey *itself* is a shrine because of the perceptions and beliefs of those who visit.

Coleman and Elsner note, "Eade and Sallnow's perspective runs the risk of discouraging analysis of how sacred space is orchestrated in pilgrimage sites, and how such organisation can have a considerable impact on the perspectives [and experiences] of pilgrims."¹² Architecture in particular influences the experience of the pilgrims by directing or constraining their movement through a sacred space. In this paradigm, sacredness comes from *without and within*, imparted by both the pilgrim's own beliefs and the architectural layout of the site.

In contrast to the great cathedral of St. David's, there is not a massive religious structure on Bardsey Island. Yet sacred space is created not only by buildings, but also by the physical landscape. The Llŷn peninsula funnels travelers down its narrow length until they are forced to stop at the rocky cliffs; the island lies tantalizingly offshore. Bardsey Mountain physically and ideologically hides the Abbey from sight and contributes to the notion that "Bardsey has turned its back on the world."¹³ The island's distinctive topography, geographic location, and

architecture contribute to its “aura” of holiness and to the multifaceted experiences of moving through its sacred spaces.



Figure 19: Crossing the Sound to Bardsey

Bardsey Island thus presents a paradox by supporting and refuting aspects of the above theories. The island occupies a conceptually liminal place since it neither entirely exemplifies nor completely rejects these anthropological approaches. While Bardsey has many features of a conventional pilgrimage destination, it also possesses many unique characteristics summarized in the table below.

Conventional Pilgrimage Destination Features of Bardsey	Unique Features of Bardsey
Holy place apart	Seldom visible from mainland
Miraculous Cures	For some, place to die and enter heaven
Apparitions of Supernatural Beings	Island as shrine
Sacred Geography	Specific location and dramatic topography
Difficulty of access	Potentially deadly sea-crossing
Religious Architecture	No known saintly shrine
Saintly legends about site (20,000 saints)	Arthurian legends (Bardsey as Avalon)
Relics of saints (Dyfrig, Elgar)	No known pilgrim badges/souvenirs

Table 3: Conventional and unique features of Bardsey as a medieval pilgrimage destination. The entries in the columns are not necessarily in opposition to each other.

3.4 TYPES OF PILGRIMAGE

In further critiquing the Turners, Eade and Sallnow proposed that “rather than providing descriptions of pilgrimage, social scientists should investigate a multiplicity of discourses about [it].”¹⁴ Pilgrimage has multiple meanings and offers differing experiences depending on the pilgrim’s social status, religious attitudes, and agenda. Pilgrimages in North Wales whether all the way to Bardsey or simply to the holy wells of the Llŷn demonstrate many aspects of Morinis’ typology of pilgrimages.¹⁵

Type of Pilgrimage	Example on Bardsey or Llŷn
Devotional	Visiting “shrine” of saints; leaving offerings – early medieval tradition of pins in holy wells of Llŷn (pre-Christian?)
Instrumental	Visiting holy wells for cures; Bardsey as a place to die and escape purgatory
Normative	Visiting saint’s shrine on feast days; TPGC has become quasi-ritualistic
Obligatory	Pilgrimages as penance or punishment for criminals ¹⁶
Wandering	Early saints and hermits seeking a place apart
Initiatory	Going to Bardsey allows one to join in the community of pilgrims past, present, and future

Table 4: Morinis’ typology of pilgrimages applied to Bardsey and the TPGC

Echoing Eade and Sallnow’s argument, Lutz Kaelber states that some medieval pilgrims might attach alternative meanings to the practice which were

at odds with ecclesiastical [definitions]...[and] the boundaries between pilgrimage proper and other...related forms of travel shifted over the course of the Middle Ages...[and] became particularly blurry in early modern and modern times.¹⁷

A “related form of travel” was the quest. Although pilgrimages and quests are performances of a similar sort, pilgrimage is more conventionally defined and has a known destination. Both forms of purposeful travel demonstrate *transience*, “exemplified by the liminal religious [pilgrim]...moving from village to village...or the hero of the ‘quest’ tales who goes on a long journey to seek his identity outside [society].”¹⁸

In 1284, King Edward I of England made a journey through the Llŷn to Bardsey as part of his triumphal tour of Wales, having defeated the last of the native Welsh princes. Like other English monarchs before him, Edward honored the Welsh saints though they were

the saints of the people he was aiming to subdue. Their holy status and power were still considered almost threatening, and these English ‘invaders’ probably wanted to appease their power by paying homage to them.¹⁹

Most scholars deem this journey a pilgrimage. However, Edward I, as an “Arthurian enthusiast,” likely knew of Bardsey’s connections to the legendary King Arthur, a supposedly Welsh ruler.

Loomis proposed that Edward “liked to think of himself in the rôle of *Arthurus redivivus*” and quoted Powicke on how Edward

would not allow [Prince] Llywelyn and the Welsh to rely upon the memories of King Arthur and the belief in his return to save them...[and] the conquest of North Wales appealed to [Edward] as an Arthurian adventure.²⁰

Thus, Edward’s journey to Bardsey is both a form of pilgrimage *and* a type of quest. The island’s “liminality” becomes “centrality,” as Bardsey became the seat of the monarchy during Edward’s visit. Most importantly for my purposes, the English court records note the main stopping places on Edward’s route through the Llŷn and provide an approximation of a medieval path of pilgrimage to Bardsey Island.



Figure 20: “Enlli-016.” Image credit: Tony Jones, Golau Llŷn Light

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- ¹ Coleman and Elsner, 100-101.
- ² Coleman and Elsner, 100. See also Halliday: 1906, 89, 92, and 112 for examples of pilgrim badges for the Shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury.
- ³ Keulemans and Burton: 2006, 99.
- ⁴ Keulemans and Burton: 2006, 100. Emphasis added.
- ⁵ Preston, in Morinis: 1992, 33.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Turner and Turner: 1978, 7.
- ⁸ Turner and Turner: 1978, 9.
- ⁹ Turner and Turner: 1978, 23.
- ¹⁰ Coleman and Elsner: 1995, 207-209 and Kaelber, in Swatos and Tomasi: 2002, 53.
- ¹¹ Coleman and Elsner: 1995, 208
- ¹² Coleman and Elsner: 1995, 209
- ¹³ R.M. Lockley, *I Know an Island*, 1938, Quoted in Evans: 2008, 129.
- ¹⁴ Kaelber, in Swatos and Tomasi: 2002, 53.
- ¹⁵ Morinis: 1992, 10-14.
- ¹⁶ Dr. Enid Roberts noted that murderers and criminals were sent on pilgrimages that could last for years. This practice provided society with a way to effectively banish miscreants; they wore ragged garments and dragged their chains with them. The note about the ragged garments and shackles is not in the English edition of Roberts; it appears on page 39 of the Welsh edition (Roberts: 1993, 39. Trans. Stanton). Irish monastic authors described this practice as early as the 8th century; “the practice was discontinued in the 14th century in order to prevent the roads from being overrun by criminals in the guise of penitents.” (Tenderini, in Tomasi, 9 in Swatos and Tomasi: 2002).
- ¹⁷ Kaelber, in Swatos and Tomasi: 2002, 53.
- ¹⁸ Turner and Turner: 1978, 250.
- ¹⁹ Wood, personal communication.
Edward’s wife, Queen Eleanor, is the only historically-known woman associated with pilgrimage to Bardsey.
- ²⁰ Loomis: 1953, 114 and 126.
On the burial place of Arthur and Guinevere, see also Ahl: 1982, 402-405.

CHAPTER 4

A PILGRIMAGE OF PILGRIMAGES – THE MEDIEVAL ROUTE

June 22, 2016 – Sheep and their wool have long been important parts of the farming landscapes of the Llŷn and Bardsey. So, in hiking the Pilgrim's Way, we were literally following in the 'footsteps' of sheep and conceptually in those of the early saints and medieval pilgrims.

4.1 MEDIEVAL PILGRIMAGES TO BARDSEY – THE REASONS

Although the *individual* motivations of medieval pilgrims may remain largely unknown, some generalized statements can be made. Owing to the societal structure of the Middle Ages

... which offered scant economic opportunities to leave one's close circle of [associations]... the *only possible journey* for those who were not merchants, peddlers, minstrels, jugglers, acrobats, wandering friars or outlaws, was a... pilgrimage or crusade.¹

Part of the attraction of pilgrimage was that “it could be *done*: it was devotion pitched in the language of action rather than [solely of] belief.”² The long, difficult, cathartic journey of pilgrimage especially to a remote, inaccessible place like Bardsey, offered opportunities for spiritual cleansing, reflection, and gaining protection for the soul. Furthermore, medieval pilgrimage was “also prompted by the haunting presence of *death*... [especially] spiritual death, and... the threat of hellfire.”³ That burial on Bardsey Island supposedly offered protection from the torments of hell and purgatory, as requested by Saint Lleuddad, assuredly added to the qualities that made the island a *likely* pilgrimage destination.

On the other hand, dying en-route to Bardsey, especially in crossing the dangerous Sound, was a very real possibility – “the mediaeval pilgrim risked his life on such a hazardous journey.”⁴ Among past travelers to Bardsey were the Welsh Bards, whose poems from the 12th to 15th centuries record how terrifyingly dangerous the crossing of Bardsey Sound could be; one poet implored the holy island to come closer to the land.⁵ Despite the dangers, other poets and pilgrims desired to be buried on the island. Although the chronology and identities of the

skeletons buried on Bardsey have not been firmly established, a possibility exists that some could have been pilgrims, perhaps of the later Middle Ages, especially since there is “no evidence that those interred on the island actually lived there.”⁶

An often-cited tradition connected to the island is that the pope declared three pilgrimages to Bardsey equalled one to Rome. The origins of this medieval tradition are obscure; and whether a Papal decree ever existed is questionable.⁷ However, a rare Welsh-Catholic work from c.1586 entitled *Y Drych Cristianogawl* notes that the author “saw a copy of a Charter of the island under the hand of the Pope of Rome giving great rights to those who might come [to Bardsey] on pilgrimage to honor the 20,000 Saints.”⁸

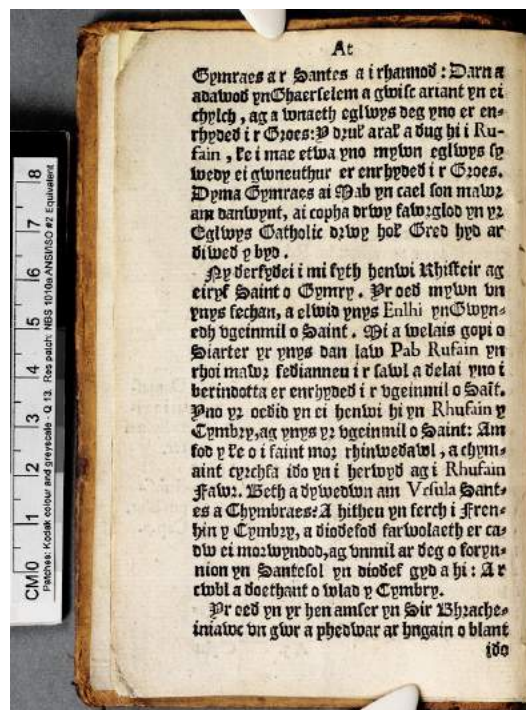


Figure 21: *Y Drych Cristianogawl* (“The Christian Mirror”), p. vi. Image Credit: National Library of Wales⁹

Evidently, a Papal document probably existed recognizing Bardsey as a place of pilgrimage. This recognition, or at least the legend about it, provided another motive for medieval pilgrims to journey to Bardsey – indulgences. There was a precedent of papal recognition given to famous Welsh sites of pilgrimage. At the urging of Bishop Bernard (bishop of St. David’s 1115-1147),

Pope Callixtus II granted pilgrimage concessions to St. David's Cathedral in 1123 – “*Roma semel quantum, bis dat Menevia tantum* (Once to Rome gives the same value as twice to St. David's).”¹⁰

As mentioned in section 3.4, paying homage to the powerful saints of Bardsey and visiting the island for its Arthurian connections were probable motives for King Edward I of England to undertake a pilgrimage to the island. Whatever Edward's reasons, his pathway through the Llŷn peninsula provides the only known “travelogue” of pilgrimage to Bardsey.

4.2 PLANNING THE ROUTE

The itinerary of Edward I lists his stopping places en-route to the island. Reconstructing his route through the Llŷn not only provides evidence of a routeway to Bardsey, but also approximates the modern pathway of the TPGC. However, not all medieval Bardsey-bound pilgrims travelled with an entourage as large as that of the King of England. Consequently, their pathway may have been different, especially if they were travelling on foot, as most pilgrims did. How did medieval Welsh pilgrims plan their route through the Llŷn to reach their ultimate goal of Bardsey Island?

Although cartography is an ancient skill going back to Classical antiquity,

...Medieval people simply did not think of drawing maps for the innumerable purposes for which we are apt to take them for granted.... *directions for a journey would take the form of a list of the places to be passed through.*¹¹

The timing of journeys depended largely on the destination; recall the dangers of crossing Bardsey Sound. Travel times varied greatly and were subject to the type of journey; one loose approximation was 30 miles per day, though Newman's estimate of 15-20 miles per day for a group of riders and walkers seems more reasonable.¹² The farthest that the modern Pilgrim's Way group hiked in a day was 12 miles.

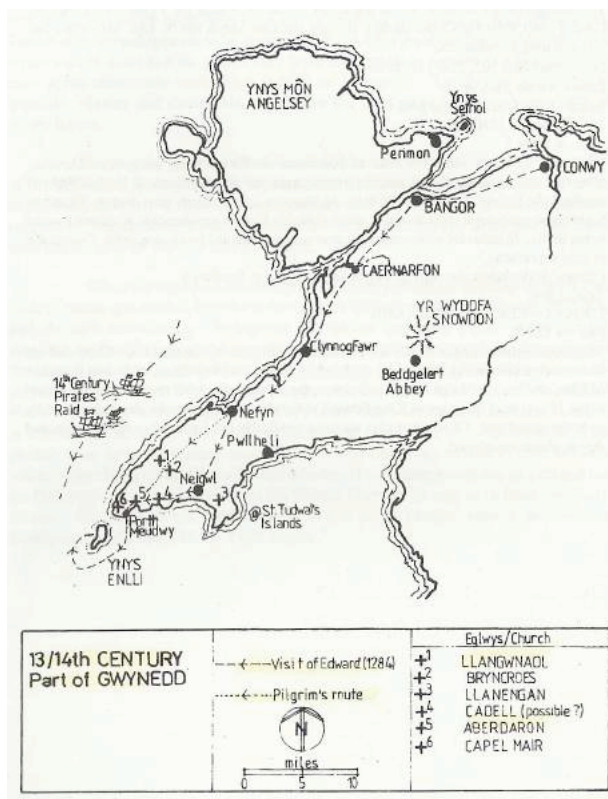


Figure 22: Map of Edward I's itinerary to Bardsey. Reproduced from Chitty: 2000, Part Two, 32

Medieval pilgrims were encouraged to journey in groups because of the dangers of travel - inclement weather, bandits, and wild animals. Before leaving, all pilgrims were advised to make preparations and obtain some form of travel documentation to prove that they were genuine pilgrims and not itinerant beggars.¹³ Should a pilgrim die along the way, churches and hostels alike had graveyards for those who perished in their travels.¹⁴

The various types of monuments in the Llŷn, including holy wells, act as points of reference for creating mental maps of the routes to Bardsey. There are 16 holy wells in the Llŷn which provided regular opportunities for medieval pilgrims to refill their leather canteens (*costrels*).¹⁵ Cross-carved stones probably functioned as wayside markers. As the pilgrim route to Bardsey became more well-known and popular, certain farm houses, e.g. one in Pistyll and *Cwrt* farm in Aberdaron, became exempt from paying tithes since they provided lodging to pilgrims.¹⁶

Churches provided food and accommodation to travelers, though often only for one night.¹⁷

Taken all together, the surviving wells, stone monuments, and chapels can provide some sense of the medieval paths of pilgrimage to Bardsey.

4.3 MEDIEVAL MONUMENTS – MEMORIES AND PLACE-MAKING

The Llŷn peninsula contains hundreds of monuments from many different time periods.

Time Period	Date Range	Llŷn Examples	Bardsey Examples
Mesolithic and Neolithic	9600 to 2300 BC	Portal tombs (<i>cromlechi</i>)	Flint scatters
Bronze Age	2300 to 800 BC	Standing stones (<i>meini hirion</i>), ¹⁸ burial cairns	Cremation burials on Henllwyn Beach
Iron Age	800 BC to 43 AD	<i>Tre'r Ceiri</i> (Town of the Giants), other “hill-forts”	Hut circles
Romano-British	43 AD to 410 AD	Roman roads	No specific example
Early Medieval Age of Saints Anglo-Saxon	400 to 1000 AD c. 450 to 650 AD 410 to 1066 AD	Holy wells Inscribed stones Celtic Chapels (e.g. St. Beuno’s Pistyll and Clynnog Fawr)	Inscribed stones Cadfan’s monastery? Monastic cells
Medieval	1050 to 1650 AD	Additions to chapels	Augustinian abbey

Table 5: Monuments and dates from the Llŷn and Bardsey¹⁹

The modern North Wales Pilgrim’s Way emphasizes the wells and chapels of the saints, but also incorporates older monuments often found in the same areas. Influencing the experiences of people moving through the landscape, these monuments are “agents” producing a new sense of place, visible and durable representations of the past, and objects whose meanings change over time.²⁰ Social memory is never static. Material objects such as stone monuments can be “agents” as long as people are interacting with them in meaningful ways, e.g as way-markers to aid in constructing mental maps of pathways in the landscape *before* printed maps became widely available. All of the types of monuments listed above incorporate stone in some way; they can

then be thought of as connected by their materiality, even if the stone-types are not always identical or local. Often, some monuments such as portal tombs are constructed of local stone, further anchoring them to the area both conceptually and materially.²¹

In their landscape settings, monuments relate to each other since they create networks of memories and imbue places with layers of significance. There are monuments in the Llŷn and on Bardsey, such as standing stones and Iron Age huts, that pre-date medieval pilgrimage to the island; but the materiality of medieval pilgrimage to Bardsey is most evident in the inscribed stones, Celtic chapels, and holy wells pilgrims encountered while moving through the landscape. I have included images of the earlier monuments for reference since they likely had significance for medieval pilgrims.



Figure 23: The Bachwen cromlech, Clynnog Fawr. Image credit: Eric Jones, geograph.org.uk
Figure 24: The Llangwnnadr *maenhir*.²² Image credit: Alan Fryer, geograph.org.uk



Figures 25-26: *Tre'r Ceiri* (Town of the Giants) from the air (L) and some of the huts inside (R). Image credits: www.webbaviation.co.uk and <http://www.britainexpress.com>.²³

4.3.1 INSCRIBED STONES

The inscribed stones of North Wales provide a rich corpus of archaeological material. There are several types, summarized in the table below. Medieval Irish and Welsh texts list three general roles for inscribed stones: to commemorate the name, genealogy, or soul of the dead; to serve as boundary-markers; and to state the ownership of land.²⁴ Starting in the 7th century, more land charters were given to ecclesiastical organizations. Thus, land rights were no longer bound up in the older system of kinship groups.

At about the same time, the cross-carved stone appears in the archaeological record. These changes in the form and function of monuments reflect the changing religious attitudes of the 7th and 8th centuries, namely the change from commemorating the *body* to commemorating the *soul*. They also emphasize a “Christian” affiliation with the symbol of the cross. Compare the 6th century memorial stones of Veracius and Senacus in section 2.3, whose inscriptions both contain the phrase *hic iacit*, “HERE lies,” drawing attention to the physical proximity of the grave. In contrast, those simply inscribed with crosses, “continue to mark the immediate physical proximity of the grave, [although] it is no longer expressed in words. They may mark a grave but they do not label the individual within it.”²⁵ Consequently, these monuments are emblematic of new religious attitudes toward death, burial, and remembrance.



Figure 27: 7th to 9th century ring-cross, reputedly St. Gwynhoedl’s tombstone, Parish Church of Llangwinnadl



Figure 28: 8th or 9th century sundial, St. Beuno's, Clynnog Fawr²⁶
 Figure 29: 11th or 12th century font, St. Beuno's, Pistyll

Category of Inscribed Stone Monuments	Number in North Wales
Ogham- and Roman letter inscriptions	3
Roman-letter inscriptions	37
Roman letter inscriptions with cross or icon	7
Cross-only inscribed stones and cross shafts	24
Other: Fonts, sundials, fragments	4

Table 6: Inscribed stone monuments in North Wales



Figure 30: Stone monuments along the current TPGC

4.3.2 CELTIC CHAPELS

In their current forms, St. Beuno's churches at Pistyll and Clynnog Fawr date mostly to the 15th century although they preserve traces of their 7th century foundations. Because of the paucity of evidence for the locations of other early churches, evidence from toponyms has proven useful. *Llan-* is one of the most common place-name elements in Wales, with over 640 places containing this element.²⁷ Originally, *llan* signified an area of land. After being granted the land, saints would erect a small Celtic chapel upon it. Eventually, the meaning of *llan* shifted from “plot of land” to “the saint’s church” – hence, the myriad of Welsh place-names composed of *llan* + a saint’s name.



Figure 31-2: St. Beuno's, Pistyll and the Parish Church of Llangwnnadr



Figure 33: Main churches and chapels on the Llŷn and Bardsey

4.3.3 HOLY WELLS – *FFYNHONNAU*

Celtic chapels are often located near water sources which provided potable water – a necessity for inhabitants of the area, for travelling pilgrims, and for monastic communities who used the water for baptismal services.²⁸ In North Wales alone, there are 122 holy wells.²⁹ All the wells are naturally occurring springs that have been transformed into archaeological sites by erecting buildings and chapels at the well itself or in the vicinity.

Re-named for saints after the arrival of Christianity in Wales, the holy wells of the Llŷn are reputed to have healing qualities. The water of some provided cures for warts, epilepsy, diseases of livestock, and other ailments. The map below shows that the holy wells from Clynnog Fawr to Bardsey have a non-random distribution that is linear and spaced at roughly regular intervals. These elements of the landscape provide the most unambiguous evidence of holy sites that contributed to the construction of a pilgrimage path through the Llŷn. Furthermore, the wells had religious significance in their own right. Making pilgrimages to saintly sites was a means of obtaining forgiveness for sins, and “[it] was so much easier to pray to these local saints – our own dear little saints as Sir Ifor Williams called them – than to the invisible God whom no one had ever seen.”³⁰

The wells imposed an episodic structure on the overall journey, dividing it into a sequence of miniature pilgrimages. The archaeological, historical, and cultural significance of the holy wells for the modern TPGC lies in the fact that people imbued them with religious meaning, by naming them for religious figures, generating stories about their healing qualities, and investing them with ritual power.



Figures 34-35: St. Beuno's Well, Clynnog Fawr

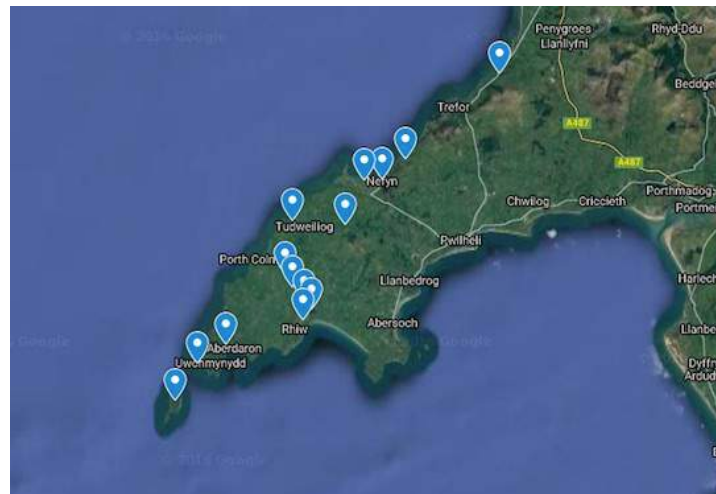


Figure 36: The holy wells of the Llŷn

4.4 LANDSCAPES AND MONUMENTS

The *places*, the *physical locations* of the wells themselves, have lengthy histories that reach back into geologic conceptions of time. Monuments of any time period *and* natural features in the same area reinforce the process of place-making; however, these processes are seldom seen as complementary.³¹

The holy wells became “monumentalized” by virtue of the stone structures built around them. This process also made these natural places more prominent in the landscape, and more archaeologically visible – “natural features of the landscape were not replaced by artificial

monuments; they were complemented by them until they achieved a richer cultural resonance.”³² The character of the North Wallian landscape has been “maintained” for centuries; traces of the medieval farming practice of un-enclosed field systems in the Llŷn are still visible today. The landscapes of the Llŷn and Bardsey are stunningly beautiful environments. Yet, they are in part the products of human influence as well as natural biophysical processes. When landscapes are maintained “for as long as anyone can remember” in the same way, the “unnaturally stable landscape” itself becomes a monument.³³ The Llŷn peninsula and Bardsey Island, even if there were no major monuments like those described above, would still echo their rich histories.



Figure 37: The author atop Bardsey Mountain with the Llŷn across Bardsey Sound in the background

REFERENCES

¹ Tomasi, in Swatos and Tomasi: 2002, 7. Emphasis added. See also Newman: 2011, 1 – “...medieval people are often thought of as immobile and root-bound. Admittedly, many people did live out most or all of their lives without ever venturing more than twenty miles or so from their homes. However, throughout the Middle Ages, large numbers of people, from peasants to kings, did travel.”

² Adair and Brown: 1978, 14.

³ Tomasi, in Swatos and Tomasi: 2002, 8.

⁴ Roberts: 2008, 14.

⁵ Rhys Llwyd ap Rhys ap Rhicert of Ceredigion (fl. c. 1450) in Roberts: 2008, 80-82.

⁶ Arnold: 1998, 103. See also Evans: 2008, 75 and Roberts: 2008, 75-77.

⁷ Two British historians give opposing answers. One implies that King Henry II of England and Pope Alexander III agreed to give pilgrimage concessions to Bardsey – “[Henry] offered land for new monasteries and shrewdly secured from the pope pilgrimage concessions to St. David’s and Bardsey Island, much to the benefit of Welsh tourism.” (Jenkins: 2011, 63.) I contacted Sir Simon Jenkins to enquire what source he had consulted that led him to this conclusion to which he replied that it must have been “in some obscure Welsh history.” Conversely, the other historian doubts whether a papal decree ever existed - “You won’t find the papal formula recorded on parchment in the Vatican’s archives, but the legend has survived because it rings true.” (Stanford: 2011, 25.) I have contacted Mr. Stanford to enquire about this statement, but have not yet received a response. I also await a response from the Vatican Library.

⁸ Trans. Harbert and Stanton.

⁹ National Library of Wales, *Y Drych Cristianogawl*, vi. The work was once attributed to Canon Gruffydd Roberts of Milan Cathedral (c. 1522 to 1610), a Welsh priest, grammarian, and poet. He fled to the Continent because “he refused to acknowledge the authority of queen Elizabeth in spiritual matters” (Dictionary of Welsh Biography). However, the author’s style and initials of G.R. point to Robert Gwyn (c.1540/50 - 1592/1604), a missionary priest and a native of Llanarmon near Pwllheli in North Wales. “The [Welsh language] work deals with the Catholic Church’s teaching on the Four Last Things, viz. Death, the Day of Judgement, Hell and Heaven” (National Library of Wales). For more, see: <https://www.llgc.org.uk/discover/digital-gallery/printedmaterial/y-drych-cristianogawl/>

¹⁰ J. Wyn Evans: 12, in Cartwright: 2003. Bishop Bernard of St. David’s (bishop from 1115-1147), though a Norman appointed by Henry I of England, was highly enthusiastic about Saint David and his cult. It was Bernard who secured two important concessions from Pope Callixtus II in 1123: “the canonization of David and the privilege which stated that two pilgrimages to Saint David’s were equal to one to Rome.”

¹¹ Harvey, in Matthews: 2007, 28. Emphasis added. See also Danielsson in Willams: 2015, 80 – “...rune-stones must be implemented where they can have an impact on people, in this case on roads and routes where people commonly travelled; more specifically at junctions or cross-roads where people were perhaps ‘forced’ to rest, or slow down, on their journeys.”

¹² Newman: 2011, 96. See also, Matthews: 2007, 10. “English sources give us only a limited impression of the anticipated daily mileage. Probably the nearest calculation is that of Landon, who reckoned that in the time of Richard I, ‘the ordinary traveller or pilgrim’ could maintain an average of thirty miles a day, with perhaps a maximum of thirty-eight for an express rider. This does not help a great deal as much depends upon what is meant by an ordinary traveller or pilgrim and whether he even had a horse, quite apart from the hazards of interruptions through poor weather, adverse wind and obstructive officials.”

¹³ Roberts: 2008 42-43 and Matthews: 2007, 29-32.

¹⁴ Matthews: 2007, 16 and Newman: 2011,75.

¹⁵ Gruffydd: 1999, *Cyfrol* 2, 10. Newman: 2011, 13.

¹⁶ Ein Treftadaeth | Our Heritage, “St. Beuno’s Church,” and Roberts: 2008, 58 and 79. This seems to be the same establishment as *Cwrt*, Bardsey abbey’s manor house and estate on the mainland.

¹⁷ Newman: 2011, 65-67. See also Hopper: 2002, 133 on the tradition of the “Wayfarer’s Dole,” a practice still in use at Winchester Cathedral in England.

¹⁸ Like the *stelai* of the Mediterranean, standing stones are vertically oriented; this characteristic enhances the monument’s capacity to define a place or locality by its presence. See Gaifman: 2012, 185

¹⁹ For the approximate date ranges, I have followed the interactive timeline given by Oxford's Ashmolean Museum. See: <http://www.ashmolean.org/ash/britarch/collections/paleolithic.html>

²⁰ Summarized from Bradley: 1993, 5. See also Williams: 2006, 1-4.

²¹ Ein Treftadaeth | Our Heritage, "Archaeology." Kytmanow, however, notes "[to] say that a hill or mountain is visible for a tomb in Snowdonia is a bit like saying that there is snow in the arctic, but if the highest peak, Snowdon itself, is clearly visible that might be of significance" (2008:129).

²² Sited in a private access field, this stone has a distinctive step-shaped top and stands approximately 9 feet tall. We did not have access to the monument the day we hiked through Llangwinnadl.

²³ For immensely detailed discussions of Iron Age forts and settlements in Wales and England, see: Cunliffe's *Iron Age Communities in Britain* and Forde-Johnson's *Hillforts of the Iron Age in England and Wales*.

²⁴ Ogam, a self-contained alphabetic system representing the sounds of early Irish, begins to be recorded on monuments in Ireland in the 4th and 5th centuries.

On inscribed stones generally: See Edwards: 2013, Vol. III; Edwards: 1990; McManus: 1991 and Swift: 1997; Petts: 2003; Harbert and Hudson: 2014.

²⁵ Petts, 201 in Williams: 2003.

²⁶ Carved from imported Anglesey cream-colored quartz arenite, the font is one of five or six known in North Wales (Edwards: 2013, 309).

Edwards (2013, 266) also lists two examples of early medieval sundials in Wales; most examples are from monastic centers in Ireland. This dial is divided by five lines into four equal segments instead of the typical six; it has been suggested that these divisions correspond with the liturgical offices of Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, and Vespers. "Sext" equates to the liturgical office conducted at noon. I found the sundial at Clynnog Fawr to be a particularly interesting monument and noted in my journal that "the monument embodies two different conceptions of time, one the liturgical, and the other geological. I am reminded of Jeremy Cohen's book *Stone – An Ecology of the Inhuman*. Cohen noted that 'Stone is primal matter, inhuman in its duration. Yet despite its incalculable temporality, the lithic is not some vast and alien outside. A limit-breaching intimacy persistently unfolds.' Medieval authors, Cohen rightly notes, thought about materiality in ways that may seem strange to us. Because of their materiality, stone monuments are entangled in narratives that stretch *far* back beyond human conceptions of time...yet the 'inscrutable forces materialized by rock and earth combine with vanishing yet legible human histories'...Stones and the earth thus possess 'a queer vivacity – and perhaps, even, a kind of soul.'"

²⁷ Personal communication with my hosts, both local historians, at Bryn Eisteddfod, Clynnog Fawr.

²⁸ Gruffydd: 1997, Cyfrol 1, 6. Trans. Stanton.

²⁹ Gruffydd: 1999, Cyfrol 2.

³⁰ Roberts: 2008, 37.

³¹ Bradley: 1993, 26 – "The problem is that they are never seen as *parts of the same phenomenon*" (emphasis in original).

³² Bradley: 1993, 44.

³³ O'Connor: 2009, 16-17. The "micro-environment" of the churchyard at St. Beuno's, Pistyll, provided an unexpected timely example of "landscape as changing monument." While the churchyard has been maintained for centuries, the highly invasive Himalayan balsam had established itself near the church's bridge. This plant, which spreads its seeds by ejecting them up to 15 feet away, is changing the character of St. Beuno's church-landscape-as-monument. We were encouraged to uproot any Himalayan balsams we could reach.

CHAPTER 5

PILGRIMAGE REVITALIZED – BARDSEY TODAY

June 18, 2016 – To paraphrase one fellow hiker, ‘This is what pilgrims do. We all meet up together and walk together, each with our own thoughts, yet sharing in the experience of it all’ – personal ‘liminality’ within a shared community of pilgrims.

5.1 BARDSEY’S CHANGING LIMINALITY – THE MODERN ERA

Except for the occasional visits of historians, naturalists, and archaeologists from the 1600’s to the 1800’s, Bardsey faded into relative obscurity. However, the small community of Bardsey residents continued to farm the island and to keep its traditions alive. In the 1800’s, Lord Newborough, owner of the island, instituted the office of “king” of Bardsey “since he wanted to impose a constitution on the islanders, possibly because of difficulties in extracting rent.”¹

In 1925, the last King of Bardsey, Love Pritchard, led an exodus of the older residents to the mainland – “we have not enough men to row boats off for us and look after the cattle.”² “Census records show...that the population of the island went into steep decline in the 20th century falling from 132 in 1881 to 54 in 1931 and to 14 in 1951.”³



Figure 38: Love Pritchard, the last king of Bardsey, c. 1925. Image credit: rhiw.com

Currently, only a handful of people live on the island year-round and are still dependent on the mainland for many of their supplies. But recently, Bardsey has stepped back onto the historical

stage as a pilgrimage destination owing to a renewal of interest in the island, its history and traditions, and to the revitalization of the medieval pilgrim's way.

5.2 PILGRIMAGE RENEWED – *TAITH PERERIN GOGLEDD CYMRU*

In 2010, a former official of St. Asaph's Church went on sabbatical pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. He noted how the Compostela route had boosted the local economy by providing an impetus for travelers to visit the area and to experience the rich history of the route-way. Thus, he and several friends formed the founding committee of the *Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru*, the North Wales Pilgrim's Way. Their goal was to revitalize a version of the medieval route way to Bardsey in hopes of promoting the history, folklore, archaeology, and natural beauty of North Wales. They designed official way-marker signs and placed them on stiles, kissing gates, and wooden posts to mark pathways to Bardsey. Local children designed "Pilgrim's Passport" stamps to be collected at the major churches and towns along the route.⁴



Figure 39: Official TPGC marker

By including the monuments and wells of the saints, the medieval pilgrim's way to Bardsey created a pathway through a "network of sacred places... This [is] commemorative topography..."⁵ The current North Wales Pilgrims' Way follows this tradition and in many respects offers an approximation of the route of the medieval pilgrims, including the experience of following sheep tracks across the mountains and along cliff sides.



Figure 40: Modern Welsh pilgrims hiking along sheep trails in North Wales

5.3 PHENOMENOLOGIES OF PILGRIMAGE

Whether past or present, pilgrimages place much emphasis on the *experience* of the journey. Phenomenologist Christopher Tilley emphasizes the importance of *walking* through a landscape, referring to it as “pedestrian speech,” which creates a narrative through movement.⁶ “Walking through [a landscape] awakens the hiker’s senses” and highlights the multi-sensory aspects of the experience.⁷ Every day I kept a personal journal detailing what I saw, smelled, heard, and felt, as well as the impact of the weather when I hiked the Pilgrim’s Way. To paraphrase anthropologist Tim Ingold, “Experiencing a landscape is more than just looking at it.”⁸

Both physically walking the Pilgrim’s Way and digitally mapping the monuments along it gave me two different yet complementary ways of experiencing and studying the past and present landscape of North Wales. The funnel-like topography of the Llŷn is certainly apparent from aerial imagery, such as my GoogleEarth maps. However, I gained a new, personal perspective of the narrow length of this mountainous peninsula by actually walking it, as would have the medieval pilgrims.

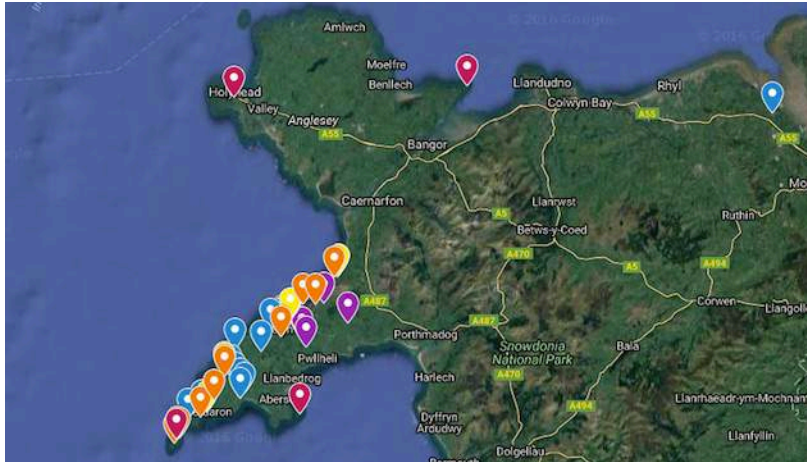


Figure 41: Map showing the main sites along the Llŷn. Blue = holy wells, yellow = chapels, purple = stone monuments, orange = pre- or post-medieval sites, and red = holy islands of North Wales.



Figure 42: Looking down the Llŷn towards Bardsey

5.4 EXPERIENCING MONUMENTS

Adopting a phenomenological approach to the Pilgrim’s Way prompts discussion of how its monuments are experienced by people moving through the landscape of the Llŷn. It is important to keep in mind how the landscape itself and the monuments in it work together – “[while] the natural landscape facilitates access along certain routes, the proximity of *monuments from any*

period would have enhanced the experience of the traveller and aided those journeying through the landscape.”⁹ These archaeological sites contain not only the *physical items* people created, such as walls around holy-wells and inscribed memorial stones, but also *abstract, intangible things*, such as the spiritual significance people imputed to the holy wells.

As stated before, those monuments pre-dating medieval pilgrimage to Bardsey had significance for pilgrims. Bradley’s *caveat* concerning “continuity” is pertinent – instead of an *actual* continuity, a *perceived* continuity is evident through the presence of medieval monuments near earlier sites.¹⁰ Acting as physical, tangible reminders of earlier ages, these ancient stone monuments connect the pilgrimage communities traversing the same landscape across different time periods. Therefore, landscape is simultaneously a place that holds history and a place that conceals it – a place containing a plurality of temporalities.¹¹ Where monuments from different time periods exist side by side, the feeling of “spectrality” arises.¹² This haunting feeling of connection to those who journeyed through this place before is part of the experience of pilgrimage, especially on Bardsey today.



Figure 43: “Abbey ruins with graves and Celtic cross memorial, circa 1885.”
Image credit: <http://www.ancient-origins.net>

5.5 MODERN PILGRIMAGES TO BARDSEY

A recent survey of visitors to the remote mountain shrine of Pennant St. Melangell provides insights into why pilgrims seek out places like Bardsey. Besides functioning as healing retreats, Pennant and Bardsey draw visitors for a number of reasons including spiritual motives and historical, architectural, or archaeological interests; one visitor noted that he felt these were spiritual or sacred rather than exclusively Christian places.¹³

Pilgrimage to Bardsey today can take on many forms. Some search for Arthurian relics as Merlin supposedly buried the “13 Treasures of the Isle of Britain” on the Island of Avalon, which some have conjectured is Bardsey. Others seek out the island for its wealth of unique plant life; the “Bardsey Apple” has gained fame as a disease-resistant, unique species, perhaps descended from the apple trees planted by the medieval monks. In addition to its designation as a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and a Llŷn Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Bardsey is a world-recognized bird sanctuary, especially for Manx shearwaters, guillemots, puffins, and Peregrine falcons. The island draws ornithologists and amateur bird-watchers from all over the UK.



Figure 44: A colony of guillemots nesting on the cliffs of Bardsey

The motivations for the TPGC pilgrims I spoke with are diverse, with some emphasizing the spirituality of the experience and finding God through reflection along the journey. Others say it is the full experience of pilgrimage that draws them back year after year; this was the sixth year to trek to Bardsey for many members of my group. All add that life is a journey and that pilgrimage – spiritually motivated or otherwise – provides an opportunity for contemplation and reflection, as well as time to catch up with friends and share stories along the way.

The relative inaccessibility of Bardsey, coupled with the “limit” of 12 visitors per trip – enforced by the physical size of the ferryboat and the conditions of the Sound – will forever prevent Bardsey from becoming a “tourist trap.” Kaelber’s discussion of “true pilgrimages” versus “tourism” in the post-medieval period is particularly relevant –

The increasing fuzziness of the boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism and related types of travel...has been noted by a great many observers who find it difficult analytically and empirically to distinguish between the two.¹⁴

The boundaries are blurred not only between pilgrimage and tourism *to* the island, but also between the sacred and the secular *on* the island; Bardsey’s current community has integrated the island’s long religious history into everyday life. Pilgrims and tourists provide the island’s residents with additional sources of income from the sale of the tickets for the ferry-trip and from the goods, locally made crafts, and Bardsey books sold in the island’s few small shops.



Figure 45: “Benlli III,” the ferry boat of Bardsey

5.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the answer to why Bardsey developed into a pilgrimage destination in the Middle Ages is multi-faceted and requires an interdisciplinary approach. Whether medieval or modern, pilgrims to Bardsey journey there for a multitude of reasons – its history, its archaeology, its traditions, its sacredness. The recent revival of the *Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru*, The North Wales Pilgrim’s Way, has contributed to putting small, remote, inaccessible Bardsey Island back into discussions of the historical importance and modern relevance of pilgrimage. From the ancient stone monuments, to the saints’ chapels and wells, the Pilgrim’s Way to Bardsey Island beautifully incorporates the history and heritage of North Wales. The island now attracts artists, poets, birdwatchers, hikers, and pilgrims of all sorts to experience something of the long and multifaceted history of Bardsey.

Ynys Enlli – “island of the riptides” and “isle of the saints” – has been a destination for thousands of people for thousands of years, traveling in the footsteps of saints and sheep.



Figure 46: An “ancient” pilgrim on Bardsey Island

REFERENCES

¹ Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 13. “A crown and ceremonial snuff box were made and were first used at the coronation of the second king of Bardsey in 1826....[The crown is] made of gold painted tin and glass and kept in a glass case [in Bangor Museum]; the snuff box is lost.”

² Kenney and Hopewell: 2015, 13.

³ Ibid. “Pritchard was 82 years old at this time and he died the following year.” The tradition of the *Brenin Enlli* (“Bardsey’s King”) is remembered by a beer of the same name from Cwrw Llŷn. They note that the “island was renowned for its barley – crops were so heavy that the grain touched the earth by harvest time. The island folk brewed their own beer – it was legendary strong stuff, so powerful that bottles of the beer occasionally exploded on the shelves of the cottages!”

⁴ This paragraph has been summarized from my own personal communication with the TPGC committee members. They had been criticized because the route-way was not “*the original*” path of the saints and medieval pilgrims to Bardsey. However, it was *not meant* to be the original route, but rather to provide a version of the medieval pilgrimage experience, and in particular, a chance to promote this under-appreciated and unique part of Wales. The Llŷn is unique in the concentration of its archaeological, historical, and religious sites and traditions, and this history resonates deeply with the Welsh people in general. The TPGC also collaborated with Edge of Wales Walks, The Wales Coastal Path, and the Sacred Doorways trails. I remember a particularly touching moment as we were returning to Aberdaron from Bardsey: our ferryman asked for an official *Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru* sticker to put on his ferryboat, “Benlli III.” He proudly affixed the marker to the door-frame of the cockpit, declaring his sturdy little boat to be a “floating piece of the Pilgrim’s Way.”

⁵ Williams: 2015, 7.

⁶ Tilley: 1994.

⁷ Redick: 2016, 1.

⁸ Ingold, in Johnson 2012, 273.

⁹ Kirton, 49 in Williams: 2015. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Bradley in Petts: 2002. See also: Edwards “Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales: Context and Function.”

¹¹ Keller: 2016

¹² Keller: 2016

¹³ Keulemans and Burton: 2006, 105.

¹⁴ Kaelber, 65, in Swatos and Tomasi: 2002.

APPENDIX

For an interactive map showing the monuments and way-markers in the area of the current North

Wales Pilgrim's Way, please see "Project Website" under Emily Stanton at:

<http://ciams.cornell.edu/students/>.

Or, contact the author for access to the map at eryanstanton@gmail.com.

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