

1. Early Beginnings

Cairns, burial sites and Cerrig y Cledd (The Sword Stones) in the hills surrounding Barmouth suggest that the area was important during the Bronze Age. There is also much archaeological evidence from the Iron Age showing fortifications and structures in the area.

A 5th century inscribed stone was found on Ceilwart Isaf farm in Llanaber and another on the beach at Barmouth. The first stone was inscribed with “Caelexti Monedo Rigi” which can be interpreted as “Caelestis, Mountain King”, which suggests an early administrative unit in the area covering both the coast and the mountains or it could possibly refer to Caelestis Monedorix a mythical king of Mona (Anglesey). The second stone is inscribed with “Aeterni Et Aeternai”, possibly brother and sister. The first name could refer to Ederus, an early saint and son of Cunedda Wledig, king of the north Britons in the 5th century. Ederus lived around 520–580CE. The stones can be seen in St Marys and St Bodfan’s church in Llanaber.



Llanaber Stones in St Marys and St Bodfan



Caelexti Mondeo Rigi



Aeterni Et Aeternai

There is a recording of the river Mawddach in 1188 by Gerald Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales, the Archbishop of Brecon). During Henry II reign the Archbishop Baldwyn of Canterbury was sent to Wales to muster support for a further crusade to liberate Jerusalem. The Archbishop chose Gerald as his chaplain and they set out on their

expedition across Wales supported by a troop of some 3000 armed men. Gerald travelled across the Dyfi to Tywyn, then over the Mawddach, probably at Llanelltyd where there was a ford and a ferry run by monks, before carrying on to Llanfair. There are some interpretations that assert that Gerald crossed the Mawddach by ferry from Penrhyn Point to Ynys y Brawd and then by a second ferry from Ynys y Brawd to the mainland where Barmouth now stands.

Taken from the itinerary of Archbishop Baldwin through Wales:

“We slept that night at Tywyn. Early next morning, Gruffydd son of Conan came to meet us, humbly and devoutly asking pardon for having so long delayed his attention to the archbishop. On the same day, we ferried over the bifurcate river Maw, where Malgo, son of Rhys, who had attached himself to the archbishop, as a companion to the king’s court, discovered a ford near the sea.”

The following entry describing Meirionnydd is interesting:

“That night we lay at Llanfair, that is the church of St. Mary, in the province of Ardudwy. This territory of Conan, and particularly Merioneth, is the rudest and roughest district of all Wales; the ridges of its mountains are very high and narrow, terminating in sharp peaks, and so irregularly jumbled together, that if the shepherds conversing or disputing with each other from their summits, should agree to meet, they could scarcely effect their purpose in the course of the whole day. The lances of this country are very long; for as South Wales excels in the use of the bow, so North Wales is distinguished for its skill in the lance; insomuch that an iron coat of mail will not resist the stroke of a lance thrown at a small distance.”

According to legend, the palace of King Gwyddno, ruler of the legendary Cantre Gwaelod, the Welsh Atlantis, was at Garandir on the sea-facing hillslope at, or near, Barmouth. A large enclosure half-way between Llanaber church and Barmouth appears on Lewis Morris's 1748 map of the coastline which does not exist in any form today.

At some period, a fortification, now known as Castell, existed above Barmouth guarding a route between the church in Llanaber and a creek at the mouth of the Dwynant river. This creek would later be a *“free landing place of the people”*.

The Merioneth Lay Subsidy Roll of 1292-1293 recorded Llanaber as being relatively well off, worth between 30 and 40 shillings per 1000 acres. They also record Llanaber as having 101 tax payers in the Parish at that time.

In 1294 a grant to a Bleddyn Fychan refers to lands in Maenol Llanaber with a small villa called Caer Hepnewid, perhaps lands near the Llanaber Church with Castell above.

There was a church at the site of St Mary's and Bodfan in the 6th Century built by St Bodfan. The church was rebuilt in the 13th Century.

In 1326 *“a clansman of Llanaber was fined for keeping his animals in the common pastures of the old settlement after the township community had moved early in May with its animals to the mountains.”*

The poet Dafydd Ap Gwilym stayed at the inn Bwlch y Goedleoedd and wrote the poem Maddeunant around 1330 where he mentions Abermaw:

*“... Dafu’r gweuddiau dirfawr,
Digyffro fo Artro fawr,
Talwn fferm Borth Abermaw,
Ar dôn drai, er ei d’wyn draw....”*

Bwlch y Coedleoedd was situated near the Panorama walk on the old road to Bontddu. It is now a ruin.

Egryn (a holding between Llanaber and Tal y Bont) was identified as a hospice licensed in 1391 for the celebration of divine office. The licence was granted to Gruffydd ap Llewelyn ap Cynwrig *“to have masses celebrated in the oratory of the poor hospital of St Mary the Virgin in the said diocese situate between two arms of the sea called Traeth Urtro (Artro) and Abermo, eight English miles apart, in which the tide ebbs and flows twice a day as far as the mountains, which are opposite the sea; the said hospital having been begun to be founded and built by him for poor and wayfarers and being difficult to access”*.

A 1530s report from a tour of Wales by John Leland the Antiquary mentions:

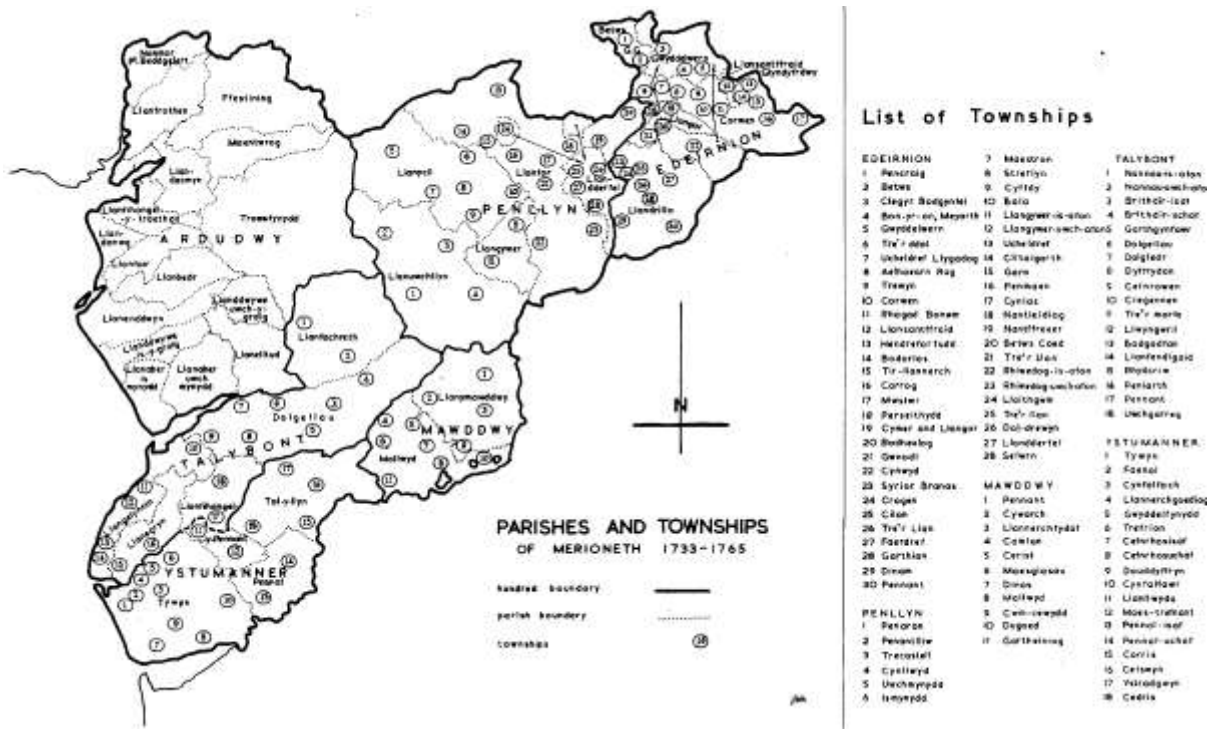
“At the north of Marw river lyeth a little islet, scant a bow shot over, withoute habitation. At ebbe it is fresche water, and at fludde salt.”



Barmouth

In 1565 Queen Elizabeth I commissioned a survey of the havens and creeks of Wales. This was said of Barmouth:

“Abermowe, being likewise a haven having no habitation. But only foure howses, whereof there are owners Res ap Res, Haryy ap Eden, Thomas ap Edward and John ap Howell Goche. And there is nother Shipp nor vessel that belongeth to the same haven. But only towve little Bootes that the said Res ap Res and Haryy ap Eden do use to cary men over that Passage”



Parishes and Townships 1733 - 1765

In the mid 17th Century Robert Powell Vaughan wrote

“Then Llan Aber, there at Aber Mowddach (usually called Bermo, in English Barmouth) a haven town: the River Mowddach, divideth itself into two heads, making a little Island called Ynys Brawd (the Friar’s Island) and so poureth itself into the Ocean. In this town (Barmouth) also there is a military fence or trench, cast about the top of the hill, and called Dinas Gortin.”

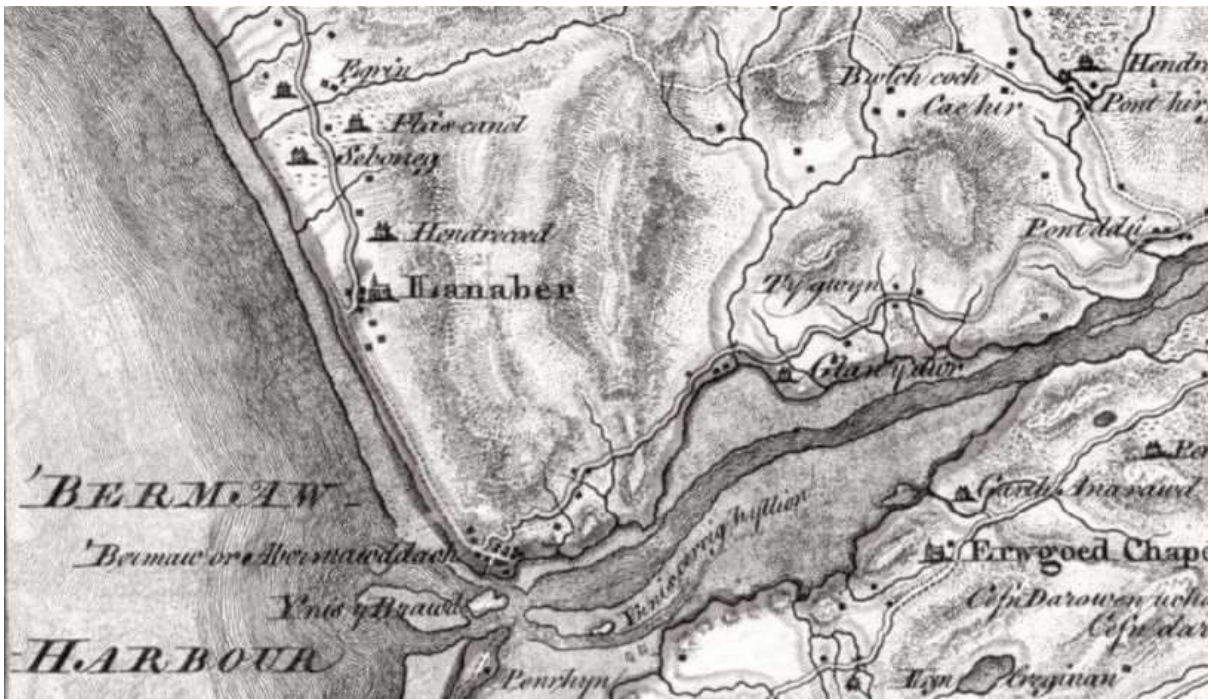
Taken from The History Of Merionethshire.



Barmouth 1780



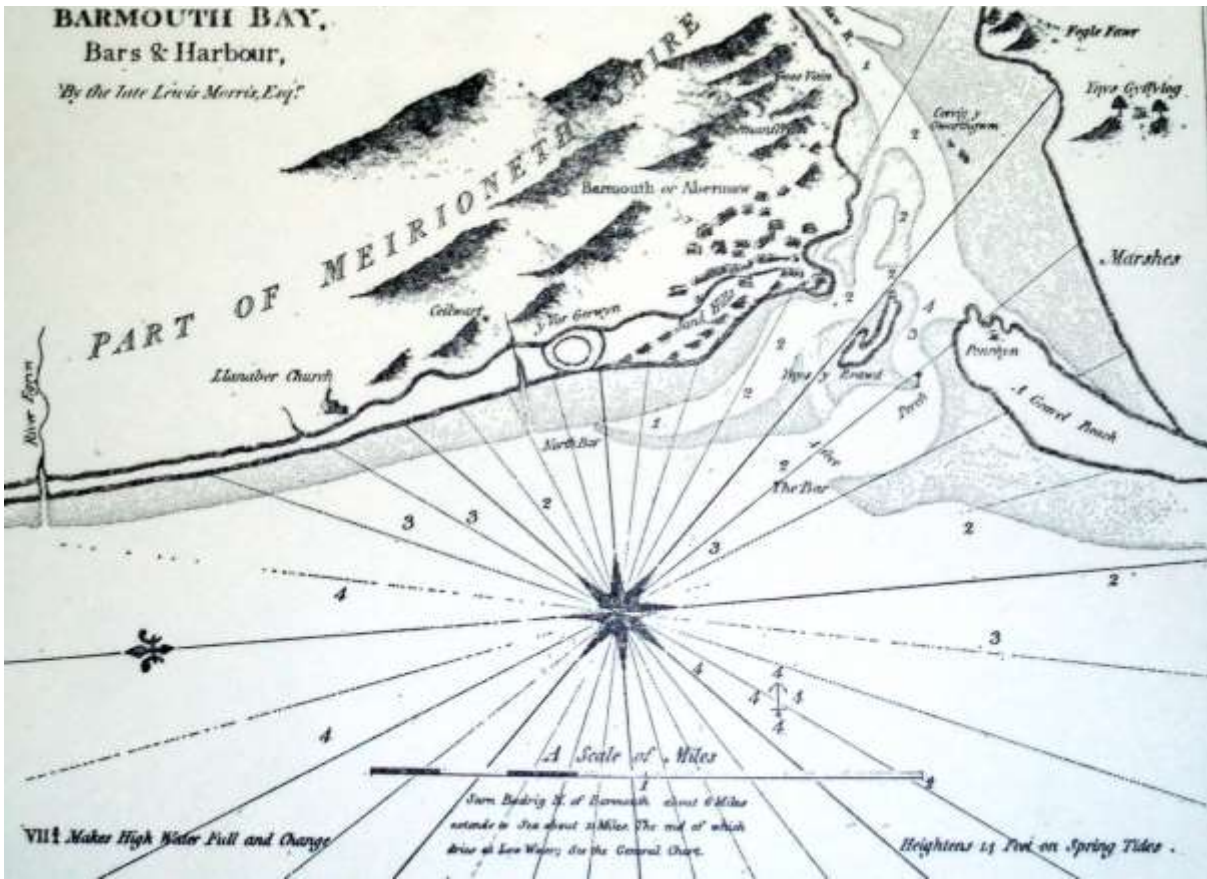
Barmouth 1792



Map 1795



The Quay 1798



Barmouth 1800



Barmouth 1813



Town Map 1841



Barmouth 1850

The island Ynys y Brawd was an actual island before the causeway was built. The channel used to run between the island and Barmouth Beach as well as the existing channel that passes between the point and Penrhyn Point. Earlier than that, it used to run as the North Channel, as far as St. Mary's in Llanaber. Long ago the harbour was probably somewhere along Church Street and it is believed that there are still

mooring rings in the cellar of the Fanny Talbot (previously the Lion Hotel). It is possible that wrecks of old boats still lie under the main street. There was a time that the Georgian cottages of Water Street were the nearest to the water hence their name. It is also understood that there was a mooring area where the football field and The Wern now stand which afforded a safe mooring from North Easterlies.



High Street 1860



The Beach 1854



Barmouth from Ynys y Brawd 1872