

Preface

History is often told through the deeds of rulers. Kings rise and fall. Dynasties compete for power. Castles are built, battles are fought, and kingdoms are conquered. Yet the history of Cymru was never simply the story of its princes. Beneath royal courts, political rivalries, and military campaigns lived the people whose labour sustained the country and whose traditions preserved its identity through centuries of change.

This book explores those people. It is not a history of rulers, but a history of society. While kings and princes shaped the political landscape of medieval Wales, most inhabitants of Cymru were not rulers. They were farmers, craftspeople, merchants, clergy, poets, labourers, and families whose daily lives unfolded far from royal courts. Their work fed communities, supported economies, maintained traditions, and ensured the survival of Welsh culture through periods of both prosperity and uncertainty.

The medieval period transformed Cymru profoundly. Kingdoms expanded and fragmented. Laws became increasingly sophisticated. Churches and monasteries spread across the landscape. Trade connected Welsh communities to Ireland, England, and continental Europe. New forms of administration, warfare, and economic organisation altered many aspects of life. Yet despite these changes, the foundations upon which Welsh society rested remained remarkably resilient.

Most people continued living within rural communities tied closely to family, kinship, and the land itself. Seasonal rhythms of agriculture governed much of daily life. The Welsh language endured across generations. Communities preserved their histories through memory, poetry, storytelling, and tradition. Mountains, valleys, rivers, and coastlines remained central to identity and belonging. The people of Cymru adapted to changing circumstances

while carrying forward social structures and cultural traditions inherited from those who came before them.

The experience of medieval life also varied greatly across Wales. Communities in the mountains of Gwynedd lived differently from those of the fertile lowlands of Deheubarth. Coastal settlements maintained connections across the Irish Sea, while frontier regions experienced regular contact with neighbouring English territories. Geography shaped patterns of settlement, economy, communication, and identity in every region. Just as in earlier periods, the landscape remained one of the most powerful influences upon Welsh society.

A central idea runs throughout *The Cymru Cycles*: the history of Wales cannot be separated from its landscape. That principle is especially important when examining ordinary life. The environments in which people lived shaped how they farmed, travelled, traded, worshipped, built communities, and understood their place in the world. Rivers provided transport and resources. Mountains created both barriers and protection. Coastlines connected communities to distant regions. The land influenced daily life at every level.

This book focuses particularly on the centuries following Edward I's conquest of Wales. Political authority changed dramatically during this period. Native kingdoms disappeared, new systems of administration emerged, castles expanded their influence, and English law increasingly shaped governance. Yet even as these transformations unfolded, Welsh communities continued to preserve many of the traditions, customs, relationships, and identities that had defined life in Cymru for generations.

Like every volume in this series, this book is intended as a framework rather than a catalogue. The surviving evidence for medieval society comes from legal texts, poetry, archaeology, administrative records, chronicles, and material culture, each offering only part of the wider picture. New discoveries continue to

refine our understanding of the medieval world. Throughout this book, the aim is to present the interpretation that appears most consistent with the available evidence while recognising that alternative views may exist.

The people explored within these chapters were not separate from the Wales that followed. They helped shape many of the foundations that continue to influence Welsh identity today. From them came enduring traditions of language, poetry, religion, community, law, and attachment to place. Their world stood between the age of the native princes and the later Wales transformed by union, industry, and modernity.

Even when kingdoms disappeared, these foundations remained. Princes lost their thrones. Castles changed hands. Dynasties faded into history. Political authority passed to new rulers. Yet the people of Cymru endured, carrying their language, traditions, communities, and memories forward into a new age.

This book is the story of how they lived, worked, worshipped, governed, traded, learned, and remembered, and how the foundations of Welsh society survived within a changing medieval world.

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The Cymru Cycles