

# Preface

The story of Cymru did not begin with kings, castles, or written history. Long before medieval kingdoms emerged beneath the mountains of Wales, generations of people had already lived, worked, travelled, traded, worshipped, fought, and remembered within these landscapes for thousands of years. Rivers were crossed long before roads existed beside them. Hillforts overlooked valleys centuries before Roman armies entered Britain. Burial monuments stood upon ridges long before the Welsh language itself had fully formed. The foundations of Wales reach far deeper into time than the surviving written record alone can reveal.

Yet the peoples who lived within ancient Cymru often remain difficult to see clearly. Unlike later periods of Welsh history, Iron Age Wales left behind no histories written in its own voice. What survives instead are fragments: hillfort earthworks softened by weather, traces of roundhouses beneath fields, objects deposited in lakes and rivers, pathways crossing uplands, and scattered discoveries preserved beneath the soil. Much of what we know must therefore be reconstructed through archaeology, landscape, linguistics, environmental evidence, and the careful interpretation of later traditions.

This absence of direct written testimony has often allowed ancient Wales to become obscured beneath stereotype. The peoples of Iron Age Britain are frequently reduced either to romantic myth or to simplistic images of painted warriors standing against Rome. The reality was far more complex. Most people were not warriors or rulers. They were farmers, craftspeople, herders, traders, families, and communities whose lives were shaped by labour, kinship, memory, survival, and a deep familiarity with the landscapes around them.

This book seeks to reconstruct that world. Rather than presenting the ancient Cymry as a single unified civilisation, it explores the gradual

development of Iron Age society within Wales through long processes of continuity, adaptation, exchange, and cultural change. Ancient Cymru was never culturally uniform. Different regions evolved according to their own geography, resources, and connections. Coastal communities developed differently from upland societies. Mountain territories followed different paths from fertile river valleys. Yet despite this diversity, recognisable patterns emerged across the land, including kinship-based societies, farming economies, warrior elites, trade networks, and regional identities that would later encounter Rome.

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 the Iron Age. The mountains, forests, rivers, marshes, coastlines, and valleys of Wales did not simply provide a backdrop to human activity. They shaped movement, settlement, defence, survival, and identity. Geography influenced how communities farmed, travelled, traded, and interacted with one another. Hillforts emerged where visibility and security mattered. Coastal settlements developed through maritime connections. Upland communities adapted to isolation and challenging terrain. The land helped shape the people who lived within it.

The purpose of this book is therefore not to search for a perfectly defined Celtic people, because no such singular identity ever truly existed. Instead, it seeks to understand how the peoples of ancient Wales emerged through layered relationships between land, language, economy, memory, and inherited tradition. Cymru became part of the wider Celtic world not through a single moment of invasion or replacement, but through centuries of interaction with neighbouring regions while remaining deeply shaped by its own landscapes and communities.

Like every volume in this series, this book is intended as a framework rather than a catalogue. Absolute certainty is not always possible. New discoveries may challenge existing interpretations,

and some conclusions may require revision as knowledge advances. Where evidence is incomplete, interpretation is sometimes necessary. Throughout this book, the aim is to present the reconstruction that appears most consistent with the available evidence while acknowledging that alternative interpretations may exist.

In many ways, the story explored here is not solely about the distant past. The foundations of later Welsh identity were already beginning to emerge within Iron Age Cymru. Relationships between people and landscape, the persistence of regional identities, the importance of kinship and memory, and the resilience of communities rooted within challenging environments would continue shaping Wales for centuries to come.

This book therefore begins not with Rome, but with the world that existed before it: a world of forests and hillforts, of roundhouses and river crossings, of seasonal labour and oral tradition, of tribal territories developing across the land that would later become Cymru. The traces of that world still remain within the landscapes of Wales today. To understand ancient Cymru fully, we must therefore look not only at history, but at the land where that history unfolded.

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*The Cymru Cycles*

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