



This historic town, located on the Gwynedd coastline at Tremadog Bay, is best known for Harlech Castle, started by Edward I of England in 1283, captured by Owain Glyndwr in 1404, later becoming the stronghold of Henry Tudor.

Originally the castle was next to the sea but over the years geological changes to the coastline have changed the outline of the shore, so today it stands on a cliff face about half a mile inland. As well as playing a significant role in Welsh history, Harlech Castle is also inextricably linked to Welsh mythology through the tragic tale of Branwen, daughter of Llyr, the second branch of the Mabinogi (a collection of ancient Welsh tales collected together and translated by Lady Charlotte Guest in the mid-nineteenth century).

Harlech is regarded as one of the finest – if not the finest - example of medieval British defensive architecture. It remains a testament to the architectural genius of Master James of St. George, Edward I's military architect. He fused the natural strength of the site with the defensive requirements of the age and created a building which commands respect on behalf of its sheer defensive strength and majestic beauty.

As previously mentioned, the building of the castle began during King Edward I's second campaign in North Wales. It forms an important part of his 'iron ring' of castles that surround the coastal fringes of Snowdonia, a ring intended to prevent the region from ever again rising in rebellion. The King's forces arrived at Harlech in April 1283 and building work began almost immediately. Over the next six years a veritable army of labourers, craftsmen, masons and quarriers were employed in the creation of the castle. In 1286, at the height of construction, ledgers note that some 950 men were employed on the site under the supervision of Master James.



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sense of place

A century and a half or so after its construction by the English King, Harlech was to play a significant role in the national uprising led by Owain Glyndwr. Following a long siege, it fell to his forces in 1404, and became Owain's main residence and headquarters, and one of only two places to which it is believed, he organised a parliament of his supporters (the other being the Senedd House in Machynlleth). Owain was to hold Harlech castle until it was re-taken by English forces following another long siege in 1408. This time, the English forces were under the leadership of Harry of Monmouth, who later became Henry V.

During the War of the Roses, some sixty years later, the castle was held for the Lancastrians until it was taken for the Yorkists by Lord Herbert of Raglan. It was this long siege which gave rise to the popular Welsh air 'Men of Harlech'.

The pretty historic town lies on a hillside above the castle, the two areas being linked by a steep, winding lane known as the Twtil. Today, it has a population of some 1,300, of whom 63% are Welsh-speaking.