

## VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

### BRIDGNORTH

The Library, Listley Street, WV16 4AW  
Tel: 01746 763257

### CHURCH STRETTON

Church Street, SY6 6DQ  
Tel: 01694 723133

### ELLESMERE

The Mereside, SY12 0PA  
Tel: 01691 622981

### ELLESMERE INFO LINK

4 Ploughman's Corner, Wharf Road, SY12 0EJ  
Tel: 01691 624488

### IRONBRIDGE

Coach Road, Coalbrookdale, TF8 7DQ  
Tel: 01952 884391

### LUDLOW

Castle Street, SY8 1AS  
Tel: 01584 875053

### MARKET DRAYTON

49 Cheshire Street, TF9 1PH  
Tel: 01630 653114

### MUCH WENLOCK

The Museum, High Street, TF13 6HR  
Tel: 01952 727679

### OSWESTRY TOWN

Heritage Centre, 2 Church Terrace, SY11 2TE  
Tel: 01691 662753

### OSWESTRY MILE END

Mile End, SY11 4JA  
Tel: 01691 662488

### SHREWSBURY

The Music Hall, The Square, SY1 1LH  
Tel: 01743 281200

### TELFORD

Telford Shopping Centre, TF3 4BX  
Tel: 01952 238008

### WHITCHURCH

12 St Mary's Street, SY13 1QY  
Tel: 01948 664577



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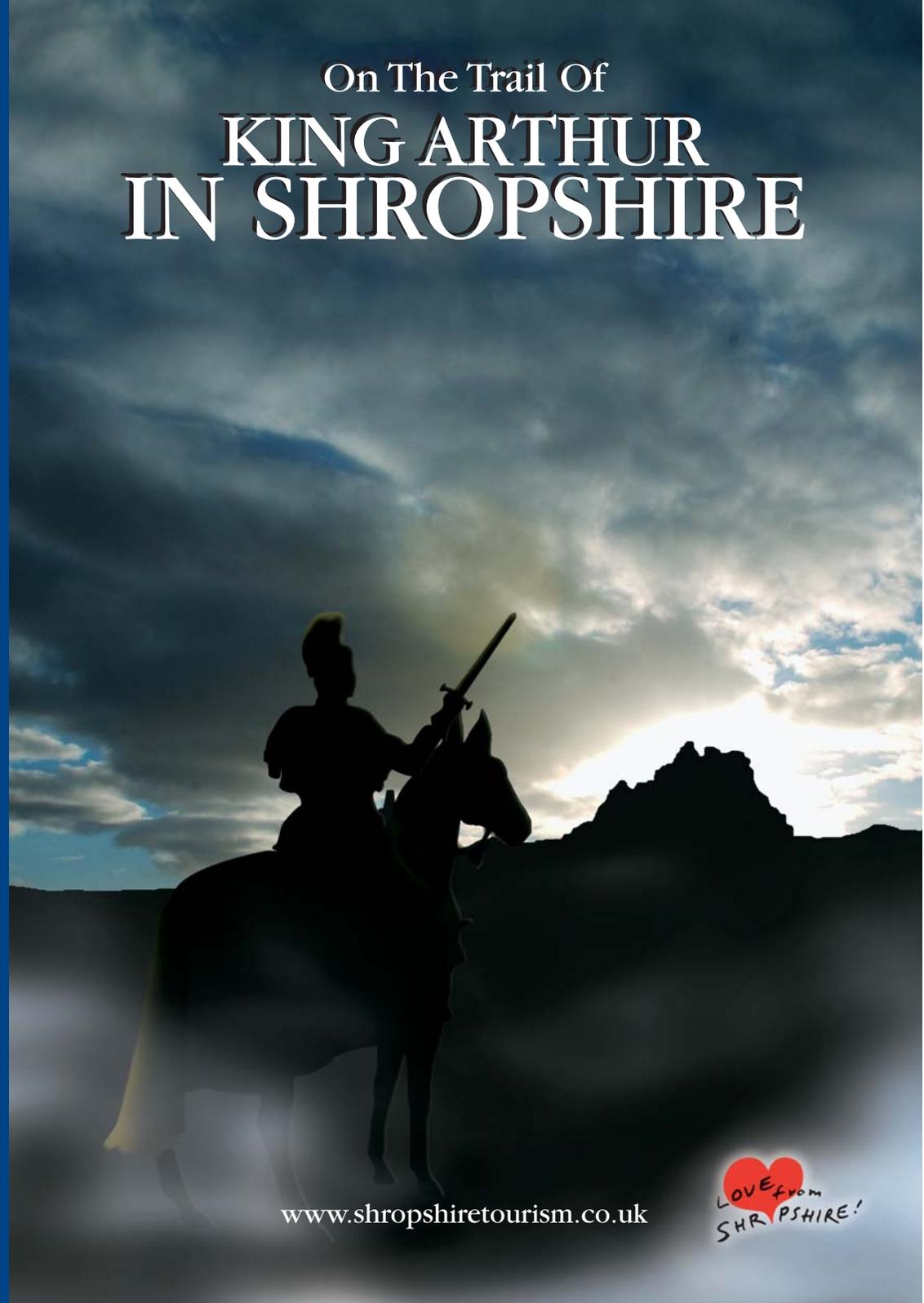
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# On The Trail Of KING ARTHUR IN SHROPSHIRE



www.shropshiretourism.co.uk



# ON THE TRAIL OF KING ARTHUR IN SHROPSHIRE

## INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been based on the research and book *King Arthur: The True Story* by Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman. It will help you discover King Arthur's Shropshire; and will explain some of the stories associated with him. It will show you the real sites of the stories, including the sword in the stone, the Holy Grail, Camelot and the Lady Guinevere.

The King Arthur we have all been brought up with was a romantic figure surrounded by his Knights of the Round Table. Much of this was based on myth and legend drawn from the Medieval Arthurian Romances. But like many legends they nearly all have some basis in fact - facts which get lost in the mists of time.

It is time to dispel these romanticised myths and introduce you to the real King Arthur - 'Owain Ddantgwyn - The Bear', a great king of the Dark Ages who ruled his kingdom from Wroxeter near Shrewsbury.

Manuscripts in the British Library, suggest that King Arthur historically existed. The earliest reference to Arthur, which is still in existence, suggests that Arthur was in fact a king of Powys, a kingdom that once covered what is now Shropshire and Mid Wales.

Excavations at the Dark Age capital of Powys, Wroxeter, four miles to the east of Shrewsbury, have shown that in the fifth century this city may have been the most sophisticated in the country. This is precisely the time that Arthur is said to have been Britain's most powerful king.

A tenth-century manuscript in the British Library records that Wroxeter was occupied around 493AD by Owain Ddantgwyn, a late fifth-century king of Powys and an important warlord. There is contemporary historical evidence that he was actually known as Arthur.

The sixth-century monk Gildas refers to Owain by his battle name, The Bear. In the old British language, and still preserved by modern Welsh, the word for Bear is Arth. 'Arthur' therefore seems to have been a title rather than a personal name. Moreover, Owain's father bore the battle name the 'Terrible Head Dragon', which translates into Welsh as Uthr Pen Dragon. In the legends, Arthur's father is called Uther Pendragon.

When Owain Ddantgwyn died around 520AD civil war appears to have broken out between his rival heirs, his son Cuneglasus based at Wroxeter and his nephew Maglocunus based in Gwynedd, North Wales.

Written three centuries before the Medieval Romances connected Arthur with the South West of England the ninth-century Welsh poem 'The Song of Llywarch the Old' states that the kings of Powys were "heirs of great Arthur".

## HOW TO USE THE TRAIL

This is a circular route which begins just outside Shrewsbury, at Wroxeter - the ruined Roman city of Viroconium and takes you on a tour through Shropshire and the borders and ends up back in Shrewsbury. The route plots the historical sites and connections with the Arthurian stories and can be split into 3 smaller trails:

**TRAIL 1** - Wroxeter, The Wrekin and Much Wenlock Priory

**TRAIL 2** - Caer Caradoc, Mitchell's Fold Stone Circle & Rhyd-y-Groes, Old Oswestry and Whittington Castle

**TRAIL 3** - Hawkstone Park & Baschurch

More information on Shropshire, the best places to stay, things to do and see and where to eat can be obtained from any of the Visitor Information Centres listed on the back page or by visiting [www.shropshiretourism.co.uk](http://www.shropshiretourism.co.uk).

More information on Arthur can be obtained from 'King Arthur: The True Story' by Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman and by visiting [www.shropshiretourism.co.uk/king-arthur](http://www.shropshiretourism.co.uk/king-arthur)

(Ordnance Survey Land ranger 1:50,000 maps that cover this trail are sheets 126, 127 and 137).

## 1. WHITTINGTON CASTLE IN SEARCH OF THE HOLY GRAIL

Shortly after the battle of Hastings, William the Conqueror gave Whittington to one of his lords, Payn Perevil, who is accredited with building the present castle. Perevil married Lynette the granddaughter of the Welsh baron Cadfarch, a direct descendant of Owain Ddantgwyn (Arthur).

In the 13th Century Lynette's great-grandson, Fulk Fitz Warine, became the subject of a medieval romance in which he is portrayed as the living heir of King Arthur - an authentic claim if Owain Ddantgwyn was the historical Arthur.

Fulk is portrayed as the guardian of the Holy Grail which was said to have been kept in the chapel of Whittington Castle. Other Arthurian romances also appear to accept that the Grail Castle is Whittington Castle. In a number of Grail stories composed in the Middle Ages the Grail is kept in a magical White Castle on the Welsh border. In the early twelfth century Whittington Castle was named the White Castle and it is situated only a few miles from Wales.

## 2. OLD OSWESTRY HILL-FORT (EH) GUINEVERE'S HOME

The ancient name for Old Oswestry Hill-Fort is *Caer Ogyrfan* which translates as the City of Gogyrfan. Gogyrfan was the legendary father of Guinevere. Old Oswestry Hill-Fort was probably the site of the final stand by Cynddylan, the last descendant of the historical Arthur to rule in Shropshire. 10th Century records show that the Saxon king Oswy defeated Cynddylan, in 658AD.

Excavations suggest Old Oswestry dates back to 700BC and was among the largest of the forts within the territory of the Celtic Cornovii tribe. Subsequent phases enclosed the hilltop and enlarged the defences to form an impressive fort of 68 acres defended by a series of five ramparts. The fort appears to have been deserted during the Roman period but it is likely, due to the importance of Oswestry, that it was reoccupied during the Anglo-Saxon period.

## 3 & 4. RHYD-Y-GROES ARTHUR'S LAST BATTLE

The 12th Century Welsh Annals record that Arthur died at the Battle of Camlann. On the eve of the battle Arthur rallied his men at Rhyd-y-Groes farm (Ford of the Cross) a river crossing that can still be seen today now marked by Shiregrove Bridge.

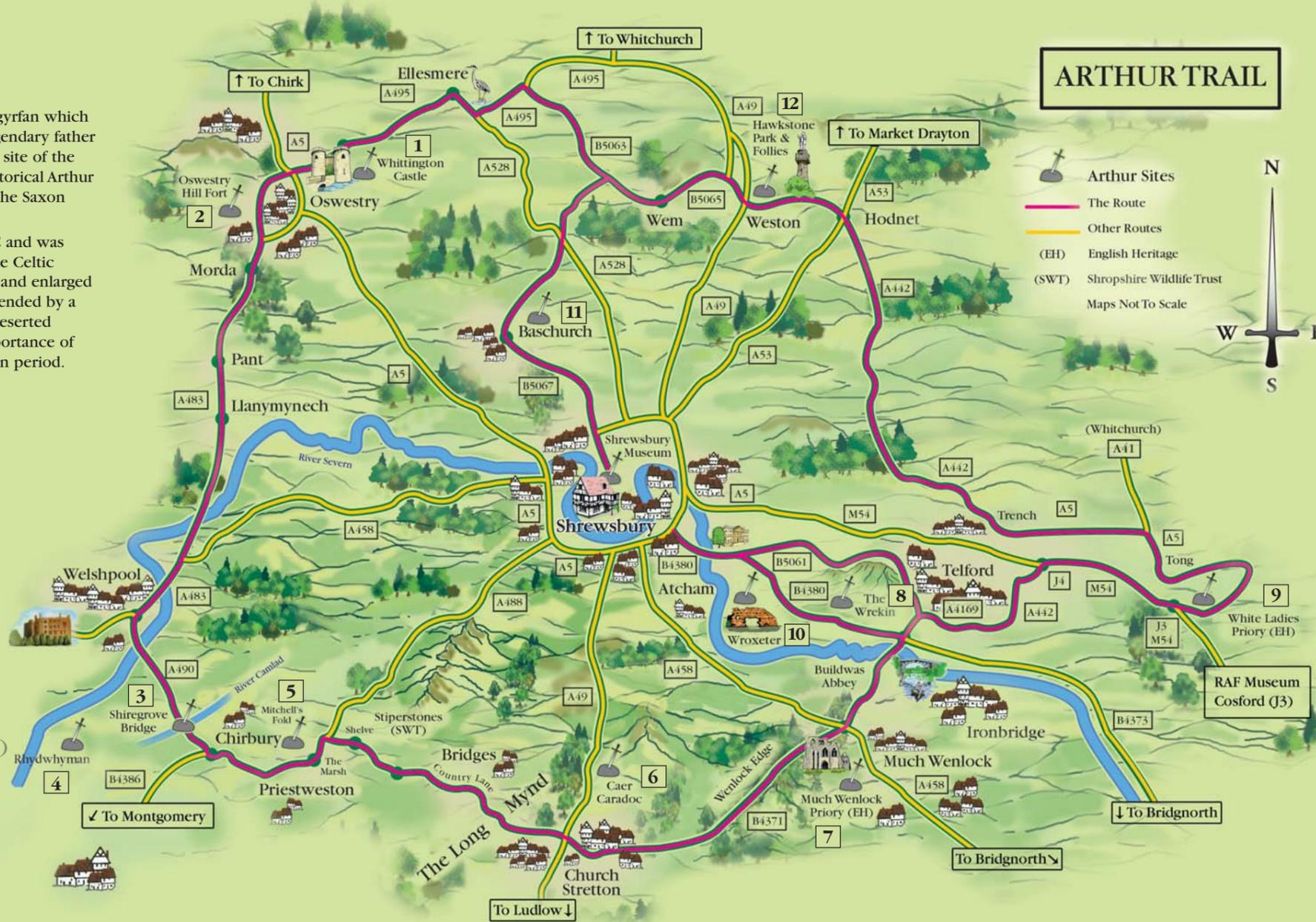
The likelihood that the battle of Camlann was historically fought here is further supported by the name of the river, the Camlad - possibly a derivation of Camlann. In this strategic location it is likely that the historical King Arthur made his last encampment before he fell on the field of battle.

## 5. MITCHELL'S FOLD STONE CIRCLE (EH) THE SWORD IN THE STONE

Legend says that Arthur became king by drawing a sword from a stone. Local folklore sites this event at Mitchell's Fold Stone Circle.

Fifth Century leadership disputes between rival warriors were often resolved in single combat, the victor drawing a 'sword of office' from a stone altar; a practice that may have given rise to the legend of the sword and the stone. Ancient Britons are known to have used megalithic circles for tribal rites and kingship duels could have been fought at Mitchell's Fold Stone Circle.

Set on dramatic moorland, Mitchell's Fold Stone Circle was erected over 3500 years ago and many legends are connected with the site. Around 80 feet in diameter, this ancient ring is believed to have had both religious and ceremonial purposes.



## 6. CAER CARADOC, EXCALIBUR & AVALON

In the legend of the Magical Cauldron of Di-wrnach, the cauldron is said to contain the treasures of Britain and a magical sword. The Cauldron lies hidden in a cave below the summit of Caer Caradoc. One Welsh tale recounts Arthur's search for the Cauldron of Diwrnach, and in another Arthur recovers the cauldron from the mystical isle of Annwn. The

## 12. HAWKSTONE PARK KNIGHTS BATTLE GIANTS AND THE GRAIL IS DISCOVERED

Tel: 01948 841700 www.hawkstone.co.uk

The 18th Century Grade I listed historic park with its eccentric follies has legendary associations with King Arthur. Legends recount how in the time of King Arthur the Red Castle belonged to two giants called Tarquin and Tarquinius, and their fearsome brother Sir Carados who captured Sir Gawain.

Sir Lancelot and Sir Tristram of the Round Table

set out to rescue their friend. They encountered Sir Carados carrying Sir Gawain bound and tied across his saddle and after a legendary fight Sir Lancelot killed the giant at Killguards near Weston Church freeing Sir Gawain.

The Grotto at Hawkstone Park has also been linked with the Grail. In 1920 a small stone cup was found hidden in the base of an eagle statue that then stood in the Grotto. It was identified as an early Roman scent jar, and recent research has suggested that it may have been the vessel that inspired the medieval Grail legend.

## 11. BASCHURCH ARTHUR'S RESTING PLACE

A 9th Century poem names the burial site of the Dark Age King of Powys as the 'Churches of Bassa', relating that many great leaders were buried there. As a king of Powys, this is the most likely last resting place of King Arthur.

Although the exact location is not given, the village of Baschurch, about 15 miles from Wroxeter, is the most feasible location for the 'Churches of Bassa'.

## 10. WROXETER THE LEGENDARY CAMELOT

Viroconium at Wroxeter was the fourth largest city in Roman Britain. Archaeological excavations reveal that shortly after the departure of the Romans, and while civilisation was collapsing elsewhere in Britain, Viroconium was rebuilt in a highly sophisticated fashion. On the site of the Roman baths complex, elaborate classical buildings surrounded a massive winged mansion.

This remarkable 5th Century city may well have been the capital of Arthurian Britain, the Camelot of King Arthur himself. In the early 6th Century the city was abandoned, probably for a more defensible site. The impressive Roman ruins are open to visitors and the museum houses finds from the town.

## 9. WHITE LADIES PRIORY GUINEVERE'S RETREAT

The name Guinevere derives from the Welsh name Gwenhwyfar, the White Lady of Celtic mythology. In the most famous Arthurian romance, Thomas Malory's 'Le Morte d'Arthur' (circa 1470), Guinevere retires to a secluded priory after Arthur's death. According to a 16th Century rendition of Malory's tale, Guinevere retires to White Ladies Priory.

Although the present ruins date from the Middle Ages, ecclesiastical buildings were often constructed on older, sanctified sites. At the time of the Norman Conquest, White Ladies Priory housed a small foundation of Augustinian canonesses, called White Ladies after the colour of their undyed habits.

## 8. THE WREKIN THE FORT OF ARTHUR'S SON

When Arthur died around 520AD civil war appears to have broken out between his rival heirs, his son Cuneglasus and his nephew Maglocunus. It was at this time that Wroxeter declined, Cuneglasus probably left for a more defensible site to the nearby Iron Age hill-fort on The Wrekin.

Not only were many pre-Roman forts re-occupied during this period, but 'The Song of Llywarch the Old' calls the 7th Century capital of Powys 'Dinlle Wrecon', from which the word Wrekin probably derived.

The summit of the Wrekin is a stronghold with visible inner and outer lines of defence conforming to the shape of the hill. These are the remains of an Iron Age hill-fort. (There is a four mile circular walk up the Wrekin and around the fortifications on the summit which affords spectacular views over 12 counties).

## 7. MUCH WENLOCK PRIORY, THE CROWN JEWELS

Early Welsh poetry says that the treasures of Powys, seemingly the crown jewels of King Arthur himself, were hidden at the site of Much Wenlock Priory after the Anglo-Saxons defeated Cynddylan around 658AD. Probably the last Briton to rule in Shropshire, Cynddylan is described in 'The Song of Llywarch the Old' as Arthur's heir. The treasures of Powys remain undiscovered to this day.

A monastery was founded at Wenlock shortly before

690AD by Merewald, a member of the royal house of the kingdom of Mercia. Wenlock was re-founded as a Cluniac Priory by Roger de Montgomery after the Norman Conquest.

The remains of the church that can be seen today are those of the impressive 350ft long church which was reconstructed during the 1220's. The striking ruins stand in a peaceful setting with attractive gardens and topiary.