



Ynys Enlli

Directions: To visit Ynys Enlli / Bardsey Island contact www.bardseyboattrip.com 07971769895

*In the sea, there's an anchor for me –
through the dazzling
Swell of the Sound, I find Bardsey;
A boat can turn towards its calm
Where the foam is stilled.*

Myrddin ap Dafydd

Ynys Enlli has attracted pilgrims since the early centuries of Christianity and these days it attracts people wanting to go on a retreat.

It lies about 3km (1.75 miles) south east of the far end of Llŷn. Between Enlli and the mainland is the often tempestuous sound of the Swnt with its strong tides. This has always controlled the movements of the pilgrims.

The island has flat land along its western side (2.5km) from Pen Diban to Penrhyn Gogor, and the higher ground of Mynydd Enlli (167m) protects the lower ground from the easterly wind.

Enlli became the property of the Newborough Lordships in the early C18th and many of the houses and courtyards were built in the 1870s. Since 1979 it has belonged to Bardsey Island Trust. It's a special place because of its history and wildlife, and because of that it's a significant attraction for historians and naturalists as well as other visitors.

Enlli has a working farm, keeping sheep and Welsh Black cattle and the farmer and his family live at Dyno Goch.

Birdwatchers live in Cristin, and the island's warden at Tŷ Nesa. Ernest Evans, who was brought up on the island, and his wife Christine the English poet come here to stay the summer at Tŷ Nesa.

Stone tools were found on the west coast and the western slopes of the mountain, evidence of people here during very early times. So people must have been living here for over 4,000 years.

Enlli had a flourishing population of a hundred or more in the late C19th and early C20th. They had their own chapel and school and would sail as far as Liverpool to sell fish and lobsters caught here. In fact the women of Enlli were more fashionable than those of the Mainland!

But attractions and developments drew people away and the need to cross the Swnt often made the islanders' lives difficult compared to those on the Mainland. The population declined and there was a major migration away from the island in the 1920s.

By now however the island has enjoyed a second age and still attracts modern day pilgrims.

*There's a green track, lined with meadowsweet.
Stone houses, ramparts to the weather.
Small fields that run all one way
west to the sea, inviting feet
to make new paths to their own
discovered places.*

Christine Evans



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government





Enlli Pilgrims



Remains of the abbey with the chapel in the background

Ynys Enlli / Bardsey Island is referred to as the Rome of Wales, and three visits to the island were equal to one visit to the Holy City of Rome.

It's said the first monastery on Enlli was established in the C6th by Cadfan, a monk from Brittany and his followers, people like Lleuddad, Hywyn and Maelrhys. In 616 A.D., 1,200 monks from Bangor-on-Dee came here to seek sanctuary after their monastery was attacked.

Two gravestones in the chapel show that Christians were buried here around the C9th. Prominent saints like Dyfrig, Deiniol and Cybi came to the island at the end of their lives. There's a memorial stone to Cybi on the west coast of the island. Dyfrig's body was moved from here around 1120 A.D. to be buried in Llandaf (Landaff). Giraldus Cambrensis visited Nefyn in 1188 and he mentioned the Culdeans, the devoted monks of Enlli. He said it was claimed the air was so clean and pure on the island that people only died of old age there.

It's said there are twenty thousand saints buried on Enlli, but that's probably an exaggeration. Even so, farmers ploughing the land would very often find human bones, such as the skull found in 1995 with a coin from 1070 in its mouth.

The first clas in Llŷn was established on the slopes of Mynydd Anelog and then moved to Aberdaron but later Enlli was seen as a better place for retreat. These monks joined the Augustinian Order around 1200, which had very similar ideals to those of the Culdeans. This order was rich and it built an abbey whose ruins in those days brought wealth to Enlli. In the past, the wealth of the abbey attracted people to attack it, like the attack by John Bannerburg and his 30 soldiers in 1346 and another attack by men from Dublin later on.

The pilgrims would have tasks to complete as part of their penance and then they would give a few pennies to the abbey. Crossing the Swnt to Enlli would certainly have been another difficult task for them if the weather was stormy.

In time, the abbey declined and by the C16th it only brought in £2 a year in offerings. Even so, the Order still owned a great deal of land in Llŷn.

The abbey was dissolved in the 1530s, the same as happened to every other abbey. The screen and six bells from the abbey went to Llanengan church and the abbey building deteriorated.

The tower stand as evidence of how it flourished in the past and it brings pilgrims these days to visit this special retreat.

The Swnt and the Sea



Only the most experienced sailors should dare to cross the Swnt from the Mainland to Enlli / Bardsey. They need to know about the pattern of the incoming and outgoing tides, understand how the shape of the peninsula influences currents and flows, and read the weather. The boatmen of Aberdaron in the Age of the Pilgrims understood the elements exactly and knew full well about the seven tides of the Swnt. As the name suggests, they crossed either from Porth Meudwy (cove + hermit) or straight across from Ffynnon Fair to Bae'r Nant. By now, the landing place on Enlli is the Cafn.

Crossing the Swnt and communicating with the Mainland could be very difficult for the islanders. If a doctor were needed on Enlli then a fire would be lit on the mountain, or two fires if someone had died. The people of the Mainland would then reply from the slopes of Mynydd Mawr.

Almost everyone owned a boat, and fish would be nourishing and tasty food for them. People knew exactly where to find crabs in holes in the rocks and the holes all had names to make it easier to discuss where they were. Names such as Twll Ogo' Wiail (hole + cave + willow), Twll



Cyfyng (hole + restricted) and Twll Llaw Chwith (hole + left hand). It was only in Pembrokeshire, Llŷn and Enlli that lobsters would be caught to sell. The boats from Enlli would sail as far as Liverpool with their catch.

Every rock and inlet had a name; names that continue to be used these days. A number of them had historical connections, such as Carreg Gybi and Maen Bugel and there are interesting stories associated with the others. The sons of Tyddyn Mawr, Penllech were drowned near Trwyn Llanciau (peninsula + lads), and the old cemetery was near Trwyn y Fynwent (peninsula + cemetery). There's a tradition that the place where the pirate Harri Morgan landed is Ogo' Morgan (cave + Morgan). The residents in the past were insular and superstitious. It's not surprising there are Ogof Ellyll (cave + harmful spirit) and Ogof Tylwyth Teg (cave + fairies).

After the dissolution of the monasteries the island became a haven for pirates and the islanders certainly benefited from that. Goods that floated ashore from the sea were very useful and shipwrecks were welcomed. But they would often also be sad occasions as bodies came ashore.

It was the increase in traffic on the sea that led to the demand for a lighthouse on Enlli and in 1821 it was built, with a square white tower. The light still flashes regularly but the foghorn has now stopped. A new lamp was fitted in 2014, with a red light. It's hoped that will reduce the number of migrating birds attracted to the light and killed. The old lamp is now on display at Porth y Swnt.

The People of Enlli



It was the end of an age in the late 1920s, when people emigrated from Enlli. The attractions of the outside world were drawing young people to the Mainland and living conditions on the island became more difficult for the older people.

The island's residents had lived in their own way for some centuries, earning a living from farming and fishing. There was a good market for the fish, and the men of Enlli would sail as far as Liverpool to sell their produce. But they were insular people, introverted and superstitious.

The island belonged to the Newborough Lordships from the early C17th to the mid C20th. There was a good relationship between them and the islanders and they would visit regularly in summer. In the 1870s the 3rd Lord Newborough built farmhouses, agricultural buildings and sheltered courtyards for the islanders. He gave them a choice of providing either a mill for grinding corn or a chapel, and they chose a chapel. It was built in 1875 and it still stands these days, a short distance from the ruins of the abbey.

There was a gap in history of religion on Enlli and there is a reference to the residents being 'particularly ungodly and uncivilized'. In the early C19th one of the farmers, Robert Williams, was quite successful in ministering and leading services for a while. The Calvinistic Methodists of the Mainland felt that a Missionary should be sent to serve on Enlli. That person would also have the job of running the school, and the two establishments were very successful.

The residents of Enlli didn't have to pay any tax or tithe. A School Inspector came to Aberdaron, intent on visiting Enlli. But the boatmen on the beach were suspicious of him, thinking he had come to impose a tax on them and because of that no one would take him there.

The school remained open almost without interruption until 1950, when it closed because there were not enough children. At that time, the teacher there was the Crowned Bard Dilys Cadwaladr.

The Wildlife of Enlli



One of the main attractions of Ynys Enlli / Bardsey Island is the variety of its wildlife. The island is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve.



The farm has been leased to the RSPB and by doing that the natural characteristics will be protected. Enlli is on a bird migration route in spring and autumn and information is collected about the remarkable numbers of birds that call in at the island on their journeys. The Warden and birdwatchers keep records of them, and about 200 different species visit the island every year. The Bird and Field Observatory was established there in 1953 and it provides a detailed annual report.

There are no rats, snakes or foxes on the island, which explains why birds such as the Manx shearwater are so successful in breeding in underground tunnels. In fact one Manx shearwater from Enlli was recently 54 years old. Puffins have returned to the slopes of the mountain, where there are also razorbills and guillemots.

Grey seals can be seen lying on rocks in Honllwyn or heard singing from Carreg yr Honwy. Porpoises can be seen regularly off the coast and dolphins and orca from time to time.

Insects are recorded there, and moths are very numerous.

The light from the lighthouse is harmful to birds. They're attracted to the light and killed when they strike against the tower. An attempt has been made in 2014 to reduce this, by fitting a new lamp in the lighthouse. By now the lighthouse shows a red light and it's hoped it won't attract birds as much as the white light did. This will be much safer for migrating birds but it's possible fewer of them will choose to land on Enlli in future.

The King of Enlli



King John Williams II

One of the special things about Enlli / Bardsey is that it had a king. No one knows when or why this title was created, but William Bingley in 1804 said that a king had been crowned there some eight years earlier. Lord Newborough and his retinue came there for the crowning and colourful hats were distributed to the islanders. There was considerable festivity there and the nobility promoted the event, maybe at the expense of the residents.

In 1826 John Williams of Cristin was crowned King, using a crown presented by Lord Newborough. This crown is by now on display in Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery, Bangor. John Williams was ideally suited to be the leading citizen of Enlli because he was an excellent seaman and an agent for Trinity House, the lighthouse authority. He performed an act of heroism in helping the barque 'Lady Douglas' when it was in difficulty in Aberdaron bay and the crew had lost control of it.

But the irony is that John Williams himself was drowned in the Swnt in 1841, fairly close to the coast of Enlli. He was buried in Aberdaron cemetery. His wife had given birth to a son three days earlier, and that boy was named John.

In time he also became the King of Bardsey, John Williams II, but his reign was only a brief one and quite troubled. He had to go to live on the Mainland and died in Pwllheli Workhouse.

This happened in the early years of the C20th. The next and last king was Love Pritchard, although he was not from the Cristin family line. He was highly respected by the other residents and served as Lord Newborough's agent. He offered to serve in the Great War but was refused because he was over seventy years old! According to some people, that is why Enlli was neutral throughout the war.

Love Pritchard moved to the Mainland at the time of the great exodus of people and he settled in Uwchmynydd. He visited the National Eisteddfod in Pwllheli in 1925 and he and his crown were led to the stage there as one of the Welsh Exiles!

He died in 1926 and is buried high up on the slope in Aberdaron cemetery.

Arthur and Enlli

Ynys Enlli / Bardsey Island is Ynys Afallon, the Isle of Avalon. There are enough connections and evidence to prove that, which include:

The Battle of Camlan was fought at Porth Cadlan, near Aberdaron – King Arthur's final battle. 'Cadlan' means 'a battlefield'.



The patron saint of Aberdaron is Hywyn, and his mother was Gwenonwy. There's a large rock called Maen Gwenonwy (SH201259) in the sea between Trwyn y Penrhyn (SH188252) and Trwyn Talfarach (SH215257). Gwenonwy was the sister of Arthur.

The Battle of Camlan happened in the mid C6th. It was at that time that Hywyn established his church in Aberdaron. It's therefore very possible that Gwenonwy and Hywyn saw the Battle of Camlan.

Arthur's opponent in the battle was Medrawd, one who turned his back on Arthur. His army included Medrawd's father, called Cawrdaf, and Cawrdaf's brother, Cadfarch. Cawrdaf is the patron saint of Abererch Church, on the boundary between Llŷn and Eifionydd. There are the wells of Ffynnon Cawrdaf (Insert (SH 392357) and Ffynnon Cadfarch (Insert (SH 398402) in the area.

The church at Penrhos (Insert (SH 342337) was established by Cynfil. He was one of the Knights of the Round Table.

There are documents claiming that the Isle of Avalon is located between Borth, Ceredigion and Arklow, Ireland. Enlli is the only sizeable island in that area.

Arthur was taken to the Isle of Avalon on a ship, with three queens looking after him. He was cared for in a glass palace by Queen Morgan and her nine maidens.

Geoffrey of Monmouth said that Taliesin and Merlin (Myrddin) were on Enlli; Merlin was guarding the thirteen treasures of the island of Britain.

Apple trees grew in the glass palace. It's an interesting coincidence that a unique kind of apple tree was recently found on Enlli.

Myrddin and Taliesin took Arthur, after he was injured, to Insula pomorum que Fortunata, which is the island of apples – the fruitful isle. Is there a link between the Isle of Avalon – Afallon – and Ynys Afallen, the island of apples?

The old name for Swnt Enlli / Bardsey Sound was Caswennan. Out at sea south west of Enlli there is a tempestuous area of water. This is Gorffrydiau Caswennan, (it's shown on a map by Lewis Morris (1748)). Here according to tradition is where King Arthur's favourite ship, the '*Gwennan*', was sank.

No other island has as much evidence to prove its links with King Arthur.