



Cantre'r Gwaelod



Many lands have a legend about a land drowned by the sea, such as the Arthurian land of Avalon. Wales is no exception, but in this case it is no mere legend. Cantre'r Gwaelod was a low-lying fertile stretch of land covering much of what is now Cardigan Bay. Stories say it was drowned some 3,000 years ago when Seithenyn, charged with maintaining the sluice gates that protected the fields from the sea, got drunk on the night of a big storm. All the land was submerged and lost to the sea. Today you can still see the tree stumps of a drowned forest at the lowest tides at Borth, and further north is Sarn Dewi, a causeway that runs out to sea for over six miles. Fishermen report seeing buildings beneath the waves and on still nights the church bells can still be heard ringing.

What few know is that not all of Cantre'r Gwaelod was lost. Those church bells are the real thing. The main town of Caer Wyddno was



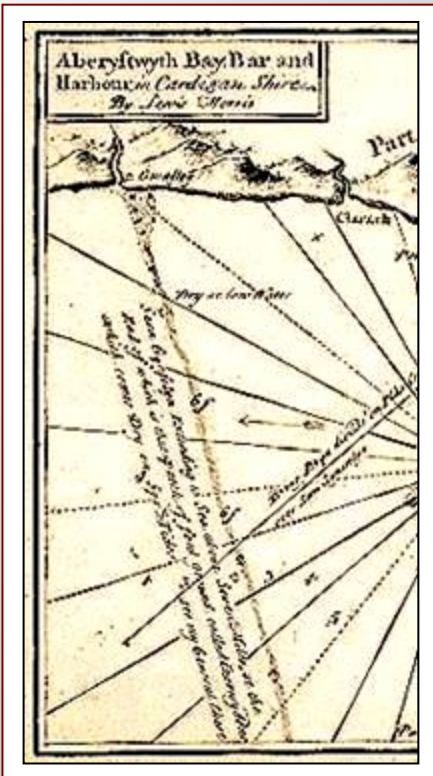
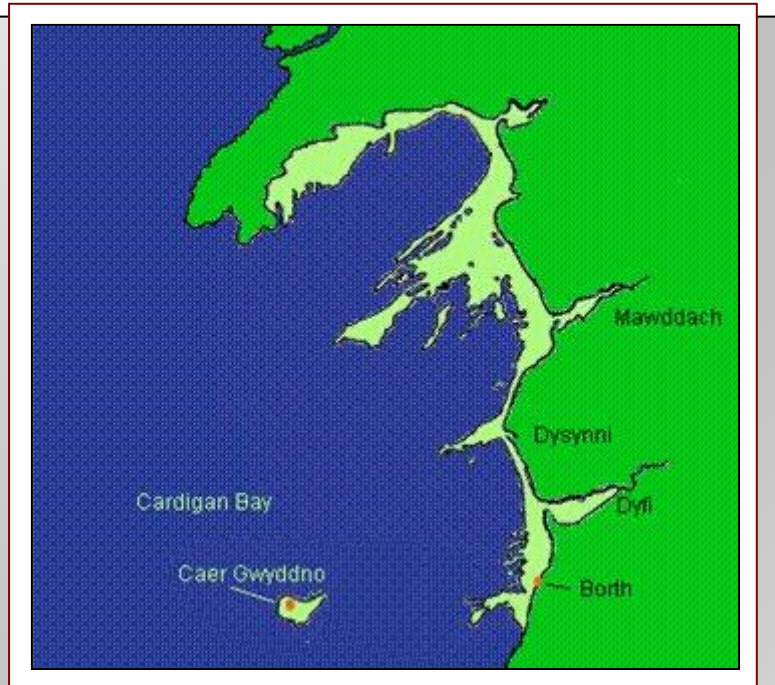
flooded in the deluge, but was not lost to the sea. What's left of Cantre'r Gwaelod lies just over the horizon and out of sight of the mainland. It is hidden from mariners by the rain, drizzle (the Welsh have 73 words for rain) and sea mists that make up the Welsh weather. The town is now fortified against the sea and the few fields are protected by dykes. The islanders are very insular and do not regard themselves as part of Britain; not even part of the Wales that we all know. They believe themselves to be the only true Welsh folk remaining. The islanders were converted to Christianity by St Gwynllyw when he got lost and ran aground there on his way to adopting a hermit's existence. They agreed to convert if he promised to keep up his quest (and stop ranting on).

While the town is still ruled feudally, with cars, bicycles, even hoops and sticks and any form of technology shunned, some mainland ideas are adopted. One of these is a postal system. There are just two rates. One for mail within Cantre'r Gwaelod, and one for the occasional mail sent to the mainland (usually Abermaw or Aberdyfi) for hand delivery.

Adhesive stamps are used, but they lack any indication of where they came from (apart from a Celtic design) and they only use simple numerals, I or II, for the two rates. These are not a value, but describe the purpose of the stamp, much like the 1st on UK stamps. For the first issue different colours have been recorded for both values. These were soon followed by a pair, showing a more complex Celtic design in complementary colours, which have remained in use. A pair of colourful pictorial stamps, showing views of the walled town (*Caer* in Welsh), seems to have been issued but whether these are a replacement issue or a special issue is unknown.

Of course, much of this is untrue.

This bit is for those who still doubt that Cantre'r Gwaelod is not fictional. While maps and details are far and few between, some information can be found on a simple Google search. A map diagram showing the shallower waters off the Cardigan Bay coast and the sites of three of the causeways or sarnau running out to sea, also shows the location of Caer Gwenno as an island lying in the shallow waters some miles out to sea.



Also a portion of an old chart of Aberystwyth Bay (just below the bottom of the other diagram) shows a narrow straight causeway, as Aberystwyth Bay bar, running out to sea in a direction down and slightly to the right, next to the writing.

While the most obvious and accessible area of fossil forest lies at the current lowest tide line at Borth, there are many other smaller areas with tree stumps exposed at low tide. In recent years a number of stumps have been buried deep in mud in the Dyfi estuary. Studies show these tree stumps to be 3,000 years old, the same as the drowning of Cantre'r Gwaelod. Coincidence or evidence?

Lastly a mosaic at Ynys Las nature reserve near Borth represents the drowning of Cantre'r Gwaelod. Unsurprisingly there are sea birds depicted, but interestingly there are 3 swifts too. These are birds of the fields and villages. Is that a subtle clue from the artist about the continued existence of Caer Gwenno?

