

THE FALL OF THE BRITONS' SHIP HAVEN AT PORTCHESTER

THE ELEGY OF GERAINT

The full story of the Saxon invasion of Britain has mostly been lost to history. There are scant records, such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which give us insight along with archaeological evidence. From these and what few other sources we have, sometimes we can piece together a story based on the best available evidence. When a Welsh poem and Saxon sources coincide, we have the basis of an Arthurian-era scenario.

By David Davies

The Elogy of Geraint is a poem from the Black Book of Carmarthen. It tells the story of Geraint the Great, a king of Dyfnaint (Dumnonia) who fought the Saxons at Llongborth (literally 'ships haven' in Welsh). There he fought alongside 'Arthur's men' but was slain fighting his foes. One possible site of this battle has been suggested to be Langport in Somerset, but the name is Saxon, derived from *Langeberga* or 'long market', and is likely to have been known as *Peryddon* to the Welsh on the river Parrot. A better site for the battle and fit-

ting the title of 'ships haven' is the old Roman fort at *Portus Arundi*, what is now called Portchester. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

AD 501. This year *Porta* and his two sons, *Beda* and *Mela*, came into Britain, with two ships, at a place called *Portsmouth*. They soon landed, and slew on the spot a young Briton of very high rank.

This section of the chronicle fits a location and the right time period, if the poem was accurate, in which Arthur's men (but notably not the legendary Arthur himself) fought alongside Geraint.

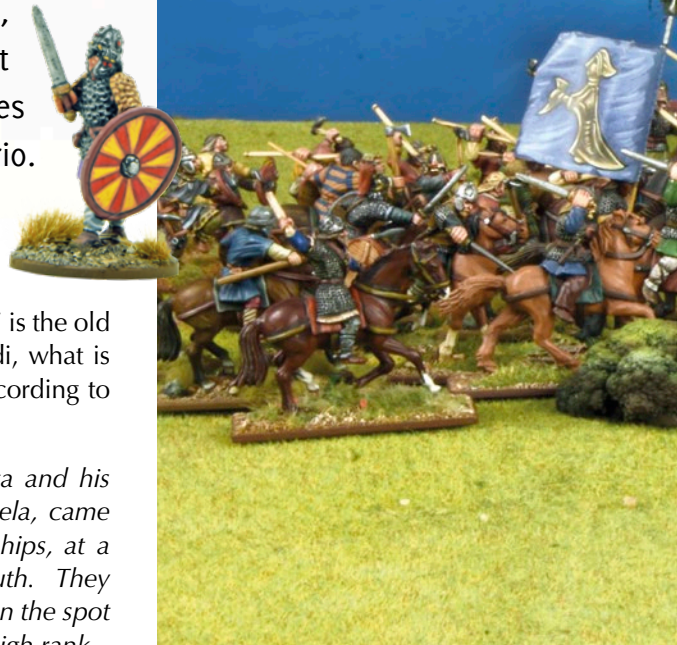
THE HISTORICAL GERAINT

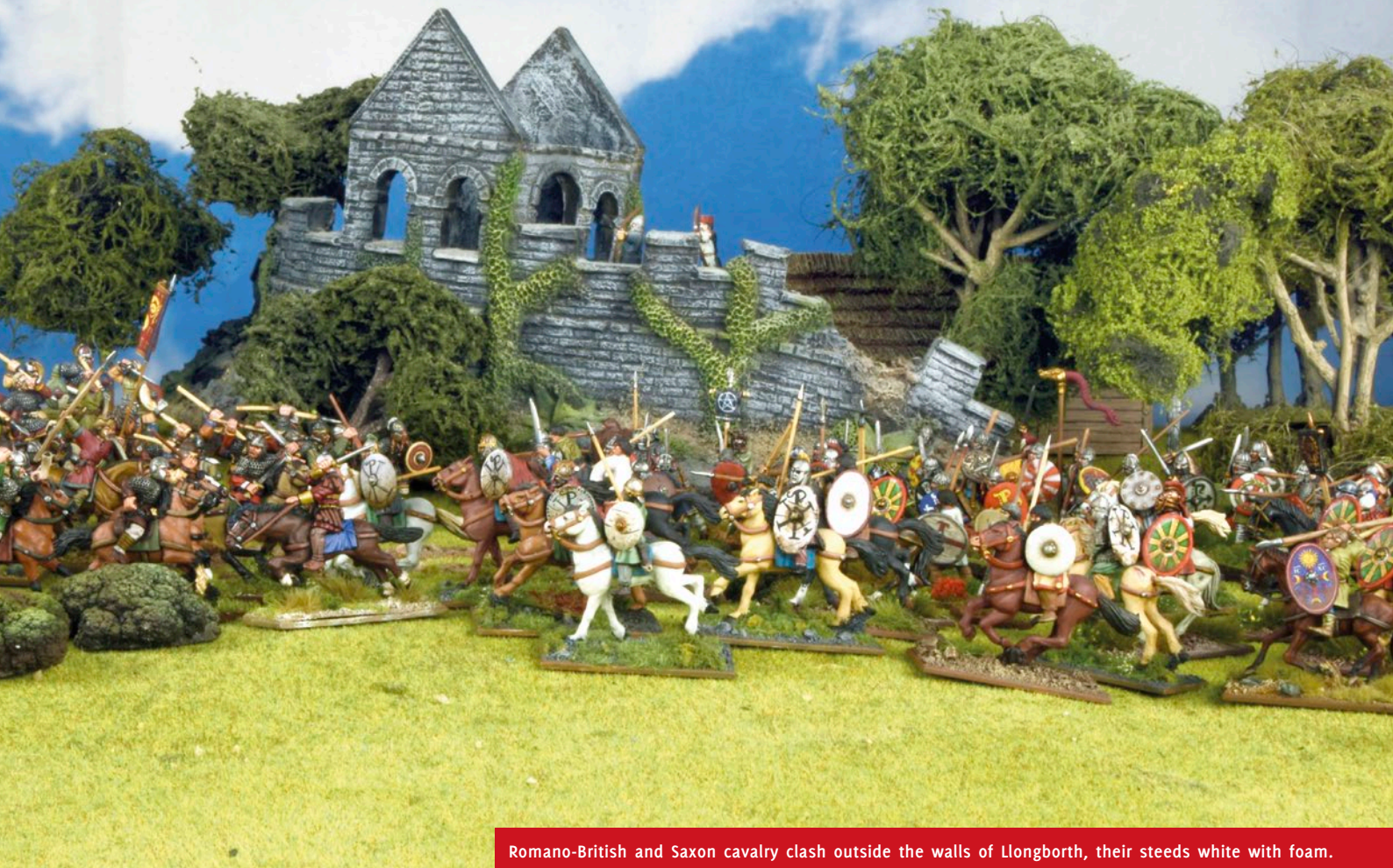
There is a little we can glean about the historical Geraint *Llyngesidd ab Erbin*, 'the admiral'. He was the son of the Dumno-

nii king *Erbin ap Constantine*. He also appears in the Welsh romance *Geraint and Enid*. According to the *Mabinogion*, Erbin was an old ruler whose kingdom was subject to attacks from his enemies. He recalled his son, Geraint, from the court of King Arthur to aid him in the war and restored the Dumnonii to power. Erbin then abdicated in his son's favour. In the Welsh Triads he is noted as a naval commander, owning six-score ships, each with six-score men. Finally, Geraint is named as one of Arthur's 'knights'.

THE ELEGY OF GERAINT

From these common threads, we have an important harbour, an admiral defending it, and an attacking Saxon horde. It might be a little bit of guesswork mixed with some historical basis, but that's about as good as we get for Arthurian Britain. Llongborth was a logical target for the Saxons and controlling it would diminish the Britons' ability to prevent coastal raids. The fortress would then be a springboard for other coastal





Romano-British and Saxon cavalry clash outside the walls of Llongborth, their steeds white with foam.

raids and for pushing the Saxon influence further westward.

Before Geraint, the scourge of the enemy, / I saw steeds white with foam, / And after the shout of battle, a fearful torrent.

At Llongborth I saw the raging of slaughter, / And an excessive carnage, / And warriors bloodstained from the assault of Geraint.

The *Elegy* mentions cavalry, so our battle sees the defenders of the old Roman fortress at Llongborth with Geraint's men and 'knights' from Arthur against a Saxon landing force. I have taken the liberty of assuming the Saxons had a small cavalry detachment that met with the landing force, and that the Saxons have managed to destroy the British fleet before landing. The battle takes place outside the Roman fort.

THE SCENARIO

This scenario has been designed with *Lion Rampant*



2 in mind. However, the basic scenario is generic enough to be tailored for other games. There are a few suggestions at the end for adapting it to some common game systems.

The terrain is flat and mostly open. The fortress is impassable to both sides, but the Britons are helped by some missile fire from the ramparts. If the Saxons get

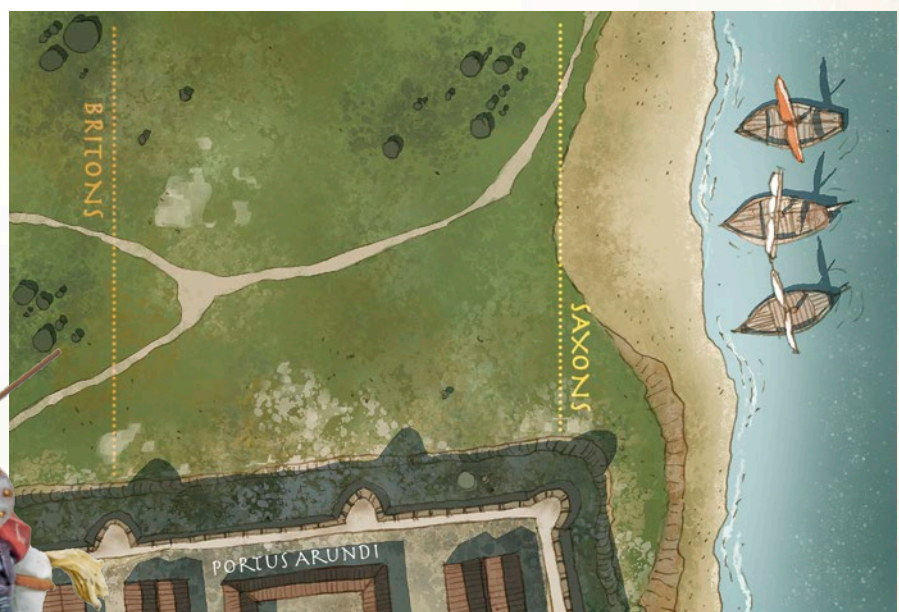
pushed back into the water, they can mount their boats and flee.

Each force is divided into two commands. A * denotes a leader with that unit.

Britons

Dumnonii force

- Geraint ab Erbin (rash, lionheart)



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The Saxons leap from their sailing vessels, rapidly moving towards the fortress, eagerly looking for combat.

- 1 x elite cavalry* (motivated, 7 points)
- 2 x heavy cavalry (8 points)
- 3 x light cavalry with javelins (9 points)

Llongborth garrison

- Dywel of Llongborth (commanding)
- 1 x heavy infantry* with javelins (5 points)
- 1x heavy infantry with javelins (5 points)
- 3 x light infantry with javelins (12 points)
- 1 x skirmishers (2 points)

The skirmishers may be placed on the walls of the fortress.

Saxons

Landing force

- Porta (brutal, aggressive)
- 1 x armoured warrior infantry* (6 points)
- 1 x heavy infantry with javelins and banner (6 points)
- 2 x light infantry with javelins (8 points)
- 1x slingers (3 points)
- 1 x skirmishers (2 points)

Flanking force

- Beda (aggressive, strongsword)
- 1x heavy cavalry* (4 points)
- 2x light cavalry with javelins (6 points)
- 2x light infantry with javelins (8 points)
- 1x slingers (3 points)
- 2 x skirmishers (4 points)



Victory

This is a straight-up pitched battle ("Bloodbath", page 137). The winner is the one who destroys the most enemy units. If either Geraint or Porta is killed, all of the units on their respective side must make a courage test. If Geraint is killed, the Saxons gain two victory points. If Porta is killed, the Britons gain one victory point.

If the Saxons are pushed into the sea, they may man their boats to escape. However, if any units do so, the Britons may claim an extra victory point.



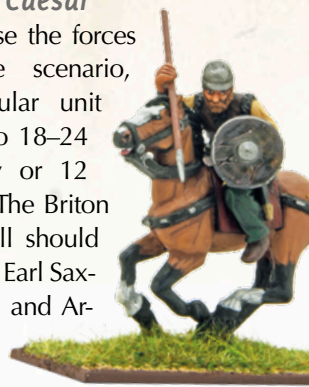
The Romano-British infantry brace against the oncoming tide of Saxons and prepare to counterattack.

ADAPTING TO OTHER SYSTEMS

Adapting to *Hail Caesar*

For *Hail Caesar*, use the forces suggested in the scenario, treating each regular unit as standard size, so 18–24 strong for infantry or 12 strong for cavalry. The Briton archers on the wall should be a small unit. The Earl Saxon list on page 13 and Arthurian British list on page 26 of the *Hail Caesar Army*

Lists: Late Antiquity to Early Medieval should be used. Arthur should be treated as a Leadership 9 general.



Adapting to *Swordpoint*

For *Swordpoint*, treat each unit as six bases strong. Use the Dark Age Britain and Ireland lists on page 7 of the *Swordpoint: Dark Age Armies* lists for the Saxons and the Romano-British entry from the Late Imperial Roman lists on page 10.

CONCLUSION

As the title suggests, Geraint was slain at Llongborth. The Saxon leader Porta took control of the area and probably gave his name to the fortress, which became known as Portchester. The Isle of Wight remained under the control of the Britons until Cerdic conquered it some 30 years later. **WS&S**