



# The story of Hugh Lupus, the Norman Earl of Chester and his connection with Deganwy.

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## Introduction

I took some interest some years ago in a talk given by David Haynes of the Llandudno Historical Society about the origins of the name "Bryn Lupus Rd" and he pointed me in the direction of the Lowe family of Deganwy who claim descent from this important Marcher Lord. The research I have undertaken so far paints an interesting picture of Norman incursions into 11th century Wales with his cousin Robert of Rhuddlan but proving descent from Hugh d'Avranches (Hugh Lupus) is proving challenging. This study is not comprehensive but is particularly biased towards Deganwy and the claim of the Lowe family of descent from Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester. Thus providing "Bryn Lupus Road" in the Deganwy / Llanrhos area. For the purposes of this study I will call him Hugh Lupus i.e. Hugh the Wolf although he is often referred to also as "Hugh the fat".

Elan Rivers ,

History of Deganwy Group, 2013

## Origins.



Earl Hugh and his cousin Robert of Rhuddlan are both descended from Ansfrid or Amfrid a Dane.

Hugh Lupus was the son of Richard Goz, Vicomte d'Avranches but his paternal family were land owners in the Cotentin in France. His father supplied many ships to assist William the Conqueror in the invasion of England in 1066. Soon after the invasion whilst still a young man he crossed to England in the service of King William.

His first military command was at Tutbury Castle in the ancient Kingdom of Mercia (now Staffordshire). About 1070 King William gave him a much more powerful role and made him Earl of Chester. He worked in partnership with two other powerful earls, his cousin Robert of Rhuddlan, and an older man Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury (he was a close friend of King William). These were three Norman earls charged with securing the borders against the rebellious Welsh.



They were also given vast estates and in the case of Hugh Lupus almost all of Cheshire and large areas of the Midlands. In 1066 Domesday records 487 houses in Chester as paying \*geld but the city had fallen into decline when Earl Hugh received it and there were still only 282 houses there in 1086. Domesday Cheshire included the whole of Flintshire and much of the present Denbighshire. There isn't much information on the holdings of land to the west of Rhuddlan held between Earl Hugh and Robert of Rhuddlan. Some of the Welsh place names have been lost so it's difficult to make any assessments of land ownership beyond Rhuddlan ( the\* castle being built by Robert of Rhuddlan). Robert of Rhuddlan and Earl Hugh appear to have held areas of North Wales between them,

i.e. Rhos and Rhufoniog and Rhuddlan also Deganwy.



Robert seems to have had the legal land rights over Gwynedd but Hugh seems to have used his armies to reinforce this until Robert is killed in 1093 near the Great Orme fighting the Welsh whilst staying at Deganwy Castle. This led to Hugh taking over Robert's responsibilities and lands in North Wales. One of the

features, we understand, of the character of the early Marcher Lords was that they took their securing of their positions quite seriously and one chronicler mentions Hugh Lupus travelling around his domain with a small army. "The Earl (Hugh) took wholeheartedly to his new found wealth and indulged himself totally in food, hunting and women". It is known that he fathered a lot of illegitimate children and so this leads to further complications for the family historian. Another difficulty is that he gave many of his estates to young men from Normandy of good family but these young men may also have fathered children outside marriage and so the search for the family connection with the 11th century and the Lowe's of Deganwy living in the 21st century continues .

After a considerable amount of fighting between the Welsh princes Gruffydd ap Cynan emerges as challenger to become the potential King of Gwynedd and all Wales. He is the grandson of Sitric, King of Dublin. So that in fact Gruffydd is part Viking part Welsh and he employs his Irish based relatives to make a bid for power in Wales. Gruffydd used the Normans at Rhuddlan at first to help him in battle. He then made the mistake of attacking the Normans in Rhuddlan and he was tricked by Earl Hugh of Chester (around 1081) and imprisoned by him for many years in Chester. In this study the achievements of both Hugh Lupus and Robert of Rhuddlan are so intertwined that it is probable that Robert was responsible for Deganwy Castle and that Hugh and his armies actually rebuilt the castle.

\*It is thought that around this time Hugh Lupus built castles in the west of Gwynedd including the motte and bailey castle at Aberlleiniog, Anglesey (built 1088?) .



William (the Conqueror) died in 1087 and was succeeded by his second son William Rufus to whom the Marcher Lords switched their allegiance. From time to time Hugh was away either in England, Scotland or France assisting the King. During the 1080's he married Ermentrude, daughter of Hugh de Clermont and they had one son, Richard, who later died in the\*“White Ship disaster of 1120.”

Robert of Rhuddlan based himself at Deganwy Castle at a time of the great Welsh revolt. He got word that the Welsh were loading loot off the Great Orme and so as to catch them before they sailed away on the tide he rushed out with only his standard bearer to accompany him and was speared to death by the Welsh who sailed away with his head on a spike on one of their ships. He died in 1093 and Earl Hugh took over his lands and responsibilities. Around about this time Gruffydd ap Cynan after escaping from prison reignited rebellion amongst the Welsh in order to establish his right to the kingdom of his ancestors. The two Marcher Lords, Hugh Lupus and the Earl of Shrewsbury fought a campaign against Gruffydd ap Cynan at the Battle of Menai Straits in 1098 but they were defeated by Magnus Barefoot, King of Norway (an ally of Gruffydd) and the Earl of Shrewsbury was killed (shot through the eye). Although the Normans didn't win this battle Hugh Lupus did come away from Anglesey with lots of booty and prisoners. After this, the hold the Normans had, particularly in Gwynedd slackened and although William Rufus sent Royal forces into Wales and his brother and successor Henry 1st. made further incursions it would be another two hundred years in the reign of Edward 1st. before serious subjugation took place. During the 1090's Hugh Lupus and his wife took a keen interest in re - founding the minster church of Saint Werburgh (now Chester Cathedral) as a Benedictine Monastery and was able to persuade no less a person than Anselm of Bec to become the Abbot and with the monks he brought they formed the basis of the new foundation. About 1100 Earl Hugh became ill and died in 1101. He was buried in the Abbey grounds but later moved inside to the Chapter House where I understand several other Earls of Chester were buried. On a visit to Chester Abbey, (Cathedral now) I was told by the cathedral historian that all these corpses were dug up and their whereabouts are unknown.

The Simon Ripley Stone (Can be seen in the Cloisters laid against the wall).



"This stone was found under the Chapter House floor in 1723 covering the upper part of a coffin. The monogram S. R. is that of Abbot Simon Ripley 1485-93 who finished the building of the nave and central tower. In the coffin was a skeleton wrapped in black leather 18th Century antiquaries thought the Wolf's

Head on the stone showed it was the grave of Hugh Lupus (died 1101) the Earl of Chester and founder of the Abbey. If so, the coffin must have been renewed in the time of Simon Ripley as the stone is late 15th. century in date."

### Concerning the "Lowe" family of Deganwy

At present I have been unable to directly connect the Lowe's with Hugh Lupus of the 11th century. It is possible that the only way to connect them and be certain is a DNA test with a member of the Duke of Westminster's family who also claim to be descended from Hugh Lupus. In an old section of a diary kindly shown to me by John Lowe, a predecessor of his writing in 1858 says that he has examined the family pedigree and finds it correct back to Elizabethan times but is then not entirely sure going further back than this as to the correctness of the research. However, there are some pointers which are intriguing. Firstly, the Lowe family jewellers are still based in Chester, although the Deganwy branch came to Llandudno to set up business in the 1850's. Also on looking in P.H.Reaney's Dictionary of British surnames the name "Lowe" is described as 1) being a short person or 2) a cunning wolf.



The house "Bryn Lupus" i.e. "Wolf's Hill" was built in the 1880's for George Lowe born 1847 who retired here from his work as a jeweller in Chester. The family chose the wolf's head as a family motto and the words "whosoever feeds the raven in turn feeds the wolf." George Lowe eventually moved to Barmouth. Harold Godfrey Lowe his son was the 5th officer on the Titanic when it sank in 1912. He was 29 at the time and became a Commander in the Mercantile Navy. He moved to no.1 Marine Crescent in the 1930's and his grandson John Lowe and his family live there now (2013). Harold Godfrey Lowe died on the 12th. May 1944 and he is buried at Llandrillo yn Rhos. Harold Godfrey Lowe's courageous deed is recognised by a plaque on 1 Marine Crescent, Deganwy.

"Bryn Lupus", the house became a convalescent home for male patients for the Manchester and Salford Hospital Saturday Fund and it was renamed "Swinglehurst".

an earlier postcard and painting of Swindlehurst / Swinglehurst





## Obituary

### *A TRIBUTE TO THE LATE MR. CHAS. SWINGLEHURST, O.B.E., M.A.*



Mr. Chas. Swinglehurst passed away suddenly on the 18th June, 1947.

Mr. Swinglehurst had been a member of the Committee for fifty years and Chairman of the Fund for thirty-six years. During this time, he saw the Fund progress from a small organisation to become one of the largest contributory schemes in the country, with an income of £359,000 in 1946. During his lifetime, five convalescent homes were built or acquired, and one of them at Deganwy bears his name as a lasting memorial to his devotion to the Fund.

Mr. Swinglehurst was a great leader and an inspiration to all who worked with him. He never missed an Annual Meeting during the time he was Chairman, and seldom missed a meeting of the Executive Committee. He was a great worker for the Voluntary Hospitals and various charitable organisations in Manchester and was always trying to raise money on their behalf.

His loss will be felt by the Executive Committee, the delegates and all who knew him.

Mr. Percy Chadwick, J.P., who has been the Vice-Chairman for twenty years, succeeds Mr. Swinglehurst as Chairman of the Fund, and Mr. T. Barnes, for many years the Chairman of the Finance Committee, succeeds Mr. Chadwick as Vice-Chairman of the Fund. Under their leadership it is hoped that the Fund will continue to prosper and provide benefits for the members.

Next door "Plas Mariandir" dealt with female patients.

"Bryn Lupus" fell into disrepair and was eventually pulled down in `1965. The



porter's Lodge still survives and is called Swinglehurst. On the site now is a modern housing development built by Macbryde's in the 1990's.

### **Acknowledgements**

My thanks to Mr John Lowe and Mr Gwyn Hughes for their invaluable input into this report.

Elan Rivers .

## **Appendix**

\*Motte and bailey castles built when the Normans came as conquerors (not the Edwardian Castles visible today built by Edward 1st later.)

\*Geld is a land tax imposed in late Anglo Saxon times and continued by the Normans.

\*Robert of Rhuddlan's torso was taken back to Chester Abbey (now Chester Cathedral) and buried there. It was later exhumed and reburied at St. Evroult's monastery in Normandy.

\*White ship disaster 1120. King Henry 1st who succeeded William Rufus(his brother) had a successful campaign against the French and many senior Norman nobles including Henry's only legitimate son William(heir to the throne) were drowned when the ship which was returning to England sank off the Normandy coast. Amongst the dead was the second Earl of Chester, the only legitimate son of Hugh Lupus. It is thought that the crew and passengers were all drunk as they were celebrating their victory against the French.

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# Grŵp Hanes Deganwy - History of Deganwy Group



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***by  
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***2013***

