

## An exploration of the story of Carausius

Inspired by the work of the Center (sic) for the Study of Ancient Wales in Texas under Darrell Wolcott and the book *Carausius and Allectus* by P.J. Casey.  
John Pitts, November 2021

### Background

The Roman empire at the time was beset with problems of revolts in many areas. Controlling and governing an area of its size was proving difficult and expensive. An era of delegation and devolution was instituted by Diocletian, who was the Roman emperor from 284 to 305 AD. Born to a family of low status in the Roman province of Dalmatia, Diocletian rose through the ranks of the military to become cavalry commander to the Emperor Carus. After the deaths of Carus and his son Numerian on campaign in Persia, Diocletian was proclaimed emperor. Diocletian's reign stabilized the empire, and marked the end of the Crisis of the Third Century. He appointed a fellow officer, Maximian, as Augustus, co-emperor, in 286AD. Diocletian delegated further in 293AD, appointing Galerius and Constantius as caesars, junior co-emperors. Under this "tetrarchy," or "rule of four," each emperor would rule over a quarter-division of the empire. Diocletian further secured the empire's borders and purged it of all threats to his power.

Maximian appointed Carausius, a skilled sailor and warrior to clear the English and Bristol Channels of pirates. In this he was successful, but when it was pointed out to Maximian that much of the captured loot was failing to get to the Roman authorities, his capture for execution was ordered. At this point, he rebelled by calling himself emperor.

### What we know.

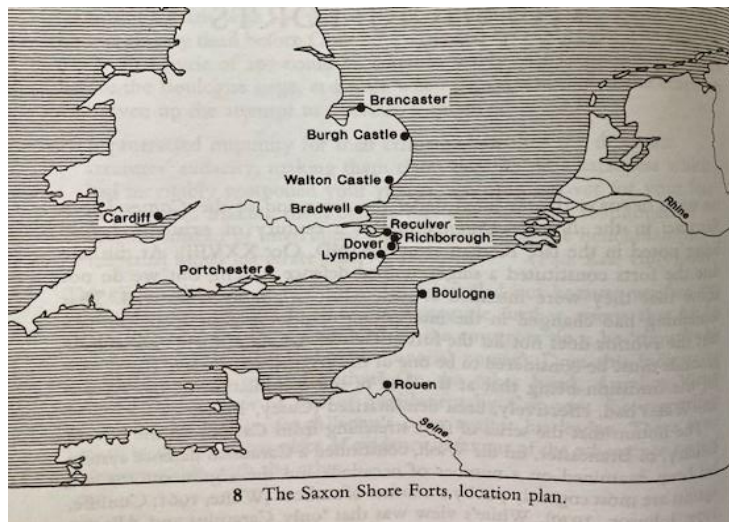
In 286AD a revolt against the ruling Roman empire occurred, led by a man called Carausius (Mauseus Carausius Dionotus). Said to be of low birth, and a skilled sailor, he is often referred to as Menapiian, from the longstanding Celtic tribe based around modern day Belgium and Holland. They were a trading nation with outposts in Wexford, Ireland and Wales, both known to the ancients as Menapia. Overall though, it must be said that it is generally acknowledged that his origin remains unknown (**Mongan**, 1995).

A popular leader of both the army and navy, when Carausius declared himself emperor, he controlled an area that included not just England and Wales but territory in Gaul. At this time his forces comprised his existing fleet, new ships he had built, three legions stationed in Britain, one in Gaul, some foreign auxiliary units, a levy of Gaulish merchant ships and barbarian mercenaries attracted by the prospect of booty (Wikipedia).

The independence of Britain under Carausius depended on sea power, but in anticipation of Maximian's counter attack, fortifications known as the Saxon Shore forts were either constructed (**White**, 1961) or previous constructions reinforced (**Johnson**, 1979). In 289 Maximian did indeed mount an invasion that failed catastrophically due either to natural causes or military defeat. Having lost northern Gaul to Maximian's advance, Carausius was able to consolidate his rule over the island of Britain. At this point, Diocletian and Maximian were forced to accept Carausius as an emperor pro tem. His rule ended after seven years when he was assassinated by his 'finance minister', Allectus who then declared himself emperor in his place. After three years of rule, he in turn was killed by Asclepiodotus, a Roman, the deputy of Constantius who was appointed to mount the invasion.

**Casey** (1994) writes that 'This whole episode made little impact in the Roman world as a whole, and by the time the Byzantine historian **Zonaras** completed his universal history of the world in the early twelfth century, the memory of events had become hopelessly distorted'.

The story seemed to rest for several hundred years.

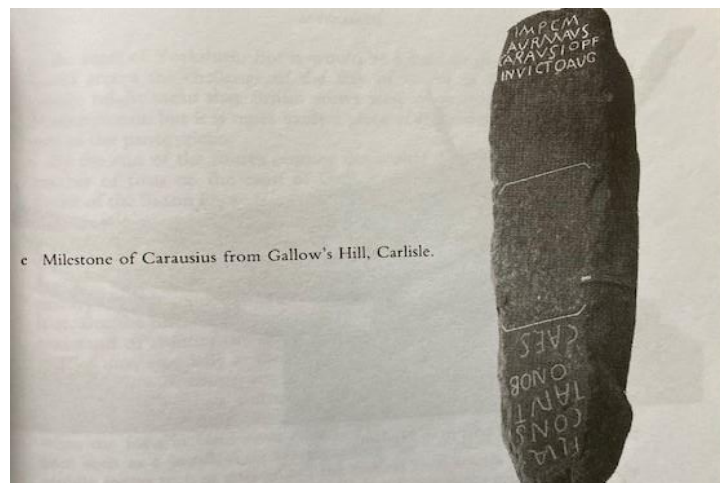
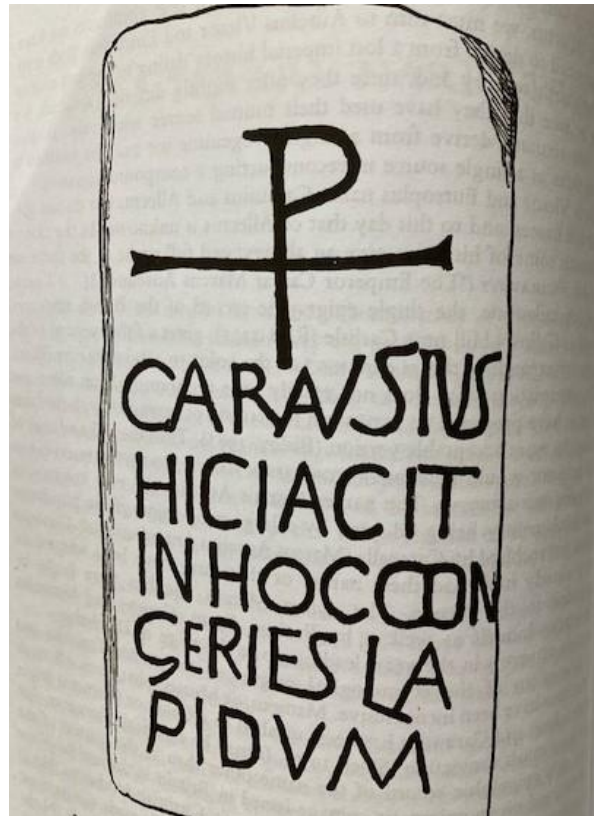


### The resurgence of interest in the 16-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Britain at this period of time was at the forefront of intellectual renaissance. The Industrial Revolution was changing the world and there was a huge growth in scientific knowledge. The Arts thrived with literature, painting and the theatre. In the footsteps of the great empires of the Greeks, Persians, Romans, Vikings, the Islamic empires of the middle east and Africa, competition among European powers to create empires was intense, and the British were particularly successful. Widespread throughout previous history, slavery was abolished by the British in 1807. Part of this intellectual growth involved looking backwards, with the availability of printed material facilitating discussion and argument.

Contemporary accounts existed in the writings of **Aurelius Victor** and **Eutropius**, who named both Carausius and Allectus in part. Other historians and panegyricists such as **Claudius Mamertinus** wrote in demeaning and insulting terms such as pirate and robber, and were unusually silent when Carausius scored a major victory over Maximian in 289. In the West, **Orosius** paraphrased **Eutropius** and **Bede** reproduced **Orosius** word for word.

Coin inscriptions suggest the full title adopted could be something like Marcus Aurelius Mauseus Carausius Augustus. Many emperors adopted the Marcus Aurelius names. Discussion of the etymological origins are inconclusive; Mauseus has genuine Roman antecedents and Carausius has been ascribed to Celtic or Germanic origins (Shiel, 1977). The only other records of the name other than the revolt itself and coinage is in an inscription on an early Christian tombstone, now residing in the village church in Penmachno, in north Wales (*'Carausius lies here under this pile of stones'*) and a milestone from Gallow's Hill, Carlisle which was interestingly recycled and inverted after his defeat with the name of Constantine, the emperor son of Constantius.



### Later investigations and claims.

In this section I am going to summarise the points made by later writers and historians in rough chronological order to find what picture can be painted.

**Fifth Century.** **Gildas**, a monk who created the first written account of Britain (*De Excidio Britanniae*) makes no mention, which Casey (1994) describes as a 'startling commentary on his knowledge of Roman Britain'.

**Tenth century.** **Nennius** created the *Historia Brittonum*, a miscellany created at St. David's in South-west Wales. He listed in an inaccurate form a list of emperors who visited Britain, names Carausius as Caritius and credits him with slaying the emperor Severus, who in fact had died of natural causes in York in 211.

**Twelfth century.** **Geoffrey of Monmouth** wrote the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, claiming various ancient texts and oral histories and drew on Gildas and Nennius. His work is regarded with scepticism, but was influential in creating stories of King Lear and Arthurian tales. His Carausius appears after the defeat of Severus' army as petitioning Rome for command of a fleet to defend Britain. He declared himself king, killed Bassianus, Severus' surviving son, and gave lands to the Picts. This took root in Scottish history as legitimising the territorial integrity of Scotland. Casey (1994) writes that the conjunction of Carausius and the Picts is extraordinary as the first mention of them in Roman literature postdates the demise of Carausius, appearing when Constantius arrived to campaign against them nine years after the defeat of Allectus. Geoffrey's version of events is that Coel Hen, an overking of much of northern England and Wales rose against and killed Asclepiodotus, the killer of Allectus. Subsequently, Constantius marries Coel's daughter Helen, and fathers Constantine I, the Great.

**Fourteenth century.** **John of Fordun**, a chronicler of Scotland picked up the Scottish thread in *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* to provide an inspirational version of its history designed to support the independence of Scotland. The Carausian part follows that of Geoffrey, and Carausius, supported by Picts and Scots defeated Quintus Bassianus, (who in this account was not a son of Severus). When Carausius was killed by Allectus, the unity of the nation collapses.

**Fifteenth century.** **Hector Boethius** continued the nationalistic theme in the *Scottish Chronicle*. **Webb** (1906) claimed that his account was "most interesting and it is difficult to regard it as purely imaginary. Its details are minute and not inconsistent with the accounts of Roman authors". However scepticism of the account was expressed early on, bolstered by the account of a domed building near Falkirk known as Arthur's O'on, or Oven, which was probably a mausoleum or shrine constructed during the Antonine occupation of Scotland. On the banks of the river Carron it was exploited as proof again of the involvement of Carausius in Scotland.

**Sixteenth century.** Translated from the original Latin, Boethius' work was used in Holinshed's *Chronicles*. **Holinshed** contributes a version of the Carausius story to English history, based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's account. Casey (1994) avers that after study of Geoffrey's account for completeness, he "cuts the Gordian knot of three centuries of speculation to reiterate the contemporary Latin sources, sorts their evidence into order and offers a series of correct dates and events and offers an English translation of the panegyric of 297. This represents a considerable scholarly achievement from which an understanding of events might have been launched".

**Seventeenth century.** However, the influence of Geoffrey was passed on by **John Speed** in *The History of Great Britaine* to the next generation of historians.

The story also involved continental historians who tended to use the ancient texts. Writing primarily about Allectus, **Tristan** in his *Commentaires Historique* considers the Menapian origins and concludes that "Carausius, whose forename and family name we do not know, was Hibernian" (implying Irish). At the same time, strange claims were being made by **Giacomo Zabarella** in Venice, with the purpose of establishing that the Doge, Giovanni Pesaro, was descended from Carausius for

reasons of political status. Using Geoffrey and his own ideas he built a family tree to connect these families. Conjecture apart, it is interesting to note that he stated that Carausius was related to King Coel, and father in law to Constantine I, and that earlier a king called Cunobeline had produced a son called Carausius who fathered a line of Carausii with the fourth being our hero here. It can be pointed out that Cunobelinus is regarded as the father of Caradog (Caratacus), one of the two contenders for the historical leader that stood against the Roman invasion in the first century; the other being Caradog ap Bran of the Ordovice of North Wales who, described by Tacitus as 'unbeaten in battle' has a better claim than the other who was soundly defeated in a battle in which his brother was killed.

A comprehensive approach was taken by **Claude Genebrier** who included numismatic study in his sources, but the purpose was firmly partisan, designed to flatter his patron, John Carteret, Earl of Granville, who was Viceroy of Ireland and so the Irish origin was for Carausius was included.

**Eighteenth century.** **William Stukely** became one of the most controversial figures in Carausian studies with continued disagreements with **John Kennedy**. Initial controversy centred around a coin found at Silchester (Roman *Calleva*) that had an impression of Carausius on one side and a female figure on the reverse, a figure identified to Stukely and Kennedy as Oriuna, though possibly Fortuna. Kennedy claimed that Oriuna was the patron deity of Carausius; Stukely his wife. Kennedy published his '*Dissertation upon Oriuna*' followed by Stukely's '*Oriuna, wife of Carausius, Emperor of Britain*'. Their arguments continued until Stukely's '*The Medalllic History of Marcus Aurelius Carausius, Emperor in Britain*', which became established as the base for Carausian studies for the next century. He had included in his work an account given to him by **Charles Bertram**, who faked a chronicle that claimed to be by a fourteenth century monk, **Richard of Cirencester**. In it he constructed a map of Roman Britain, from which Stukely concluded that Menapia was St. David's in Pembrokeshire, creating a Welsh Carausius to compete with the Dutch and Irish ones. **James Macpherson** published a set of poems based on his claim to have discovered a set of poems dating back to Roman times by Ossian but based on his own partisan ideas and old Scottish ballads.

These public debates had some interesting spinoffs. The Oriuna story became the subject of a play by **Samuel Foote** at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1745; in the same year, **Thomas Amory** published '*Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*' where one character claims to have found an urn containing the ashes of Carausius.

**Richard Gough** raised a voice against Stukely in an anonymous publication in Camden's *Britannia* but his influence continued when naval hero worship raised Carausius to a British naval one. **Captain George Berkley's** *Naval History of Britain* elevated Carausius as teaching Britain the importance of a strong navy for both defence and offence. This work was criticised as having been assembled by **John Hill**, a 'notorious literary hack' using Berkley's posthumous papers. However, **Gibbon**, in his *Decline and fall of the Roman Empire* wrote that 'his fleets rode triumphant.....under his command, Britain destined in a future age to obtain the empire of the sea, already assumed its natural and respected station of a maritime nation'. **Campbell's** *Lives of the British Admirals* followed this line, claiming Carausius as a British hero.

**Nineteenth century.** The focus here took on a numismatic slant as more Roman coinage was recovered and categorised, culminating in the publications of **Percy Webb** such as '*The reign and coinage of Carausius*' and '*The Roman Imperial Coinage*' in the following century. Finally, the American writer **John Watts de Peyster**, among his writings extolling the virtues and achievements of the Dutch incorporates the Carausian story firmly within this range. His suggested melodrama was never made, but we can but await Andrew Lloyd-Webber's '*Carausius the musical*'!

## Fading lights.

**Casey** (1994) raises the interesting question of why, in the panorama of great British heroes, Carausius is today excluded. We have Boudicca, whose revolt barely changed the course of history, Arthur, whose valiant stand against the Saxons at Mount Badon around 500AD after a long campaign of resistance eventually failed to defeat the Saxon takeover of England, and Alfred and his grandson Athelstan who laid the foundations of a unified England.

Perhaps, apart from the chronological separation of nearly two millennia, we are left with uncertainty as to whether he counts as a truly British hero because of controversy over his place of birth.

A resurgence of Carausian studies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, based on speculation as much as the limited historical data, provoked vigorous discussion and outright hostility among its contributors.

In modern times, the image of Britain going its own way after becoming unhappy with foreign rule is captured in an article titled 'Britain's first Brexit was in 286AD' (Woolf, 2021). Described as a Romanised Celt, the author likens him to Sir Davos Seaworth, the naval commander in *Game of Thrones* played by Liam Cunningham.

While his place of birth is uncertain, **Darrell Wolcott** ([www.ancientwalesstudies.org](http://www.ancientwalesstudies.org)) makes a strong case for Carausius being Welsh. I am going to use his own paper in its entirety to state this case.

### BRITAIN'S ROYAL ROMAN FAMILY By Darrell Wolcott

We have previously suggested there was one special family on the isle of Britain in the 4th century which was recognized as worthy "to wear the purple" and rule as Emperor in the Roman style. It began as a purely Celt family where the concept of a "kingly" family ruling a tribe was long established. While that form of government in Wales continued until the Edwardian Conquest, its Roman nature, which had been strong for 200 years, began to fade away in the century after Rome officially withdrew from the island. The most Romanized element of the population lived in the cities of the flatlands which were overrun by Saxons in the 5th and later centuries; by the end of the 7th century, only the mountainous lands in the west, dubbed "weahls", remained under Celtic control.

Our story begins with the family descended from the brave Caraticus whose AD 51 stand against the Roman invasion was recorded by Tacitus. Called "Silures" in that account, the family had settled in Wales two generations earlier by the arrival of a Menapien mariner known only as Llyr Llediath, the "man of the seas who spoke with a foreign accent". By the beginning of the 3rd century, his descendants held lands circling the coast of Wales, from Caerleon in Gwent to Menevia in Dyfed to Segontium by the Menai Straits to Degannwy at the mouth of the Conwy and Rhuddlan at the Clwyd. If the rugged interior of Wales was populated by earlier tribes unrelated to this family, none of their names have been preserved. It is our belief the early Roman conquerors referred to them as "mountain men" or Silures, and called the ruling family "Ordovices". We think later historians referred to men of that ruling family as "Menapians" from their pre-British ancestry.

That this family provided military leaders for the Roman legions as early as the 2nd century is indicated by the name cited for a great-grandson of Caraticus: Meirchion Fawr Filwr, the "great soldier". Four generations later, the early pedigree materials identify four brothers born about the first quarter of the third century, sons of Einudd ap Gwrddwyfan:

1. Caradog, the eldest born c. 220 to the first wife of Einudd and who resided at Minevia in Dyfed, and ruled a territory called Demetia.
2. Arthfael, born to Einudd's second wife about 230 and who resided at Llanmelin in lower Gwent, and ruled a territory called Dumnonia.
3. Eudaf Hen, born about 230 who resided at Segontium across the Menai from Anglesey in Gwynedd, and ruled a territory called Cernyw.
4. Gereint, born c. 235 who resided at Degannwy, and ruled a territory called Llydaw. His son Cynan resided at Rhuddlan and held a lordship called Meriadog during the life of his father.

Caradog ap Eunydd had a son born c. 250 named Ceris, who became a skilled seaman since his father's kingdom extended both above and below the Bristol Channel (Dyfed and Cornwall). When Roman Emperor Maximianus Herculius sought an admiral to clear pirates from the North Sea off the coast of France, he was referred to Ceris. Pronounced KARE-us in the Brythonic Celt language, this man became known by the Latin cognomen Mauseus Carausius Dionotus. While his fleet achieved the Roman goal of defeating and deterring piracy on the seas between Britain and France, it is claimed that he would wait until they had plundered coastal towns and attack their ships only when loaded with loot. When it was reported to the Emperor that such loot



When Maxen Wledig was killed in 388, none of his sons were yet old enough to rule. Desperately needing military assistance to repel Picts invading from the north, the British ruling council invited Rome to reassume control of the island. Stilicho was sent with a legion to oust the Picts and regain Britain for the Western Roman Empire. But about 405, his army was required on the European continent and his withdrawal again left the island undefended. When Honorius told the ruling council to look to their own defenses, they again annointed a "breakaway" Emperor, again chosen from the same family:

300 Ceris (Carausius II)  
|  
330 Selyf  
|  
365 Custinnen aka Constantine III

The Roman legions had put forth two "Emperor" candidates from their own ranks, but both had been rejected and deposed by the ruling council as unfit outsiders. The suitability of Constantine III was enhanced by requiring him to marry Sefera, a daughter of Maxen Wledig, thus connecting him to the lineage of Constantine the Great. Rather than settle for being a "breakaway" Emperor ruling only Britain, Constantine III took an army to Gaul to contend for the entire Western Empire held by Honorius. Both he and his eldest son, Constans, were captured and killed by forces loyal to Honorius in 411. Meanwhile, the Britains had purged all the Roman bureaucracy from their cities and installed a new "overking". The reason why they rejected Constantine III after he went over to Gaul is unknown, but he may have enacted heavy taxes on the wealthy class to finance his adventure.

Maxen Wledig had left 2 sons when slain in 388, neither of which was then old enough to succeed him. The eldest, Owain, had since fallen battling Irish invaders in North Wales, but Maxen's younger son was in his mid-30's when passed over for Constantine III in 407. Known as Blessed Custinnen, this man had entered a monastery to train as a cleric and did not wish to hold political office. But in 409, with no other eligible adults in the "royal" family, he was persuaded to accept the role of "overking" and given a council of military advisers to assist him. His chief adviser and battle leader, Gwrtheyrn ap Gwydol, married his daughter Sefera. About the year 425, Blessed Custinnen was slain in a battle with Picts. His only legitimate son, Ambrosius, was a youngster about 15 years of age. As interim "overking", the council selected his penteuulu and son-in-law who became known to history as Vortigern.

When Ambrosius reached "full age" for kingship under the Celtic custom, Vortigern refused to stand aside. An attempt to depose him militarily failed in 437, and it was not until about 445 that Vortigern finally stepped down and was replaced by Ambrosius. He had a daughter, but no sons. In c. 447, this daughter married the man [1] who was the battle-leader for Ambrosius. Ambrosius died about 475 and was succeeded as "overking" by that son-in-law. This new "overking" had an eldest son who became his warband leader and eventual successor. That son fathered a son c. 475, who was elevated to battle-leader c. 500 and scored an impressive victory over the Saxons at Mount Badon. Called "the bear", that son became king c. 510 and is better known as King Arthur.

#### NOTES

[1] We do have a birth name for this man and for his son (the traditional "Uther Pendragon") and grandson, but choose not to disclose the names. The first is a man well-known to history, but in his primary role. The same is true of his son, and his famous grandson who was NOT named Arthur at birth. We prefer not to devote our time debating this single subject and will leave that pursuit to others. The only observation we will share is that the historic "Arthur" bore no resemblance whatever to the Arthur of romantic myths. His "knights" did not gallantly rescue damsels in distress. If anything, they were the cause of that distress.

#### **Brexit – 286, 1534 and 2016.**

On three occasions in the last two thousand years, Britain has resisted foreign interference.

The second was in 1534 under a king when Henry VIII threw off the influence of the Roman church, at least in part driven by his libido and his desire to remarry; the third was in 2016 under a democracy when Britain voted to leave the European Union.

The first, though, was in 286AD under an emperor. It is interesting to consider how and why the rebellion was successful. Carausius had the motivation as he was to be executed, but the widespread support from the army and navy needs consideration.

The empire had problems; rule and control, periodic insurrections from eastern and western tribal groups, demands for tribute, the taking of men to serve as soldiers and the granting of citizenship to any and all within the boundaries of empire. Casey (1994) identified one of the growing contradictions in the continued existence of Rome's empire as the increasing diversity of its constituent parts submerged beneath a thin covering of generalized *romanitas*.

We can recognise that Carausius had charisma and leadership, but the speed with which the revolt was joined was rapid. The Britons' adoption of Roman ways was varied and often localised. Under Roman rule the tribal and regal structures of the iron age tribes were left in place, persisting after the eventual full withdrawal in 410, and it seems likely that the periodic uprisings were indicative of a degree of dissatisfaction with being a mere province of a distant empire.

Darrell Wolcott argues that in Wales, these families were directly involved and provided leaders in these rebellions.

**Woolf** (2016) draws parallels with the British democratic vote to leave the European Union in 2016 (*Britain's first Brexit was in 286AD*). While news of Carausius' revolt must have spread by word of mouth, with access to the media of newspapers, television and the internet, every stage of disillusionment with the change from a market based organisation to an expanding pan-European super-state was available to the general public. The wish for an army and establishment of diplomatic missions around the world helped people to recognise the growing problems of loss of sovereignty, the huge growth of Target 2 financial debt to Germany which had no prospect of ever being repaid, and the north-south divide over financing of the southern countries and the east-west divide over culture. Despite a veneer of democracy where the European Parliament was effectively ruled by the unelected European Commission, countries such as Germany and France ignored and broke the rules when it suited them. For Britain, demands for ever increasing financial contributions sat with the damaging of our manufacturing capacity through the issue of grants for companies to move to Eastern Europe and even beyond its borders to Turkey. The lack of border controls and free movement of people led to public services failing and suppression of wages as troubled economies exported their unemployed youth.

### **Who were the Menapians?**

This ancient Celtic tribe, with its homeland in the low-lying lands of Belgium and the Netherlands was a seafaring and trading one since about 500BC, with settlements in Ireland, Wales including Anglesey and the Isle of Man.

Around 60-50 BC the original settlement suffered a triple setback. A Saxon invasion from the north, severe flooding which devastated their lands, and Julius Caesar was invading from the south. Many were killed and many fled. It is not inconceivable that a diaspora of Menapians to their further outposts happened, in which case the populating of Wales to which several Irish tribes contributed could have involved the family of Llyr Llediath, described below. Caesar has described this tribe as his fiercest opponents, and after their defeat many were recruited as soldiers to fight for the Romans. They are well represented in the literature: **Benet Salway** writes (personal communication, 2023), 'the Belgic Menapii/Castellum Menapiorum are/is mentioned not only by Ptolemy but also by Caesar (mid-1st c. BC), Strabo (early 1st c. AD), Pliny the Elder (1st c. AD), Tacitus (early 2nd c. AD) and Cassius Dio (3rd c. AD), of whom Caesar, Pliny, and Tacitus are likely to have been familiar to Victor and/or his Latin readers.

In addition a cohort I Menapiorum, recruited from Belgica, is known to be active in Britain in the 120s by the evidence of military diplomas (CIL XVI 65 of 122 and CIL VII = RIB II 2401.6 of 124).

Then, after Victor, Orosius (early 5th c. AD) again mentions the Belgic Menapii and the Notitia Dignitatum (of approximately the same date) mentions the military unit of the Menapii Seniores in the field army of Gaul.'

## Carausius' s place of birth.

His actual place of birth is an enigma; starting with the Dutch claim on the assumption of the Menapian tribal area, which originated from the earliest writing of **Aurelius Victor**, who stated '*Quo bello Carausius Menapiae*', **Mongan** (1995) writes in *The Menapia Quest* that:

'All the writers since who have addressed the problem have mistakenly read the text as '*Menapius ciuis*'. The difference is important, as in classic literature there is absolutely no mention of any place called 'Menapia'. The reason why Aurelius Victor did not write it like everybody else was that this African only knew of the Menapii and Menapia in Belgic Gaul and was ignorant of the fact that this tribe had colonies elsewhere, in Ireland, Wales, Anglesey and the Isle of Man.

**Benet Salway**, (personal communication, 2022), takes issue with this and clarifies here.

'The full sentence is: Quo bello Carausius, Menapiae ciuis, factis promptioribus enituit ('In this war Carausius, a citizen of Menapia, distinguished himself by rather resolute deeds'). 'Menapiae ciuis' is not mistranslated as 'a citizen of Menapia' but, of course, it is the identification of Menapia that is controversial(ish). If Victor (or his epitomator - because we are almost certainly dealing here with an abbreviated version of his original history) had used the adjectival form for the citizenship, then the natural Latin order would be 'ciuis Menapius' - Menapius ciuis would not have sounded right. The fact that Victor does not say 'Menapius ciuis' is not evidence that he did not think Carausius came from the civitas Menapiorum in Belgica. This does not prevent the identification of one of the other Menapiae as Carausius' homeland. Victor cannot be used to support or exclude any one of the possibilities, except on the Occam's razor argument that the only ciuitas Menapia that either Victor or his readers is likely to have been familiar with is the community in the Low Countries'.

But, I would offer, considering that Aurelius Victor who was from North African in the fourth century seems to have started the Menapia/Netherlands origin story, is it possible that the source of his information was based on Ptolemy's AD140 map showing the only place being recorded as called Menapia and that he was actually talking about Ireland?

**Benet Salway** writes, (personal communication, 2023), 'The only surviving source for the Menapian origin of Carausius is the 'Menapiae ciuis' phrase in Aurelius Victor and he does not place it geographically. His origin is not mentioned in any of the small collection of surviving panegyrics. Eutropius does not give any ethnic origin for Carausius. He simply says that he was humbly born (Carausius ... 'uilissime natus'). I don't think that the information on origin needs to have been derived from Ptolemy, but equally possibly derived from a historical tradition going back to a now-lost panegyric celebrating Constantius' victories over Allectus.'

However, I would comment that this latter point must therefore be hypothetical.

## Other claims.

**Janssens** believed that Carausius was a native of Menapiae, the old name for the Isle of Man. Other theories have been advanced, but **Mowat\*** cites three places with equal claim: the district of Belgium near the Scheldt estuary (the original homelands), the Isle of Man and the area around County Wicklow (Wexford) in Ireland. The number of authors who favour Carausius being an Irish-born Menapian also include two seventeenth century numismatists: **Walker\***, writing in London in 1672 calls Carausius an Irishman while **Bergero** on 1697 advances *Carausius, Menapia urbe Hiberniae, orindus...*' though **John Milton\*** writing in 1719 believed him to have been born on the North Sea coast in the original Belgic territory. A fourth site, St. David's in Wales formerly known as *Menapia* or *Menevia* was added by **Stukely** in the 17<sup>th</sup> century"....."**Geoffrey of Monmouth, Fordun** and **Boethius** all considered Carausius to be a native of Britain. To add support to this theory, **Rhys** has pointed out the survival of a memory of Carausius in the name of a lake called Ceris near the Menai straits between Anglesey (formerly Mon) and the mainland. But he also provided quite convincing arguments in relation to the geographic location of '*Manapia*', the colony on the east coast of Ireland, that Carausius was an Irish-born Menapian. It is interesting to note

where the name survives today. It is not found in the Netherlands, Belgium or northern France, but in north Wales, carved on the cairn in Penmachno and on the milestone near Carlisle. **Nennius** preserves the name in his account of the wonders of Britain, mentioning a *vorago Cerauus* again located on the Menai Straits". (\*cited by **Mongan** , 1995).

### Possible origins of Carausius in the literature

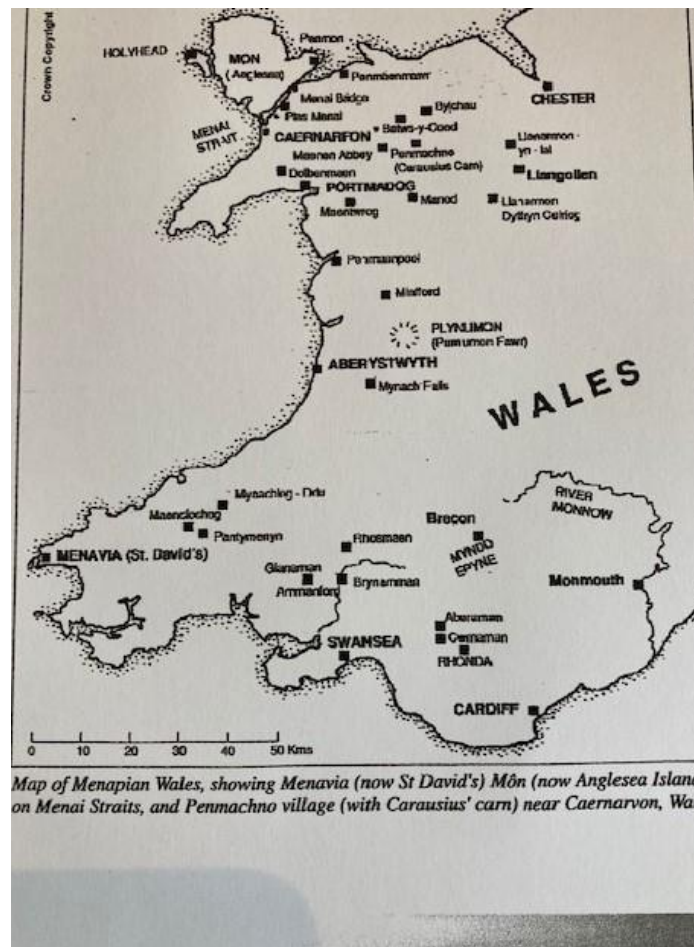
Traditional	Britain	Ireland	Wales
Aurelius Victor, 4 <sup>th</sup> century	Geoffrey of Monmouth, 12 <sup>th</sup> century	Jean Tristan, 17 <sup>th</sup> century	William Stukely, 18 <sup>th</sup> century
Eutropius, 4 <sup>th</sup> century	John of Fordun, 14 <sup>th</sup> century (1)	Walker, 17 <sup>th</sup> century	Bertram, 18 <sup>th</sup> century, citing Richard of Cirencester, 14 <sup>th</sup> century
Orosius, 4 <sup>th</sup> century	Hector Boethius, 15 <sup>th</sup> century	Bergaro, 17 <sup>th</sup> century	Wolcott, 20 <sup>th</sup> century
(Gildas), 5 <sup>th</sup> century *	Zabarella, 17 <sup>th</sup> century (2)	Claude Genebrier, 18 <sup>th</sup> century (3)	
Bede, 7 <sup>th</sup> century	?Casey, 20 <sup>th</sup> century **	Rhys, 19 <sup>th</sup> century	
Nennius, 9 <sup>th</sup> century			
Geoffrey of Monmouth, 12 <sup>th</sup> century			
Robert of Gloucester, 13 <sup>th</sup> century			

\*Gildas is notable that in his existing writings, he makes no mention of Carausius or the rebellion.

\*\*Title of book 'The British Usurpers'.

- (1) Writing to support a claim to Scottish identity and independence through treaty with Carausius.
- (2) Writing to support a claim of the Doge of Venice for family descent.
- (3) Writing for an Irish patron making a similar claim.

## Map of Menapian Wales (Mongan, 1995)



If not from the Menapian homeland, how can we reconcile the claim of Wales and the family tree making him a son of Caradog ap Eunydd advanced by **Wolcott** and the claims for Ireland?

May I advance the notion that both could be correct? The answer may well lie in the fact that the Menapian area of Wales, known to the Romans as Menevia, was ruled by descendants of Menapian settlers in Ireland, who after time had become Romanised Welsh.

Let us consider another paper by **Darrell Wolcott**, *Beli Mawr and Llyr Llediath in Welsh Pedigrees*, reproduced in part below:

In the first century AD, the portion of Wales west and south of the territory later called Powys was ruled by descendants of Llyr Llediath. He is another man of unknown birth name, simply known to us as "the man of the seas who spoke with a foreign accent". We suspect he was a Menapii sea trader who spoke Goidelic Celt. His son is called Bran, but both he and his father were simply equated to Celtic gods of those names. It was Caradog ap Bran who was defeated by the Romans in 51AD and taken to Rome as a prisoner. By the time Rome left Britain early in the 5th century, this family held virtually all the coastal lands circling Wales on three sides. Thereafter, it intermarried with the descendants of Cunedda and, by the 7th century, ruled only the southeast part of Wales.

The extant pedigrees of Llyr Llediath are almost certainly corrupt; they seek to connect him to Brutus of Troy but lack about 15 generations to be credible. The families which claim descent from him, however, can present chronologically stable pedigrees:



## **Conclusion.**

Who was our hero, Carausius? It seems that throughout history he has been what people chose to make of him, whether for personal, political or partisan reasons. We know little as fact apart from his existence. Low born, i.e. not Roman, associated with Menapia or its outposts, a skilled sailor, a charismatic and powerful leader of men.

**Consideration of the known literature and the competing claims allows the theory that makes it possible to combine the possibility of both Irish and Welsh origins being correct; the first through Menapian ancestry and the second through line of birth and emigration into and establishment in Wales from the Irish Menapia.**

Therefore, it seems reasonable to claim that Carausius was indeed a British, probably a Welsh-born Roman emperor. The identification of a second Carausius as his grandson and Custinnen the grandson of this Carausius II who adopted the name of Constantine III as later rulers is scope for further exploration.

## Bibliography

- Bede. *Ecclesiastical History*, Ed. B. Colgrave and B. Mynors, Oxford, 1969.
- Berkley G. (1756) *The naval history of Britain, from the earliest periods of which there are accounts from history*. London.
- Boethius H. (1941) *The Chronicles of Scotland*, Ed Bellenden J et al, Edinburgh.
- Campbell J. (1742) *Lives of the British Admirals and other eminent British Seamen*. London.
- Casey PJ. (1994) *The British Usurpers; Carausius and Allectus*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- De Peyster J.W. (1858) *The History of Carausius, with which is interwoven an Historical and Ethnological account of the Menapii*, reprinted by Forgotten Books ([www.ForgottenBooks.com](http://www.ForgottenBooks.com)).
- Eutropius. *Breviarum ab urbe condita*. Ed. C Santini, Leipzig, 1979.
- Foote S. (1752) *Taste: a comedy in two acts*, London.
- Fordun John of. *Chronicle of the Scottish nation*. Ed. W. Skene, Edinburgh, 1872.
- Genebrier C. (1740) *Histoire de Carausius, Empereur de la Grande-Bretagne*, Paris.
- Geoffrey of Monmouth. *Historia Regnum Britanniae*. Ed. M. Reeve, Boydell Press, Suffolk, 2007.
- Gibbon E. (1775) *The decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, London.
- Gildas. *De Excidio Britanniae*, trans H. Williams, Dodo Press, London, 1899.
- Holinshed R. (1577) *The firste volume of the chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande*, London.
- Janssens E. *Carausius: First national sovereign of Great Britain*. Latomus, I. pp. 269-279.
- Johnson S (1979). *The Roman forts of the Saxon shore*. Elek, London.
- Kennedy J. (1751) *Dissertation upon Oriuna, said to be empress or queen of England, the supposed wife of Carausius, monarch and emperor of Britain.....* London.
- Kennedy J. (1756) *Further observations on Carausius, emperor of Britain, and Oriuna, supposed by some to be real person. With answers to those trifling objections made to the former discourse*, London.
- Macpherson J. (1762) *Fingal, an ancient epic poem in six books, composed by Ossian, son of Fingal, Translated from the Galic (sic) language*, London.
- Mongan N. (1995) *The Menapia Quest*. Herodotus Press, Dublin.
- Nennius. *The British history and Welsh annals*, Ed. J. Morris, London, 1980.
- Orosius. *Historia adversum paganos*, Ed. C. Zangmeister, Leipzig, 1889.
- Speed J. (1611) *Historie of Greate Britaine under the conquest of Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans*, London.
- Rhys J. (1890) *Early Irish conquests of Wales and Dumnonia*. Proc. RSIA Journal, Volume 21.
- Stukely W. (1752) *Oriuna wife of Carausius, Emperor of Britain*. Palaographica Britannica III.
- Stukely W. (1757) *The medallic history of Marcus Aurelius Carausius, Emperor in Britain*, London.
- Tristan J. (1644) *Commentaires historique. Contens l'histoire generale des empereurs, imperatrices, caesars et tyrants de l'empire Romain*, Paris.
- Webb PH. (1907) *The reign and coinage of Carausius*, N.C. 1ff.
- White D. (1961) *Litus Saxonicum: the British Saxon Shore in scholarship and history*. Madison W, University of Wisconsin Press.
- Wolcott D. *Britain's Royal Roman Family*. Center for the Study of Ancient Wales.  
[www.ancientwalesstudies.org](http://www.ancientwalesstudies.org).
- Wolcott D. *Beli Mawr and Llyr Llediarth in Welsh Pedigrees*. Center for the Study of Ancient Wales.  
[www.ancientwalesstudies.org](http://www.ancientwalesstudies.org).
- Woolf C. (2016) *Britain's first 'Brexite' was in 286AD*. Pri.org and Global Post.
- Zabarella G. (1659) *Il Carosio overo origine regia et auguste della serenissima famiglia*, Padua.
- Zonaras. *Corpus Scriptorum Byzantinae*, Bonn, 1987.