

Gruffudd ap Cynan

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Gruffudd ap Cynan (c. 1055 – 1137), sometimes written as **Gruffydd ap Cynan**, was King of Gwynedd from 1081 until his death in 1137. In the course of a long and eventful life, he became a key figure in Welsh resistance to Norman rule, and was remembered as King of all Wales. As a descendant of Rhodri Mawr, Gruffudd ap Cynan was a senior member of the princely House of Aberffraw.^[1]

Through his mother, Gruffudd had close family connections with the Norse settlement around Dublin and he frequently used Ireland as a refuge and as a source of troops. He three times gained the throne of Gwynedd and then lost it again, before regaining it once more in 1099 and this time keeping power until his death. Gruffudd laid the foundations which were built upon by his son Owain Gwynedd and his great-grandson Llywelyn the Great.

Contents

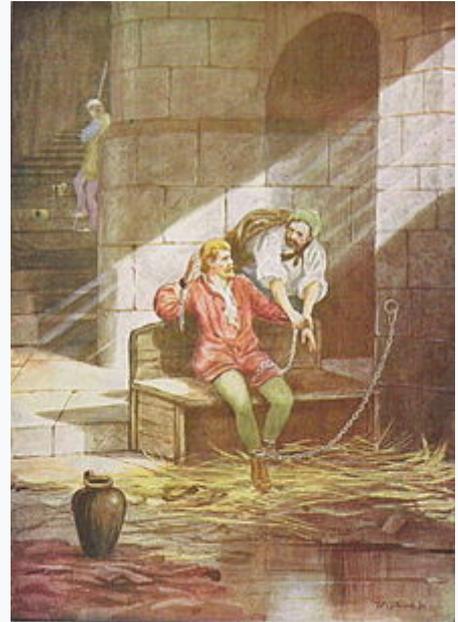
- 1 Life
 - 1.1 Ancestry
 - 1.2 First bid for the throne
 - 1.3 Second bid for the throne and capture by the Normans
 - 1.4 Escape from captivity and third reign
 - 1.5 King for the fourth time and consolidation
- 2 Death and succession
- 3 Children
- 4 Ancestry
- 5 References
 - 5.1 Notes
 - 5.2 Citations
 - 5.3 Sources

Life

Unusually for a Welsh king or prince, a near-contemporary biography of Gruffudd, *The history of Gruffudd ap Cynan*, has survived. Much of our knowledge of Gruffudd comes from this source. The traditional view among scholars was that it was written during the third quarter of the 12th century during the reign of Gruffudd's son, Owain Gwynedd, but it has recently been suggested that it may date from the early reign of Llywelyn the Great, around 1200. The author is not known.

Most of the existing manuscripts of the history are in Welsh but these are clearly translations of a Latin original. It is usually considered that the original Latin version has been lost, and that existing Latin versions are re-translations from the Welsh. However Russell (2006) has suggested that the Latin version in Peniarth MS 434E incorporates the original Latin version, later amended to bring it into line with the Welsh text.

Gruffudd ap Cynan



Gruffudd ap Cynan escapes from Chester, Illustration by T. Prytherch in 1900

King of Gwynedd

Reign	1081–1137
Predecessor	Trahaearn ap Caradog
Successor	Owain Gwynedd
Born	c. 1055 Dublin, Ireland
Died	1137 Gwynedd, Wales
Burial	Bangor Cathedral
Spouse	Angharad ferch Owain
Issue	Cadwallon, Owain Gwynedd, Cadwaladr, Susanna, Gwenllian
House	Aberffraw
Father	Cynan ab Iago
Mother	Ragnailt ingen Amlaib

Ancestry

According to the *Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan*, Gruffudd was born in Dublin and reared near Swords, County Dublin in Ireland. He was the son of a Welsh Prince, Cynan ap Iago, who was a claimant to the Kingship of Gwynedd but was probably never king of Gwynedd, though his father, Gruffudd's grandfather, Iago ab Idwal ap Meurig had ruled Gwynedd from 1023 to 1039. When Gruffudd first appeared on the scene in Wales the Welsh annals several times refer to him as "grandson of Iago" rather than the more usual "son of Cynan", indicating that his father was little known in Wales. Cynan ap Iago seems to have died while Gruffudd was still young, since the *History* describes his mother telling him who his father was.

According to *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*, Gruffudd's mother was Ragnailt ingen Amlaíb, a granddaughter of King Sigtrygg Silkbeard and a member of the Hiberno-Norse Uí Ímair dynasty.^[2] The latter had two sons named Amlaíb: one died in 1013, whilst another died in 1034. Either man could have been Ragnailt's father.

During his many struggles to gain the kingship of Gwynedd, Gruffudd received considerable aid from Ireland, from the Hiberno-Norse at Dublin, the Isles and Wexford and from Muircheartach Ua Briain.

First bid for the throne

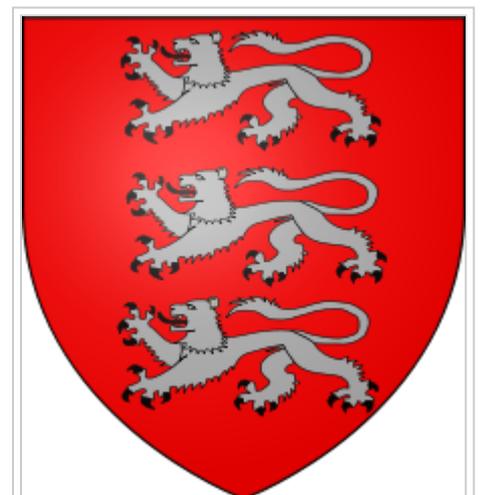
Gruffudd first attempted to take over the rule of Gwynedd in 1075, following the death of Bleddyn ap Cynfyn. Trahaearn ap Caradog had seized control of Gwynedd but had not yet firmly established himself. Gruffudd landed on Abermenai Point, Anglesey with an Irish force, and with the assistance of troops provided by the Norman Robert of Rhuddlan first defeated and killed Cynwrig ap Rhiwallon, an ally of Trahaearn who held Llŷn, then defeated Trahaearn himself in the battle of Gwaed Erw in Meirionnydd and gained control of Gwynedd.

Gruffudd then led his forces eastwards to reclaim territories taken over by the Normans, and despite the assistance previously given by Robert of Rhuddlan attacked and destroyed Rhuddlan Castle. However tension between Gruffudd's Danish-Irish bodyguard and the local Welsh led to a rebellion in Llŷn, and Trahaearn took the opportunity to counterattack, defeating Gruffudd at the battle of Bron yr Erw above Clynnog Fawr the same year.

Second bid for the throne and capture by the Normans

Gruffudd fled to Ireland but, in 1081, returned and made an alliance with Rhys ap Tewdwr, prince of Deheubarth. Rhys had been attacked by Caradog ap Gruffudd of Gwent and Morgannwg, and had been forced to flee to St David's Cathedral. Gruffudd this time embarked from Waterford with a force composed of Danes and Irish and landed near St David's, presumably by prior arrangement with Rhys. He was joined here by a force of his supporters from Gwynedd, and he and Rhys marched north to seek Trahaearn ap Caradog and Caradog ap Gruffudd who had themselves made an alliance and been joined by Meilyr ap Rhiwallon of Powys. The armies of the two confederacies met at the Battle of Mynydd Carn, with Gruffudd and Rhys victorious and Trahaearn, Caradog and Meilyr all being killed. Gruffudd was thus able to seize power in Gwynedd for the second time.

He was soon faced with a new enemy, as the Normans were now encroaching on Gwynedd. Gruffudd had not been king very long when he was enticed to a meeting with Hugh, Earl of Chester and Hugh, Earl of Shrewsbury at Rhug, near Corwen. At the meeting Gruffudd was seized and taken prisoner. According to his biographer this was by the treachery of one of his own men, Meirion Goch. Gruffudd was imprisoned in Earl Hugh's castle at Chester for many years while Earl Hugh and Robert of Rhuddlan went on to take possession of Gwynedd, building castles at Bangor, Wales Bangor, Caernarfon and Aberlleiniog.



Coat of Arms retroactively attributed to Gryffudd ap Cynan

Escape from captivity and third reign

Gruffudd reappeared on the scene years later, having escaped from captivity. According to his biography he was in fetters in the market-place at Chester when Cynwrig the Tall, on a visit to the city, saw his opportunity when the burgesses were at dinner. He picked Gruffudd up, fetters and all, and carried him out of the city on his shoulders. There is debate among historians as to the year of Gruffudd's escape. Ordericus Vitalis mentions a "Grifridus" attacking the Normans in 1088. The *History* in one place states that Gruffudd was imprisoned for twelve years, in another that he was imprisoned for sixteen years. Since he was captured in 1081, that would date his release to 1093 or 1097. J.E. Lloyd favours 1093, considering that Gruffudd was involved at the beginning of the Welsh uprising in 1094. K.L. Maund on the other hand favours 1097, pointing out that there is no reference to Gruffudd in the contemporary annals until 1098. D. Simon Evans inclines to the view that Ordericus Vitalis' date of 1088 could be correct, suggesting that an argument based on the silence of the annals is unsafe.

Gruffudd again took refuge in Ireland but returned to Gwynedd to lead the assaults on Norman castles such as Aber Lleiniog. The Welsh revolt had begun in 1094 and by late 1095 had spread to many parts of Wales. This induced William II of England (William Rufus) to intervene, invading northern Wales in 1095. However his army was unable to bring the Welsh to battle and returned to Chester without having achieved very much. King William mounted a second invasion in 1097, but again without much success. The *History* only mentions one invasion by Rufus, which could indicate that Gruffudd did not feature in the resistance to the first invasion. At this time Cadwgan ap Bleddyn of Powys led the Welsh resistance.

In the summer of 1098, Earl Hugh of Chester joined with Earl Hugh of Shrewsbury in another attempt to recover his losses in Gwynedd. Gruffudd and his ally Cadwgan ap Bleddyn retreated to Anglesey, but were then forced to flee to Ireland in a skiff when a fleet he had hired from the Danish settlement in Ireland accepted a better offer from the Normans and changed sides.

King for the fourth time and consolidation

The situation was changed by the arrival of a Norwegian fleet under the command of King Magnus III of Norway, also known as Magnus Barefoot, who attacked the Norman forces near the eastern end of the Menai Straits. Earl Hugh of Shrewsbury was killed by an arrow said to have been shot by Magnus himself. The Normans were obliged to evacuate Anglesey, and the following year, Gruffudd returned from Ireland to take possession again, having apparently come to an agreement with Earl Hugh of Chester.

With the death of Hugh of Chester in 1101, Gruffudd was able to consolidate his position in Gwynedd, as much by diplomacy as by force. He met King Henry I of England who granted him the rule of Llŷn, Eifionydd, Ardudwy and Arllechwedd, considerably extending his kingdom. By 1114, he had gained enough power to induce King Henry to invade Gwynedd in a three-pronged attack, one detachment led by King Alexander I of Scotland. Faced by overwhelming force, Gruffudd was obliged to pay homage to Henry and to pay a heavy fine, but lost no territory. By about 1118, Gruffudd's advancing years meant that most of the fighting, which pushed Gwynedd's borders eastward and southwards, was done by his three sons by his wife Angharad, daughter of Owain ab Edwin of Tegeingl: Cadwallon, Owain Gwynedd and later Cadwaladr. The cantrefs of Rhos and Rhufoniog were annexed in 1118, Meirionnydd captured from Powys in 1123, and Dyffryn Clwyd in 1124. Another invasion by the king of England in 1121 was a military failure. The king had to come to terms with Gruffudd and made no further attempt to invade Gwynedd during Gruffudd's reign. The death of Cadwallon in a battle against the forces of Powys near Llangollen in 1132 checked further expansion for the time being.

Gruffudd was now powerful enough to ensure that his nominee David the Scot was consecrated as Bishop of Bangor in 1120. The see had been effectively vacant since Bishop Hervey le Breton had been forced to flee by the Welsh almost twenty years before, since Gruffudd and King Henry could not agree on a candidate. David went on to rebuild Bangor Cathedral with a large financial contribution from Gruffudd.

Owain and Cadwaladr, in alliance with Gruffudd ap Rhys of Deheubarth, gained a crushing victory over the Normans at Crug Mawr near Cardigan in 1136 and took possession of Ceredigion. The latter part of Gruffydd's reign was considered to be a "Golden Age"; according to the *Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan* Gwynedd was "bespangled with lime-washed churches like the stars in the firmament".

Death and succession

Gruffudd died in his bed, old and blind, in 1137 and was mourned by the annalist of Brut y Tywysogion as the "head and king and defender and pacifier of all Wales". He was buried by the high altar in Bangor Cathedral which he had been involved in rebuilding. He also made bequests to many other churches, including one to Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin where he had worshipped as a boy. He was succeeded as king of Gwynedd by his son Owain Gwynedd. His daughter Gwenllian, who married Gruffudd ap Rhys of Deheubarth, son of his old ally Rhys ap Tewdwr, is also notable for her resistance to English rule.



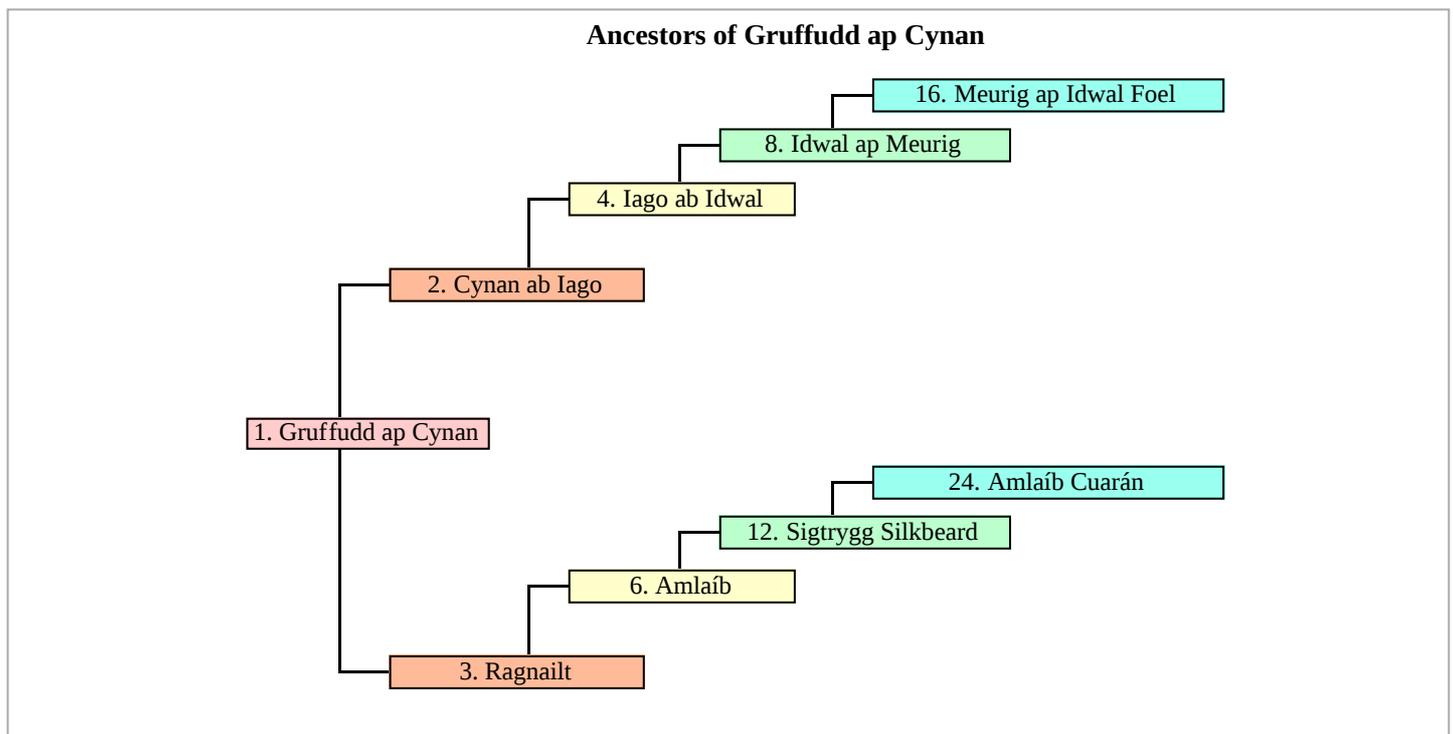
Gruffudd was buried in Bangor Cathedral

Children

The family line of Cynan shows he had many children by several different women.^[3] With wife Angharad (daughter of Owain ab Edwin) he had:^[4]

- Owain Gwynedd (Owain ap Gruffudd),^[1] married (1) Gwladus (Gladys) ferch Llywarch, daughter of Llywarch ap Trahaearn (2) Cristin ferch Goronwy, daughter of Goronwy ab Owain
- Cadwaladr ap Gruffudd, married Alice de Clare, daughter of Richard Fitz Gilbert de Clare
- Cadwallon ap Gruffudd^[5]
- Mareda
- Susanna, married Madog ap Maredudd, prince of Powys
- Ranulht
- Agnes
- Gwenllian ferch Gruffudd, married Gruffudd ap Rhys, prince of Deheubarth

Ancestry



References

Notes

Citations

1. Lloyd 2004, p. 93.
2. Hudson, p 83
3. Llwyd 2002, p. 151.
4. Lloyd 2004, p. 274.
5. Lloyd 2004, p. 78.

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<div><div></div><div>Gruffudd ap Cynan</div></div> <div><div></div><div>House of Aberffraw</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Cadet branch of the House of Gwynedd</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Born: c. 1055</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Died: 11 April 1137</div></div>		
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