

DAVID (DEWI), Saint, founder and abbot-bishop of S. Davids, and patron saint of Wales

Name: Dewi
Parent: Non
Parent: Sant
Gender: Male
Occupation: founder and abbot-bishop of S. Davids, and patron saint of Wales
Area of activity: Religion
Author: Thomas Jones

His exact dates are not known, but it is probable that he died about the end of the 6th century; in *Annales Cambriae* his death is recorded s.a. 601, but it is possible that the date given in *Chron. Scot.* (i.e. 588) is nearer the truth. If the tradition recorded by [Rhygyfarch](#) that he died on a Tuesday is correct, it may be that the correct date is 589 - the date given in the record in *Annals of Inisfallen*. He was one of the influential monks of the 6th century, and his cognomen, 'the Waterman' (W. 'Dyfrwr,' Lat. 'Aquaticus'), suggests that he was a member of that monastic sect who rejoiced in the rigour of their ascetic life and who were called 'aquatici,' 'the watermen.' He is mentioned together with [Cadog](#) and [Gildas](#) in the 'Catalogue of the Saints of Ireland' (c. 730); and in 'The Martyrology of Oengus' (c. 800) 1 March is recorded as his festival. There are churches associated with his name in South Wales, Brittany, Cornwall, and southwestern England. Of the churches named after him in Wales (the majority of them probably founded by him), there is not one to the north of a line drawn from the mouth of the river Wyre to Glasbury. It is likely that the distribution of his churches represents the area in which he laboured, and their geographical positions suggest that he and his followers represented a more extreme and reformatory monastic movement than that of [Illtud](#), [Cadog](#), and [Gildas](#), and that he evangelized in districts outside the areas of his predecessors' activities. Reference is made to him in 'Arymes Prydein Vawr' (The Prophecy of Great Britain, *Bk. Tal.*, 13) early in the 10th century, as the spiritual leader of the Welsh against the English. His 'Life' was written by [Rhygyfarch](#), son of [Sulien](#), bishop of S. Davids c. 1090, and this is the source of every 'story' of his life. [Rhygyfarch](#) states that he made use of ancient records at S. Davids, some of them in the saint's own hand, but the contents of the 'Life' consist of a mixture of folk-lore, oral traditions, and some historical facts. He states that David was the son of Sant, king of Ceredigion, and Non (Lat. 'Nonnita'), that he was educated by Paulinus at Henfynyw (near Aberayron), that he founded many monasteries, that he overcame an Irish chieftain called Boia near S. Davids; and he describes the hard life led by David and his fellow-monks, the miracles which he performed, his journey to Jerusalem with [Teilo](#) and [Padarn](#), the part he played in two synods (at Llanddewi-brefi and 'Lucus Victoriae') against the Pelagian heresy, and the general lamentation at his death.

An *awdl* to him was composed by the poet [Gwynfardd Brycheiniog](#), and it contains some traditions not given in [Rhygyfarch](#)'s 'Life.' The Life of David by [Giraldus Cambrensis](#) (*Opera*, iii, 377-404) is based on [Rhygyfarch](#)'s work; so also is his 'Life' by John of Tynemouth (c. 1290 - 1350). The Welsh 'Life' also is a translation and an adaptation of [Rhygyfarch](#)'s work: the earliest version is found in 'The Book of the Anchorite of Llanddewi-frefi' (1346). Odes to David were composed by many later poets, e.g. [Iolo Goch](#), [Ieuan Rhydderch ap Ieuan Llwyd](#), [Dafydd Llwyd ap Llywelyn](#), Rhisiart ap Rhys, [Lewis Glyn Cothi](#). In 1398 an edict was promulgated by archbishop Arundel, commanding his festival to be celebrated throughout the whole province, and in 1415 archbishop Chicheley ordered it to be celebrated under the leadership of the choir and with nine lessons.. Throughout the ages pilgrims flocked to S. Davids, (Calixtus II granted the privilege of a blessing corresponding to one pilgrimage to Rome to two to St. David's), but after the Protestant Reformation the feast of S. David was no longer celebrated as a religious festival, although Welshmen continued to observe the immortal memory of the saint. After its resurrection in the 18th century, and its adoption by patriotic societies, it became the national festival of the Welsh people.

Author

Professor Thomas Jones

Sources

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Further Reading

Martin Crampin, *Depicting St David* (Talybont 2020)

NLW Archives: [The Red Book of Talgarth: Llanstephan MS 27C](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Saint David](#)

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