

LLYWELYN ap GRUFFYDD ('Llywelyn the Last,' or Llywelyn II), Prince of Wales (died 1282)

Name: Llywelyn ap Gruffydd
Pseudonym: Llywelyn The Last, Llywelyn Ii
Date of death: 1282
Spouse: Eleanor de Montfort
Child: Gwenllïan ferch Llywelyn ap Gruffudd
Parent: Senena ferch Caradog
Parent: Gruffydd ap Llywelyn
Gender: Male
Occupation: Prince of Wales
Area of activity: Military; Patriots; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Royalty and Society
Author: Thomas Jones Pierce

Second son of [Gruffydd ap Llywelyn](#) by Senena, and grandson of [Llywelyn ap Iorwerth](#). His career can be traced no further back than 1245 when he emerges as one of a group of magnates in the entourage of [Dafydd II](#), a fact which suggests that, unlike his father and elder brother, [Owain](#), he was favoured by his uncle, and was possibly regarded as [Dafydd](#)'s destined heir. After the catastrophe of 1246 and the conclusion of the peace of Woodstock with Henry III in 1247, he had for eight years to share with [Owen](#) a much diminished realm west of the Conway. But by his victory over [Owain](#) and a younger brother, [Dafydd](#), at Bryn Derwin, in 1255, he took the first step towards re-consolidating the undivided territorial power once exercised by [Llewelyn I](#). Between 1256 and 1267 he experienced a period of almost unbroken military success: helped by the weakness of the crown and the disunity of the marcher lords, he reunited North Wales from the Dovey to the Dee, and annexed extensive territories in the middle march as far as the borders of Gwent, meanwhile protecting his conquests by a succession of merciless raids into South Wales. In 1258 the other native princes (except [Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn](#), who submitted in 1263) were obliged to transfer their homage from the king to Llywelyn, and in the same year he declared himself Prince of Wales. A *tour de force* of great constitutional significance, this achievement (officially recognised by Henry III, saving the personal allegiance of the Prince, in the peace of Montgomery (1267)) raises Llywelyn to a unique place among the great figures of Welsh history as the sponsor of the first experiment in Welsh statehood.

The decade 1267-77 saw the centre of gravity in Anglo-Welsh affairs shifting to the south-east: guarding his rear by a thorough exploitation of the fiscal and military resources of the interior, Llywelyn built the castle of Dolforwyn and founded the borough of Abermule, launching attacks on his neighbours further south, and meeting with some success in his dealings with the Bohun family, but failing to unseat the [Clare s](#) in their new castle at Caerphilly. The evident ruthlessness of his domestic policy at this time - as witness his attitude to the northern bishops - brought to a head social and legal changes of radical import, and earned him the hostility of many subjects. The defection of [Dafydd](#) and of [Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn](#) (1274) was a serious blow, anticipating the wholesale desertions of 1277.

Llywelyn's dissatisfaction over mounting difficulties along the border accounts for his repeated refusals from 1273-7 to observe treaty obligations as vassal of the new king - Edward I. Though it is unknown how serious were his grievances, he has been severely criticised for his intransigence and lack of caution, to say the least, in thus challenging the revived power of the English monarchy, a policy which ended with his defeat in the war of 1277 and the collapse of his life's work. The subsequent peace of Aberconway left him with only Gwynedd west of Conway, though he was still accorded the now hollow title of Prince of Wales, with which was associated the overlordship of five small baronies on the outskirts of Snowdonia.

At Worcester, on 13 October 1278, in the presence of the king, he was married to [Eleanor de Montfort](#), daughter of earl Simon, an alliance contracted as far back as 1265, at Pipton, when Simon and Llywelyn had formally joined forces against the Crown. The wedding had actually been postponed since 1275 owing to the bride's forcible detention, at Windsor, by Edward I.

Five fateful years followed during which Llywelyn acted with the utmost propriety towards the king, exercising, in most painful circumstances, untold patience and a high degree of diplomatic finesse. Technical legal issues bound up with the exact interpretation of the recent treaty lay at the root of the trouble in which [Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn](#) also had a part, although causes of friction arose outside the direct control of either party. From Llywelyn's standpoint the king was unquestionably contravening treaty terms in applying English instead of Welsh law to the matters in dispute, though his motives in so doing have been subject to varying judgements. Even then Llewelyn's hands were forced; it was [Dafydd](#) who provided the *casus belli* by his attack on Hawarden on Palm Sunday, 1282, thus precipitating general hostilities.

While campaigning in the Builth region Llywelyn was killed on 11 December 1282, an event which virtually brought Welsh political independence to an end. He did not die in open battle, but on the banks of the Irfon, at the hands of one who was

unaware at the time of his victim's identity. His head was later sent for public display in London, the body being interred by the Cistercians of Cwm Hir - one of the houses of an Order to which the prince had been much attached and in which he found some of his most loyal supporters. [Eleanor](#) had died in childbirth some little time before, and her daughter, Gwenllïan, Llywelyn's sole legitimate descendant, ended her days as a nun of Sempringham.

Author

Professor Thomas Jones Pierce, (1905 - 1964)

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Additional Links

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