

LLWYD, (LHUYD), HUMPHREY (c. 1527 - 1568), antiquary and map-maker

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Name: Humphrey Llwyd

Date of birth: c. 1527

Date of death: 1568

Spouse: Barbara Llwyd (née Lumley)

Child: Lumley Llwyd

Child: Jane Llwyd

Child: Humphrey Llwyd

Child: John Llwyd

Child: Henry Llwyd

Child: Splendian Llwyd

Parent: Joan Llwyd (née Pigott)

Parent: Robert Llwyd

Gender: Male

Occupation: antiquary and map-maker

Area of activity: History and Culture; Scholarship and Languages

Author: Huw Thomas



Humphrey Llwyd was born in about 1527 at Denbigh, the only child of Robert Llwyd, Clerk of Works at Denbigh Castle, and Joan (b. 1507), daughter of Lewis Piggott. A member of a cadet branch of the Llwyd-Rossendale family of Foxhall, Henllan, Denbighshire, he could trace his ancestry back to Henry (Harri) Rossendale of Rossendale, Lancashire, a liege of Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln and Lord of Denbigh, who granted him lands in the county in 1287 for his part in the Edwardian conquest. Henry's son, also called Henry, married the heiress of the Foxhall estate from whom it was claimed that Llwyd could trace his ancestry back to Einion Efell of Cynllaith.

Little is known of his early life; Anthony Wood states that he was unable to determine at which Oxford College Llwyd first studied but that he had received his B.A. in 1547 and thereafter had been a commoner of Brasenose College where he received his M.A. in 1551. Wood's assertion that Llwyd studied medicine appears to be based on the existence of two translations of medical texts which were ascribed to Llwyd. However, as [Professor R. Geraint Gruffydd](#) points out, they are more likely to have been the work of [Humphrey Lloyd](#) of Leighton who was in the service of Lord Stafford, to whom one of the texts is dedicated. Most subsequent biographers have followed Wood.

After completing his studies, in 1553 he entered the service of Henry Fitzalan, twelfth Earl of Arundel, and Chancellor of the University at Oxford. With the accession of Mary I in 1553 Arundel was at the height of his power and entering the household of one of the leading magnates in the country would have been an achievement. Though the exact nature of his duties is unknown he is not now thought to have been the Earl's physician as stated by Wood. Ieuan M. Williams lists a number of documents from the Arundel Castle Archives and elsewhere which show Llwyd acting on behalf of the Earl with regard to properties in London, Hampshire and Sussex. It is clear that Llwyd was a valued member of Arundel's retinue for during Elizabeth's first Parliament in 1559 he was elected as the member for East Grinstead in Surrey, a Borough of the Duchy of Lancaster, of which Arundel was the Steward.

In addition to his legal and political activities on behalf of Arundel, Llwyd also seems to have had some responsibility for the Earl's library, helping to collect books for it and for the Earl's son-in-law John, Lord Lumley, while at the same time amassing a substantial library of his own. Eventually these combined libraries were purchased by James I and now form part of the Royal Collection in the British Library. Over sixty volumes in the collection contain Llwyd's and/or Lumley's signature.

Llwyd's connection to the Arundel household was cemented by his marriage to Barbara Lumley, John's sister. The date of their marriage is unknown, but they had six children, four boys: Splendian, Henry, John and Humphrey, and two girls: Jane and Lumley.

By 1563 Llwyd had returned to Denbigh and, according to Wood, was living within the Castle walls. He was also listed as an Alderman of the town. In the same year he was elected MP for the Denbigh Boroughs and it was during this Parliament that he is said to have helped steer through the Bill to allow the translation of the Bible and Book of Common Prayer into Welsh. Though there are no Parliamentary records to confirm this, it is attested to in the eulogy written by [Gruffudd Hiraethog](#).

The subsequent Act resulted in the translation of the *New Testament* into Welsh by [William Salesbury](#) in 1567. [Salesbury](#) was a fellow Denbighshire man and Oxford graduate and it is clear that they were well acquainted; in fact one of Llwyd's cousins had married a Salesbury.

There has been much speculation about Llwyd's religious views. On the one hand he was a member of the Arundel household and brother-in-law to Lord Lumley, and both Arundel and Lumley were leading Catholics; some have spoken of him as a 'conforming Catholic'. On the other hand his support for the Bill for translating the Bible into Welsh suggests otherwise. It has been suggested that his return to Denbigh may have been a way of absenting himself from the plotting with which Lumley especially was increasingly associated. Also it is unlikely that a known Catholic would have gained the blessing of Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester and Baron of Denbigh, a staunch Protestant, as MP for Denbigh.

Whatever Llwyd's reasons for returning to Denbigh he was still involved in the Arundel household and accompanied Arundel on his trip to the continent in 1566-7. It was during this trip that Llwyd was introduced to Abraham Ortelius by [Richard Clough](#), another Denbighshire man. It is through his relationship with Ortelius that Llwyd became established as an authority on Welsh history, language and toponymy beyond his homeland.

Sometime after returning from this visit to the continent, while in London during the summer of 1568, Llwyd became ill with a severe fever, which became worse on his return to Denbigh and he died on the 21st August, though Ortelius records the date as the 31st and some authors have followed this. Llwyd was buried at St Marcella's Church, Denbigh, where there is a memorial to him in which he is described as 'A famus worthy wight'.

Llwyd's reputation for scholarship was well established even in his own day, even though the works for which he is most famous were not published until after his death. His earliest works are now lost. *An Almanacke and Kalender, conteynyngge, the daye houre, and mynute of the change of the Moone for ever, and the sygne that she is in for these thre yeares, with the natures of the sygnes and Planetes* is known only from a description in correspondence between Wood and [Robert Davies](#). The manuscript of Llwyd's translation from the French edition into English of *De Auguriis* by the Italian humanist Agostino Nifo is known only from the 1609 catalogue of the Lumley Library.

Perhaps one of his most important works is what is known as the *Cronica Walliae*, a translation of the Brut y Tywysogion into English with additional material added by Llwyd and completed in 1559. This work is known from five extant manuscripts, all later copies. It also formed the basis of [David Powel's](#) *Historie of Cambria*, published in 1584, which became the standard work on Welsh history until the twentieth century. Llwyd's original text was not published until 2002.

There are two manuscript copies of works by Llwyd in Welsh, a pedigree copied by [Gruffudd Hiraethog](#) of Llwyd's second cousin Foulk Lloyd of Foxhall and a treatise on heraldry in the hand of [William Llŷn](#), which Llwyd compiled from unknown works in French and other languages.

All the other works ascribed to Llwyd we know only in their published forms, and their existence we owe to Abraham Ortelius. The first of these is a letter sent by Llwyd to Ortelius on 5 April 1568. The letter known by its opening '*De Mona Druidum insula*' is chiefly concerned with the derivation of the Welsh name for Anglesey and also its antiquities. This letter seems to have been a response to the queries posed by Ortelius during their meeting in Antwerp in 1567. After Llwyd's death Ortelius published the letter in the first edition of his atlas *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570).

The rest were all sent to Ortelius with a covering letter dated 3 August 1568. In this letter ([NLW MS 13187E](#)) Llwyd details the works and explains that his imminent death has forced him to send them in an unfinished state. Of the three works only one was textual; *Commentarioli Britannicae descriptionis fragmentum*, a short historical and geographical description of Britain, which was published in Cologne in 1572 through the influence of Ortelius. An English translation of this work was published by Thomas Twyne as *The breviary of Britayne* (1573).

The other two works were maps; a map of England and Wales entitled *Angliae regni florentissimi nova descriptio* and a map of Wales, [Cambriae typus](#), both published in the *Theatrum* in 1573. It is perhaps this last work for which he is now most celebrated being as it was the first published map of Wales. Despite its shortcomings the map continued to be published until 1741 and helped to secure his reputation as a major figure of the Welsh renaissance.

Despite the lack of recognition in later centuries, during and immediately after his life it is clear that Llwyd was very highly esteemed by the scholars of his day. In the eulogy written in 1563-4 by [Gruffudd Hiraethog](#) he is praised for his mastery of the liberal arts, particularly astronomy and mathematics. [William Salesbury](#) dedicated the second edition of his collection of Welsh proverbs to Llwyd stating that he 'can claim precedence over all on account of completeness and worthiness in all manner of true learning and natural gentility'. In a letter of 1566 [Salesbury](#) wrote of him as 'the most famous antiquarius of all our country'.

In the years after his death his reputation continued to be enhanced, William Camden described him as a 'learned Briton' and elegies were composed by two bardic pupils of [Gruffudd Hiraethog](#), [Lewis ab Edward](#) and [Wiliam Cynwal](#). Wood's biography describes him as 'a person of great eloquence, an excellent rhetorician, a sound philosopher, and a most noted

antiquary, and a person of great skill and knowledge in British affairs.'

Perhaps his greatest proponent was Ortelius, who seems to have gone to extraordinary lengths to keep alive the memory of someone whom he cannot have met more than once or twice. Llwyd's *De Mona* is the only example in the *Theatrum* where Ortelius publishes a letter from one of his many correspondents rather than taking the information and using it to create the descriptive text on the verso of the maps. This, together with his championing of the publication of the *Fragmentum* clearly demonstrates the esteem in which Llwyd was held.

Llwyd's contribution to the study of Welsh antiquities cannot be denied, but it is clear that his influence extends far beyond academia. In creating his map of Wales as a cultural aspiration including the whole west bank of the Severn rather than a simple geographical representation of the thirteen counties which existed in his own day, Llwyd played a major part in creating the concept of Wales as a nation and thus helped to create the country we see today.

However, his achievements stretch far beyond the borders of Wales; his championing of the concept of an independent early Church in Britain helped to enhance the cause of the Protestant reformation in Britain, and in a similar way his popularising of the myth of Prince Madoc's discovery of America helped to encourage British settlement in North America and competition for the new lands with other European powers. In addition to this Llwyd is now credited with inventing the term British Empire and thus his influence can be seen on a truly global stage.

Author

Huw Thomas

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Further reading

[NLW MS 13187E - Letters to Abraham Ortelius](#) at National Library of Wales

Wikipedia Article: [Humphrey Llwyd](#)

Additional Links

VIAF: [37220652](#)

Wikidata: <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q5941507>

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