

RHYDDERCH AB IEUAN LLWYD (c. 1325 - before 1399?), lawman and literary patron

Name: Rhydderch Ab Ieuan Llwyd
Date of birth: c. 1325
Date of death: before 1399?
Gender: Male
Occupation: lawman and literary patron
Area of activity: Law; Literature and Writing
Author: John K. Bolland

Rhydderch was the son of Ieuan Llwyd ab Ieuan ap Gruffudd Foel of Glyn Aeron, near Llangeitho, and Angharad Hael, daughter of Richard ab Einion of Buellt (Buith). His family were descended from the royal line of Ceredigion and, through his paternal grandmother and her mother, from **Rhys ap Gruffydd** (died 1197), Lord of Deheubarth and chief patron of Strata Florida Abbey. The family had long been notable patrons of Welsh poets, and it is known that Gruffudd and Efa, two children of Maredudd ab Owain (died 1265), **Rhys ap Gruffudd**'s great-grandson, Rhydderch's great-great-grandfather, commissioned Welsh translations of at least three Latin and Old French prose texts, both religious and historical, which were later copied into the famous **White Book of Rhydderch**. It would appear that Ieuan Llwyd, his son Rhydderch, and, in all likelihood, his grandson **Ieuan ap Rhydderch** were in possession of the **Hendregadredd Manuscript**, written for the most part at Strata Florida in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. This important manuscript contains most of the surviving poetry of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Poets of the Princes, including copies of six poems to Maredudd ab Owain by **Y Prydydd Bychan**. Amongst the fourteenth-century additions to the manuscript are two poems by **Llywelyn Brydydd Hoddnant** to Rhydderch's grandfather Ieuan ap Gruffudd Foel and his wife Ellylw (or Elliw), two by Hilyn to Ieuan Llwyd (as well as some anonymous verses to an unspecified Ieuan), and **Dafydd ap Gwilym**'s elegy for Rhydderch's mother, Angharad.

Rhydderch was well versed in medieval Welsh law, which still pertained for many purposes in Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire in the fourteenth century, and he served as dosbarthwr or legis peritus between 1380 and 1392, hearing appeals, reversing wrongful court decisions, etc. With a correspondent expertise in English law, he also served as constable and beadle of Mabwynion, and as steward and deputy justiciar of Cardiganshire. Poetic praise of Rhydderch suggests that he was skilled in the languages of officialdom: Welsh, Latin, English, and French. In his elegy to Rhydderch, **Gruffudd Llwyd** says, cyfraith trwy bob iaith o'i ben '[he delivers] the law in every language from his mouth.' **Ddafydd ap Gwilym**, too, describes Rhydderch as cyweithas ieithydd 'a genial linguist', and **Dafydd y Coed** names him pab geirserch pob gorsedd 'the word-loving pope of every court'.

Much of our understanding of Rhydderch's character, his reputation, and even his career comes to us through poems to and about him. Perhaps as early as the 1340s **Ddafydd ap Gwilym**, who died well before Rhydderch, composed a ffug-farwnad, a false or mock elegy, to Rhydderch, extolling in particular the latter's close friendship with his second cousin, Llywelyn Fychan ap Llywelyn Goch ap Llywelyn Gapan. **Llywelyn Goch ap Meurig Hen** also composed a praise poem to the two friends. In his description of a poetic circuit of Wales, **Iolo Goch** recommends 'greeting Rhydderch the giver / son of Ieuan Llwyd', and one suspects Iolo must have written additional poems, now lost, to such an important patron. **Dafydd y Coed**'s praise poem to Rhydderch in The Red Book of Hergest compares him to Solomon, but also to numerous characters from traditional tales and triads: **Arthur**, **Cai**, **Caw**, **Garwy Hir**, **Meirion**, **Bedwyr**, **Lŷr**, **Geraint**, and **Rholant** (the French hero Roland). Such a list surely reflects Rhydderch's interest in and familiarity with the Welsh narrative tradition, especially as preserved in the famous manuscript that bears his name.

Around the middle of the fourteenth century Rhydderch commissioned the scribes of Strata Florida, most likely, to compile the manuscript of prose tales and other texts which was known by the late sixteenth century, and probably earlier, as **Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch**, 'The White Book of Rhydderch'. This important collection includes the earliest complete texts of *The Mabinogi*, *How Culhwch Got Olwen*, and five other tales of Welsh mythological, legendary, and Arthurian interest, thus comprising all but one of the texts now called 'The Mabinogion'. In addition, it also contains Welsh translations of popular religious texts, saints' lives, tales of Charlemagne, and some early Welsh poetry and traditional triads. This precious manuscript, divided into two parts, is kept in the National Library of Wales as **Peniarth MS 4** and **Peniarth MS 5**.

According to genealogical records, Rhydderch had seven sons and five daughters with his two wives, Margred, daughter of Gruffudd Gryg ab Ieuan Fychan, and Mawd, daughter of Sir William Clement, Lord of Tregaron, as well as an extra-marital son, Guto. According to **Bartrum** (Cydifor ap Gweithfoed 3) and **Lewys Dwnn** (p. 45), **Ieuan ap Rhydderch**, who became a well-known poet, was the son of Rhydderch and Mawd, but elsewhere (p. 28) **Dwnn** states that a certain Annes, daughter of Gwilym ap Ffyllib of Morgannwg, 'married Rhydderch ap Ieuan Lloyd, Esgwier, and she was the mother of **Ieuan ap Rhydderch** the Poet'. Thus, there may have been a third marriage.

As evidenced in the poetry, Ieuan ap Gruffudd Foel, Ieuan Llwyd, and Rhydderch resided at Glyn Aeron, about ten miles from Strata Florida Abbey, where more than a dozen of their forebears are known to have been buried. The precise location of Glyn Aeron is unknown, but it may have been in the vicinity of either Glyn-ucha or Glyn-isa, just to the northeast and south, respectively, of Llangeitho. The family is later connected to Parchrhydderch, which may have been located on the site of the post-medieval house of that name, recorded photographically in the 1890s but no longer extant, on the present-day Parc Rhydderch farm a mile and a half southwest of Llangeitho.

Author

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Further reading

Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch

Dafydd ap Gwilym.net

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd

Additional Links

NLW Archives: Peniarth MS 4: Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch

NLW Archives: Peniarth MS 5: Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch

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