

LLYWARCH HEN, a 6th century British prince and a hero of a cycle of Welsh tales dating from the mid-9th century

Name: Llywarch Hen
Parent: Gwawr ferch Brachan
Parent: Elidyr Lledanwyn
Gender: Male
Occupation: British prince and a hero of a cycle of Welsh tales dating from the mid-9th century
Area of activity: Poetry; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Royalty and Society
Author: David Myrddin Lloyd

The following ancient pedigrees are our only source of knowledge of the historic Llywarch: 'Bonedd Gwŷr y Gogledd' - [Peniarth MS 45](#), B.M. Harl. MS. 3859 (although Llywarch's name does not appear here, mention is made of some of his contemporary relations in the *genealogiae Saxonum* which are attached to the text of [Nennius](#)), B.M. Cottonian, Vesp. A. xiv, Domitian 1, 'Bonedd y Saint,' and the pedigrees of the princes of Gwynedd as contained in the 'Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan.' According to these, Llywarch was descended from Coel Gotebauc, his father was Elidyr Lledanwyn, and his mother was Gwawr, daughter of Brachan. He was, both on the paternal and the maternal side, a cousin of Urien of Rheged who fought against the sons of Ida in the latter half of the 6th century; and the princes of Gwynedd, and other Welsh provinces, were descended from him through [Merfyn Frych](#) and [Rhodri Mawr](#).

Towards the middle of the 9th century, during a period of adversity for Powys, a story-teller of that province composed a cycle of tales about Llywarch and his sons. These contained *englynion*, which alone are extant as a result of having been copied into the Red Book of Hergest, col. 1026-49 (although a few also appear in earlier MSS). The stories were woven around the names of Llywarch and some of his genuine contemporaries in the old North, as found in the pedigrees, but these dramatic tales are located on the eastern borders of Powys. A well-established tradition that Llywarch was a poet and a native of Powys resulted from these romances, and the same source gave rise to the pedigrees of his sons which appear in *Dwnn* (*Visitations*) and the descent from him of the leading families of Penllyn and the surrounding country, together with the legend of his burial in Llanfor, and the association of his name with the old remains there and elsewhere in Wales. The unravelling of the recorded facts concerning the historical Llywarch from these legendary accretions is the work of [Sir Ifor Williams](#), on whose researches this note is entirely based.

Author

[David Myrddin Lloyd](#), (1909 - 1981)

Sources

Ifor Williams, *Canu Llywarch Hen* (1935)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Llywarch Hen](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q1434699](#)

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