

## OWAIN GLYNDWR (c. 1354 - 1416), 'Prince of Wales'

**Name:** Owain Glyndwr  
**Date of birth:** c. 1354  
**Date of death:** 1416  
**Spouse:** Margaret Hanmer  
**Child:** Catherine ferch Owain Glyndwr  
**Child:** Alice ferch Owain Glyndwr  
**Child:** Gwenllïan ferch Owain Glyndwr  
**Child:** Maredudd ab Owain Glyndwr  
**Parent:** Helen ferch Thomas ap Llywelyn ab Owen  
**Parent:** Gruffydd Fychan II ap Madog ap Gruffydd Fychan I  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** 'Prince of Wales'  
**Area of activity:** Military; Politics, Government and Political Movements; Royalty and Society  
**Author:** Thomas Jones Pierce

Son and heir of Gruffydd Fychan (II) ap Madog ap Gruffydd Fychan (I), barons of Glyndyfrdwy and Cynllaith Owain in northern Powys, once held in its entirety by Gruffydd Maelor II, father of Gruffydd Fychan I; he was thus descended from **Madog ap Maredudd**, last king of united Powys, and in him reposed claims of succession to that ancient province. His mother was Helen, daughter and co-heiress to Thomas ap Llywelyn ab Owen (her sister married **Tudur ap Goronwy**), Thomas being the representative in the senior line of the old royal family of Deheubarth. Helen transmitted this claim to her son, together with land in the Cardiganshire commotes of Gwynionydd and Iscoed Uch Hirwern. He had no close ties of blood with Gwynedd, though remoter links through marriage gave him descent from **Owain Gwynedd** and **Gruffudd ap Cynan**; and after the death of **Owain ap Thomas ap Rhodri** in 1378, few remained with a better claim than his to the heritage of the Llywelyns. He married (perhaps in 1383) Margaret, daughter of **David Hanmer** of Maelor; there were six sons and several daughters. Of the sons, only Maredudd appears to have survived his father.

There is no indication in his early life presaging the events of his later years. Some time was spent in London acquiring - at the Inns of Court - some of the social graces of the courtier. After a further period of apprenticeship as a soldier, he courted the crown in several campaigns: he certainly accompanied the Scottish expedition in 1385 and, in 1387, may have supported Henry Bolingbroke - the future king Henry IV - at Radcot Bridge. In 1386 he appeared as witness in a notable case heard before a court of chivalry, a fact which suggests familiarity with heraldic and military lore. Otherwise his interests, as revealed by poets who frequented his homes at Carrog and Sycarth, were those of a normal Welsh gentleman or uchelwr. His reaction to the change of dynasty in 1399 is unknown; and there is no reason to suppose that a quarrel then brewing with his neighbour - Reginald Grey, lord of Ruthin - was caused by anything more than a clash of temperament and personal interests. Yet it was his decision to bring this issue to the arbitrament of force which precipitated the most serious rising against alien rule since the fall of **Llywelyn ap Gruffydd**.

On 16 September 1400, in association with a group of kinsmen, he attacked Ruthin. Assaults on other boroughs in the neighbourhood followed, after which the records are ominously silent concerning his movements (the initiative meanwhile passed to his cousins (see under **Ednyfed Fychan** of Penmynydd) until he re-appears in the summer of 1401. A victory in the Plynlimmon region over royal forces gathered there encouraged a successful appeal to the men of west Wales to join 'in liberating the Welsh race from the bondage of their English enemies.' The year 1402, spent mainly in campaigns along the eastern march, saw the capture of Reginald Grey (later ransomed for 10,000 marks) and **Edmund Mortimer**, a cadet of the family whose kinship to the late king, Richard II, was a standing threat to the survival of the reigning Lancastrians. Owain's alliance with **Mortimer**, cemented by marriage with his daughter Catherine - and with the younger Percy (Hotspur), son of the powerful earl of Northumberland, increased his prominence; though Percy was defeated and slain at Shrewsbury (1403), the arrangement was continued by the elder Percy, being amplified in the Tripartite Indenture (1405) which visualised for Owain a dominion extending well beyond the normal boundaries of Wales, with little to fear from an England divided between his fellow-conspirators. The capture of Aberystwyth and Harlech in 1404 made him master of west Wales from sea to sea. Already enjoying the tacit support of the Scots, his triumph was complete when in the same year a treaty with France was concluded. But in spite of French aid, he failed to retrieve the tragic defeat of Pwll Melyn (May 1405) by engaging Henry at Worcester and so bringing the war to a decisive issue. The next three years witnessed the recession of foreign allies, the submission of the western lowlands, the defeat of Percy at Bramham Moor, and finally the loss of Aberystwyth and Harlech. He held out for many years longer in the mountains of central Wales: in 1410 he was still in possession of his home district and was able to muster sufficient support for a raid on the Salop border. After 1412 he is heard of no more, though he evidently lived on until 1416, spending his last days, it is believed, at Monnington, a secluded spot in Herefordshire - the home of his daughter Alice Scudamore.

There is a tantalisingly elusive quality about Owain's career; it is impossible to do more than guess how the immediate occasions of the rising fit into the pattern of general social discontent which brought his leadership the support of a proud and conservative peasantry making its last protest against the interaction of alien institutions with the old native way of life. The extent to which Owain was sensitive to this public feeling, or whether indeed he foresaw the consequences of his initial move, is unknown. On the other hand the programme unfolded after 1400, including the assumption of the title 'Prince of Wales' and the royal arms of Gwynedd, the twin conception of a national parliament and an independent Welsh church, the trend of diplomatic relations and the exploitation of the struggle between crown and aristocracy in England, all suggest a premeditated plan of action based on a knowledge of political traditions derived from the days of the last **Llywelyn**. But the question remains as to how far such ideas were inspired by Owain himself, or alternatively how far his experience and antecedents made him an instrument in the hands of others. He nevertheless remains in popular imagination the outstanding figure of Welsh history in the ages preceding the Methodist Revival.

### Author

Professor Thomas Jones Pierce, (1905 - 1964)

## Sources

J. E. Lloyd, *Owen Glendower / Owen Glyn Dwr* (1931), in which a full bibliography will be found

## Further Reading

Rhun IEmlyn, *Pennal Letter: Wales' important role in European politics*, NLW blog, 29 March 2019

Glanmor Williams, *Owain Glyndŵr* (Cardiff 2005)

Wikipedia Article: *Owain Glyndŵr*

## Sound and Film

Owain Glyndŵr's Pennal Letter

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