

RHYS ap THOMAS, Sir (1449 - 1525), the chief Welsh supporter of Henry VII

Name: Rhys ap Thomas
Date of birth: 1449
Date of death: 1525
Spouse: Joan Mathew
Spouse: Eva ferch Henri ap Gwilym
Child: Gruffudd ap Rhys
Parent: Elizabeth ferch Syr John Gruffydd
Parent: Thomas ap Gruffudd ap Nicolas
Gender: Male
Occupation: chief Welsh supporter of Henry VII
Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: James Frederick Rees

was the third son of Thomas ap Gruffudd ap Nicolas. His grandfather, **Gruffudd ap Nicolas**, had in 1440 leased the lordship of Dinefwr for a period of sixty years and thus laid the foundation of the family fortunes. His father, Thomas ap Gruffudd, had strengthened the position of the family by his marriage to Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of Sir John Gruffydd of Abermarlais, who could claim descent from the Welsh princes. As a lad he spent some time abroad with his father at the court of Burgundy, returning about 1467. On the death of his father, who had been predeceased by his two elder sons, Rhys ap Thomas succeeded to the estate. The family tradition had been Lancastrian, but in the circumstances of the time caution was necessary. In the reign of Edward IV, Rhys organized a local military force in his support, but after the accession of Richard III he got into touch with **Henry Tudor** who was then an exile in Brittany. There is little doubt that he promised to assist him and that, when **Henry** landed at Milford Haven, he used his great influence in his favour, though the story that he salved his conscience by allowing **Henry** to cross over his body while he crouched under Mullock Bridge, near Dale, must be taken as legendary. He joined the invading force near Welshpool with levies raised in the vale of Towy and was knighted for his services on the field of Bosworth (22 August 1485). In November of the same year he received other tokens of royal favour. He was granted the offices of constable and steward of the lordship of Brecknock, chamberlain of the counties of Carmarthen and Cardigan, and steward of the lordship of Builth. He thus held the chief appointments which were in the gift of the king in South Wales. Sir Rhys continued active in the support of the new dynasty. He was in command of a troop of horse at the battle of Stoke (16 June 1487) when the pretender Lambert Simnel was defeated and captured, and he took part in the expedition against Boulogne in October 1492. At the battle of Blackheath (17 June 1497) he took the leader, lord Audeley, prisoner, and was created a knight-banneret. He was present at the surrender of Perkin Warbeck at Beaulieu Abbey in September 1497. For these and other services he was made Knight of the Garter on 22 April 1505. He continued in favour after the accession of Henry VIII and took part in that king's invasion of France in 1513. His later years he spent at Carew castle which the owner had mortgaged to him. It was there that he held a great tournament to celebrate his admission to the Order of the Garter and to which he invited representatives of the leading families from all parts of Wales. He also made extensive alterations to the castle, building the gate-house and inserting windows.

Sir Rhys ap Thomas married (1) Eva, daughter of Henri ap Gwilym of Cwrt Henri, and (2) Janet, daughter of **Thomas Mathew** of Radyr, who was widow of **Thomas Stradling** of S. Donats. He died in 1525 and was buried in Greyfriars church, Carmarthen. His body was later removed to S. Peters church; the tomb there was restored in 1865. His widow died at Picton castle in 1535 and was also buried in Greyfriars church. His estates, though not his offices, passed to his grandson, **Sir Rhys ap Gruffydd**, who, in 1531, forfeited them and his life for alleged conspiracy (see further the article on the **Rice family**).

Author

Sir James Frederick Rees, (1883 - 1967)

Sources

There are many references to Sir Rhys in the Tudor chronicles and in Francis Bacon's *Bacon's history of the reign of King Henry VII with notes* (Cambridge 1888)

A detailed biography written in the early 17th cent, is printed in the *Cambrian Register* (1795â€“1818), 1796, i, and there are long excerpts from it in Richard Fenton's *A Historical Tour through Pembrokeshire* (London 1811), 1811. This biography, the author of which is unknown [but see article Rice family], contains much that must be taken with some reserve

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Rhys ap Thomas](#)

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