

BRANWEN

ferch Llŷr



Before Harlech Castle was built — in a mythical time of monsters and magic — a giant king went to war to avenge his sister, Branwen ferch Llŷr. This is our version of their story.

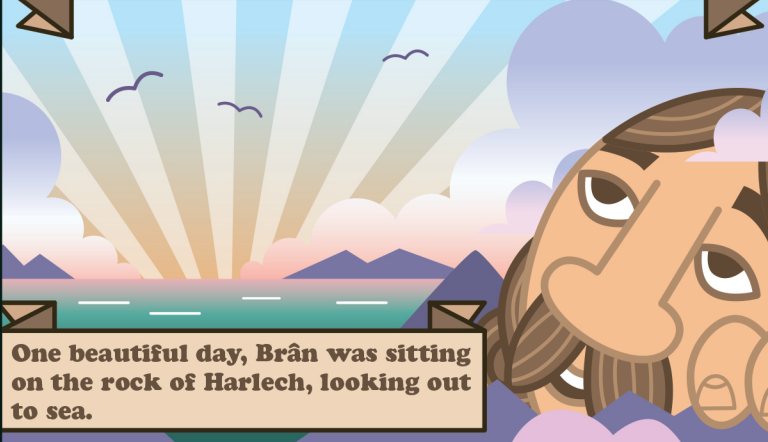


Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Cadw

Illustration ©Pete Fowler 2015

Bendigeidfran, known as Brân, was a giant who ruled the whole of Britain. He lived in Harlech with his sister, brother and half-brothers.



One beautiful day, Brân was sitting on the rock of Harlech, looking out to sea.

His sister, Branwen, came to join him — along with his brother, Manawydan, and his half-brother, Nisien.



But their moody half-brother Efnisien rode off.

Suddenly, a fleet of ships appeared.



On one ship, Matholwch, the king of Ireland, held his shield high.

I come in peace!



Matholwch's visit was celebrated with a feast.

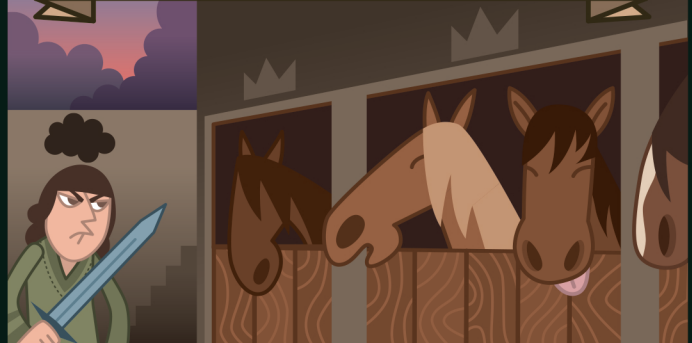


Brân agreed.



The marriage might prevent future wars between Britain and Ireland.

During the royal wedding, Efnisien returned. He was angry that no one had told him about the marriage.



In a rage, he pulled out his sword...



... and injured Matholwch's horses.

The king of Ireland was shocked and confused when he was told about Efnisien's cruel actions.

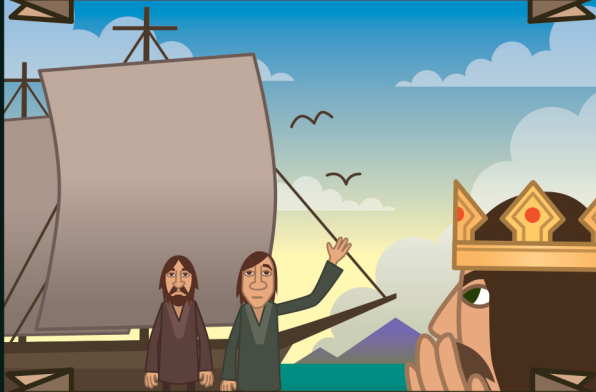


Matholwch gathered his followers...



... and told them they were leaving.

Brân's messengers caught up with Matholwch and asked him what was wrong.



The king of Ireland told them about his horses.

Brân was ashamed when he learned about Efnisien's attack on the animals.

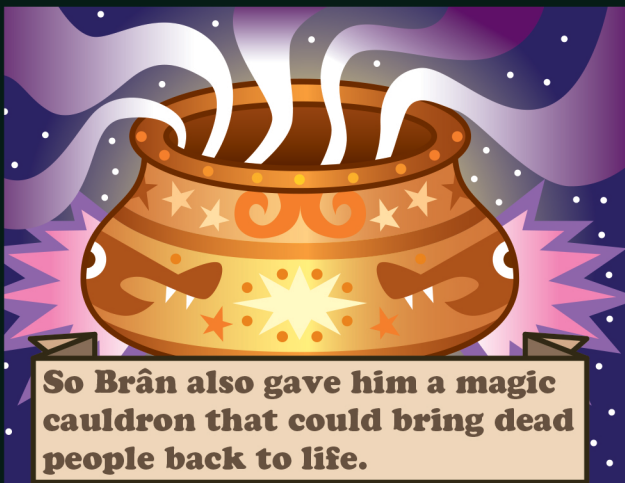


He offered the king of Ireland a horse for every one that had been injured.



Matholwch accepted — but couldn't forgive.

So Brân also gave him a magic cauldron that could bring dead people back to life.



Matholwch accepted the magic cauldron. He and Branwen set off across the sea to Ireland.



The royal couple received a warm welcome.



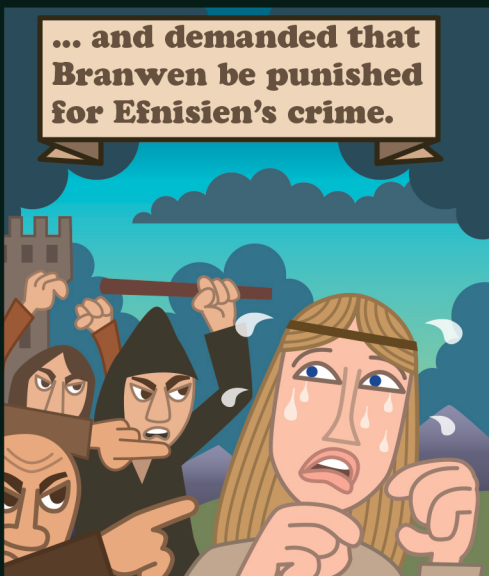
Within a year, Branwen gave birth to a son — Gwern fab Matholwch.



But the people of Ireland found out about the attack on the horses...



... and demanded that Branwen be punished for Efnisien's crime.



Branwen was sent to live and work in the kitchen, where she was beaten.



She was there for years. During that time she befriended a starling and taught it to speak.



One day, she tied a letter to the starling's wing and sent it to find Brân.



Her brother read the letter and immediately assembled an army.



To avoid war, Matholwch promised to give Ireland to his son, Gwern. But Efnisien, suspecting a trick, threw the boy into a fire.



A terrible battle began.



... but the Irish army had the magic cauldron and could bring fallen soldiers back to life.



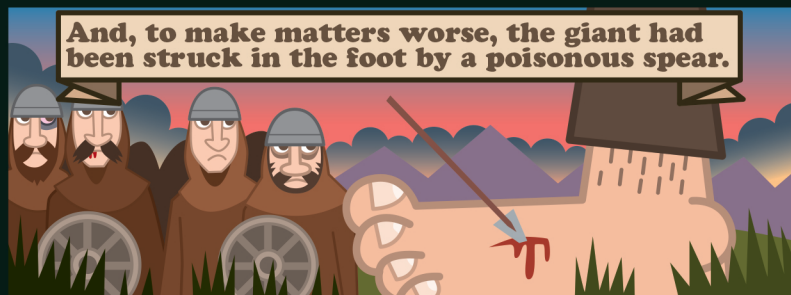
Brân had a large and powerful army...



Efnisien, full of regret, smashed the cauldron to pieces — killing himself at the same time.



Eventually, Brân's army won the battle, but only seven soldiers had survived.



And, to make matters worse, the giant had been struck in the foot by a poisonous spear.

Knowing that he would die, Brân ordered his men to cut off his head and carry it to London.

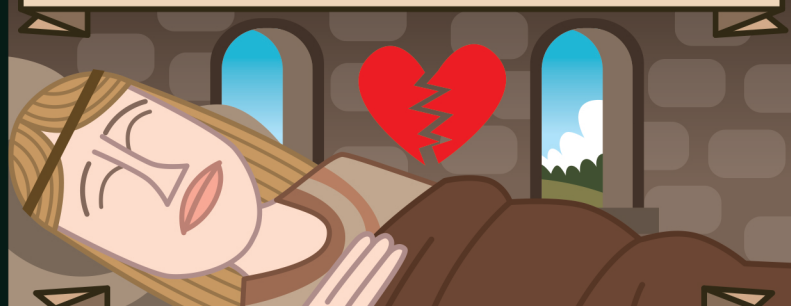


Brân's head didn't die, though. He even talked to his men during their journey — first at Harlech and then at Grassholm Island.

Eventually, after over eighty years, Brân's head was buried at Gwynfryn — the 'White Hill' — in London.



Horrified by her son's death, Branwen had died of a broken heart after the battle.



She was buried at Bedd Branwen in the heart of Anglesey.