

GWENLLIAN

A brave Welsh warrior princess



870 years ago, in the kingdom of Deheubarth (south-west Wales), the Welsh were fighting against the Normans who had conquered parts of the country. This is the story of Gwenvael, the daughter of Gruffudd ap Cynan, ruler of Gwynedd (north Wales).

Gwenllian married Gruffudd ap Rhys, prince of Deheubarth. Their marriage united two of Wales' most powerful families and kingdoms in troubled times. Gwenllian and Gruffudd began their married life in Dinefwr.



But their land was under constant attack from the Normans.



So the couple hid in the thick forests and mountains where Gwenllian raised four sons.



From the mountains, Gruffudd formed an army, led ambushes...



... and planned how to defeat the Normans.



His chance came in 1135 when the king of England died.



The king's daughter and nephew both wanted to rule England.



While the Norman lords were distracted by the fight for the crown, the Welsh began their uprising.



Gruffudd travelled north to get help from Gwenllïan's family and strengthen his army. While he was away Gwenllïan heard that the Norman lord Maurice de Londres...



... to attack the Normans at Kidwelly Castle.



...was planning an attack against the Welsh rebels. Rather than wait for Gruffudd's return, Gwenllïan felt she had to take action. She led an army, including her sons Morgan and Maelgwn...



Gwenllïan and her men battled with Maurice de Londres' forces in a field near the castle. Despite Gwenllïan's courage, her army was overpowered by the Normans.



Morgan was killed in battle and Gwenllïan and Maelgwn were captured.



Maurice de Londres showed no mercy. To set an example to all Welsh rebels, he ordered the beheading of Gwenllïan.



It is said that a spring welled up where the brave princess Gwenllïan died after fighting for Wales' land and freedom. The place is now known as Maes Gwenllïan.



Gwenllian's death was not in vain. The Welsh did not stop fighting against the Normans.



Gwenllian's brother, Owain Gwynedd, joined forces with her husband Gruffudd.



Together with their army they swept across western Wales, driving the Normans from their land.



Gwenllian's youngest son, Rhys ap Gruffudd, grew up to become a ruler of Deheubarth. He was a soldier and a diplomat.



He regained his family's kingdom through negotiating rather than fighting with the new king of England.



Known as The Lord Rhys, he built many castles and maybe even started building Kidwelly Castle in stone.



The Lord Rhys loved poetry and music and held a festival of music and poetry in 1176, which is now known as the first Eisteddfod.



The Lord Rhys died in 1197, but his legacy lives on at the National Eisteddfod, which is celebrated every year in Wales.

