

# Heroes and Heroines of Wales

## Gwenllian



 **Cadw**



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Gwenllian's story is set over 870 years ago in the kingdom of Deheubarth (south-west Wales). England and parts of Wales had been conquered by the Normans, who built great castles to show off their power. But the Welsh people fought back for their land and freedom. It was a time of endless struggle and bloodshed.

# Gwenllian

Welsh Warrior Princess



Gwenllian: the Welsh Warrior Princess

Gwenllian was a brave and beautiful Welsh princess who died trying to save her country from Norman invaders. She was the daughter of Gruffudd ap Cynan, ruler of Gwynedd (northern Wales).

**When Gwenllian married Gruffudd ap Rhys, prince of Deheubarth (south-west Wales), some say it was for love. But others saw it as a power move, uniting the two kingdoms in troubled times.**

## Married life in hiding

Gwenllian's married life began in southern Wales at Gruffudd's family home in the upper Tywi valley, perhaps at Dinefwr. But Gruffudd's land was under constant threat from the Normans. For their safety, the couple hid in the thick forests and mountains of their kingdom. From there, Gwenllian raised her four sons, while Gruffudd built an army, led ambushes, and planned how to overcome the Normans.

His chance came in 1135. The king of England had died, and his nephew and daughter were fighting for the crown. While the Norman lords were distracted, the Welsh could begin their uprising. Gruffudd travelled north to get help from Gwenllian's family.

## Gwenllian's fatal move

But while Gruffudd was away, Gwenllian heard that the Norman lord, Maurice de Londres, was gathering forces for an attack on the Welsh rebels. Rather than wait for

her husband's return, she felt she had to take action. Gwenllian led her men from the security of the forests to attack the Norman stronghold at Kidwelly Castle. By her side were two of her sons, Morgan and Maelgwn, both teenagers.

Gwenllian's army met Maurice de Londres' forces in a field near the castle. Despite Gwenllian's courage, her army was no match for the Normans. Her men were overpowered, and Morgan was killed.

## Norman lord shows no mercy

Gwenllian and Maelgwn were captured. Maurice de Londres showed no mercy – to set an example to all Welsh princes, he had Gwenllian beheaded for treason. It is said that a spring welled up where the brave Princess Gwenllian died – a place now known as Maes Gwenllian (Field of Gwenllian).



The Tywi valley where Gwenllian fled.

Source: Carmarthenshire County Council.



A memorial dedicated to Gwenllian at Kidwelly Castle



Gwenllian's army went to battle near Kidwelly Castle



Nevern Castle



Carreg Cennen Castle



Dinefwr Castle



Llansteffan Castle



The tombstone of Maurice de Londres at Ewenny Priory



Laugharne Castle

### All's not lost

Gwenllian's death wasn't all in vain. The Welsh rose up against the Normans. Her brother Owain Gwynedd joined forces with her husband Gruffudd ap Rhys. They swept across western Wales, driving the Normans from their land.

Gwenllian's youngest son, Rhys ap Gruffudd, grew up to become ruler of Deheubarth. He was both a soldier and a diplomat. Known later as The Lord Rhys, he regained his family's kingdom through negotiations with the new king of England. He built castles, many of which you can still see today. He also introduced festivals of poetry and music, which have become the traditional 'eisteddfodau' in Wales.

You can follow the story of Gwenllian and the princes of Deheubarth at lots of places in south-west Wales.

# Follow the footsteps

You've read Gwenllian's story, now explore the castles and forests where she and her family once walked...

## Kidwelly Castle

When this magnificent building is shrouded in mist, it's like stepping back into medieval times. This was the Norman castle upon which Gwenllian marched, but in later years it was captured by her son, Lord Rhys.

- Close your eyes and imagine the battle cries as Gwenllian's men fought the Normans.
- Picture Lord Rhys after capturing the castle, striding the walls in triumph.
- Explore the four towers, and sit on the great throne as if you're a medieval Prince of Wales.
- Find the stone slab near the gatehouse, a memorial to Gwenllian.
- Feel the atmosphere. Do you believe the stories that Gwenllian's ghost haunts the castle?

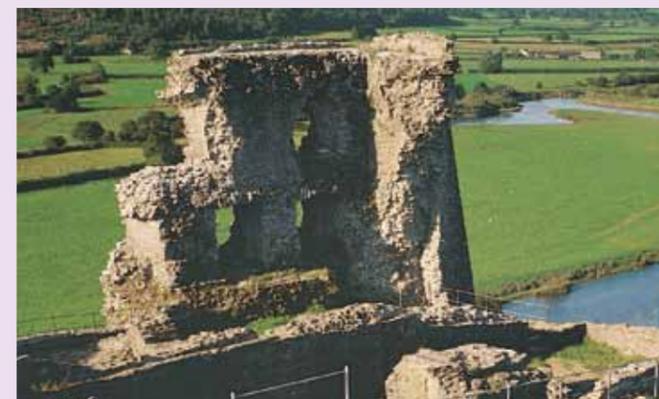
## Laugharne Castle

Castles were often built on estuaries like this, to protect against invading armies. Laugharne is said to be the place where Lord Rhys signed a peace treaty with King.

## Dryslwyn Castle

Now in ruins, the castle was probably built by Lord Rhys's son – Rhys Grug. Several generations of princes of Deheubarth lived here.

- Stand on the ruins and look down on the Tywi valley. The forests are where Gwenllian and Gruffudd hid and plotted their raids against the Normans.



Dryslwyn Castle

Visit [www.cadw.wales.gov.uk](http://www.cadw.wales.gov.uk) to explore the sites.

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## Dinefwr Castle

After her death, Gwenllian's son Lord Rhys built a new castle here as he strengthened the kingdom against attack. It might have been on the site of the family home of Gwenllian's husband, the Prince of Deheubarth.

- Explore the parkland and woods where Gwenllian and Gruffudd could have hidden from the Normans and planned their attacks.

## Carreg Cennen Castle

This could be the site of one of Lord Rhys's castles. With its sheer sides, it would have been almost impossible to penetrate. But it saw many sieges, and ownership often changed hands between the Welsh and English.

- Enjoy the spectacular views – ideal for Lord Rhys' men to watch for invading armies.
- Look down the steep cliff faces – almost impossible for invaders to climb.

## Nevern Castle

Explore the once grand castle at Nevern, which is gradually being revealed by excavation. The castle was stormed by Lord Rhys in 1191, who then gave it to his son. Later, a bitter family feud began, and Lord Rhys was imprisoned in the castle by his own sons!

- Do some detective work - find the ditches, mounds and ruined walls, and work out how they once formed the impressive stone castle.
- Stand on the peaceful earthworks and imagine more troubled times, when the Normans and princes of Wales fought for ownership of the castle.

## Llansteffan Castle

When you've explored the beach, head up to this amazing castle perched on the cliffs. The castle controlled an important river crossing, so the Welsh and Normans fought bitterly for its ownership.

