

DAFYDD ab OWAIN GWYNEDD (died 1203), king of Gwynedd

Name: Dafydd ab Owain Gwynedd
Date of death: 1203
Spouse: Emma ferch Geoffrey o Anjou
Child: Wennour ferch Dafydd
Child: Owain ap Dafydd
Parent: Christina ferch Gronw
Parent: Owain ap Gruffydd ap Cynan
Gender: Male
Occupation: king of Gwynedd
Area of activity: Military; Royalty and Society
Author: John Edward Lloyd

Son of **Owain Gwynedd** and **Christina**, daughter of Gronw ab Owain ab Edwin. Father and mother being first cousins, their union was not recognized by the church, and its issue was deemed illegitimate. Dafydd is first heard of in 1157, when he took an active part in the ambush of Hawarden Woods, which was all but fatal to Henry II. In 1165 he was stationed in Dyffryn Clwyd and opened the conflict of that year with a raid on Tegeingl, in which he carried off much booty. The death of his father in November 1170 opened up a new prospect; he and his brother **Rhodri** attacked and slew their half-brother, **Hywel ab Owain**, in a battle near Pentraeth in Anglesey. In 1173 he made an onset upon another half-brother, **Maelgwn ab Owain**, and drove him from Anglesey, to find a refuge in Ireland. 1174 was the year of his greatest triumph; he ejected all his rivals, including **Rhodri**, imprisoned **Maelgwn**, who had ventured to return from exile, and became for a brief season ruler of the whole of Gwynedd. To this year, it would appear, belongs the laudatory poem of **Gwilym Rhyfel**, who calls him 'king of Cemais.' In the great upheaval of 1173, Dafydd took the king's side, and he was thus emboldened to ask for the hand of Emma, a natural daughter of Geoffrey of Anjou and therefore Henry's half-sister. It was granted, with some reluctance; the wedding took place in the summer of 1174, the bride's expenses being met out of the royal coffers.

This was the summit of Dafydd's career. In 1175 he suffered a reverse. Attacked by **Rhodri**, whom he had imprisoned but who made his escape, he was driven across the Conway into that eastern half of Gwynedd, where he could rely on Norman help. The change was unwelcome to the Anglesey poet, **Gwalchmai**, who bemoans the loss of his patron, Dafydd, since **Rhodri**, who is now ruler in the island, has no use for his gifts. Some compensation came in 1177, when, at the conference with Henry II at Oxford, Emma's husband was gratified with the bestowal of the lordships of Ellesmere and Hales in Shropshire. He seems now to have settled in the Middle Country, with a fine castle at Rhuddlan, admired by **Giraldus Cambrensis**, who spent a night there, with archbishop Baldwin's company, in the spring of 1188.

In 1194 fortune struck him a second blow. After he had been harassed for some time by his energetic young nephew, **Llywelyn ap Iorwerth**, that rising star entered into an alliance with his cousins, the sons of **Cynan ab Owain Gwynedd**, and with their aid signally defeated Dafydd in a battle fought at Aberconwy. He was reduced to a realm of three castles, and even this he lost in 1197 when **Llywelyn** imprisoned him. Released from captivity in 1198 by the direct intervention of archbishop Hubert, he withdrew to the safety of his English manors and there spent the rest of his days. He died in or about May 1203, having, says **Giraldus Cambrensis**, won the esteem of both nations by maintaining a just balance between Welsh and English. He was a donor to the Shropshire abbey of Haughmond, bestowing upon it the vills of Stocket and Cricket in his lordship of Ellesmere and adding to its possessions in Nevin, where it had the church by gift of his uncle **Cadwaladr**.

By his wife, Emma, Dafydd had a son, Owain, and a daughter. Mother and son succeeded to Hales, which thus acquired its name of 'Halesowen.' Ellesmere, on the other hand, was resumed by the Crown, though it was not long ere it had once more a Welsh lord in **Llywelyn ap Iorwerth**. In 1212, when John and **Llywelyn** were at odds, there was an attempt to put Owain forward as prince in his father's room in Eastern Gwynedd. But there was no response in the country, and in October 1214 it would appear that Emma and Owain were both dead, for the king in that year gave Hales to Peter des Roches, who founded there a house of Premonstratensian canons. The daughter, 'Wennour,' was married to Meurig, son of Roger, a powerful baron of the march of Welsh descent, who was much employed in the royal service as interpreter between Welsh and English. She received Elson, an Ellesmere vill, as her marriage portion, and became the mother of two sons, 'Wrennoc' (Gronw) and Gwenwynwyn, who, on the death of Meurig in 1200, succeeded to his lands.

Author

Sir John Edward Lloyd, (1861 - 1947)

Sources

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Further Reading

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