

GIRALDUS CAMBRENSIS ('Gerald of Wales', Gerald de Barri) (1146? - 1223), archdeacon of Brecon and mediaeval Latin writer

Name: Giraldus Cambrensis
Date of birth: 1146?
Date of death: 1223
Parent: Angharad de Barri (née de Windsor)
Parent: William de Barri
Gender: Male
Occupation: archdeacon of Brecon and mediaeval Latin writer
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Religion; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Thomas Jones

Born some time between 1145 and 1147 at Manorbier, Pembrokeshire, the youngest son of William de Barri and Angharad, daughter of Gerald de Windsor and **Nest**, daughter of **Rhys ap Tewdwr**. He received his early education from his uncle **David FitzGerald** bishop of S. Davids, and at the abbey of S. Peter, Gloucester. Subsequently he was a student at the University of Paris, and after his return thence, in 1172, he received a commission from Richard, archbishop of Canterbury, to enforce the payment of tithes on wool and cheese in the diocese of S. Davids. He came into conflict with Jordan, archdeacon of Brecon, whose office was then transferred to Gerald who held it until he retired from public life. After **David FitzGerald**'s death in 1176, Gerald was the chapter's favourite candidate to succeed him as bishop, but Henry II refused to recognize his nomination by the canons and enforced the election of **Peter** of Lee, prior of Wenlock. In his disappointment Gerald turned to his books and spent the years 1177-80 in Paris, where he proved himself a very successful lecturer, so he himself says. Soon after his visit to Ireland, accompanied by his brother Philip in 1183, he received office in the king's service, and he acted as mediator between the court and the **lord Rhys ap Gruffydd**. In 1185, because of his relationship to the conquerors of Ireland - his mother's brothers and half-brothers and his own brothers - he was appointed to accompany prince John to Ireland, and he turned this task to good account by collecting materials for his *Expugnatio Hibernica* and *Topographia Hibernica*. In 1188 he accompanied archbishop Baldwin on his tour through Wales to recruit soldiers for the third crusade, a tour of which an account is given in his *Itinerarium Cambriae*. Early in 1194 (the year in which he completed his *Descriptio Cambriae*) he relinquished his office under the Crown and once again devoted himself to his studies, this time at Lincoln, where he remained until 1198. He was offered the bishoprics of Bangor and Llandaff in Wales and those of Ferns and Leighlin in Ireland, but his mind was set upon that of S. Davids. **Peter** of Lee died 16 July 1198, but once again the king and the archbishop of Canterbury objected to the appointment of Gerald as bishop to succeed him, even though he was the chosen favourite of the chapter. From being a struggle for the appointment of Gerald as bishop, the conflict developed into a struggle for the recognition of S. Davids as a metropolitan see independent of Canterbury. It lasted for five years, and Gerald went three times to Rome to plead his cause before pope Innocent III. The story is told in his autobiography *De Rebus a Se Gestis* (its last section is lost) and his *Dialogus de Jure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesiae*. In his enthusiasm Gerald did not realize that it was his very qualifications for being bishop of S. Davids - his Welshness, his learning, and his personal energy - that made him unsuitable in the eyes of his opponents. He sought the support of some of the Welsh princes, but all his labour was in vain; by 1203 he had lost his supporters at S. Davids itself. In November of that year Geoffrey of Henlaw, prior of Llanthony, was appointed bishop, and Gerald agreed to the appointment on condition that Geoffrey would not betray the ancient rights and privileges of S. Davids. He devoted the remainder of his life to his studies and to literature, but in 1205 he went on a spiritual pilgrimage to Rome. He died in 1223 and was buried at S. Davids.

With his friend Walter Map, and **Geoffrey of Monmouth**, he forms a trio of 12th century writers who wrote - in Latin - about things Welsh. In addition to the books mentioned above, he also wrote *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, an exhortation to the clergy on their duties, the *Liber de Invectionibus* [ed. W. S. Davies, *Cymm.*, 1920], an attack upon his enemies, the *De Instructions Principis*, the *Symbolum Electorum* - a collection of his letters, poetry, speeches, etc., the *Spectuum Ecclesiae*, an attack upon the monastic orders, the *Speculum Duorum*, a number of lives of saints including a 'Life of S. David,' based upon the work of **Rhygyfarch**, and other minor tracts.

Author

Professor Thomas Jones

Sources

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H. E. Butler, *The Autobiography of Giraldus Cambrensis* (1937)
Henry Owen, *Gerald the Welshman* (1889)
Archaeologia Cambrensis, 1946 (85, 256)
Thomas Jones (trans), *Gerallt Gymro: hanes y daith trwy Gymru* (1938)
Thomas Jones (trans), *Gerald the Welshman* (1947)
Saunders Lewis, *Ysgrifau Dydd Mercher* (Aberystwyth 1945)

Further Reading

Sally Harper, 'Gerald Gymro (Giraldus Cambrensis, Giraldus de Barri, Gerald de Barri; c.1146-c.1220)', *Cydymaith i Gerddoriaeth Cymru* (Talybont 2018), pp.188-190

Wikipedia Article: [Gerald of Wales](#)

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