

GRUFFUDD GRYG, an Anglesey bard of the second half of the 14th century

Name: Gruffudd Gryg
Spouse: Goleuddydd
Gender: Male
Occupation: bard
Area of activity: Poetry
Author: Ifor Williams

This is to be gathered from Gruffudd's *cywydd* to the seven sons of Iorwerth ap Gruffudd of Lliwon, Anglesey, men who flourished (in all probability) c. 1360-70. He says that he is related to them and he addresses them as his kindred; he must, therefore, have been related in some way to the tribe of Hwfa ap Cynddelw (see [J. E. Griffith](#), *Pedigrees*, 5). He sang also to Einion ap Gruffudd, Chwilog, Eifionydd; he refers to Einion's station 'ar waith ystad' ('in matters of state') and to his silver collar, describing him as being above others in Gwynedd. According to [Breese](#) (*Kalendars of Gwynedd*, 49) Einion was appointed sheriff of Caernarvonshire in 1351 and held the position until 1359; it is reasonable to date the *cywydd* to that period of years, or shortly afterwards. If it was Gruffudd Gryg who wrote the elegy to Rhys ap Tudur, 'chief of Anglesey,' who was honoured by king Richard and appointed 'keeper of the stags of Snowdonia,' we must believe that the poet lived until the beginning of the next century, because Rhys died in 1412, at Arddreiniog, according to Rowlands (*Archæologia Cambrensis*, iv, 267) [but according to Panton MS. 23, he was executed at Chester; [Lloyd, Owen Glendower](#), 154]. Before accepting that view one would like to get further testimony on the two points - the authorship of the *cywydd* and the year of the death of Rhys.

When he was returning from a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella, Spain, Gruffudd's ship was nearly cast ashore 'in the land of Henry,' his enemy. Is this not England, in the time of Henry IV, and therefore some time between 1399 and 1413? At what date within that period?

It is certain that Gruffudd was a contemporary, for some years, of [Dafydd ap Gwilym](#), as there was a well-known bardic 'controversy' between the two. [Dafydd's](#) *floruit* was probably 1340-70; assuming that Gruffudd did not write the poem to Einion until 1360 and that he continued to write until 1412 that would give the period 1360-70 as a possible period of association between the two poets; it would also mean that Gruffudd was composing poetry for a period extending over half a century. That is rather a long stretch of time; that is why one hesitates about the elegy to Rhys ap Tudur.

The 'controversy' with [Dafydd ap Gwilym](#) may suggest some details of chronology. In the first place it must be emphasized that the running-down and the blackening of each other's characters is but done in jest. Each bard heaps foul insults upon the other's mother, their lampoons being couched in the language of the gutter. For the eulogizing in the style of the chief bards there is substituted a competition as between writers of obscenities. They were joined in the jest by [Iolo Goch](#), [Ithel Ddu](#), [Tudur Goch](#), and others; see [Ashton](#), *Gweithiau Iolo Goch*, 404-20, for a fair example of the ribaldry of the period. The satire is, however, nothing but a pack of untruths, and it is useless to search for historical facts in such a dunghill. Gruffudd's mother was not 'Mallt y Cwd' or 'Hersdin Hogl,' nor was he an 'Irishman' or the son of an Irishwoman. It is not unlikely that [Dafydd ap Gwilym](#) realized (*D.G.*, 127, 49-54) that his faction had gone too far; he urges [Tudur Goch](#) to refrain from saying any more and to leave the matter between himself and his protagonist. After that he sang an elegy to Gruffudd, a poem replete with unstinted praise of the 'nightingale of the men of Anglesey.' Gruffudd replies with a magnificent elegy to the 'peacock of Dyfed'; he says he would rather have satire from [Dafydd](#) than glowing praise from another bard - 'I have been his pupil...; he was right and I was in the wrong.' And so, by this make-believe of writing elegies on each other, the two great bards bring the 'controversy' to an end in a magnanimous manner which befitted their stature as poets. Unfortunately, it follows that we have no longer any reason for maintaining that Gruffudd was buried at Llanfaes, Anglesey, as the elegy which says so is not sober evidence. But we do learn something which is of greater importance - that [Dafydd](#) was Gruffudd's teacher in the art of the *cywydd*. Of a certainty it can be said that in regard to his power of description Gruffudd, as is seen in his *cywyddau* to the wave and to the April moon, is as good as his teacher - if not better. [Dafydd](#) had called him a 'gwas,' i.e. boy or youth, and described himself as a 'father' - before the 'controversy' had become so heated as to develop into a quarrel. In fact that is the impression which persists - a young bard challenging an older one. Gruffudd lived to sing to the yew tree growing above [Dafydd ap Gwilym's](#) grave in Strata Florida abbey.

Gruffudd's period is, therefore, a little later than that of [Dafydd ap Gwilym](#) - perhaps it extended a little into the 15th century. He was born near the home of his beloved, Goleuddydd; it was a stone-built house, the bard tells us, but he does not say where it was. He maintained that he had seven companions to welcome him at Aberffraw for every one that [Dafydd ap Gwilym](#) had (see *D.G.C.*, 137-8; *D.G.C.*, 126), but he does not say that the place was his home.

Author

Sir [Ifor Williams](#), (1881 - 1965)

Sources

Ifor Williams and Thomas Roberts (eds), *Cywyddau Dafydd ap Gwilym a'i Gyfoeswyr*, xciii-xcv, 133-58

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Gruffudd Gryg](#)

Additional Links

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