

The Last Rebel and the Mystery of the Templars' Lost Land

By
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Archer lords – the Anglo-Norman lords of the Welsh and English borders, were intricately linked to the native Welsh princes, and some, like the Scudamore family, had links to the Templars and the Knights Hospitallers. The Scudamore family had a close relationship with the self proclaimed native Prince of Wales, Owain Glyn Dwr, who revolted against the English king during 1400-1415.

Maredudd ap Owain Glyn Dwr inherited the leadership of the Welsh rebellion on his father's death, and he finally ended the revolt by accepting a royal pardon in 1421. It had been over twenty years since Owain Glyn Dwr had been proclaimed "Prince of Wales" on

his lands at Glyndyfrdwy in 1400, and Maredudd, along with his brothers, gave full support to their father, taking an active part in what was to become the last Welsh rebellion, although at the end, Maredudd would be the sole survivor.

Owain Glyn Dwr is associated with nearly as many legends as King Arthur in Wales. Like Arthur, he sleeps in a cave awaiting his call to arms to save the Welsh nation, and like Arthur, he vanished mysteriously into the enigmatic mists of time, his last years shrouded in mystery. Glyn Dwr was a native Welsh Baron, living around 900 years after the historical Arthur and was a descendant of the house of Powys Fadog through his father, and the house of Deheubarth



Halton Castle on the Cheshire border with Wales. The castle was used by the Barons of Halton during the medieval period, Edward II reputedly staying there. The castle would have witnessed increased activity during the Welsh wars. Photo by the author.

through his mother. At the dawn of the fifteenth century, he was the wealthiest and perhaps the most important of the few remaining native Welsh Barons that were descended from the old princes. These leading Welsh families, or uchelwyr, were inextricably linked through marriage, creating an interwoven network of extended family groups, holding estates and offices, and as leaders of the local community, they held powerful political positions. They may have been multi-lingual, speaking Welsh, English, and French; they were highly educated and highly knowledgeable of the political system and military matters.

Glyn Dwr was related to Rhys and Gwilym ap Tudor, the uchelwyr from Anglesey, who were of the same family line as the future king Henry VII, and Glyn Dwr's daughters linked him to key families in the March. Catherine had married Edmund Mortimer and Alice had married John Scudamore, both wealthy and influential landowners. All of his sons joined Owain in the revolt against the English in 1400. Though historians differ on the number of his sons, about five sons are named; Gruffydd, Maredudd, Madoc, Thomas, and John, and all seemed to have died childless. By 1404, Owain had captured

Aberystwyth and Harlech, and a "parliament" was held in Machynlleth. Glyn Dwr held court surrounded by leading members of the uchelwyr in key positions of his government such as John and Philip Hanmer and Gruffudd Young, and like Arthur, Glyn Dwr was celebrated in the prophecies by his bard, Iolo Goch, who saw him as the messianic deliverer of the Welsh y mab darogan. Owain's sons would have also had key roles in their father's court and would have been active in the fighting and the affairs of state.

In 1405, a French landing at Milford Haven assisted Glyn Dwr, and he got as far as Worcester. Gruffudd Young represented Glyn Dwr in France and supported the Avignon Pope, recognized by France and Scotland rather than the Pope in Rome. This was a political move, the result of which was to be the independence of the Welsh Church. After sweeping success, the revolt took a downturn in 1405. The battle of Pwllmelyn saw the death of Glyn Dwr's brother, Tudor, and his eldest

son, Gruffydd, was captured, dying as a prisoner in the Tower six years later. Another son is said to have died in 1406, and it was during this year that members of the uchelwyr, such as the Tudors in Anglesey, decided to give up the



This photo of the statue of Glyn Dwr was taken by the author.



Another photo of Halton Castle by the author.

cause and made peace with the Crown. In 1408, Aberystwyth surrendered, followed by Harlech in 1409. The surrender of Harlech saw the capture of Owain's wife, Margaret; his daughter, Catherine; and two of his granddaughters. After this defeat, Glyn Dwr and his son, Maredudd, fled to the mountains and led a guerrilla war against the English, moving through the Welsh landscape like ghosts.

Further defeat and capture of some of the rebels in 1410 continued to dampen the cause, though in 1412, Glyn Dwr and Maredudd successfully captured and ransomed Dafydd Gam of Brecon. The fact that Owain and Maredudd were still on the loose led to English officers conducting their business in Wales under escort, and Gruffudd Young was back in Paris seeking support. A pardon was refused in the same year, and Owain vanished from history, according to legend, spending the remainder of his days at the house of his son-in-law John Scudamore in Hereford, where local legends suggest a number of burial places associated with him which include Kentchurch and Monnington Straddle.

ated with him which include Kentchurch and Monnington Straddle.

The Scudamores, as Lords of Kentchurch, purchased some land in the area called Kentchurch Park from the Crown which had previously belonged to Knights Hospitallers before they had been dissolved, in 1546. The land had belonged to the Knights Templars beforehand, and the land had originally been a gift to them from the ancestors of the Scudamores. A lot of the Marcher lords had given gifts of land to the Templars, and many Anglo-Welsh knights had supported the Templars or similar orders such as Sir Griffith Vaughan, who in the late twelfth century was known as "the wild knight" and was the son of Loworth Goch, his mother Maud being the daughter of Roger de Manley. Griffith was a Knight of Jerusalem of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. During the early part of the fifteenth century when Owain Glyn Dwr supposedly retreated to Kentchurch, part of the land would have been owned by the Hospitallers, and there is a folk

legend that Glyn Dwr took on a disguise as a Franciscan Friar who was a family chaplain to the Scudamore family!

The offer of a pardon was renewed in February 1416, but this time it was directed more specifically at Maredudd, suggesting that the Royal officials knew of Glyn Dwr's death and recognized his son as the new leader of the rebels. Maredudd declined the pardon, and sympathizers to the cause would have assisted the rebels, such as his brother-in-law John Scudamore, and Henry Don, who, after securing his pardon in 1413, was soon holding power again in Cydweli, punishing the anti Glyn Dwr factions of the area. Fear of local raids would have been ever present, and Maredudd was considered dangerous enough for the Crown to try and make peace.

Gruffudd Young was the Avignon Pope's nominee for the archbishopric of St. David and was behind the declaration at the Council of Constance in 1417 that Wales was a separate nation. The claim was put down by the English spokesman who stated that Wales was politically and ecclesiastically incorporated into England. Young's career suffered as a result, and after being given the bishopric of Ross in Scotland, he lived in exile in France. The revolt was, by this time, a lost cause, yet Maredudd lingered on, drifting through the mountains of Wales with a small band of followers.

On the 8th of April, 1421, Maredudd finally surrendered and accepted a Royal pardon. After the reconciliation, Maredudd served Henry VI in France as a professional soldier, joining men who had fought on both sides of the re-



Holt Castle, a castle built by Edward I and was one that suffered during the revolt of Owain Glyndwr in the early 15th century. Photo by the author.

volt. John Scudamore became captain of Harfleur in 1416, and Mathau Goch, the nephew of Glyn Dwr's wife, became one of the most celebrated Welsh commanders in France. Maredudd seems to have been ignored by the poets, bards, and chroniclers who praised Matheu Goch, and during the aftermath of the rebellion, it seems its failure made people want to forget.

In 1430, John Scudamore tried to have Glyn Dwr's outlawry reversed in a bid to recover the confiscated lands for his wife, Alice. The estate was owned by John Beaufort at the time, but he had been a prisoner of the French since 1421. Scudamore appealed to parliament but seemed to have angered Beaufort's brother Edmund, and in 1433, Scudamore was dismissed from his office of deputy justice of the southern principality on the basis that he had married a Welsh woman. The fact that Scudamore had tried to regain Glyn Dwr's lands in the name of his wife, risking this reaction, may indicate that Maredudd was dead by this time. There are no local traditions relating to him, and his final resting place is unknown, the poets ignoring

him, as Glyn Dwr increasingly became seen as a villain, a rebel who caused more harm than good to his country. A generation after the revolt, the poets looked for a leader in the descendants of Dafydd Gam, namely William and Richard Herbert, an indication that the princely line of Glyn Dwr had ended and had been forgotten. The Scudamore family survived and still claim descent from Glyn Dwr today. Maredudd however stayed with his father until the end, keeping the flame of revolt alive, effectively becoming the last rebel.

The most haunting legend of Glyn Dwr tells how he wandered early one morning among the ruins of Dinas Bran, and met the Abbott of Valle Crucis Abbey: "You rose early this morning Abbott" says Glyn Dwr. "It is you who rose early Owain" answers the Abbott, "One hundred years too early," a reference to the rebellion of Henry Tudor, who having Welsh blood, defeated Richard III at the battle of Boswell in

1485 and was seen as finally fulfilling the prophecy of a Welshman capturing the crown of England.

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Nurture your mind with great thoughts; to believe in the heroic makes heroes.
-Benjamin Disraeli

