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## The King of Wales is Murdered

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The first (and indeed only) Welsh monarch was toppled on August 5th, 1063.



Scene of surprise: Rhuddlan Castle, Denbighshire, North Wales

Gruffydd ap Llywelyn was the first, the last and the only King of Wales. For centuries Wales had been split into petty kingdoms, in shifting patterns of alliances and hostilities. Princely dynasties had to cope not only with each other but with ambitious members of their own families, as well as attacks by the Irish and the Vikings and pressure from the English on the eastern border.

Gruffydd was the elder son of Llywelyn ap Seisyll, who ruled the kingdoms of Gwynedd in the north-west and Powys in central Wales until he died in 1023, when Gruffydd would have been about 16. His successor was Iago ab Idwal of an Anglesey branch of the family. Gruffydd bided his time until in 1039 he killed Iago or had him killed and took over Gwynedd and Powys. In 1041 he seized Dyfed in the far south-west, driving the king out and taking his wife as a concubine. He was a ruthless warrior and in a succession of battles he secured his hold on the whole south-west and went on to intervene in English politics.

The most powerful men in England under Edward the Confessor were Earl Godwin's sons Harold and Tostig, who succeeded in getting Aelfgar, the heir to the earldom of Mercia, sent into exile. Gruffydd made an alliance with Aelfgar and in 1055 the two of them joined forces to attack and loot Hereford. Gruffydd carried off substantial plunder and married Aelfgar's beautiful daughter Ealdgyth. About this time he seized Morgannwg and Gwent in the south and south-east and was now recognised as the ruler of all Wales.

Late in 1062 Earl Harold made a surprise attack on Gruffydd at Rhuddlan in North Wales, where he had his court. Gruffydd escaped by the skin of his teeth, but in the following spring Harold and Tostig attacked him again. In August Gruffydd was killed somewhere in Snowdonia, according to one tradition by his own men and to another in revenge by the son of Iago ab Idwal. His head was cut off and sent to Earl Harold, who then married Gruffydd's widow Ealdgyth. Gruffydd's realm was again divided up into its traditional kingdoms.

The Welsh chronicles known as the *Brenhinedd y Saeson* said that Gruffydd died 'after many plunderings and victorious battles against his foes, after many feasts and delights, and great gifts of gold and silver and costly raiment, he who was sword and shield over the fate of all Wales.' Ealdgyth had been Queen of Wales and was soon briefly Queen of England, but only until Harold was killed at Hastings in 1066. That would bring the Welsh up against the Normans.

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