

RHYS ap GRUFFYDD (1132 - 1197), lord of Deheubarth, known in history as ' Yr Arglwydd Rhys ' (' The lord Rhys ').

Name: Rhys ap Gruffydd

Date of birth: 1132

Date of death: 1197

Spouse: Gwenllian ferch Madog ap Maredudd

Child: Gwenllian ferch Rhys ap Gruffydd

Child: Rhys Gryg

Child: Gruffydd ap Rhys

Child: Maelgwn ap Rhys

Child: Hywel ap Rhys

Child: Cynwrig ap Rhys

Parent: Gwenllian ferch Gruffudd

Parent: Gruffydd ap Rhys ap Tewdwr

Gender: Male

Occupation: lord of Deheubarth

Area of activity: Politics, Government and Political Movements; Royalty and Society

Author: Thomas Jones Pierce

Younger son of [Gruffydd ap Rhys ap Tewdwr](#) by [Gwenllian](#), daughter of [Gruffudd ap Cynan](#). He was only 4 years old when his father died and leadership of the revolt against Norman rule in South Wales passed to his half-brothers - [Anarawd](#) and [Cadell](#). As a youth of 13 he appears with his elder brother, [Maredudd](#), fighting under [Cadell](#)'s direction in 1146. The next ten years saw the old kingdom of Deheubarth reconstituted with the expulsion of the [Clare s](#) from Ceredigion and the Clifford s from Cantref Bychan and Llandovery, and to this dominion Rhys succeeded as sole ruler in 1155 on the death of [Maredudd](#), [Cadell](#) having been permanently incapacitated four years earlier. He assumed the mantle of the old kings of Deheubarth at a moment when the political situation in England had been transformed by the accession of Henry II, and this proved the dominant factor in Rhys's career throughout the next three decades. After some show of truculence he submitted to Henry in 1158, was deprived of Ceredigion and a large part of Ystrad Tywi, and was obliged to acknowledge the overlordship of the Crown over the ancestral territory in Cantref Mawr. The act of homage, it would appear, was accompanied by an agreement whereby Rhys finally dropped the title of king, for henceforth he is always referred to in the chronicles as ' the lord Rhys ' - see [Owain Gwynedd](#) and [Madog ap Maredudd](#).

For the next seven years intermittent revolts and truces reveal his restlessness and suppressed ambitions which once again found an outlet in the great rising of 1164-5 when, Henry being preoccupied at home, Rhys seized Ceredigion and Emlyn (including the fortresses of Cardigan and Kilgerran) and very soon re-established himself in the position from which he had been ousted in 1158. For the remainder of his life he was able to maintain unquestioned control of these territories,

and, indeed, to add to them portions of Dyfed : that he was able to do so was due to a combination of favourable circumstances. There was little to fear from Powys or Gwynedd after 1170 in which year [Owain Gwynedd](#) died; at about the same time troublesome elements among the Norman settlers of Dyfed withdrew to take part in the Irish Conquest, a development which so alarmed Henry, whose prestige following Beckett's murder had fallen very low, that he sought Rhys's friendship. Confirmed in his tenure of Deheubarth, created justice of South Wales, and recognized as the leading native magnate of the time, Rhys laid aside all pretensions to the regal status of his ancestors, contented himself with the reality of power, co-operated loyally with Henry, and proceeded to set the fashion among Welsh rulers of adopting Norman ways in dress and domestic manners, as well as in matters of State. At Dinefwr, the ancient capital, a castle in the new style was begun, and at Cardigan there appeared another fortress of the same kind in which the renowned 'eisteddfod' of 1176 was held under his auspices. He lent his patronage to the new religious orders of the time, showing his concern for the spiritual welfare of his people : Whitland enjoyed his protection, Strata Florida was virtually his creation, and Talley was his special and unique foundation.

His last years were darkened by the animosities of his sons, and by the indifference of the new administration under Richard I to the special position which he had hitherto held. Believing attack to be the surest means of defence, the old warrior resumed hostilities against his Norman neighbours, which continued to the end of his life. He died on 28 April 1197 and was buried in the cathedral church of S. Davids. He had married Gwenllian, daughter of [Madog ap Maredudd](#), by whom he had eight sons (see [Gruffydd ap Rhys](#), [Rhys Gryg](#), [Maelgwn](#)) and a daughter, Gwenllian, who married [Ednyfed Fychan](#).

Author

Professor Thomas Jones Pierce, (1905 - 1964)

Sources

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Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Rhys ap Gruffydd](#)

Additional Links

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