

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, THOMAS E. WATKINS (EIDDIL IFOR)

1801 – 1889

Thomas Watkins was born in Pwll-yr-Hyward, Llanfoist, Monmouthshire on May 1st 1801. His father had worked in Abertyleri [Abertillery] but returned to Llanfoist to work in the limestone quarries belonging to the Blaenafon iron works. The family were members of the Baptist chapel in Llanwenarth. Thomas Watkins kept the White Hart tavern in Blaenafon, before going to work as a weigher in the iron works of Blaenau Gwent where in 1859 his wife died in Blaina, after which in 1860 Thomas Watkins returned to Blaenafon to keep the Three Cranes tavern for the remainder of his life .

He was an original and leading member in its early years of the Abergavenny based group of people - Cymreigyddion y Fenni - who established the series of Eisteddfodau that created such a stir in Gwent between 1833 and 1854. Thomas Watkins was a regular competitor in the Abergavenny Eisteddfodau and won many prizes for his essays of which this is one. He is best known for his history of Llanfoist parish - Hanes Llanffwyst – which won first prize in the first Abergavenny eisteddfod in November 1834. He was not as successful as a poet but he certainly was as an essayist in these eisteddfodau, winning competitions on a dozen occasions. Nine of his essays survive, five in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth and four in Cardiff Central Library.

The History of Gwent from the Birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd [1282] until the Present Time [1836] – By Thomas E Watkins (Eiddil Ifor), 1801-1889

Introduction

Gwent in the period under consideration [1282 – 1836] has never been devoid of people to govern it. According to the records left us, our early leaders were exceedingly famous and had headquarters of their government in a court at Caerleon-on-Usk until they were forced by the English to move it to Glamorgan, their former city being erased by their enemy [that was a] huge loss to the whole of Eswyllwg. The topic asks for a history of Gwent from the birth of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd up to the present, so perhaps it is not unbeneficial to say something about this never-to-be-forgotten prestigious hero.

Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (b. 1282?)

It is said that the date of his birth has not been recorded, more is the pity, nor is it known at present, but it is estimated that he was born during the reign of Henry III (1216-1272) and before the birth of his son Iorwerth. Llywelyn's father was an illegitimate son of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth and consequently he never expected to possess the honour of attaining the Prince's chair and lived peacefully in a place called to the present day Maesymynan in Swydd Galestr. He owned the cantrefs known now as Engfield, Dyffryn Clwyd, Rhos, and Rhyfoniog, an inheritance which had justly come to him from his father. He lived like the other gentry of an independent Princedom, according to the

main practices of that time, but in an unexpected way he was elected to take over ruling Wales on the death of his uncle the very famous prince Dafydd.

At this time, namely the around the birth of Llywelyn the last Prince of Wales, Gwent included the shires of Monmouth, Hereford (Eirinawg), Radnorshire, a part of Breconshire as far as the River Neath in Glamorgan, and as far as the Severn and Gloucester. Its separate parts had a variety of names: the provinces of Glewysig; Erging, Ewias, and Ystrad Yw. When Llywelyn was born there was much spilling of blood and many battles over a period of years between the *Gwenhwyswyr* – the men of Gwent - and the Normans. But in time the Normans came to a union with the *Syllyrwyr* – the Silurians, or men of Gwent - through emulating their ways and marrying the daughters of the Welsh gentry, so that it was not long before they both became peaceful towards each other with the appearance of being one nation.

A few years prior to the birth of Llywelyn there had been major contestation between the English and the men of Gwent for the town and castle at Caerleon on the Usk. Iorwerth ab Owen the prince of Gwent and Glamorgan won and held the place over his enemies. But it appears that subsequently about the time of the birth of Llywelyn, Caerleon fell in 1218 for a second time into the hands of the English at the hands of William Marshal who behaved extremely roughly and cruelly towards the inhabitants. In 1231 the noted hero Iorwerth ab Owen made a committed attack on the town and castle which were in the possession of the English and won back the main town of Gwent

government. It was kept in Welsh hands until the union of Wales with the crown of England (1536).