

Preface

The history of Wales is often told through its kingdoms, yet for many people the kings themselves remain surprisingly difficult to discover. Despite the richness of Welsh history, finding clear and accessible accounts of the rulers who shaped Cymru can be challenging. Many survive only within specialist works, fragmented genealogies, medieval chronicles, or academic studies that are often difficult for general readers to approach. For a nation with such a remarkable history, that absence feels significant.

This book grew from a desire to bridge that gap. Over many years of research, reading, travel, and exploration, I became increasingly fascinated by the rulers who governed the lands that would eventually become Wales. Some are well known, such as Rhodri Mawr, Hywel Dda, Owain Gwynedd, and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. Others survive only as names preserved within genealogies or brief references scattered through historical sources. Yet together they form a continuous story stretching across centuries of Welsh history.

The kings explored within these pages ruled a land that was rarely politically unified. Cymru was divided among competing kingdoms, dynasties, and regions whose borders shifted constantly through warfare, inheritance, alliance, and ambition. Gwynedd, Powys, Deheubarth, Morgannwg, Gwent, Brycheiniog, and many other kingdoms rose, expanded, fragmented, and disappeared over time. The history of Welsh kingship is therefore not the story of a single crown, but of many rulers competing to shape the future of the country.

The surviving evidence for these rulers is often incomplete. Some kings appear frequently within chronicles and contemporary records. Others survive only within genealogies, poetry, legal traditions, or later historical accounts. Dates are sometimes uncertain, successions occasionally disputed, and events often

described differently by different sources. Reconstructing the history of Welsh kingship therefore requires drawing together evidence from many places and viewing it within a wider historical context.

A central idea runs throughout *The Cymru Cycles*: the history of Wales cannot be separated from its landscape. The story of Welsh kingship demonstrates this clearly. Mountains protected kingdoms and created natural boundaries. River valleys provided routes for movement, trade, and conquest. Coastlines connected rulers to Ireland, England, and the wider world. Geography influenced where power emerged, how kingdoms developed, and why certain dynasties flourished while others disappeared. The political history of Cymru was shaped as much by the land itself as by the ambitions of its rulers.

This book therefore approaches Welsh kings not simply as individuals, but as part of a wider story involving geography, dynastic succession, warfare, diplomacy, law, culture, and identity. The aim is to understand how successive generations of rulers governed, competed, adapted, and attempted to secure their place within an ever-changing political landscape.

Like every volume in this series, this book is intended as a framework rather than a catalogue. Where evidence is uncertain or incomplete, interpretation is sometimes necessary. Throughout this book, the aim is to present the reconstruction that appears most consistent with the available evidence while acknowledging that alternative interpretations may exist. The goal is not to provide the final word on Welsh kingship, but to offer a coherent narrative through which readers can better understand the rulers who shaped the history of Cymru.

The kings within these pages were not merely names in genealogies. They were individuals who faced invasion, rebellion, rivalry, alliance, triumph, and defeat. Some united vast territories. Others ruled only small kingdoms for brief periods before vanishing

from history. Together, however, they created the political foundations from which medieval Wales emerged and helped shape the identity of the nation that followed.

This book is the story of those rulers. A story of dynasties and kingdoms, of ambition and survival, of conquest and resistance, and of the generations of kings who governed the lands of Cymru across more than a thousand years of history.

Nathan Williams
The Cymru Cycles