

Compile a portrait of any 'real' medieval woman from the Celtic regions. What sources can be used and how reliable are those sources?

Myfanwy ferch Iorwerth Ddu ab Ednyfed Gam, wife of Goronwy ap Tudur lived during the second half of the 14th century. She may be considered somewhat unremarkable, very little is known with certainty about her life, however, she is an interesting example of a 'true' Welsh woman living in the late medieval period. Myfanwy was born near Llangollen in Powys Fadog (now in Denbighshire) into an old native Welsh family thought to be descended from Tudur Trefor and which went on to become the influential Mostyn family.¹ She later married Goronwy ap Tudur of Penmynydd in Anglesey where she appears to have lived for the remainder of her life. Her husband was a prominent member of the early Tudor family and was clearly held in what could be considered unusually high regard by the English monarchy.² His ancestor, Ednyfed Fychan had been favoured by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth which had resulted in the security of his lands for future generations.³ As noted in the Guto'r Glyn project, edited by Ann Parry Owen, Myfanwy and Goronwy came from 'two old and important Welsh families who served the native princes, and it is not surprising that they regarded each other as suitable marriage material'.⁴

Myfanwy lived during a period of change in the political landscape of Wales; the Edwardian conquest had taken place in the century preceding her birth bringing an end to the rule of the

¹ A. D. Carr, *The Gentry of North Wales in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2017), p. 86

² Ibid. pp. 217-218

³ 'Ednyfed Fychan', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, <https://biography.wales/article/s-EDNY-FYC-1246> [accessed 26th April 2026]; see also A. D. Carr, 'Tudor family, forebears of', *Oxford Dictionary of national Biography*, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.uwtsd.idm.oclc.org/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-77357> [accessed 26th April 2026]

⁴ 'List of Patrons and Poets, Ieuan Fychan ab Ieuan of Pengwern', ed. by Ann Parry Owen < <https://www.gutorglyn.net/gutorglyn/name-full/?n=ni02> > [accessed 26th April 2026]

native princes. This in turn led to the rise of a new social class of landed gentry known as the 'Uchelwyr'. These families upheld the traditional culture and identity of Wales whilst often also serving as warriors for the crown. As members of the Welsh nobility both Myfanwy's birth family and her Penmynydd family were active patrons of the poets, and a number of praise poems and elegies to Myfanwy and her husband remain. The poem addressed to *Myfanwy Fychan of Castell Dinas Bran* by the 14th century poet Hywel ab Einion Llygliw, although less well known than the poems it inspired, caused Myfanwy and her early life to become something of legend in her native Llangollen.⁵

As discussed in detail by Gwennyth Richards the available sources for compiling a portrait of medieval women in Wales are few and far between.⁶ Many documents are either lost or may never have existed in the first place. This may have led to women being largely disregarded in the work of modern scholars of medieval Welsh biography until more recently.⁷ In compiling this portrait of Myfanwy ferch Iorwerth Ddu, it has been necessary to rely greatly on sources regarding the male characters within her life; her father, brothers and husband. Through what is available from contemporary records where they are mentioned and through the extensive writing, particularly by A. D. Carr about the Mostyns and the Penmynydd Tudors it is possible to see at least an outline of Myfanwy's life. But it is arguably her beautiful tomb which is our most interesting source regarding Myfanwy.

The family at Pengwern into which Myfanwy was born, had held an important political position within the district of Nanheudwy for many generations. Ancestors of Iorwerth Ddu,

⁵ 'Hywel ab Einion Llygliw', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, < <https://biography.wales/article/s-HYWE-ABE-1330> > [accessed 28th April 2026]; Rhiannon Ifans, ed. *Gwaith Gruffudd Llwyd a'r Llygliwiaid Eraill*, (Aberystwyth, Prifysgol Cymru, 2000), pp. 3-10

⁶ Gwennyth Richards, *From Footnotes to Narrative: Welsh Noblewomen in the Thirteenth Century*, (PHD Thesis, University of Sydney, 2005), pp.1 – 23 intro

⁷ Many, particularly female writers have published very enlightening research on the subject of medieval women of Wales; Gwennyth Richards as mentioned above; Jane Cartwright and Ceridwen Lloyd Morgan to name just a few.

Myfanwy's father are recorded as having witnessed charters for Prince Madoc and his sons.⁸ By the early 14th century, Pengwern was the seat of Ednyfed Gam who A. D. Carr writes was 'a person of some consequence in Chirkland'.⁹ For many years Ednyfed was carefully accruing small pockets of land surrounding his existing property thus extending his family's portfolio.¹⁰ Iorwerth Ddu, as the eldest of Ednyfed's nine sons inherited the Pengwern estate after his father's death sometime before 1356, and Carr suggests that like his father, Iorwerth Ddu was a prominent member of Chirkland society and continued to acquire land to extend his property.¹¹ Some of his acquisitions appear to have been made illegally as Carr notes that Iorwerth Ddu is named on a court roll of 1386 as having acquired a great deal of waste and escheat land without obtaining a license.¹² Iorwerth married Angharad, a member of another prominent Chirkland family, and they had four sons and three daughters, the youngest of which was Myfanwy. It is likely that Myfanwy was born at Pengwern Hall and that she lived there until her marriage. There is no definitive date for her birth but it would have been sometime around the middle of the 14th century; her father was farming the office of chief forester by 1356 and was still alive and acquiring land in 1394, suggesting he lived to be quite an elderly man.¹³ There is still a house, built in the 19th century at Llys Pengwern. The adjoining dairy is thought to have sections dating to the early thirteenth century so would have been in use in Myfanwy's time.¹⁴

Two of Myfanwy's brothers are also of interest when building a picture of the family; Ieuan ab Iorwerth ab Ednyfed is thought to be one of the John Trefors, bishops of St. Asaph. In his

⁸ 'Pengwern Hall', Llangollen Museum, < <https://llangollenmuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/PengwernHallEnglish.pdf> > [accessed 1st May 2026]

⁹ Anthony Carr, *The Mostyn Family and Estate, 1200 – 1642*, (PHD Thesis, University of Wales, Bangor, 1975), p.15

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 15 - 16

¹¹ Ibid. p. 18

¹² Ibid. pp. 19 - 20

¹³ Ibid. p.18

¹⁴ 'Pengwern Hall Dairy, Llangollen', *Coflein*, <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/sites/37201> [accessed 1st May 2026]

PHD thesis on the Mostyn Family, completed in 1975, A. D. Carr states that it is unlikely that Ieuan could have been the first John Trefor, bishop from 1346 – 1357, which is easy to agree with given that a son of Iorwerth Ddu would have been fairly young at this time, however Carr does note that it is possible the second John Trefor who held the position between 1394 and 1410, could have been Myfanwy's brother. Carr wrote later that Ieuan ab Iorwerth Ddu's appointment as bishop indicated the important status of the Pengwern family at that time.¹⁵

Another brother to Myfanwy, Adda, made a very prominent match when he married Isabel, a daughter of the Lord of Glyndyfrdwy and sister to Owain Glyndwr. By both her own and her brother's marriages, Myfanwy became closely linked with those families at the heart of the revolt which was to begin in 1400.¹⁶

At some point, most likely before her marriage to Goronwy ap Tudor of Penmynydd, a poem was written by Hywel ab Einion Llygliw addressed to Myfynwy Fychan of Castell Dinas Bran.¹⁷ Little is known of the bard Hywel ab Einion and the ode to Myfanwy is the only poem attributed to him. Hywel appears to have flourished between 1330 and 1370 and was the uncle of Gruffudd Llwyd ap Dafydd ab Einion Llygliw suggesting he came from a bardic family.¹⁸ The poem itself is preserved in three manuscripts, one of which makes the claim that a copy was discovered written on parchment and hidden in the walls of Castell Dinas Bran.¹⁹ The romance of this suggestion was clearly of great appeal to those who made translations of the poem in the 18th and 19th centuries and possibly led to the story of Hywel's unrequited

¹⁵ Carr, *The Mostyn family*, pp. 24-25; Carr, *The Gentry of North Wales*, pp. 60-61

¹⁶ Carr, *The Mostyn Family*, pp. 25-26 – it is worth noting that although this connection is interesting it is beyond the scope of this essay to include it further as Myfanwy likely died sometime around the beginning of the Owain Glyndwr uprising

¹⁷ Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Wales MDCCLXX 1778 Vol.1*, (London, Henry Hughes)

https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_a-tour-in-wales-mdcclxx_pennant-thomas_1778_1/page/n299/mode/2up [accessed 1st May 2026], pp. 281-284 this is the translation that will be referred to in the main discussion; see also Ifans. Ed, *Gwaith Gruffudd Llwyd*, pp. 3-27 for a detailed analysis of the poem in Welsh

¹⁸ 'Hywel ab Einion', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*

¹⁹ *ibid*

love for the beautiful maiden Myfanwy, high in the towers of Dinas Bran becoming linked with local folklore.²⁰

The poem was included in the first volume of *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, published in 1801, but had previously been published as an English translation in Thomas Pennant's *A Tour in Wales*.²¹ In the opening lines and indeed throughout the poem, we are told how the bard pines for Myfanwy;

Sorrowing I strike the plaintive string;

Deign, cruel maid, to hear me sing;

And let my song thy pride control,

Divine enchantress of my soul!

Charles Wilkins, in his *The History of the Literature of Wales from the Year 1300 to the Year 1650*, suggests that the poem is one of the earliest examples of a love poem in Wales, pointing out that prior to this time, not only was any mention of romantic love largely, if not wholly absent from the bardic tradition, but that women themselves were almost never mentioned in the poetry of Wales.²² Hywel ab Einion uses a number of nature similes in his descriptions of Myfanwy, variously describing her as 'fairer than the cherry's bloom' and 'fairer than the flowers adorning/ The hawthorn in a summer's morning'.²³ There is much mention of Myfanwy's beauty, and she is compared with *Creirwy*, the daughter of Ceridwen, 'the fairest maiden in the world'; Myfanwy is likened to other legendary female characters

²⁰ Pennant, *A Tour in Wales*, p. 281

²¹ *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales Collected Out of Ancient Manuscripts, Volume One, Poetry*, (London, S. Rousseau, 1801), pp. 512-513 <https://www.library.wales/discover-learn/digital-exhibitions/europeana-rise-of-literacy/expatriate-literature/the-myvyrian-archaiology-of-wales-collected-out-of-ancient-manuscripts> [accessed 1st May 2026]; Pennant, *A Tour in Wales*, pp. 281-284

²² Charles Wilkins, *The History of the Literature of Wales from the Year 1300 to the Year 1650*, (Cardiff, Daniel Owen and Company, 1884), p. 21

²³ Pennant, *A Tour in Wales*, pp. 281-284

known for their beauty in the praise poetry written to her later in life.²⁴ Although the poet's intention is clearly to convey a great affection for his subject, the poem is somewhat unusual in that he is at times scathing towards her; in one line she is described as 'colder too, than new fall'n snow on Aran's brow'. Were this truly a personal love poem written directly to Myfanwy, it would appear that the bard is in such turmoil that he cannot decide what emotion he feels more keenly; love or disdain. It is very clear though that the purpose of the poem is to represent a love unrequited. As Rhiannon Ifans, in her detailed analysis of the poem shows, it is largely typical of the *Amour Courtois* convention popularized by poets such as Dafydd ap Gwilym, although as discussed below, its structure is perhaps slightly unusual for a love poem.²⁵

In Pennant's brief introduction to the translation of the poem in *A Tour in Wales*, he greatly romanticises the tale, suggesting that Myfanwy had 'made a conquest' of the bard. Pennant also suggests that the poem was written around 1390 when 'the castle [Castell Dinas Bran] was inhabited by a celebrated beauty, descended from the house of Tudor Trevor'.²⁶ Although modern scholars agree that the Pengwern family were descended from Tudur Trefor, the claim that Myfanwy was living at Castell Dinas Bran cannot be correct given that she had been living at Penmynydd on Anglesey for many years by 1390, let alone the fact that Dinas Bran had been in ruins since 1277. Pennant makes no mention of the original manuscript having been found at the castle which is interesting considering the romanticised way in which he represents the poem. Ifans has suggested that Dinas Bran may have acted as a powerful patriotic symbol for the native Welsh of the Llangollen area in the 14th century and

²⁴ Ibid. p. 281; see also, for later poems Nerys Ann Jones and Erwain Haf Rheinallt. eds, *Gwaith Sefnyn, Rhisierydyn, Gruffudd Fychan ap Gruffudd ab Ednyfed a Llywarch Bentwrch*, (Aberystwyth, Prifysgol Cymru, 1995), p. 32 for notes on Myfanwy being compared to Eigr for example; Rachel Bromwich.ed. *Triodd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the British Isles*, (University of Wales Press, 2014), pp. 315-316 for Creirwy

²⁵ Ifans. ed, *Gwaith Gruffudd Llwyd*, p. 9

²⁶ Pennant, *A Tour in Wales*, p. 281

that by stating Myfanwy resided in the castle, Hywel was showing his great respect for her rather than making a literal claim that it was her home.²⁷

Ann Parry Jones considers that the family at Pengwern were great patrons of the poets. She suggests that the structure of the Myfanwy poem, a traditional *awdl* rather than a *cywydd*, in line with it being a commissioned praise poem, is indicative of the family having been patrons for generations.²⁸ Parry Jones also notes that members of the family may have been producing poetry themselves; in the poem addressed to Ieuan Fychan ab Ieuan of Pengwern (grandson of Myfanwy's brother Adda), requesting reconciliation, Guto'r Glyn mentions numerous times that Ieuan himself not only sings his own poems but he also praises his ability to accompany himself on the harp as well.²⁹

There are very few personal details to glean about Myfanwy from the poem, however its very existence supports the idea that her family were well respected in their area, that they placed great importance (and invested possibly quite substantially) in the upholding of the native Welsh traditions, and that they were likely known for this patronage locally.

It is interesting to try to imagine how the Hywel ab Einion poem came about; it appears to be commonly thought that the bard and Myfanwy had a love affair before she was made a better offer thus leaving him bitter and broken hearted, however if, as seems likely, the poem was requested of Hywel, could it perhaps have been written around the time Myfanwy was to be married and would have been leaving Llangollen for Anglesey? The poet is linking Myfanwy to her home in Pengwern, this is illustrated by the suggestion above that Dinas Bran is used symbolically; the praise throughout the poem is fairly standard of the praise poems to the

²⁷ Ifans. ed, *Gwaith Gruffudd Llwyd*, pp. 3-10

²⁸ Ann Parry Owen, ed. 'Ieuan Fychan ab Ieuan of Pengwern'

²⁹ *ibid*

uchelwyr of the fourteenth century, and perhaps the disdain Hywel shows is being used as a vehicle to express his, and by extension his patrons' great loss as Myfanwy leaves home.³⁰

The date of Myfanwy's marriage to Goronwy ap Tudur Fychan of Penmynydd is not known, but it must have been in the third quarter of the fourteenth century when Myfanwy would likely have been in her late teens or early twenties.³¹ In a praise poem by the bard Sefnyn addressed to Goronwy Fychan and Myfanwy his wife, it is suggested that Goronwy is a young man and newly married with mention of a great feast, perhaps held in honour of the wedding.³² Unfortunately there is no date attached to the poem and very little is known about the bard.³³ As mentioned above, the marriage of Myfanwy and Goronwy would have been considered very advantageous; marriage was a significant political weapon in medieval Wales and the family at Penmynydd were of a notable lineage. Penmynydd had originally belonged to Ednyfed Fychan who held extensive lands on Anglesey and the mainland. Llewelyn ab Iorwerth had rewarded Ednyfed for his service by granting him and his descendants several bond vills which were to be held free of payment aside from military service during times of conflict.³⁴ Glyn Roberts in his essay *Wyrion Eden* wrote that the early Tudor family tended to 'adhere to the system as it was' as far as their political allegiance was concerned and there is plenty of references to members of the family serving the English kings as well as joining in, in some cases quite significantly, with the Owain Glyndwr uprising at the beginning of the fifteenth century.³⁵

³⁰ This is discussed further below in reference to a line from a later poem by Rhisiertdyn where he calls Myfanwy 'Powys' bright lamp'

³¹ Kim. M. Philips, 'Maidenhood as the Perfect Age of Women's Life', in *Young Medieval Women*, ed. by, K. J. Lewis, N. J. Menuge and K. M. Philips, (New York, St Martins Press, 1999), p. 4 for suggestions of the ages of young women at the point of marriage in medieval England – this may have been younger in Wales

³² Jones and Rheinallt, eds, *Gwaith Sefnyn*, p. 31

³³ Ibid. pp.3-7 and p.31

³⁴ Glyn Roberts, 'Wyrion Eden', *Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions*, (1951), p.37; 'Ednyfed Fychan', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*

³⁵ Roberts, 'Wyrion Eden', p.51; A. D. Carr, 'Gwilym ap Gruffydd and the Rise of the Penrhyn Estate', *Welsh History Review* (1990-1991), p.8

Goronwy was the eldest son of Tudor Fychan and had inherited Penmynydd, the primary seat of the family when his father died in 1367.³⁶ Goronwy would most likely have already been successful within in his own right at the time of his marriage to Myfanwy. Edward III had placed political control of Wales into the hands of his son Edward, the Black Prince who evidently had great trust and respect for Goronwy; he had been made High Forester of Snowdon for life and was receiving a salary of 7d. per day or £10 13s. per annum.³⁷ He was also Steward of the Bishops Lands in Anglesey up until the time of his death.³⁸ Goronwy and two of his brothers, Gwilym and Rhys who held lands at Clorach in Twrcelyn and Erddreiniog respectively, all served the crown as professional soldiers which Carr notes would be a sign of high social position.³⁹ The poets included much mention of Goronwy's prowess as a soldier in their praise to him; both Gruffydd ap Maredudd and Rhisiardyn sing that he had served in France which Glyn Roberts suggests would have likely been under the Black Prince.⁴⁰

As a professional soldier who it appears was travelling quite frequently in service to the crown, it seems likely that Goronwy spent a lot of time away from Myfanwy and their home of Penmynydd. It is not possible to know what life would have been like for Myfanwy on Anglesey; perhaps it would not have been dissimilar to that at her family home of Pengwern, and it would likely have been quite soon after their marriage that Myfanwy and Goronwy had their two children; Morfudd and Tudur. Once again, there are no dates recorded for these births, but given that at the time of Goronwy's death in April 1382 both children were still minors, it is probable that they were born sometime between 1370 and 1380. Morfudd may

³⁶ Roberts, 'Wyrion Eden', p. 46

³⁷ Charles R. Hand, 'Llanfaes Priory and its Mystery Monuments', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 7th series, Vol. 4, (1924), p. 175

³⁸ Carr, *The Gentry of North Wales*, p. 45

³⁹ Roberts, 'Wyrion Eden', p.51; Carr, *The Gentry of North Wales*, p. 59

⁴⁰ Roberts, 'Wyrion Eden', pp. 52-53; Lord Mostyn and T. A. Glenn, *History of the Family of Mostyn of Mostyn*, (London, Harrison and Sons, 1925), p. 191 this makes a claim that Goronwy was also Captain of archers in Aquitaine, but no source is given so this is impossible to corroborate

well have been the older child and was definitely married by 1389, as A. D. Carr mentions a deed which is now lost that states Morfudd and her husband, Gwilym ap Gruffydd ‘obtained a license from the Crown to acquire lands and bondmen’ from Gwilym’s father.⁴¹

As Professor Roberts notes in *Wyrion Eden* when discussing the poetry written to the Penmynydd family, ‘the quantity of positive information they provide is small, once the conventional material is dismissed’, however he later states that, ‘in the absence of record evidence, the few facts which are to be gleaned from them are valuable’.⁴² This certainly holds true when attempting to build a portrait of Myfanwy’s life. As has been discussed above, she had already been sung to earlier in her life, most likely in her maidenhood, but there are also poems addressed to her which would have been written during her married life.

The ode of praise to Goronwy Fychan and Myfanwy his wife by Sefnyn sees Myfanwy being compared to *Eigr*, the mother of King Arthur and most beautiful woman Britain according to Geoffrey of Monmouth.⁴³ This Arthurian reference is extended when Goronwy is compared with *Gwrlais*, *Eigr*’s husband before she is married to Uther Pendragon, and a great warrior for his country. As Erwain Haf Rheinallt notes in his analysis of the Sefnyn ode, by the middle of the fourteenth century *Brut y Brenhinedd* was widely known amongst the Welsh and the poets often used the Arthurian characters in their Galfridian representations in the praise poems to the *Uchelwyr*.⁴⁴ The poem is conventional, praising Goronwy for his leadership skills, his generosity and his bravery in battle and portrays Myfanwy as an ideal wife; beautiful, hospitable and socially able.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Carr, ‘Gwilym ap Gruffydd’, pp. 5-6

⁴² Roberts, ‘Wyrion Eden’, p.45 and p.52

⁴³ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe, (London, Folio Society, 1966), p. 42

⁴⁴ Jones and Rheinallt, eds, *Gwaith Sefnyn*, p. 34

⁴⁵ Ibid. pp.18-24 and pp. 30-31

The poet Rhisierdyn, who flourished in the second half of the fourteenth century wrote praise to both Myfanwy and Goronwy individually. A.D. Carr has written that Anglesey was the poet's home and that he sang to many of the most prominent patrons in Gwynedd, the Penmynydd family possibly being the most prominent of all.⁴⁶ Much of the praise to Myfanwy is, like in the Sefnyn poem, very conventional; he praises her beauty, her upright stance, her grace, wisdom, wealth and the absence of vanity in her character.⁴⁷ Rhisierdyn also refers to Myfanwy as 'Powys' bright lamp', which Nerys Ann Jones has suggested was a reference to the great loss felt by her family when she left to be married.⁴⁸ This is interesting when considered alongside the above suggestion that the Hywel ab Einion poem may have been written in response to her leaving the Llangollen area to live in Penmynydd. Although much of the praise is standard of that to a married woman, Jones mentions that some of the imagery Rhisierdyn employs would more commonly be used in praise to a man; the bard states that Myfanwy is a '*magor*' or sponsor which is suggestive of how highly regarded she may have been for her intellect. This is further emphasised by a very unusual reference to Myfanwy having been literate; '*llythyr a ddysgodd*' ('she has learned her letters').⁴⁹ Both Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan and Llinos Beverley Smith reference this rare statement in their chapters regarding women and literacy in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*.⁵⁰

The house at Penmynydd still stands although very little of the original structure remains. The current owner has suggested, in a detailed study of the house and its ancestral owners, that Goronwy himself wrote poems to Myfanwy. The idea seems highly plausible, and very appealing given the family's obvious interest in literature and their patronage of the arts, but

⁴⁶ Ibid. pp. 47-51; Carr, *The Gentry of North Wales*, p. 183

⁴⁷ Jones and Rheinallt, eds, *Gwaith Sefnyn*, pp. 63-64 and pp. 95-99

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.95

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 61 and p. 95

⁵⁰ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'More written about than writing? Welsh women and the written word', in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 150; Llinos Beverley Smith, 'Inkhorn and Spectacles: the impact of literacy in late medieval Wales', in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.206

unfortunately, he does not offer a source, and this writer has been unable to discover any further references to this.⁵¹

In March 1382, Goronwy was appointed as constable of Beaumaris Castle, which Carr states was ‘an unprecedented appointment for a Welshman’.⁵² Unfortunately, only five days later on the 22nd March 1382 Goronwy was drowned in Kent and Myfanwy became a widow.⁵³ As Goronwy was still a relatively young man, his death was unexpected. It would appear he died without a will as his lands were seized by the escheator of Anglesey due to Tudor, his son and heir not yet being of age. The escheator report states that a decision was being waited upon as to whether the lands should ‘belong to the lord king, or whether they should be delivered to Mevanwy, who was the wife of the said Grono’.⁵⁴

John Williams wrote in his essay, *Penmynydd and the Tudors* that as this entry was repeated year upon year with the same wording until the end of Richard II’s reign, that possession must have passed to the heir around 1400. Williams notes that this heir may have been Myfanwy’s son Tudur who would presumably have reached 21 years old by this time, but it cannot be known if Tudur actually did ever inherit his home; by 1400 Morfudd, his sister

⁵¹ Richard Cuthbertson, *Discovering Old Welsh Houses-Plas Penmynydd* https://discoveringoldwelshhouses.co.uk/library/Hhistory/ang%20014_HH_8_PlasPenmynydd.pdf [accessed 30th April 2026], p. 16 the house at Penmynydd is opened one day each month to visitors and I contacted the owner to enquire about this and to ask about the reference to the poetry but unfortunately I am yet to receive a reply

⁵² Carr, *The Gentry of North Wales*, p. 132 and pp. 217-218; The Calendar of Patent Rolls for 1381 to 85 states, ‘Appointment for life of Gronov ap Tudor, King’s esquire, to the custody of the King’s castle of Beaumareys, receiving £40 yearly therfor from the Chamberlain of North Wales’

⁵³ Roberts, *Wyrion Eden*, p. 53

⁵⁴ J. Williams, ‘Penmynydd and the Tudors’, *Archeologia Cambrensis*, Third series, no. LVIX, (1869), pp. 291-292 the entry in full is as follows - ‘The Lands which were Grono’s ap Tudor – Of certain proceeds or profits of lands or tenements which were Grono’s ap Tudor, in the townships of Penmynyth and Dynsilwy Res, who died on the Sabbath day next before the feast of the Anunciation of Blessed Virgin Mary, in the fifth hear of the now king; and which the same Grono held of the same king in Capite by service of going with the said king in his war within the marches of Wales at his own cost, and beyond at the cost of the said king and suit, at the county court of Anglesey: remaining in the hands of the lord the king by the death of the said Grono, on account of the minority of age of Tudor, the son and heir of the said Grono; and which are extended by the year at twelve pounds beyond, etc. He answereth not, because respited by the judiciary and others of the council of the lord the king until it should be discussed whether they ought to belong to the lord the king, or whether they should be delivered to Mevanwy, who was the wife of the said Grono, for surety in answering the lord king, etc’

must have been married for some years and it is known that she and her husband lived at Penmynydd at least from c.1400, if not for some time before. According to A. D. Carr, Tudur died at some point before the end of the century and his lands passed therefore to his sister and her husband.⁵⁵

Beyond the mention of Myfanwy in the escheator's report she does not appear again in any further documents. Glyn Roberts wrote that the lands of Goronwy were passed to Myfanwy pending the decision regarding the King's right to the property.⁵⁶ This does appear the most likely outcome, that Myfanwy and her children continued to live at and receive an income from Penmynydd in the years following her husband's death. Myfanwy herself outlived her husband by many years, but she was almost certainly dead by 1400, and Morfydd, her daughter was also dead by about 1405 because around 1406 her husband remarried and purchased the escheated lands of Penmynydd.⁵⁷

It is in death that we find arguably the most interesting extant source for Myfanwy Fychan; the impressive alabaster tomb of her and Goronwy, her husband, once thought to have been housed at Llanfaes Friary, now resting in St. Gredifael's church a short walk across the fields from their home at Penmynydd. There has been much written about the Penmynydd tomb, largely due to it being linked with the early Tudor family.⁵⁸ Indeed once it would have been decorated with brightly coloured painted details with the shields that surround the chest at the base of the tomb, and the decoration on Goronwy's chest plate more obviously representing

⁵⁵ Carr, 'Gwilym ap Gruffydd', p. 6

⁵⁶ Roberts, *Wyrion Eden*, p. 53 although this outcome seems most likely given the yearly repeat of the escheator report suggesting a decision was probably deliberately never reached, Professor Roberts does appear to confuse Tudur son of Myfanwy with Tudur son of Morfudd from this point on which makes his otherwise invaluable essay somewhat confusing

⁵⁷ Ibid. pp.62-63

⁵⁸ Geoffrey G. Holme, Armoured Effigy – Penmynydd Church, Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions, (1935); Hand, 'Llanfaes Priory'; Williams, 'Penmynydd and the Tudors' – these include detailed discussions of the tomb; 'Tomb of Gronw Fychan and Myfanwy, St. Gredifael's', Heneb: Gwynedd Archeology, <<https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/tomb-of-gronw-fychan-and-myfanwy-st-gredifaels-c26c72099c844f2daf38c45135c53398>> [accessed 2nd May 2026] Gwynedd Archeological Trust conducted a study of the tomb in 2014 and carried out a 3D scan in amazing detail

the Tudor coat of arms; a chevron and three helms.⁵⁹ Much of what has been written focuses on the effigy of Goronwy ‘the knight’, with Myfanwy mentioned only as ‘his lady’.⁶⁰

Although there was no intention to portray likeness in the alabaster tomb effigies which had become popular in England around 1330, first for use in royal tombs and then for the memorials of the nobility, much can still be learned from the clothing the figures are dressed in (Figure. 1).⁶¹ Myfanwy is portrayed wearing a headdress, a close bodied gown with long, tight-fitting sleeves which are buttoned down to the wrists, a necklace of beads and ‘a mantle or cloak, distinctive of rank, fastened in front of the breast by a *fermail* (broach)’.⁶² There is much damage to her figure now, both from damp in the church and from centuries of pilgrims chipping away at the alabaster; both figures hands, which would have been raised in prayer, Goronwy’s feet, the second dog at Myfanwy’s skirt and much detail from her eyes, nose and lips are missing, as shown in Figure 2.⁶³

⁵⁹ Geoffrey G. Holme, *Armoured Effigy – Penmynydd Church*, Anglesey Antiquarian Society Transactions, (1935), p. 52; Williams, ‘Penmynydd and the Tudors’, p. 279

⁶⁰ Holme, *Armoured Effigy*, pp. 52-58 it is clear that Holmes area of interest is the armour that Goronwy is wearing and the essay offers much insight into this and how it helps with dating, however Myfanwy is almost entirely overlooked being mentioned only once

⁶¹ Charles Stothard, *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*, (London, J. M’Creery, 1817), p. 84; Rachel Dressler, ‘Identity, Status and Material: Medieval Alabaster Effigies in England’, *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture*, vol. 5, Issue 2, (Albany, 2015), pp. 65 -96

⁶² Williams, ‘Penmynydd and the Tudors’, p. 280 Williams attributes the detailed description of dress to a chapter in *Archeologia Cambrensis* by Matthew Bloxam but he offers no reference. The same article is mentioned by Charles Hand in ‘Llanfaes Priory and its Mystery Monuments’, but on finding the article by Bloxam that Hand references it is in fact about the ‘Bulkley’ tomb in Beaumaris, so I am unsure where Bloxham wrote about the Penmynydd tomb originally

⁶³ The church is now closed and has been for some time. On visiting the tomb with the current buildings manager I was told that it is about to be handed over to The Friends of Friendless Churches who are keen to work on preserving the tomb and re-opening the church to visitors



Figure 1. Alabaster tomb of Myfanwy and Goronwy Fychan, St. Gredifael's Church, Penmynydd, photograph by Katie Patrick, April 2026



Figure 2. Detail of Myfanwy Fychan effigy, St. Gredifael's Church, Penmynydd, photograph by Katie Patrick, April 2026

In her study of the tomb of Gwladus Ddu and William ap Thomas in Abergavenny, Madeleine Gray argues that it was Gwladus who commissioned that tomb in the years after her husband's death. Gray states, 'the fact she is depicted on William's right side also suggests that she commissioned the tomb'.⁶⁴ This is interesting as, like Gwladus Ddu, Myfanwy lies on the right side of her husband. She was also predeceased by Goronwy by around eighteen years so it seems plausible that it may have been Myfanwy herself who commissioned the tomb in the years after Goronwy died. There has been some dispute around dating the tomb, with John Williams writing that Bloxham placed its production around 1415, and Peter Lord suggesting it was carved over a hundred years after Goronwy's death in about 1490.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Madeleine Gray, 'The Tomb of Gwladus Ddu and William ap Thomas in the Priory of St Mary, Abergavenny', *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*. XXXVIII, (2022), p. 35 in the footnote to this line of text Gray cites a communication with Ann Adams but does not explain any further why the positioning on the female figure to the right of the male is significant

⁶⁵ Williams, 'Penmynydd and the Tudors', p. 281; Peter Lord, *The Visual Culture of Wales: Medieval Vision*, (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 274-275

However, an elegy addressed to Goronwy by Gruffudd ap Maredudd ap Dafydd, contains the lines;

‘The grief of Menai was placed in a marble tomb.

Sad indeed was it to put in oak and earth

A pillar of the coast; the ardent pursuer of France;

The powerful friend; chief of the court of Penmynydd:

The choir of the Barefooted Friars covered him’.⁶⁶

Barry Lewis thinks that the poem was most likely sung sometime after the funeral which would support the above proposal that Myfanwy may have commissioned the tomb soon after Goronwy’s death.⁶⁷ Generally the tomb is considered to have been produced in the late fourteenth century in agreement with the poem.⁶⁸

Myfanwy ferch Iorweth Ddu, wife of Goronwy Fychan is, in at least one way, an unusual example of a medieval Welsh woman as, although there is little direct mention of her in the contemporary documents, the poetry addressed to her and her family shows us that her life was filled with the arts of Wales and that, perhaps inspired by this, or driven by her intellect, she learnt to read and write. There is no evidence that she remarried after Goronwy’s death, which again may be unusual for a woman of noble birth, and it is tempting to hope that this was by choice.⁶⁹ She was likely not of great age when she died, and had potentially been predeceased by at least one of her children; it seems likely that she saw much sadness in her

⁶⁶ Williams, ‘Penmynydd and the Tudors’, p. 293; Barry J. Lewis, ed. *Gwaith Gruffudd ap Maredudd i*, (Aberystwyth, Prifysgol Cymru, 2007), pp. 154-161

⁶⁷ Lewis, *Gwaith Gruffudd ap Maredudd*, pp. 147-148

⁶⁸ Holme, ‘Armoured Effigy’, pp. 54-58 for very comprehensive outline of dating the tomb by the armour

⁶⁹ Richards, *Footnotes to Narrative*, p. 57

time. Her impressive tomb though is testament to her high standing whether or not she commissioned it herself, which of course will probably never be known.

It seems that for the researcher of any Medieval woman, perhaps particularly those who lived in Wales it is necessary to approach the available sources with both caution and creativity; to keep an open mind as to what can be learned about a woman by becoming acquainted with those she was surrounded by. In many cases medieval women are not even relegated to the footnotes; the only information about them must be found by reading between the lines.

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