

The Lives of Saint David: from monastic leader to patron saint

Jenny Day

University of Wales Centre
for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies



Seintiau

The Cult of Saints in Wales Project (AHRC)
<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/>



St David: Objectives

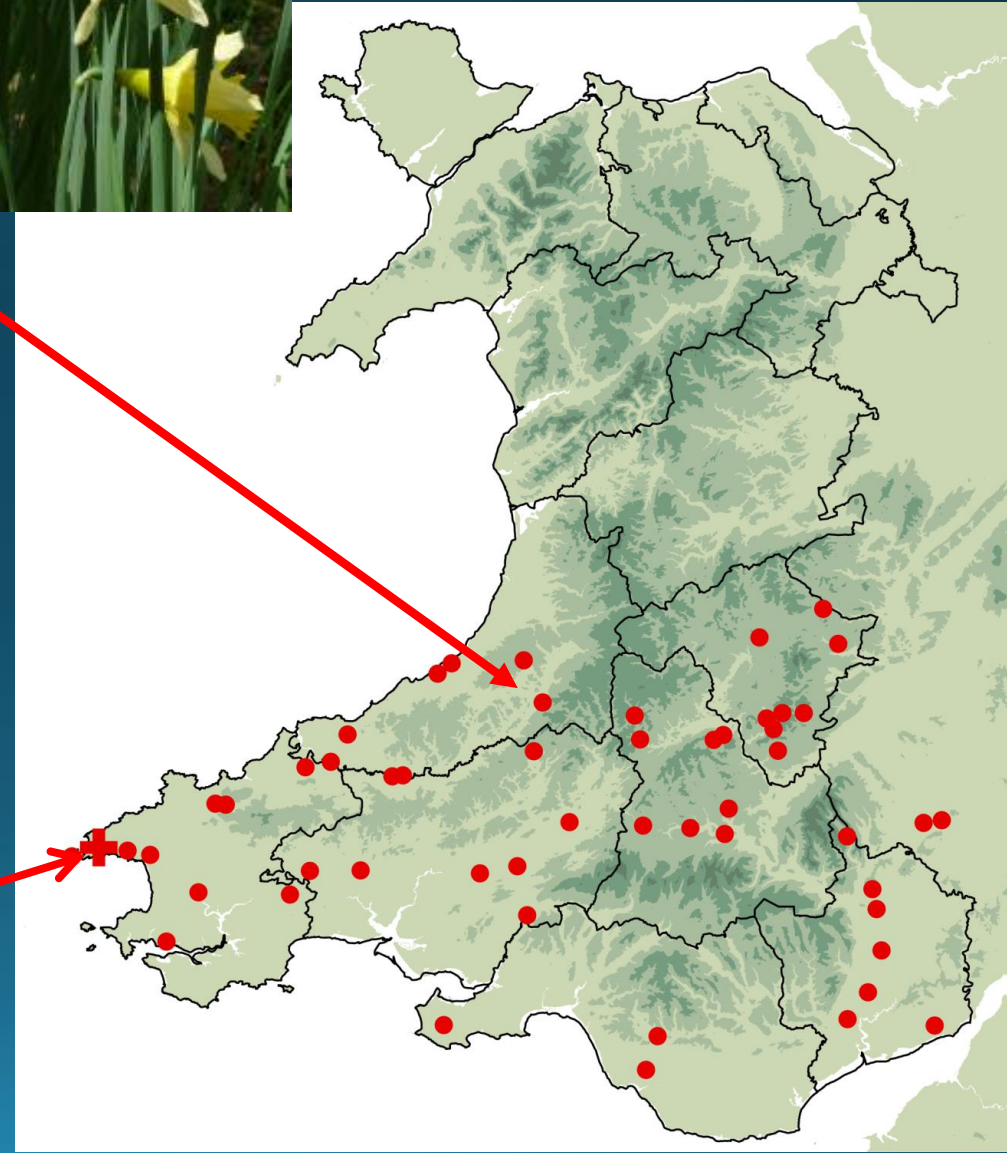
- Who was, and is, St David?
 - A humble monastic leader in south-west Wales... or 'head of all the British nation'?
 - Healer and intercessor...or a military figurehead?
- How is he portrayed in different sources? What are the motivations of the authors or adapters? Who are the audiences?
 - Latin Lives of David – late 11c (Rhygyfarch), and later versions
 - Welsh Life of David – early 14c onwards, and later versions
 - Poetry
- How and when did he become Wales's patron saint?

Agenda

- 10:00 The 'historical' David, veneration of David, and the Latin and Welsh Lives (50 minutes)
- 10:50 Questions and discussion (20 min)
 - How did the portrayal of David change in the Welsh Life as compared with the Latin Life?
 - 'Political', or 'devotional' texts?
 - A 'southern' saint?
- 11:10 Break (20 min)
- 11:30 The David of the poets (75 min)
 - Gwynfardd Brycheiniog, 'Canu i Ddewi', c.1175/6
<<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/edition/texts/verse/DewiGB/edited-text.eng.html>>
 - Iolo Goch, 'Mawl i Ddewi Sant', c.1380 × 1400
<<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/edition/texts/verse/DewiG/edited-text.eng.html>>
 - 'Armes Prydein Vawr', 10th century
 - (time permitting) Dafydd Llwyd of Mathafan, 'Canu i Ddewi', 1485
- 12:45 Questions, discussion and conclusions (15 min)
 - How does the portrayal of David differ from that in the prose Lives?
 - Different audiences, or different purposes/genres?
 - A 'southern', or a 'national' saint?

Who was (and is) St David?

- Wales's patron saint
- Feast-day 1st March
- Dove on shoulder
- Hill rises beneath him at Llanddewibrefi
- Bread and water, 'Waterman'
- Cathedral church at St Davids



St Davids Cathedral and Bishop's Palace



St Davids Bishop's Palace



Enlarged and improved by
Henry de Gower, between
1328 and 1347

St Non's chapel



- considered to be the birth place of David
- ruins of uncertain date, may be no earlier than 12c, but the presence of a 7th- to 9th-century cross-incised stone suggests an earlier chapel or cemetery (Heather James, 2007)



St Non's holy well

- Issued forth at the time of his birth according to local tradition (not mentioned in his Lives)*
- Medieval well head, restored in 18th century; restored and re-dedicated in 1951, now associated with St Non's Passion Fathers monastery.**
- *Jane Cartwright (2007)
**<https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/32511/details/st-nons-holy-well-st-davids>



The geography of David's cult

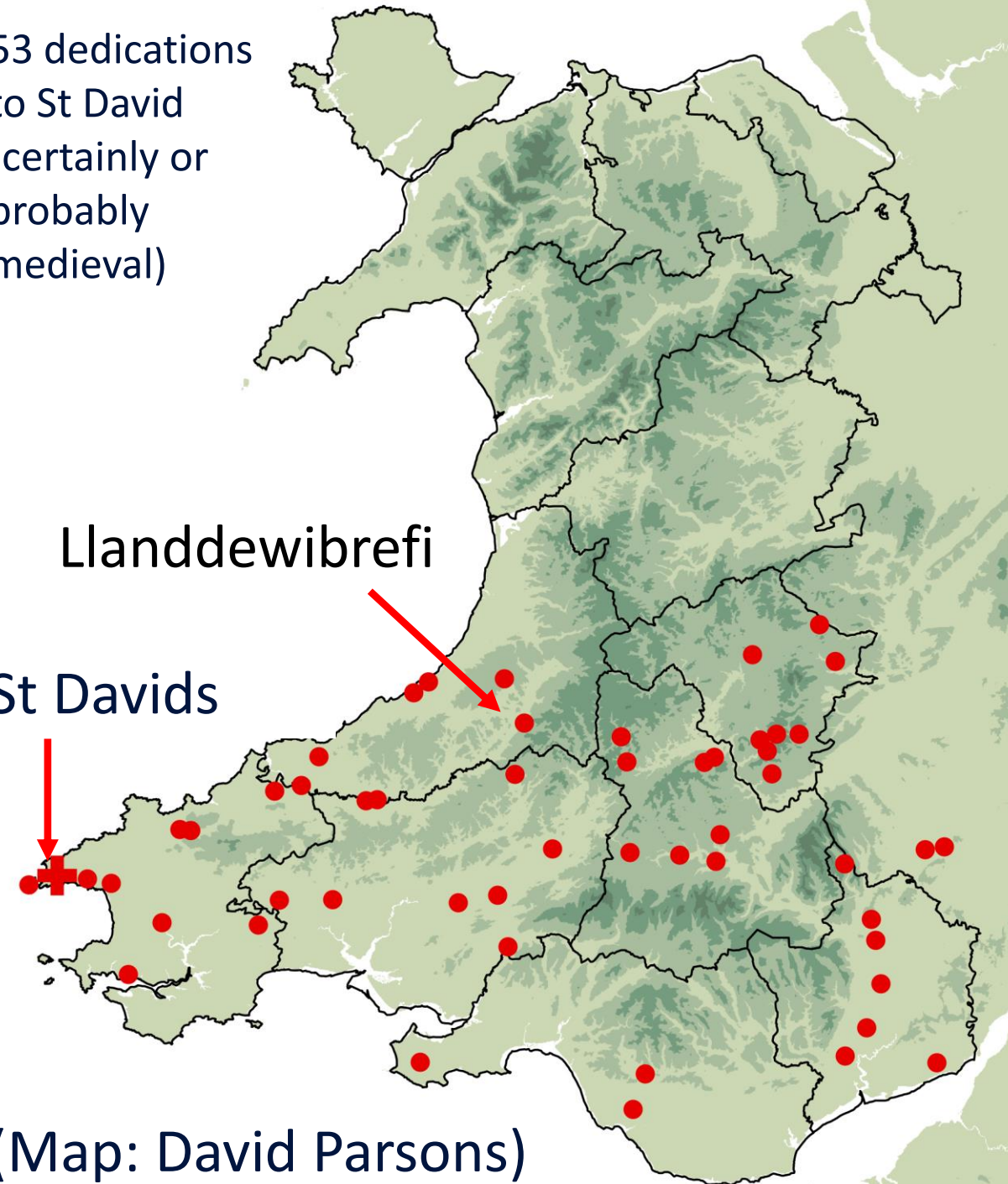
- Main centres at Mynyw / St Davids (Pembrokeshire) and Llanddewibrefi (Ceredigion)
- Over fifty churches and chapels consecrated to him across south Wales
- Traces of his cult in Brittany and south-west England

53 dedications
to St David
(certainly or
probably
medieval)

Llanddewibrefi

St Davids

(Map: David Parsons)





Ninth-century 'Idnert stone'

Only survives as two fragments, now in the church wall

Edward Lhuyd (1695):

+ HIC IACET IDNERT FILIVS IACOBI
QVI OCCISVS FVIT PROPTER PREDAM
SANCTI DAVID

'Here lies Idnerth son of Jacob who
was killed because of the despoiling
of St David'

(Nancy Edwards, *Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones*)



Other early evidence

- Irish annals refer to *David Cille Muine* 'David of the **monastery** of Mynyw'; the *Annals of Inisfallen* (Oxford, Bodleian L, Rawlinson B 503), AD 1092, refers specifically the 'Repose of David of Cell Muine' in 589 *
- *Annales Cambriae* (A-text, c.1100, copied perhaps from mid-10c MS at St Davids), refers in entry 157 (for AD 601) to *David **episcopus** moni iudeorum*
- David is mentioned in Irish saints' Lives, of St Molua of Clonfert-Mulloe & Ailbe of Emly, which may be of eighth-century origin
- Feast-day (1 March) recorded in two early ninth-century martyrologies from Ireland
- Mentioned in the Catalogue of the Saints of Ireland (*Catalogus sanctorum Hiberniae*), which probably dates from the ninth or tenth century

*<https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T100004/index.html>

**http://croniclau.bangor.ac.uk/documents/AC_A_first_edition.pdf.

See further WLS D introduction

St Davids as a centre of learning



- Asser's Life of King Alfred, composed around 885, refers to attacks upon David's jurisdiction (*parochia Sancti Degui*) and **monastery** (*monasterium*).
- Asser was a Welsh bishop who came to England 'so that Alfred's literary programme might "benefit in every respect from the **learning** of St David" (*adiuuaretur per rudimenta Sancti Degui in omni causa*)' (Wooding 2007: 14).
- Asser described a relative of his, Nyfys (*Nobis*) as archbishop (*achiepiscopus*) of St Davids
 - Not in the later sense, but 'a kind of episcopal overlordship' over several other bishops in the local region (See T.M. Charles-Edwards (1971), 'The Seven Bishop-Houses of Dyfed', B xxiv: 247–62)

The 'early David'



- To summarize: Strongly associated with the monastery of St Davids, lived in the sixth century, founded churches.
- Early reference to him as a renunciant in the Life of St Paul Aurelian (Brittany, 884)

Sanctumque **Devium** qui pro eo quod propter artissimam vitæ ejus in Christo conversationem et sui a Deo judice laboris firmissimam retributionis spem in **pane et aqua** vixerit cognomento dicebatur **Aquaticus**.

(ed.) C. Cuissard, 'Vie de Saint Paul de Léon'

S. **Dewi** (*Devius*), who was called '**Aquaticus**' on account of his strict conversation in Christ, because he lived on **bread and water** only, looking to God the Judge of all for a most sure reward for his labour.

(trans.) G. H. Doble, *The Saints of Cornwall*

Rhygyfarch's *Vita S. David*: background

- Rhygyfarch ap Sulien (died 1099), a member of an important family of clerics and scholars
 - *clas* Llanbadarn
 - Latin poems by Rhygyfarch and his brother Ieuan
 - father, Sulien the Wise (1011-1091), educated in Wales, Ireland and Scotland, twice bishop of St Davids (1072/3–78 and 1080–85)
- Turbulent times
 - Viking raids – Bishop Abraham killed 1080
 - Normans had conquered England - William the Conqueror visited St Davids 1081 'in order to pray'
 - Normans were establishing themselves in extensive areas of Wales and interfering with ecclesiastical appointments (e.g. a chaplain of William II (Rufus) made bishop of Bangor in 1092)
 - Rhygyfarch's own *Planctus* (composed 1094/5) complains of the destruction and cruelties (and taxes) brought about by the Normans: 'free necks are subjected to the yoke' (*libera colla iugo subdere*)

Llanbadarn Fawr, Ceredigion



Rhygyfarch's *Vita S. David*: purpose (i)

- Roughly the same period as the *Planctus*
- A different response to the same threats
 - St David's worthiness and authority, along with his virtues and powers, are praised throughout
 - Careful attention is paid to his status as archbishop (consecrated by the patriarch of Jerusalem); 'all ranks of people of the whole British nation' approved that appointment at the synod of Brefi (VSD §§46, 53)
 - Acknowledged as the leader and prince of the entire nation (VSD §57).
- **To promote the status of St David and St Davids**
- **... but also to inspire and instruct the faithful**

Rhygyfarch's *Vita S. David*: purpose (ii)

- VSD §66: 'The holy father David performed these and many other works [...] we have provided just a few examples in the feeble vessel of my narrative in order to quench the thirst of those who are eager [...] **we have collected these few works out of the many into one place to be an example for everyone, and to the glory of the Father.** They have been found scattered in the most ancient writings of our country, and especially of his own monastery [...]'
- VSD §67: 'I have applied the ability of my modest intellect [...] so that **whoever may have read these things with a devout mind may assist me in my prayers** [...] and that [...] since the Father's mercy [...] has carried me to the tiny flower of my understanding, it may finally [...] **bring me the fruit of a good harvest** through timely works [...] so [...] they may find a place for me within the entrance of the heavenly gates.'

Vita S. David (i)

- His coming foretold by an angel to Sanctus, son of King Ceredig; three gifts. **Parallels with Christ's birth.**
 - stag - dominion over the 'ancient serpent'
 - fish - watery life i.e. no alcohol
 - swarm of bees – wisdom (ability to understand the spiritual meaning in a literal statement just as the honey is in wax).
- Patrick leaves for Ireland to make way for him
- David's conception by rape (**leaving his mother without sin, compare the virgin birth**), as the son of Sanctus and Nonnita; Nonnita's living on bread and water.
- Gildas is unable to preach in the presence of the unborn David
- David's birth; a storm miraculously saves him from being discovered by a local tyrant (**compare Herod**); stone breaks in half
- His baptism by Ailbe, Bishop of Munster: a spring appears and a man lacking eyes or nostrils is healed
- His education in *Vetus Rubus* (Hen Fynyw, Ceredigion); first mention of the dove (**symbol of the Holy Spirit; cf. baptism of Christ**)
- His further education with Paulinus, a disciple of St Germanus
- David founds 'twelve monasteries to the glory of God', beginning with Glastonbury
- He returns to *Vetus Rubus* but is advised by an angel to move to *Vallis Rosina*, where there is a better hope of salvation: VSD §14 'a place from where few will go to perdition; for everyone who is buried in good faith in the graveyard of that place will obtain forgiveness.'

Vita S. David (ii)

- David comes to *Vallis Rosina*; he defeats opposition from Baia and his wife
 - death and resurrection of all their cattle
 - Baia's wife sending her handmaids to take off their clothes and tempt David's followers to lustful thoughts
 - she murders her devout stepdaughter, Dunod (a healing well springs forth)
- He founds his monastery at *Vallis Rosina*; its austere regime is described in detail (VSD §§ 20-32) [derived from the original rule of the monastery? See David Dumville, 2001]
 - 'every monk [...] spent his life in the community in manual labour'
 - when that was done, then reading or writing or praying
 - then 'chanting of the psalms' and devotion on bended knees
 - when everyone had gone, 'the father, alone, would pour out his private prayer to God for the condition of the church'
 - 'Eventually they gather at table [...] feeding on bread and herbs seasoned with salt, they quench their burning thirst with a temperate kind of drink'
 - 'they go to church at the canonical ringing of the bell, and there they apply themselves to vigils, prayers and genuflections'
 - David himself performing the Mass, talking with angels, seeking cold water to 'tame every passion of the flesh', the spending the whole day 'teaching, praying, genuflecting and caring for the brethren' as well as feeding the needy, the sick, and pilgrims.

Vita S. David (iii)

- Miraculous springs (water and wine)
- Miracles concerning David's disciple, Aidan (oxen and book)
- Aidan goes to Ireland to found the monastery at Ferns
- Aidan sends Scuithin to warn David of the plot to poison him; he is carried over the Irish Sea by a sea-beast; David miraculously resists the poison
- More miracles (Abbot Baire, Modomnóc, Aidan/Maedóc)
- David goes to Jerusalem with Teilo and Padarn
 - 'they were equals as fellow travellers, no one considered himself to be above the other' (VSD §44), but...
 - David was instructed by angels
 - the gift of tongues is given to David alone
 - David is made archbishop
 - David given four gifts (an altar, a bell, a staff, and a coat woven from gold); gifts also given to Teilo and Padarn but not specified or enumerated



Vita S. David (iv)

- The Synod at Brefi – to counter the teachings of Pelagius.
 - So many people present that no one can preach to them all. On the advice of Paulinus, David is summoned.
 - Messengers are sent, but David humbly refuses (VSD §50 ‘What sort of man am I that I should be able to do what they cannot?’), likewise when summoned a second and third time.
 - Eventually saints Deiniol and Dyfrig persuade him, by refusing to dine with him unless he agrees to attend
- David resurrects a widow’s son (Magnus) on the way to Brefi (cf. Luke 7.11-15 (Christ raising the widow’s son at Nain))
- David preaches at Brefi; a dove settles on his shoulder (cf. Christ’s baptism); the ground rises beneath him:

VSD §52: ‘They ordered him to ascend the built-up heap of clothes, but he refused. Instead, he ordered the boy recently raised from the dead to place a handkerchief under his feet. Standing on it, he explained the Gospel and the law as if from a trumpet. Before everyone’s eyes a snow-white dove, sent from heaven, settled on his shoulders and remained there as long as he preached. And while he preached, which was with so clear a voice that he was heard by everyone – equally by those who were nearest and those who were farthest off – the earth under him swelled and was raised to a hill.’

Vita S. David (v)

- The Synod of Victory; David's authority and right to grant sanctuary confirmed
- David is head of the British nation and lives to advanced old age (147)
- An angel warns that the time for him to receive his heavenly reward is approaching
- His last words, including exhortation to 'persevere in those things that you have learned from me, and have seen with me' (VSD §62)
- His departure for heaven escorted by angels and 'with Christ as his companion' (VSD §63)
- Prayer invoking his intercession: 'May he whose festival we devoutly celebrate on earth unite us by his intercessions to the angelic citizens, with almighty God and our Lord Jesus Christ' (VSD §65)
- Rhygyfarch's closing words
- (Genealogy, tracing David's descent to 'Ieuan the son of the sister of Mary')
- Further liturgical material

Bernard, Bishop of St Davids

- First Norman bishop of St Davids (in office 1115 to 1148)
- Strove to promote the cult of St David
- David's importance was recognized by Pope Calixtus II (reigned 1119–24), who encouraged pilgrims (from England) by saying that 'those who went twice to St Davids should have the same privileges in the way of benediction as those who went once to Rome'*
 - Note: there is no evidence that Calixtus canonized David, or that he was ever officially canonized at all (Richard Sharpe, 2007, p.102)
- Shorter 'Nero-Digby' version of the Life produced, perhaps in the 1120s in the context of rivalry between Bernard and Bishop Urban of Llandaf
- Bernard developed an interest (c.1125?) in the idea of promoting St Davids as an archdiocese
- A new cathedral was built, and consecrated in 1131

* R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (1998–9) (ed.), *William of Malmesbury, Gesta regum Anglorum* (Oxford), V.435



(the present cathedral dates, for the most part, from the period 1180–1220; see Coflein s.n. St Davids Cathedral)

The shorter 'Nero-Digby' Life

- Omission of some local, geographical references; the name *Vallis Rosina* is omitted from the account of David's first settlement
- Omission of some personal names. Even Gildas is simply described as a 'certain teacher'
- Some sections are shortened, including the Gildas and Patrick episodes and the incident where the warlord Baia's wife murders her stepdaughter.
- The miracle with Saint Aidan's bell is omitted
- The section on sanctuary is omitted.
- Wide audience – promoting the status of St Davids (vs. Llandaf)

'Gerald of Wales', Giraldus Cambrensis (?1146 – 1223)

- Version based on Nero-Digby
- Adds a few things:
 - the miracle of a gospel completed by an angel in letters of gold.
 - Some topographical details
 - David's parents meet not merely in Dyfed but specifically in Pebidiog, the cantref where St Davids is located
 - he names Porth Clais as the location of David's baptism.
- Places David's Life more firmly within the local landscape
- Promoting the agenda of the archdiocese (see Evans 2007)

Giraldus (right) with St David (left),
Church of St James, Manorbier



St David in the *Journey Through Wales* (i)



In the church at Glascwm, in Elfael, there is a handbell which has most miraculous powers. It is supposed to have belonged to Saint David and at is called a 'bangu'. In an attempt to liberate him, a certain woman took this handbell to her husband, who was chained up in the castle of Rhaiadr Gwy [...] The keepers of the castle not only refused to set the man free, but they even seized the bell. That same night God took vengeance on them, for the whole town was burned down, except the wall on which the handbell hung.

Book I, Chapter 1 (Thorpe (ed.), 79)



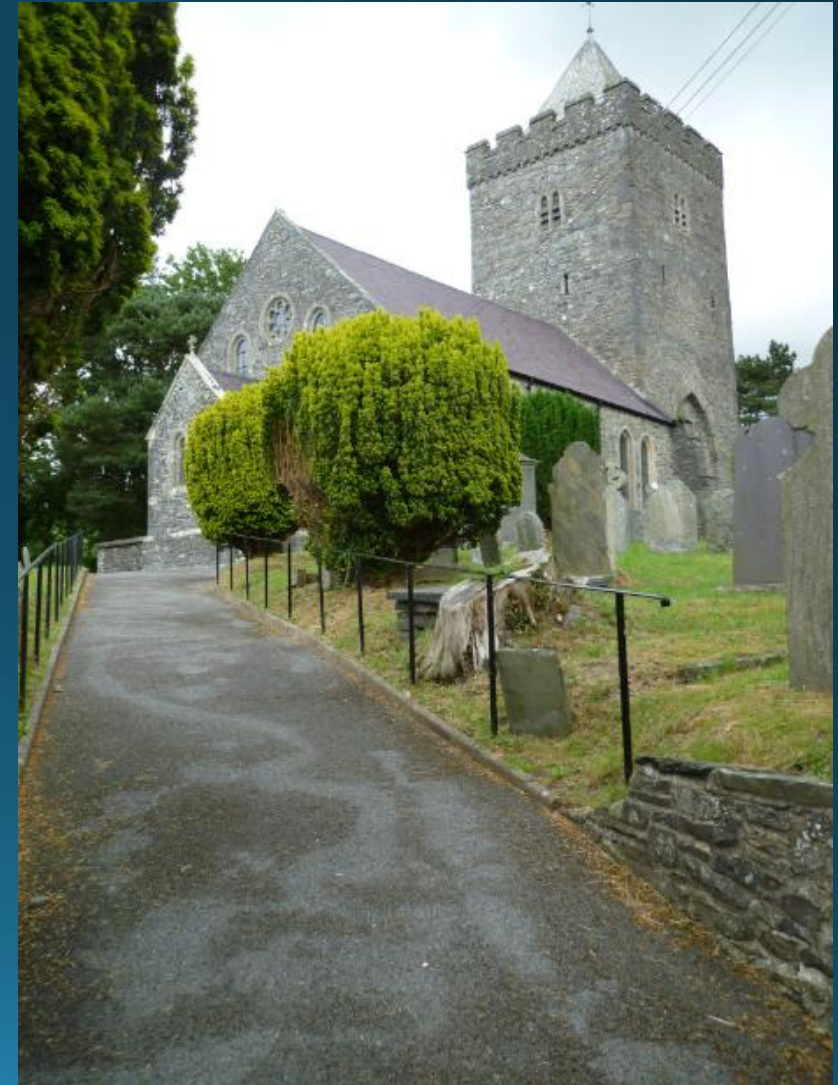
'St Gwyddelan's Bell'
Church of St Gwyddelan,
Dolwyddelan, Gwynedd

St David in the *Journey Through Wales* (ii)

David was extremely devout and lived a most saintly life. My *Life of Saint David* gives abundant evidence of this. Of all the miraculous events which you can read there, three in particular seem noteworthy to me: the story of his origin and conception; the fact that thirty years before he was born it was known that he would become Archbishop; and most remarkable of all, the way in which, in full view of an astonished congregation, the ground on which he was standing rose up in the air one day when he was preaching at Llanddewi Brefi.

From the time of David onwards, twenty-five Archbishops occupied the see of St Davids down the years [...]

Book II, Chapter 1 (Thorpe (ed.), 161)



Other versions of the Latin Life

- A very concise version, also 12th-century, was produced as part of a Legendary, probably for Leominster priory; survives in a manuscript known as Lincoln Cathedral, MS 149
 - Leominster was one of the churches founded by David according to Rhygyfarch
 - 13th century references to an arm of St David (James, 2007, p. 80)
- Another abbreviated version was written by John of Tynemouth, a monk of St Albans, for his own collection of saints' Lives, first half of the 14th century
- An abbreviated 'Irish recension', part of a well-known collection of mainly Irish saints' Lives; the earliest copy is preserved in an early 14th-century manuscript
 - David's Irish connections are emphasized
- All in collections of Lives, hence the abbreviation!

The Welsh Life of St David

- Early fourteenth century (Evans, WLSD)
- Earliest surviving copy is in the Book of the Anchorite of Llanddewibrefi (1346) (Oxford, Jesus College, MS. 119)
- Post-conquest Wales; the archdiocese no longer a burning issue
- Thriving literary culture
 - Compare the 'Mabinogion' and other prose tales in the White Book of Rhydderch (c.1350) and the Red Book of Hergest (c.1400)

The Welsh Life (i)

- Genealogy
- His coming foretold by an angel to Sant, son of King Ceredig; three 'finds' (stag, salmon, swarm of bees); ~~their significance explained (David as Aquaticus)~~
- Patrick leaves for Ireland to make way for him
- David's conception, as the son of Sant and Non; Non's ~~and David's~~ living on bread and water
 - VSD §4 'from the very time she conceived, she lived only on bread and water'
 - WLSDT 'The first miracle which David did: from the time she conceived, she did not desire in her lifetime any food except bread and water. And David consumed no food except bread and water.'
- Gildas is unable to preach in the presence of the unborn David
- David's birth; a storm ~~miraculously saves his life~~; stone breaks in half
- His baptism ~~by Ailbe, Bishop of Munster~~: a spring appears and a blind flat-faced man is healed
- His education in *Vetus Rubus* (*Henllwyn*); the dove
- His further education with Paulinus, a disciple of ~~a holy bishop in Rome~~
- David builds churches, including Glastonbury
- He returns to *Vetus Rubus* but is advised by an angel to move to *Glyn Rhosyn*, where there is a better hope of salvation

The Welsh Life (ii)

- David comes to *Glyn Rhosyn*; he defeats opposition from Boia and his wife (as in VSD)
- He founds his monastery; ~~its austere regime is described~~
- Miraculous springs (water and wine)
- ~~Miracles concerning David's disciple, Aidan (oxen and book)~~
- ~~Aidan goes to Ireland to found the monastery at Ferns~~
- Aidan sends Scuthyn to warn David of the plot to poison him; he is carried over the Irish Sea by a sea-beast
 - + 'Then David welcomed him warmly and embraced him, and asked him how St Maedóc [=Aidan] was faring; and David greatly loved his disciple'
 - David miraculously resists the poison
- ~~More miracles (Abbot Baire, Modomnóc, Aidan/Maedóc)~~
- ~~David goes to Jerusalem with Teilo and Padarn and is made archbishop~~

The Welsh Life (iii)

- The Synod at Brefi ~~—to counter the Pelagian heresy,~~ Paulinus mentions David's being ordained an archbishop in Rome
- David is summoned (as in VSD); on the way he raises the widow's son ~~(Magnus)~~ from the dead
- He preaches at Brefi; ~~a dove settles on his shoulder;~~ the ground rises beneath him (slightly simplified – a pre-existing hill, no mound of clothes).

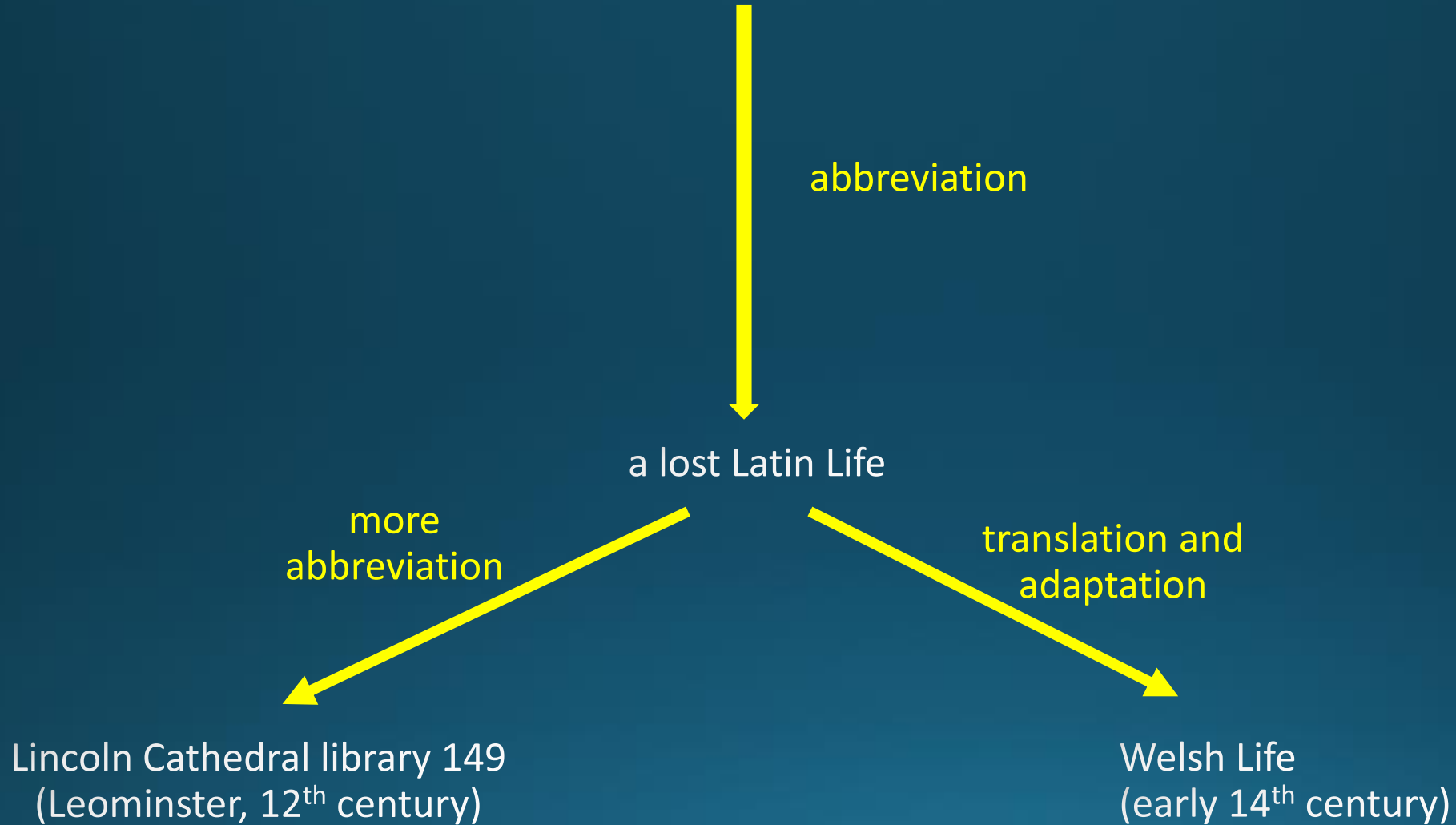
WLSDT: 'He refused to ascend to the top of the mound, and said he did not wish any place to stand except on level ground. And David began to preach from there of the law of Christ and the Gospel, and that was like the cry of a clarion horn, and clear to every man, as clear to the furthest as to the nearest, and as universal as would be the sun for everyone at midday. And that was a marvel for everyone. And when David was on the flat ground, which was mentioned above, preaching, that ground rose like a high mountain beneath his feet'

The Welsh Life (iv)

- ~~The Synod of Victory;~~ David's authority and right to grant sanctuary confirmed (+ the borders of his sanctuary are defined)
- David is head of the British nation ~~and lives to advanced old age (147)~~
- An angel warns that the time for him to receive his heavenly reward is approaching
- His last words, including exhortation to 'do the little things that you have seen and heard from me.'
- His departure for heaven with Christ and angels;
- + description of the glories of heaven
- Prayer invoking his intercession
- ~~Rhygyfarch's closing words~~

D. Simon Evans, WLSD lii: Welsh Life is 'more familiar', 'less formal' and 'less sophisticated' in tone

Rhygyfarch's original Latin Life



(after Paul Russell)

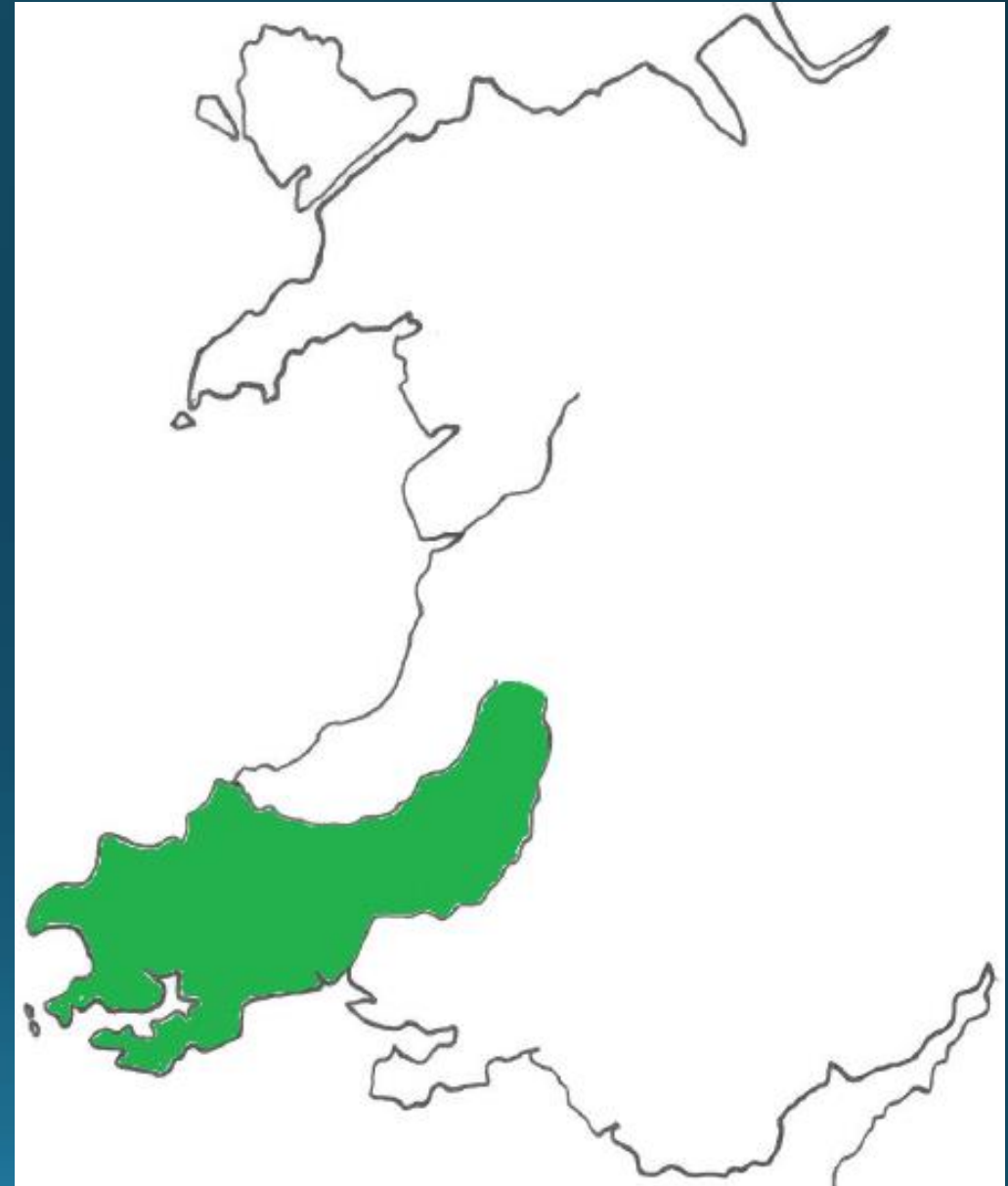
‘[...] the angels took his soul, and bore him to where there is light without end, and rest without labor, and joy without sorrow, and abundance of every kind of good, and triumph, and brightness, and beauty, where there is praise of Christ’s champions, where the evil rich are despised, where there is health without disease, and youth without old age, and peace without discord, and glory without vanity, and songs without weariness, and rewards without end, where Abel is together with the martyrs, where Enoc is with the living, where Noah is with the sailors, where Abraham is with the patriarchs [...]’

WLSDT

Cf. Latin Life of Cybi (James, 1955)

‘This is the sanctuary of David for everyone who may be in Dinas Rubi [=St Davids], in David’s refuge and under his protection: if it is necessary, [his protection] may run from the river Tywi as far as the river Teifi’

WLSDT



- Evans, WLSD lii, noted that there is in the Welsh Life a focussing of interest on St Davids and the local area, and ‘on David’s simple goodness and godliness, on his humility and devotion, on his miracles, to the exclusion of other aspects.’
- A devotional text for private or public reading, accessible to laymen and women

VSD §62: ‘My **brothers**, persevere in those things that you have learned from me, and have seen with me [...]

WLSDT: “Lords, **brothers and sisters**, be joyful and keep your faith and your belief, and do the little things which you have seen and heard from me [...]

- Defending the status of David and his diocese in the new environment of post-conquest Wales is likely to have been a further motive.

The Welsh Life: medieval manuscripts

- 'The Book of the Anchorite of Llanddewibrefi',
Jesus College 119 (edited in WLSD) 1346
- Llanstephan 4 (incomplete) 1375–1425
- Llanstephan 27 1375–1425
- Peniarth 15 1375–1425
- British Library Cotton Titus D xxii 1429
- National Library of Wales 5267B (incomplete) 1438
- Peniarth 27ii (paraphrase, north Wales) 1450–1500
<<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/>>

Questions and discussion (20 min)

- How did the portrayal of David change in the Welsh Life as compared with the Latin Life?
- 'Political', or 'devotional' texts?
- A 'southern' saint?

Bibliography / further reading

Primary sources

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Lewis Thorpe (1978) (trans.), *Gerald of Wales: The Journey Through Wales/The Description of Wales* (Harmondsworth)

A.W. Wade-Evans (1923), *Life of St David* (1923) [an old edition, but the explanatory/historical notes are still valuable]]

Editions of the 'Lincoln' Life and a late version of David's Life (Peniarth 27ii, late 15th century) will soon be published, by Paul Russell and Jenny Day, respectively, on the 'Cult of Saints in Wales' website <<https://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/>>

Bibliography / further reading

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D. Simon Evans (1988), *The Welsh Life of St David* (Cardiff), introduction

J. Wyn Evans (2007), 'Transition and survival: St David and St Davids Cathedral', SDW 20–40

Heather James, H. (2007), 'The geography of the cult of St David: a study of dedication patterns in the medieval diocese', SDW 41–83

J. W. James (1955), 'The Welsh version of Rhigyfarch's "Life of St David"', *Cylchgrawn Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru*, ix

Sharpe, R. (2007), 'Which text is Rhygyfarch's Life of St David?', SDW 90–105

Jonathan M. Wooding (2007), 'The figure of David', SDW 1–19