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Rhydderch Hen

(fl. c. 573–c. 612)

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Rhydderch Hen (fl. c. 573–c. 612), king of Strathclyde, was son of Tudwal Tudclyd ap Clynog. He ruled the north British kingdom of Strathclyde, based at Dumbarton, in the second half of the sixth century. When or whom he succeeded to the kingship is not known; most of the available information about his life and rule is derived from incidental notices in saints' lives. In these texts his pious character is stressed: he was allegedly baptized in Ireland by disciples of St Patrick and had personal contact with the future saints Columba of Iona and Kentigern of Glasgow (whose career he fostered). In the *Historia Brittonum* Rhydderch Hen (the epithet means 'the Old') is represented as one of the four North British kings who fought, ultimately unsuccessfully, against the expanding Northumbrian kingdom of Bernicia. His allies included Urien ap Cynfarch, king of Rheged, Gwallog ap Llinog (whom some would place in Elfed in what is now Yorkshire), and a Morgan (possibly Morgan Mwynfawr). The main Bernician opponents were Theodoric (*supp. r.* 572–9) and Hussa (*supp. r.* 585–92). Later Welsh tradition claims that Rhydderch fought against the Briton Gwenddolau ap Ceidio at the battle of Arthuret in Cumberland in the year 573, but earlier accounts of that encounter do not mention his involvement. Relations with the neighbouring Scottish kingdom of Dál Riata were not always amicable. A Welsh triad states that the Dál Riata king Áedán mac Gabráin (*r.* 574–608) ravaged the court of Rhydderch at Dumbarton 'leaving neither food nor drink nor beast alive'. This may reflect some sort of military encounter rather than excessive gluttony on the part of Áedán. Rhydderch is said to have feared that he would be slain by enemies but was reassured by St Columba that he would die a natural death. Later sources date his death to the same year as that of Kentigern, traditionally 612 (though 614 is also possible). Despite his importance for the kingdom of Strathclyde, Rhydderch Hen does not seem to have been succeeded by any of his descendants. He is credited in late Welsh genealogies with a daughter Gwladus.

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