

# Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

## Cynan Garwyn

(fl. c. 550–c. 600)

David E. Thornton

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/51393>

**Published in print:** 23 September 2004

**Published online:** 23 September 2004

**Cynan Garwyn** (fl. c. 550–c. 600), king of Powys, was son of Brochfael Ysgithrog of Powys. Cynan ruled the kingdom of Powys in north-east and east Wales in the late sixth century. His epithet Garwyn or possibly Carwyn means either ‘of the White Thigh’ or ‘of the White Chariot’. Regarded by the later genealogists as one of the royal descendants of Cadell Ddyrnllug, little reliable information is known of Cynan's reign. He may have been ‘Aurelius Caninus’, one of the Welsh kings chastised by Gildas in the mid-sixth century, though his kinsman Cynin ap Millo has also been suggested as a candidate. According to a poem addressed to Cynan (and probably erroneously attributed to the famous Taliesin), he was a great war-leader who fought widely throughout Wales: on the Wye, against the men of Gwent, on Anglesey, in Dyfed (possibly against Aergul Lawhir ap Tryffin), in Brycheiniog, and even in Cornwall. Gildas, it might be noted, drew attention to ‘the thirst for civil war and constant plunder’ of Aurelius Caninus. In the life of St Cadog, Cynan Garwyn is said to have been discouraged from such a raid against Glamorgan through the saint's intercession. He is there called king of Rheinwg, situated either in Dyfed or, more likely, on the Herefordshire–Brecknockshire border. The Welsh life of St Beuno claims that Cynan granted land at Gwyddelwern (in Edeirnion) to Beuno, demonstrating that he was capable of non-violent acts, but such hagiographical notices are notoriously unreliable. The sources give no indication that Cynan Garwyn fought against the English, in which regard he was more fortunate than his son and probable successor Selyf Sarffgadau. His other sons include Eiludd (sometimes conflated with Selyf) and, in unreliable sources, also Maredudd and Dinogad.

## Sources

---

*The poems of Taliesin*, ed. I. Williams, trans. J. E. Caerwyn-Williams (1968)

R. Bromwich, ed. and trans., *Trioedd ynys Prydein: the Welsh triads*, 2nd edn (1978)

*Gildas: ‘The ruin of Britain’, and other works*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom (1978)

P. C. Bartrum, ed., *Early Welsh genealogical tracts* (1966)

D. P. Kirby, 'The bards and the Welsh border', *Mercian studies*, ed. A. Dornier (1977), 31-42