
LLUDD AND LLEUELYS

The Welsh tale of *Lludd and Lleuelys* is preserved in a collection of stories contained in two manuscripts, the English titles of which are the *White Book of Rhydderch* (written ca. 1300–25) and the *Red Book of Hergest* (ca. 1375–1425). The stories are thought to be much older, some dating back to the latter part of the eleventh century. The traditional but inaccurate title, given to the collection by its nineteenth-century translator, is *The Mabinogion*, a mistake for *Mabinogi*, which has been interpreted as a generic term for the youthful exploits of a hero but probably refers to a group of interconnected traditional stories. A group of the *Mabinogi* deals with characters who are related through crossovers between the human world and a supernatural other-world; *Lludd and Lleuelys*, however, is one of several independent tales. Lludd is among the kings of Britain mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth, where he appears (as in the tale below) as a restorer of the walls of London and builder of many towers in that city. Geoffrey says that the city's original name Trinovantum (New Troy), given to it by its eponymous founder Brutus was changed to Caer Lludd (Lludd's city or stronghold), which became Caer Llundein, and finally London. The tale here has the same etymology for London though nothing about a change of names. Geoffrey probably took the etymology from a Welsh source, and the redactor of *Lludd and Lleuelys* could have taken it from Geoffrey's *History*, which was translated into Welsh. Either way, the etymology is not convincing but typifies a characteristic of both Irish and Welsh literature to explain place names with stories. *Lludd and Lleuelys* gives us an idea of the kind of material Geoffrey of Monmouth must have been dealing with and what he may have chosen to omit. The three plagues of which King Lludd rids his land on the advice of his brother are the stuff of folktales, which Geoffrey may have regarded as too far-fetched to belong in a history book even though he did not draw that line at Merlin's magic.

Ll in Welsh represents a sound that does not exist in English and may be approximated by an aspirated *l* [hl] or simply pronounced as [l]. Welsh *u* may represent short or long *i*. The double consonant *dd* corresponds to *th* in *see~~th~~e*. Thus Lludd in Welsh is pronounced something like *hleethe*, but when his name is anglicized, it is spelled and pronounced as Lud.

Lludd and Lleuelys¹

Beli Mawr son of Mynogan had three sons: Lludd, Caswallawn, and Nin-niaw; according to the lore about him, Lleuelys was a fourth son. After Beli died, the kingdom of the isle of Britain fell into the hands of Lludd, his eldest son, and Lludd ruled it successfully. He refurbished the walls of London, and surmounted them with countless towers. After that he ordered the citizens to build houses of such quality that no kingdom would have houses as splendid as were in London.

And besides that, he was a good warrior and generous, and he gave food and drink freely to all who sought it, and although he had many forts and cities, he loved this one more than any other, and dwelt there most of the year.

1. The translation is by Patrick K. Ford, *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales* (1977).

For that reason it was called *Caer Lludd*, and finally *Caer Llundain*. After the foreign people came it was called *Llundain* or *Londres*.

Lludd loved Lleuelys best of all his brothers, for he was a wise and prudent man. When Lleuelys heard that the king of France had died leaving no heir save a daughter, and that he had left his realm in her hands, he came to his brother Lludd seeking counsel and encouragement from him. And not only for personal advantage, but to try to add honor, dignity, and merit to their race, if he could go to the kingdom of France to seek that woman for his wife. His brother agreed with him immediately, and he was pleased with that counsel. Without delay ships were made ready and filled with armed horsemen, and they set out for France. As soon as they disembarked, they sent messengers to announce to the nobles of France the nature of the business they had come to attempt. And by joint counsel of the nobles of France and her princes, the maiden was given to Lleuelys, and the realm's crown along with her. After that, he ruled the land wisely, prudently, and in good fortune, as long as he lived.

After some time had passed, three oppressions came upon the isle of Britain, such that none of the islands had ever seen before. The first of these was the advent of a people called the *Coraniaid*; so great was their knowledge that there was no utterance over the face of the land—however low it was spoken—that, if the wind met it, they didn't know. For that reason, one could do them no harm.

The second oppression was a cry that resounded every May Day eve above every hearth in Britain; it went through the hearts of men and terrified them so much that men lost their color and their strength, women miscarried, sons and daughters lost their senses and all animals, forests, earth and waters were left barren.

The third oppression was that despite how extensive the preparations and provisions were that were readied in the king's courts, even though it be a year's provision of food and drink, nothing was ever had of it except what could be consumed on the very first night.

The first oppression was evident and clear enough, but no one knew the meaning of the other two oppressions. There was greater hope, therefore, of deliverance from the first than from the second or third.

Lludd, the king, grew anxious and worried then, for he didn't know how he could get relief from those oppressions. He summoned all the nobles of his realm, and sought advice from them concerning what they could do against those oppressions. With the unanimous counsel of the nobles, Lludd son of Beli determined to go to his brother Lleuelys, king of France, for he was a man of great and wise counsel, from whom to seek advice. And they prepared a fleet—secretly and quietly, lest that people or anyone else know the meaning of their business except the king and his counselors. When they had been prepared, Lludd and those whom he had selected went to their ships and began to plough the seas toward France.

When news of that came to Lleuelys—since he did not know the reason for his brother's fleet—he came from the other side to meet him, with an enormous fleet. When Lludd saw that, he left all his ships out at sea except one, and in that he went to meet his brother. The other did the same. After they came together, each put his arms around the other's neck, and they greeted each other with brotherly affection. When Lludd had told his brother the purpose of his mission, Lleuelys said that he knew the meaning of his arrival

in those lands. Then they conspired to conduct their business differently, in order that the wind might not carry their speech, lest the Coraniaid know what they said. So Lleuelys had a long brass horn made, and they talked through that. But whatever speech one of them uttered through the horn, only adverse, contrary speech was heard by the other. When Lleuelys saw that, and that a demon was obstructing them and creating turmoil in the horn, he had wine poured into the horn to cleanse it. By virtue of the wine, the demon was driven out.

When their speech was unobstructed, Lleuelys told his brother that he would give him some vermin, and that he should let some of them live to breed, in case by chance that sort of oppression came again. The others he should take and break up in water. That, he affirmed, would be good to destroy the race of Coraniaid, as follows: after he came home to his realm, he should summon all the people together—his people and the Coraniaid people in the same assembly, with the pretext of making peace between them. When they were all together, he should take that charged water and sprinkle it on everyone universally. And he affirmed that that water would poison the Coraniaid people, but that it would neither kill nor injure any of his own people.

“The second oppression in your realm,” he said, “is a dragon. A dragon of foreign blood is fighting with him and seeking to overthrow him. Because of that, your dragon utters a horrible scream. This is how you shall be instructed regarding that: after you return home, have the length and width of the island measured. Where you discover the exact center, have that place dug up. Then, have a vatful of the best mead that can be made put into that hole, with a cover of silk brocade over the top of the vat. And then you yourself stand watch, and you will see the dragons fighting in the shape of horrible animals. Finally, they will assume the form of dragons in the air. Last of all, after they cease their violent and fierce battle, being tired, they will fall in the shape of two young pigs onto the coverlet. They will sink the sheet with them and draw it down to the bottom of the vat; they will drink all the mead, and after that they will sleep. Then immediately wrap the cover around them. In the strongest place you can find in your kingdom, deposit them in a stone chest, and hide it in the ground. And as long as they remain in that secure place, no oppression shall visit the isle of Britain from another place.”

“The cause of the third oppression,” he said, “is a powerful magician who carries off your food, your drink, and your provisions, and by his sorcery and his magic he puts everyone to sleep. And so you yourself must stand guard over your banquets and your feasts. And lest he induce sleep in you, have a vat of cold water at hand, and when sleep weighs you down, get into the vat.”

Ludd returned to his country then, and without delay summoned every single one of his own people and the Coraniaid. He broke the vermin up in the water, as Lleuelys had taught him, and sprinkled it generally over everyone. All the Coraniaid folk were destroyed instantly without injury to any of the Britons.

Some time after that, Ludd had the island measured in length and breadth; the middle point was found to be in Oxford. There he had the earth dug up, and in that hole he put a vat full of the best mead that could be made, with a silk veil over the surface. He himself stood watch that night. As he was thus, he could see the dragons fighting. When they grew weary and exhausted, they fell onto the screen and dragged it down with them to the bottom of the vat. After they drank the mead they slept; as they slept, Ludd wrapped the veil

about them. In the safest place he could find in Eryri, he secluded them in a stone chest. After that the place was called Dinas Emrys; before that it was known as Dinas Ffaraon Dandde. He was one of three stewards whose hearts broke from sorrow.

Thus was stopped the tempestuous scream that was in the realm.

When that was done, Lludd the king had a feast of great magnitude prepared. When it was ready, he put a vat full of cold water beside him and he personally stood guard. And as he stood there fully armed, about the third watch of the night, he heard much magnificent music and songs of different kinds, and drowsiness driving him to sleep. What he did then—lest his plan be thwarted and he be overcome by sleep—was to leap into the water frequently. At last a man of enormous stature, armed with powerful, heavy weapons, came in carrying a basket. As was his custom, he put all the preparations and the provisions of food and drink into the basket and started out with it. Nothing astounded Lludd more than such a quantity as that fitting into that basket. Thereupon, Lludd the King set out after him, and shouted; “Stop! Stop!” he said, “though you have committed many outrages and have been responsible for many losses before this, you’ll do it no more—unless your prowess proves you stronger than I or more valiant.”

Immediately, he set the basket on the floor and waited for him. They fought ferociously, until sparks flew from their weapons. Finally, Lludd took hold of him, and fate took care that the victory fell to Lludd, casting the tyrant to the ground beneath him. When he had conquered him through force and violence, the fellow sought protection from him.

“How could I give you protection,” said the King, “after how much loss and injury you have perpetrated against me?”

“All the losses I have ever caused you,” said the other, “I will restore to you, as well as I have carried them off, and I will not do the like from this moment on, but will be your faithful man henceforth.”

And the King accepted that from him. Thus did Lludd ward off the three oppressions from the isle of Britain. From then until the end of his life, Lludd ruled the isle of Britain successfully and peacefully.

This tale is called the Adventure of Lludd and Lleuelys, and so it ends.