

The proud history of the Welsh Dragon

Whilst the oldest recorded use of the Red Dragon flag, or "y Draig Goch" comes from the 'Historia Brittonum', written around 820 AD, some claim its history goes back even further and that it was, in fact, the battle standard of Arthur and other ancient Celtic leaders. Certainly, the prophecy of Myrddin (Merlin) told of a fight between a red and a white dragon - the white dragon at first dominating but the red dragon eventually winning - a powerful symbol of the historical struggle between the Welsh and the English if nothing else! The most likely, if slightly less romantic theory however, is that it was brought to what is now Wales during Roman times and used by military cohorts under the reign of the Emperor Trajan (98 - 117 AD).

Whatever its origins, after the Romans left, it remained a key emblem of Wales. Indeed, several battles against the Saxons took place under the Red Dragon. During the Norman invasion of England in 1066, the symbol seems to have been used by both sides, with the Bayeux tapestry depicting a dragon standard close to King Harold as he falls and a dragon also appearing on the pennant of one of Duke William's messengers.

What we do know for certain is that it became the symbol of the Welsh nation when it was adopted by the Tudor ancestors of King Henry VII. Edmund and Jasper Tudor had a dragon as crest and supporter to the arms granted them by Henry VI. When Henry Tudor faced King Richard III at the battle of Bosworth in 1485, he had three standards. One of them carried the arms of St. George of England, one the arms of the house of Beaufort and on one was a "Red ffyry dragon peyntid upon white and Grene Sarcenet". It is believed that this dragon symbolised Henry's claim to be a true representative of the ancient kings of Britain and served as his tribute to the Welsh people who had made his victory possible.

Despite being associated with Wales for centuries, the flag was actually only granted official status in 1959. What's more, there is no such thing as a standardised Welsh dragon. Modern renderings must be based on historic precedents but a degree of variation is allowed. The dragon on the flag must, however, face to the left, be sited centrally and cover equal parts of the white and green panels.