

MYSTERIOUS AFAN CUDD WELSH MEDIEVAL DOCTORS: THE PHYSICIANS OF MYDDFAI



16th-century drawing showing distillation equipment in use (Wellcome Collection CC BY 40, Public Domain, Roesslin 'Kreuterbuch'/ Herbal)
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The Doctors of Myddfai (*Meddygon Myddfai*) were a family of physicians who lived in the village of Myddfai in Carmarthenshire.

They are said to have started work in the 1200's, when Rhiwallon the Physician and his three sons were doctors Cadwgan, Gruffudd and Einion, were physicians whose skill became well-known in medieval Wales.

The family went on treating patients until the family ended in 1739. Their herbal medicines were written down in the Red Book of Hergest, from the 14th century, and some people passed on remedies without writing them down.



Llyn y Fan Fach

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Mural at Plas Meddyg, Rhuthin. Artist: Maggie Humphry By Eirian Evans, CC BY-SA 2.0,

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The story of the Physicians of Myddfai

While he was tending his cattle, a young man, who lived with his mother beside the lake of Llyn y Fan Fach near Blaen Sawdde (near Llanddeusant), saw a beautiful girl arise from the water. He fell in love with her, and asked her to marry him.

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She said she would, as long as he did not hit her three times without cause, or she would return to her father.

He was in love, so he agreed easily. As a bride's dowry, she brought him a herd of beautiful white cattle. They lived in Esgair Llaethdy near Myddfai, had children, prospered, and were happy.

One day, going to a christening, the man reminded her to fetch a horse, he tapped her on her shoulder. Then, when she cried at a wedding, he tapped her again. When she laughed at a funeral, this was the third time that he hit her, on her arm.

That day, she got up, walked back to the lake, waded into the waters, and disappeared; and all the cattle followed her, and the beautiful things they had gained while they were together, all went into the lake. All that was left behind her were her husband and their three sons.

The sons often walked around the lake hoping to see their mother again. One day she appeared to Rhiwallon, the eldest son, and gave him medicinal prescriptions, and told him how to heal people. She said that his future and that of his descendants was to be a healer. A while later, she returned and gave him information on herbs and plants to be used in cures.

And that was how the Physicians of Myddfai began. Men said to be their last two descendants are remembered on a gravestone in the porch of St Michael's Church in Myddfai.

Dr Rice Williams of Aberystwyth (1757 - 16th May 1842) was coroner for North Wales and responsible for the building of the Marine Baths on Aberystwyth's seafront. He also claimed to be the last of the Physicians of Myddfai.



Common foxglove, source of the medicine digitalis.
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The **National Botanic Garden of Wales** in Llanarthne has an Apothecary's Garden, and an Apothecary Shop, that people can visit.

Text adapted from:
<https://botanicgarden.wales/>

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