

Robert Fitzhamon

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Robert Fitzhamon (died March 1107), or Robert FitzHamon, Sieur de Creully in the Calvados region and Torigny in the Manche region of Normandy, was Lord of Gloucester and the Norman conqueror of Glamorgan, southern Wales. He became the leader of Glamorgan in 1075.

As a kinsman of the Conqueror and one of the few Anglo-Norman barons to remain loyal to the two successive kings William Rufus and Henry I of England, he was a prominent figure in England and Normandy.

Not much is known about his earlier life, or his precise relationship to William I of England.

	Robert FitzHamon
Spouse(s)	Sybil de Montgomery
Father	Haimo
Born	c. 1045-1055
Died	March 1107

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Parentage and ancestry

Robert FitzHamon (born c. 1045-1055, d. March 1107 Falaise, Normandy) was the son of Haimo the Sheriff of Kent and grandson of Haimo Dentatus ('The Toothy', i.e., probably buck-toothed). His grandfather held the lordships of Torigny, Creully, Mézy, and Evrecy in Normandy, but following his death at the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047, the family might have lost these lordships.

Career in England and Wales

Few details of Robert's career prior to 1087 are available.

Robert probably did not fight at Hastings, and does not appear in the Domesday Book, although some relatives may. He first comes to prominence as a supporter of William Rufus during the Rebellion of 1088. After the revolt failed he was rewarded with great estates in Gloucestershire and elsewhere. Some of these had belonged to the late Queen Matilda, and were supposed to be inherited by Rufus's younger brother Henry (the future Henry I); nevertheless Fitzhamon remained on good terms with Henry.

The chronology of Fitzhamon's conquest of Glamorgan is uncertain, but it probably took place in the decades after he received Gloucester.

The Twelve Knights of Glamorgan

One explanation is the legend of the Twelve Knights of Glamorgan, which dates from the 16th century, in which the Welsh Prince Iestyn ap Gwrgan (Jestin), prince or Lord of Glamorgan, supposedly called in the assistance of Robert Fitzhamon. Fitzhamon defeated the prince of South Wales Rhys ap Tewdwr in battle in 1090. With his Norman knights as reward he then took possession of Glamorgan, and "the French came into Dyfed and Ceredigion, which they have still retained, and fortified the castles, and seized upon all the land of the Britons." Iestyn did not profit long by his involvement with the Normans. He was soon defeated and his lands taken in 1091.

Whether there is any truth in the legend or not Robert Fitzhamon seems to have seized control of the lowlands of Glamorgan and Gwynllwg sometime from around 1089 to 1094. His key strongholds were Cardiff Castle, which already may have been built, on the site of an old Roman fort, new castles at Newport, and at Kenfig. His descendants would inherit these castles and lands.

Rhys's daughter Nest became the mistress of King Henry I of England and allegedly was mother of Robert, 1st Earl of Gloucester who married Mabel, Fitzhamon's daughter and heiress and thus had legitimacy both among the Welsh and the Norman barons.^[1] (Robert of Caen's mother is however unknown to historians and genealogists).

Founder of Tewkesbury Abbey (1092)

He also refounded Tewkesbury Abbey in 1092. The abbey's dimensions are almost the same as Westminster Abbey. The first abbot was Giraldus, Abbot of Cranborne (d. 1110) who died before the abbey was consecrated in October 1121. The abbey was apparently built under the influence of his wife Sybil de Montgomery. [1] (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=40269>), said to be a beautiful and religious woman like her sisters.

Fitzhamon and His Kings

Legend has it that Robert had ominous dreams in the days before Rufus' fatal hunting expedition, which postponed but did not prevent the outing. He was one of the first to gather in tears around Rufus' corpse, and he used his cloak to cover the late king's body on its journey to be buried in Winchester. How much of these stories are the invention of later days is unknown.

In any case Fitzhamon proved as loyal to Henry I as he had been to his predecessor, remaining on Henry's side in the several open conflicts with Henry's brother Robert Curthose. He was one of the three barons who negotiated the 1101 truce between Henry I and Robert Curthose.

In 1105 he went to Normandy and was captured while fighting near his ancestral estates near Bayeux. This was one of the reasons Henry crossed the channel with a substantial force later that year. Fitzhamon was freed, and joined Henry's campaign, which proceeded to besiege Falaise. There Fitzhamon was severely injured in the head; although he lived two more years he was never the same mentally. He was buried in the Chapter House at Tewkesbury Abbey, which he had founded and considerably enriched during his lifetime.

Marriage and children

Fitzhamon married Sybil de Montgomery around 1087 to 1090, apparently the youngest daughter of Roger of Montgomery, 1st Earl of Shrewsbury by his first wife Mabel Talvas, daughter of William I Talvas, by whom he is said to have had four daughters. His eldest daughter Mabel inherited his great estates and married Robert, 1st Earl of Gloucester around 1107. Fitzhamon's Gloucestershire property thus became the nucleus of the Earldom of Gloucester later given to his son-in-law. Fitzhamon is sometimes called Earl of Gloucester, but was never so created formally.

Another daughter Isabella (or Hawisa) is said to have been married to a count from Brittany, but no further details exist. His widow and two other daughters (unnamed) are reported to have entered a convent.

Robert Fitzhamon's great-granddaughter Isabel of Gloucester married John of England.

References

- C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I*
- Lynn Nelson, *The Normans in South Wales, 1070-1171* (http://www.ku.edu/carrie/texts/carrie_books/nelson/5.html) (see especially pp. 94–110 in chapter 5)
- Cardiff Castle (<http://www.castlewales.com/cardiff.html>)
- Norman invasion of South Wales (http://www.castlewales.com/glam_rum.html)
- Tour of the Abbey (<http://www.britannia.com/traveltours/glstour7.html>)
- Lord of Bristol (<http://www.antiquefairs.co.uk/a-history-of-bristol.html>) refers to Robert Fitzhamon as Lord of Bristol, which town and castle became important to his son-in-law.
- Robert of Caen, son-in-law is said here to be grandson of a Welsh prince (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/fab/fab008.htm>) but most other sources say that his mother was an unnamed woman of Caen.
- *Ancestral Roots of Certain American Colonists Who Came to America Before 1700* by Frederick Lewis Weis, Lines: 63-26, 124A-26, 125-26, 185-1.

Notes

1. ^ Four Ancient Books of Wales: Introduction: Chapter VI. Manau Gododin and the Picts (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/fab/fab008.htm>)

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