

## Llewellyn and His Dog: Teachers Background Notes

### Background to the Poem

The poem is based on a Welsh legend believed supposedly based in historical fact. Llewellyn was the ruler of Wales in the thirteenth century, before Wales was conquered by the English. Gelert is usually believed to have been an Irish wolfhound, a greyhound or deerhound.

In the original publication of the poem, Spencer, the author, appended a note which stated, "The story of this ballad is traditional in a village at the foot of Snowdon where Llewellyn the Great had a house. The Greyhound named Gêlert was given him by his father-in-law, King John, in the year 1205, and the place to this day is called Beth-Gêlert, or the grave of Gêlert."

Today, visitors to the village of Beddgelert in Wales can see Gelert's tombstone in a field near the village. The tombstone reads:

#### GELERT'S GRAVE

IN THE 13TH CENTURY, LLEWELYN, PRINCE OF NORTH WALES, HAD A PALACE AT BEDDGELERT. ONE DAY HE WENT HUNTING WITHOUT GELERT "THE FAITHFUL HOUND" WHO WAS UNACCOUNTABLY ABSENT. ON LLEWELYN'S RETURN, THE TRUANT STAINED AND SMEARED WITH BLOOD, JOYFULLY SPRANG TO MEET HIS MASTER. THE PRINCE ALARMED HASTENED TO FIND HIS SON, AND SAW THE INFANT'S COT EMPTY, THE BEDCLOTHES AND FLOOR COVERED WITH BLOOD. THE FRANTIC FATHER PLUNGED THE SWORD INTO THE HOUND'S SIDE THINKING IT HAD KILLED HIS HEIR. THE DOG'S DYING YELL WAS ANSWERED BY A CHILD'S CRY. LLEWELYN SEARCHED AND DISCOVERED HIS BOY UNHARMED BUT NEAR BY LAY THE BODY OF A MIGHTY WOLF WHICH GELERT HAD SLAIN, THE PRINCE FILLED WITH REMORSE IS SAID NEVER TO HAVE SMILED AGAIN. HE BURIED GELERT HERE. THE SPOT IS CALLED BEDDGELERT

The original tombstone was erected by a local innkeeper in the late eighteenth century, supposedly to encourage tourists to the village.

Some scholars point out that legends such as the one about Gelert are found in many cultures, as far back as at least the third century B.C.

### The Author

William Robert Spencer (1769-1834) wrote the poem after a visit to the village of Beddgelert.

### Scaffolding the poem

Some words in the poem which may need scaffolding for students include:

- Brach – female dog
- Sentinel'd – guarded
- Suppliant – pleading, begging.