

“THE HOUSES OF THE OLD CROSS”:
VALLE CRUCIS ABBEY IN THE POEMS OF GUTUN OWAIN

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INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the praise poetry addressed by the gentleman-poet, antiquary, genealogist and scribe Gutun Owain to two fifteenth-century abbots of Valle Crucis, Siôn ap Rhisiart and Dafydd ab Ieuan. Medieval Welsh poetry is a source that needs to be interpreted with care, but it provides an unusual, distinctive and, in Gutun’s case, well-informed viewpoint on the abbey community and on its relations with the wider world. There are many aspects that could be discussed but this article focuses on some of the names and phrases used by Gutun to refer to the abbey, and on what these reveal about its Welsh and Cistercian identities, and about the ways in which the abbey was perceived and presented, especially in relation to the local landscape and community.¹

Valle Crucis is one of the Cistercian abbeys of north Wales, founded as a daughter house of Strata Marcella around the year 1200, and stands in an abandoned meander of the river Dee, not far from Llangollen. It occupied an important place in the culture of north-east Wales in the later Middle Ages, being a centre of manuscript production and providing patronage for poets.² As many as nine poets addressed verses to Valle Crucis’s abbots, but

ABBREVIATIONS

CTC Catrin T. Beynon DAVIES, *Cerddi'r Tai Crefydd* (M.A. thesis University of Wales (Bangor), 1973)
GG.net ‘Guto’r Glyn.net’ Website <www.gutorglyn.net>
GO E. BACHELLERY, éd., *L’oeuvre poétique de Gutun Owain*, Paris 1950–1951
GPC *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, Cardiff 1950–2002

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¹ On the cultural identities and associations of Valle Crucis and its abbots, see Janet BURTON, “Home and Away: the Networks of Cistercian Abbots of the Whitland Family, Wales, c.1480 to c.1520”, *The Mediaeval Journal*, 10.2 (2020), p. 87–136.

² See Daniel HUWS, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, Aberystwyth 2000, p. 52–53, 189–192; J. Beverley SMITH, “Historical Writing in Medieval Wales: the Composition of *Brenhinedd y Saesson*”, *Studia Celtica*, 42 (2008),

Gutun Owain seems to have been foremost amongst them.³ Gutun had a long career and a large body of his poetry survives, comprising love poems, satires, poems requesting gifts, elegies, and praise poems addressed to both secular and ecclesiastical patrons.⁴ It is noteworthy that his poems addressed to two successive abbots of Valle Crucis, Siôn ap Rhisiart (*floruit* c.1455–1480) and Dafydd ab Ieuan (*floruit* 1480–1503), constitute a particularly high proportion – almost a third – of his surviving poetic works, and moreover that, though several Welsh abbeys provided patronage for poets, Valle Crucis is by far the best-represented amongst the wider corpus of such verses.⁵ Abbots Siôn and Dafydd were well-connected local gentry, as was Gutun himself, and were clearly generous and discerning patrons.⁶ It seems they were good and effective abbots, improving the fabric of the buildings (as the poetry attests), and Abbot Dafydd in particular had a flourishing career which included acting with the abbot of Fountains as reformator of the Order in Wales in 1485, and being nominated by the Pope as bishop of St Asaph in 1500, an office he seems to have held concurrently with his abbacy.⁷

p. 55–86; Owain Wyn JONES, *Historical Writing in Medieval Wales* (Ph.D. thesis Bangor University, 2013), chapter 2; Dafydd JOHNSTON, “Monastic Patronage of Welsh Poetry”, *Monastic Wales: New Approaches*, ed. Janet BURTON and Karen STÖBER, Cardiff 2013, p. 177–190; Karen STÖBER, “The Cistercians and the Bards – Praise and Patronage in Fifteenth-century Wales”, *“Gwalch Cywyddau Gwŷr”: Essays on Guto’r Glyn and Fifteenth-century Wales*, ed. Dylan FOSTER EVANS, Barry J. LEWIS and Ann PARRY OWEN, Aberystwyth 2013, p. 305–326; BURTON, “Home and Away”.

³ On his life and career, see J. E. Caerwyn WILLIAMS, “Gutun Owain”, *A Guide to Welsh Literature ii: 1282–c.1550*, ed. A. O. H. JARMAN and Gwilym Rees HUGHES, revised by Dafydd JOHNSTON, second edition, Cardiff 1997, p. 240–255. Other poets who enjoyed the patronage of Valle Crucis were Dafydd ab Edmwnd (Gutun Owain’s bardic tutor), Guto’r Glyn, Syr Rhys, Tudur Aled, Dafydd Gowper, Gruffudd ab Ieuan, Lewis Môn, and an anonymous poet who requested a horse from Abbot Siôn ap Rhisiart. This body of poetry is discussed, along with poems relating to other religious houses, by Catrin T. Beynon DAVIES in *CTC* and in Catrin DAVIES, “Y Cerddi i’r Tai Crefydd fel Ffynhonnell Hanesyddol”, *National Library of Wales Journal*, 18 (1974), p. 268–286, 345–373. The poems of Guto’r Glyn, and the relevant one by Syr Rhys, are edited and discussed on the Guto’r Glyn Website (*GG.net*).

⁴ See E. BACHELLERY’s edition of all Gutun Owain’s poems (*GO*); the poems to Valle Crucis’s abbots are also edited and discussed in *CTC*. In this article I cite Gutun’s Valle Crucis poems from my forthcoming edition and discussion of these works, provisionally entitled *Landscape, Patronage and Devotion at a Welsh Cistercian House: Valle Crucis Abbey in the Poetry of Gutun Owain*. They are cited as poem number followed by line number, this being the usual convention for editions of medieval Welsh poetry. For ease of reference to Bachelery’s edition, the following indicates how my poem numbers correspond to his (the latter are in Roman numerals): 1/XVIII, 2/XIX, 3/XX, 4/VIII, 5/XXII and 6/XXI are poems addressed to Siôn ap Rhisiart, 7/XXIII is Siôn’s elegy, and 8/XXIV, 9/XXVIII, 10/XXV, 11/XXX, 12/XXVII, 13/XXIX, 14/XXXI and 15/XXVI are addressed to Dafydd ab Ieuan.

⁵ DAVIES, “Y Cerddi i’r Tai Crefydd”, p. 269, notes that amongst the 124 poems relating to Welsh religious houses, thirty-six are concerned with Valle Crucis (a third patron there being Dafydd ab Ieuan’s successor, Siôn Llwyd), and twenty with Aberconwy, the second best represented house; see also *CTC* p. lxiii–lxiv.

⁶ Gutun had his home in the parish of Dudleston in the lordship of Oswestry, also holding land at nearby St Martin (WILLIAMS, “Gutun Owain”, p. 240). It seems he may have been a nephew of Abbot Siôn (J. Y. W. LLOYD, *The History of Powys Fadog*, 6 volumes, London 1881–1887, vol. III, p. 385–386), and the abbots Siôn and Dafydd were certainly related to one another, both being members of the influential Trefor family (see the patron notes in *GG.net*).

⁷ David H. WILLIAMS, *The Welsh Cistercians*, Leominster 2001, p. 62, 72; BURTON, “Home and Away”, p. 105–110; see also the patron notes in *GG.net*.

Though most of the poetry addressed to Cistercian abbots dates from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries, it needs to be viewed in the wider context of the long-standing poetic tradition of Wales. In brief, poets had once held a major role in promoting and legitimizing the status of Wales's independent rulers, their praise often contrasting the two ideals of courage on the battlefield and liberality in the feasting-hall. By the later Middle Ages the poets' main patrons were the gentry and though the old ideals did not disappear, there was an increasing emphasis on more peaceful pursuits and accomplishments. The verses of the professional poets continued to be valued highly, and became formalized into a variety of strict metres with complex requirements for internal rhyme and consonance of consonants, known as *cynghanedd*. Poets would visit the homes of the gentry and perform a poem, often for a special occasion, and would receive hospitality, payment or gifts in return. Whilst it is true that there was also a long tradition of religious poetry, which was itself diverse and included poems in praise of God, saints, and religious houses, the poetry addressed to the abbots of Valle Crucis and other Cistercian houses does seem to owe a good deal to the secular tradition, in keeping the main emphasis on praise of the patron's personal qualities (notably generosity).⁸

Gutun may not have given pride of place to the abbey community or complex in his verses, but what he does reveal is illuminating, and suggests he had a long and close association with Valle Crucis and its abbots. His elegy for Abbot Siôn contains the couplet *Fy mywyd yn ei glyd glos, / Fy neugain a fu'n agos* "My life was within his sheltered close, / my fortieth year was close at hand" (7.25–26), which, along with a further reference to the abbey being his "patrimony" (*tref tad*, line 23), suggests he may have been familiar with Valle Crucis from a very young age. He might have attended a school organized by the abbey, since it is thought that both Valle Crucis and Basingwerk abbey offered education to the sons of local gentry in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁹ Or he may have visited Valle Crucis in the company of his bardic tutor Dafydd ab Edmwnd, who himself composed a poem to Abbot Siôn ap Rhisiart.¹⁰ Later in his life, it seems Gutun became particularly well

⁸ For the religious poetry, see Catherine MCKENNA, *The Medieval Welsh Religious Lyric: Poems of the Gogynfeirdd, 1137–1282*, Belmont 1991; the Cult of Saints in Wales Website < www.saints.wales/theedition/ >; and Barry J. LEWIS, *Medieval Welsh Poems to Saints and Shrines*, Dublin 2015.

⁹ David THOMSON, "Cistercians and Schools in Late Medieval Wales", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 3 (1982), p. 76–80.

¹⁰ Thomas ROBERTS, ed., *Gwaith Dafydd ab Edmwnd*, Bangor 1914, poem L; DAVIES, "Cerddi'r Tai Crefydd", poem 49.

acquainted with the abbey in his capacity as scribe, antiquary and genealogist. He is known to have copied, adapted or written a wide range of texts including pedigrees, a treatise on heraldry, saints' Lives, medical and astrological material, bardic grammars, and historical narratives and chronicles, in eleven surviving manuscripts and several more that have been lost, and it is thought that some and perhaps most of his manuscripts were written at Valle Crucis.¹¹ Interestingly, it sometimes appears that there are "echoes" in his poetry of texts he knew from his scribal activities, most notably in the case of the historical narratives in *Ystoria Dared*, an account of the Trojan War, and the Welsh translations of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum* or *Historia Regum Britanniae*, known as *Brut y Brenhinedd*.¹²

I. LLYN-, GLYN- AND LLANEGWESTL AND "THE (OLD) CROSS"

Turning to the names and terminology used in connection with Valle Crucis, the most usual means of referring to the abbey in Welsh in the Middle Ages was by names deriving from that of the original township on the site. This had been called *Llynegwestl*, as the abbey's founding charter attests, but the name later became *Llanegwestl* or *Glynegwestl*, or variations upon these, as the initial element *llyn* "lake, pool" was displaced by *llan* "church, enclosure" and *glyn* "valley".¹³ The *llyn* to *llan* change would have happened naturally enough once the abbey was established; that from *llyn* to *glyn* might have been encouraged by awareness of the *valle* element in the abbey's Latin name *Valle Crucis*, and perhaps also by the fact that *llyn* and *glyn* are identical in form (*lyn*) when they undergo lenition in certain common grammatical contexts.¹⁴

¹¹ WILLIAMS, "Gutun Owain", p. 243–245; Daniel HUWS, *A Repertory of Welsh Manuscripts and Scribes c. 800–c. 1800*, Aberystwyth 2022; Ben GUY, "Writing Genealogy in Wales, c.1475–c.1640: Sources and Practitioners", *Genealogical Knowledge in the Making: Tools, Practices, and Evidence in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jost EICKMEYER, Markus FRIEDRICH and Volker BAUER, Berlin 2019, p. 99–125.

¹² See discussion in JONES, *Historical Writing*, p. 115–118, where it is noted that Gutun's awareness of the "Welsh Historical Continuum" is reflected particularly strongly in poems addressed to members of the Trefor family, including and especially Abbot Siôn ap Rhisiart.

¹³ Huw PRYCE with the assistance of Charles INSLEY, *Acts of the Welsh Rulers*, Cardiff 2005, number 499 (p. 698–700); Derrick PRATT, "Valle Crucis Abbey: Land and Charters", *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*, 59 (2011), p. 9–55 (p. 11).

¹⁴ The possibility that *Llanegwestl* might refer specifically to the abbey complex, with *Glynegwestl* referring more generally to the abbey in its wider valley location, needs to be mentioned, but the poetic references do not allow any such distinction to be drawn.

Gutun Owain, who used both *llan*- and *glyn*- forms of the name in his verses, would doubtless also have been aware of the abbey's Latin name.¹⁵ That awareness may be reflected in his references to the abbey (perhaps envisaged together with its valley setting) as “the *Fâl*” (6.23), or “his *Fâl*”, with “his” referring to Abbot Siôn (2.62). *Fâl* is attested in several other poetic sources and is considered to be a borrowing from Middle English *vale*, but in these two references by Gutun it seems likely that Latin *valle* was also in the poet's mind.¹⁶ Furthermore, the name *Pant-y-groes* “the Valley of the Cross”, used by Gutun Owain and by his fellow poets Guto'r Glyn and Dafydd ab Edmwnd, is directly equivalent in meaning to *Valle Crucis*.¹⁷ It is impossible to say whether the one is a translation of the other, nor which may have come first, though *Pant-y-groes* is certainly later as regards its attestation, with no instances prior to the fifteenth century. A further, similar name used by Gutun Owain is *Pant-y-groes Hen* “the Valley of the Old Cross”, whilst the same elements are rearranged, with identical meaning, in the name *Pant yr Hengroes* used by Guto'r Glyn.¹⁸

It has long been supposed that the “Cross” or “Old Cross” of these various names should be identified with the nearby pillar of Eliseg, a monument ostensibly set up by Cyngen, king of Powys (died 854), in honour of his great-grandfather Eliseg. The antiquary Edward Lhuyd, for example, expressed in a letter of 1696 his view that “Vale Crucis” had been named after the monument, albeit with the supposition that this had resulted from a misidentification: “I doubt not, but the vale received its name from this very stone, tho' 'twas never intended for a crosse.”¹⁹ It has been demonstrated convincingly, however, that the pillar, which stands only about 400 metres away from the abbey church, was indeed surmounted originally by a cross.²⁰ It would have been, and remains, an imposing feature in the landscape, and it is noteworthy that there are a number of other names or descriptive phrases used of the abbey and its environs that refer to “the (Old) Cross”. In Gutun's poetry we find *acr y Groes* “the acre of the Cross” (15.4), *adail y Groes* “the building of the Cross” (11.9), *bronnydd y Groes* “the hillsides of the Cross” (12.1), and *tŷ'r Groes* and *tai'r Groes* “the house(s) of the Cross” (8.4, 9.10, 10.39), as well as *lle'r Groes Hen* “the place of the Old

¹⁵ His verses also contain lenited *lyn*- forms which are of course ambiguous (see above), but no radical *llyn*-forms.

¹⁶ *GPC* s.v. *fâl* cites instances dating from the fifteenth century to the early seventeenth century.

¹⁷ Poem 5.25; ROBERTS (ed.), *Gwaith Dafydd ab Edmwnd*, L.2; *GG.net* 110.6n, 112.58.

¹⁸ Poem 6.24; *GG.net* 110.38.

¹⁹ R. T. GUNTHER, *Early Science in Oxford*, vol. XIV, *Life and Letters of Edward Lhwyd*, Oxford 1945 (reprinted in facsimile 1968) <<https://archive.org/details/earlyscienceinox14gunt>>, number 153 (p. 306–307). Compare also Thomas PENNANT, *A Tour in Wales*, 3 volumes, London 1778–1781, vol. I, p. 373.

²⁰ Nancy EDWARDS, “Rethinking the Pillar of Eliseg”, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 89 (2009), p. 143–177.

Cross” (4.8) and *tai’r Groes Hen* “the houses of the Old Cross” (7.10). Guto’r Glyn, similarly, referred to the abbey as *plas y Groes* “the palace [or “place”] of the Cross”.²¹ The form of the word *croes* lent itself to some apt juxtapositions, with alliteration reinforcing the association, as in the following instance with *cred* “faith”:

Ef a roes dai’r Groes, o gred – a salmau
A nwyf eb amau, fal nef bumed.

“He gave [to us] the houses of the Cross, through faith and psalms / and passion free from doubt, like the fifth heaven.” (10.39–40)

And again with *grasol* “filled with grace”, which provides consonance with all three consonants of (lenited) *croes*:

Oen i Dduw yw yn y ddôl,
A thai’r Groes a’i thir grasol.

“He is God’s lamb in the meadow, / and in the houses of the Cross and its grace-filled land.” (9.9–10)

In the same poem to Abbot Dafydd, Gutun asserts “I have praised the good name of the feasts / and lords of the Old Cross” (*Gair gwleddoedd ac arglwyddi / Y Groes Hen a gerais i*, 9.27–28), and this suggests particularly strongly that the “Old Cross” could be seen as representing the abbey. On the other hand, abbey and monument are clearly separated in the opening lines of another of Gutun’s poems to Dafydd:

Dafydd, i’w lys rydd yr af – i gwyno
Rhag annwyd y gaeaf;
Aur a gwin bob awr a gaf
Is acr y Groes wresocaf.

²¹ *GG.net* 116.19n.

“Dafydd, it is to his open court that I go to complain / of winter’s chill; / at every hour I receive gold and wine / beneath the acre of the warmest Cross.” (15.1–4)

The abbey complex is indeed located *down* the river-valley from the pillar of Eliseg, and the raising of the monument on its mound would encourage the idea of its being seen as presiding *over* the surrounding territory. Furthermore, the idea of “the warmest Cross” may imply spiritual power as well as a more prosaic warm welcome in “winter’s chill”.²²

It does appear that Gutun is seeking repeatedly to associate the abbey with the pillar, presumably with the intention of evoking its connotations of secular and sacred power. This ties in with the conclusions of important recent scholarship on the pillar’s positioning and significance, both in its original ninth-century context and in the longer historical continuum. Nancy Edwards has called it “an important piece of public propaganda erected at a time when the kingdom of Powys was severely under threat”, and Patricia Murrieta-Flores and Howard Williams refer to it as “an early medieval locus of power, faith and commemoration in a contested frontier zone.”²³ The continued interest in the area on the part of later, twelfth- and thirteenth-century rulers of Powys has also been noted. Discussing the founding of Valle Crucis by the Welsh prince Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor around 1200, James Bond pointed out that “[a]ttachment to more ancient political traditions” might well have been a factor in deciding the abbey’s location, so far as Madog was concerned, and that Madog may have wished to invoke the ancient glories of Eliseg’s day in the context of contemporary Welsh resistance to English expansion.²⁴ Moreover, it is likely that it was Gruffudd ap Madog, one of the sons of Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor, who built the nearby and very imposing castle of Dinas Brân, demonstrating the dynasty’s continued interest in the local landscape.²⁵

With Gutun Owain’s poetic references to “the (Old) Cross” in mind, it is interesting to consider the record of the abbey’s foundation in the version of the chronicle *Brenhinedd y*

²² See GPC s.v. *gwres* (b) “intensity (of feeling)”, and compare *gwres haul Pant-y-groes Hen* “the warmth of the sun of Pant-y-groes Hen” (6.24), in a poem to Abbot Siôn and in the context of feasting and hospitality.

²³ EDWARDS, “Rethinking the Pillar”, p. 143; Patricia MURRIETA-FLORES and Howard WILLIAMS, “Placing the Pillar of Eliseg: Movement, Visibility and Memory in the Early Medieval Landscape”, *Medieval Archaeology*, 61 (2017), p. 69–103 (p. 69).

²⁴ James BOND, “The Location and Siting of Cistercian Houses in Wales and the West”, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 154 (2005), p. 51–79 (p. 57).

²⁵ D. J. Cathcart KING, “Two Castles in Northern Powys: Dinas Brân and Caergwrle”, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, CXXIII (1974): p. 113–139. It may be that Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, prince of Gwynedd, was also involved in the castle’s development; see David STEPHENSON, *Medieval Powys: Kingdom, Principality and Lordships, 1132–1293*, Woodbridge 2016, p. 234–235, 237; Craig Owen JONES, *Princely Ambition: Ideology, Castle-building and Landscape in Gwynedd, 1194–1283*, Hatfield 2022, p. 107–113.

Saesson that he wrote in the Black Book of Basingwerk: *Yr vn vlwyddyn honno yr adeilodd Madoc ap Gruffydd Maelor vynachloc Lanegwest yNol yr Hen Groes yn Ial* “That same year Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor built the monastery of Llanegwest in the Meadow of the Old Cross in Yale”.²⁶ *Dôl yr Hengroes* might be a descriptive phrase (“the meadow of the Old Cross”) rather than a place-name, but in either case it reinforces identification of the poetic “(Old) Cross” with a specific feature in the local landscape, namely the pillar of Eliseg. Neither the Old Cross nor the founder’s name are mentioned in the shorter records of the abbey’s foundation in surviving versions of the earlier chronicle *Brut y Tywysogion*, and Gutun may well have supplied this information himself.²⁷ He would have had both the means and the motive to do so if, as is likely, he was writing at Valle Crucis.

II. THE ABBEY’S FOUNDER-FIGURES

Gutun Owain refers to Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor in two of his Valle Crucis poems. The clearest reference is in what is perhaps one of his earliest poems addressed to Abbot Siôn:

O Fynyw y doeth ei fendithion,
O gyrrau Llëyn i Gaerlleon;
Am hyn, ysbys ym mhennau osbion
Yw mawl Llanegwestl mal llanw eigion.
Ei sail yw Madog, sâl Lawmedon,
A’ Maelor Ruffudd, milwr waywffon;

²⁶ The Black Book of Basingwerk (NLW MS 7006D), p. 270, < <http://hdl.handle.net/10107/4401103>>; Thomas JONES, ed./trans., *Brenhinedd y Saesson, or, the Kings of the Saxons: BM Cotton MS. Cleopatra B v and the Black Book of Basingwerk, NLW MS. 7006*, History and Law Series, 25, Cardiff 1971, p. 196; see also the note in Thomas JONES, ed./trans., *Brut y Tywysogion, or, the Chronicle of the Princes: Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, History and Law Series, 11, Cardiff 1952, p. 192–193.

²⁷ Thomas JONES, ed., *Brut y Tywysogion, Peniarth MS. 20*, History and Law Series, 6, Cardiff 1941, p. 146: *yn y vlwyddyn honno yr edeilwyt manachloc yn Yal yr honn a elwir Llynegwestyl* “In that year there was built a monastery in Iâl, which is called Llynegwestl” (translation from Jones’s 1952 volume cited above); cf. Thomas JONES, ed./trans., *Brut y Tywysogion, or, the Chronicle of the Princes: Red Book of Hergest Version*, History and Law Series, 16, Cardiff 1955, p. 182. The identity of Gutun’s source or sources for the relevant part of his chronicle has been a matter of some debate, but comparison with the older, now incomplete version of *Brenhinedd y Saesson* in Cotton Cleopatra B.v (written around 1330, also at Valle Crucis) suggests that he did add material to earlier entries (up to 1198); see JONES, *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, p. xxv–xl; David DUMVILLE, ed./trans., *Brenhinoedd y Saeson, “The Kings of the English”, A.D. 682–954: Texts P, R, S in Parallel*, Basic Texts for Mediaeval British Archaeology, 1, Aberdeen 2005, p. v–xi; SMITH, “Historical Writing”, p. 55; JONES, *Historical Writing*, p. 47–49; Huw PRYCE, “Chronicling and its Contexts in Medieval Wales”, *The Chronicles of Medieval Wales and the March*, ed. Ben GUY, Georgia HENLEY, Owain Wyn JONES and Rebecca THOMAS, Turnhout 2020, p. 1–32 (p. 26–27); Ben GUY, “Historical Scholars and Dishonest Charlatans: Studying the Chronicles of Medieval Wales”, *ibid.*, p. 69–106 (p. 85–86).

Eu tir a gynnail tŷ o'r ganon
A llu o seiniau llewyswynion.
Af i bur raddau nef Beryddon,
Y Fâl a ddenai fil o ddynion,
I Gwlen obry a Glyn Ebron,
Y tai y seigwyd tywysogion.

“From St Davids did his [*i.e.* Siôn's] blessings come, / from the extremities of Llŷn to Caerleon; / because of this, well-known in the heads of guests / is praise of Llanegwestl like an ocean's flood-tide. / His [or “its”] foundation is Madog – of the wealth of Laomedon²⁸ – / ap Gruffudd Maelor, of the soldierly lance; / their land sustains a house of the canon / and a host of white-sleeved saints. / I go to the pure ranks of Peryddon's heaven,²⁹ / the Vale that would entice a thousand men, / to Cologne yonder and Glyn Ebron,³⁰ / the houses where princes were feasted.” (2.33–44)

Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor may have been envisaged by the poet as the *sail* “foundation” either of the abbey or of Siôn himself, in the sense that he is the one upon whom Siôn's activities and authority are built. At the end of the extract Gutun returns to the abbey's founding dynasty in referring to princes, *tywysogion*, being feasted there, suggesting that he was aware that other members of Madog's dynasty had connections to the abbey.³¹

This is the only one of the poems considered here that mentions Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor clearly by name, but he is almost certainly the *tywysog* mentioned in a later poem

²⁸ The father of King Priam of Troy; Gutun seems to be drawing upon his knowledge of *Ystoria Dared*.

²⁹ *I.e.* the “heaven” by the river Dee (on *Peryddon*, see Ifor WILLIAMS, ed., and Rachel BROMWICH, *Armes Prydein*, Dublin 1972, p. xl, 25–26; Eurys I. ROWLANDS, ed., *Gwaith Lewys Môn*, Cardiff 1975, p. 444–445). This is just one amongst many instances where Gutun likens Valle Crucis to heaven, a comparison perhaps most strongly developed in the opening section of poem 6, beginning *Y nef o lâl yn fyw ynn* “Yale's heaven is alive for us”.

³⁰ The place to which Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, and from which the wood of Christ's cross originated; see Sarah ROWLES, *Golygiad o “Ystoria Adaf”* (M.Phil. thesis University of Wales (Aberystwyth), 2004), p. 87–104.

³¹ Grants to Valle Crucis were made not only by Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor but also by his uncles Owain Brogyntyn and Owain Fychan and their sons, and by his own son Gruffudd who also issued a confirmatory charter and, with all his brothers and a nephew, judged in the monks' favour in a boundary dispute (PRYCE, *Acts*, numbers 496, 511, 513, 514, 611). The burial of Madog and two of his sons at the abbey is recorded in JONES, ed., *Brut y Tywysogion, Peniarth MS. 20* (1941), p. 195, 219; cf. JONES, ed., *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, p. 230–231, 248–249; and the grave and ornate grave-slab of his great-grandson, another Madog ap Gruffudd (died 1306), were discovered before the high altar (D. H. EVANS, *Valle Crucis Abbey*, new edition, Cardiff 2008, p. 51).

addressed to Abbot Siôn's successor, Dafydd ab Ieuan. Here Valle Crucis is "the house of Jesus and the prince", in the context of Abbot Dafydd's building activities:

Aur tŷ Iesu a'r tywysog
A gyfrennir yn gyfrannog:
I'r gwaith main a'r gwŷdd yr â, a llys rydd,
Os Dafydd sydd swyddog.

"The gold of the house of Jesus and the prince / is shared equitably: / it is spent on the stonework and the timber, and an open court, / if Dafydd is the one presiding." (12.37–40)

By contrast, in an earlier poem addressed to Abbot Siôn it is the international monastic founder-figure St Benedict who is given a similar proprietorial status over the "house" of Valle Crucis: *Ail Deiniol yw, a Dunod, / A Beuno tŷ Sain Bened* "He [*i.e.* Siôn] is a second Deiniol and Dunod, / and the Beuno of St Benedict's house" (3.7–8). It is striking, however, that this institutional association with Benedict is preceded by a personal association between the abbot and three important figures in the tradition of Welsh monasticism. Beuno supposedly founded many churches, being particularly associated with the monastic church at Clynnog Fawr in Arfon, in north-west Wales; Deiniol was abbot-bishop of Bangor in Arfon; and Dunod was abbot of the important early monastery at Bangor-on-Dee which, before its infamous destruction by Northumbrian forces, stood about eleven or twelve miles from the later site of Valle Crucis.³² It is noteworthy that whilst Gutun's poetry addressed to the abbots abounds with personal comparisons to Welsh saints, he does not associate his patrons with St Benedict in the same way, nor with St Bernard. Instead, these two founder-figures are associated either with the abbey itself (*tŷ Sain Bened*, above, and *gwenllys Berned* "the holy court of Bernard", discussed below), or linked with the abbots in a patron-client or leader-disciple relationship, with Abbot Siôn being described as St Bernard's "hawk", in a figurative sense (*gwalch Sain Berned*, 6.54), and Abbot Dafydd as St Benedict's "lord" or "king"

³² Further references in this poem indicate that Gutun was familiar with Dunod's reputation as a talented abbot, and probably also with the story of his resistance to the attempts of St Augustine of Canterbury to impose English authority upon the Welsh Church, as related in *Brut y Brenhinedd*; compare the reference to Gweirydd in the same poem, discussed by JONES, *Historical Writing*, p. 117–118.

(*Arglwydd Sain Bened*, 10.1; *rhi Sain Bened*, 10.60). There is a sense of due respect in Gutun's references to these two founder-figures, but also perhaps a sense of distance.

III. THE ABBEY AS A "HOUSE" OR "HOUSES"

The use of *tŷ* "house, dwelling" to refer to the abbey, as in the references discussed above, is common in Gutun's poetry, and the plural form *tai* is used even more frequently, and often seemingly in a similar manner, as in the *tŷ/tai'r Groes (Hen)* names. This usage may reflect the fact that a monastery was at once a single institution and a complex of many buildings and chambers. Indeed, the poets sometimes used *tai* to refer to the dwelling of a secular patron, reflecting the custom whereby a noble court would consist of many different buildings.³³ The use of *tŷ* and *tai* to refer to a monastery was widespread.³⁴ Guto'r Glyn, for example, referred to Strata Florida abbey as *tŷ Fflur* and *tai Gynfelyn*, and praised its abbot, Rhys ap Dafydd, as the "blessing of yonder houses" (*dawn y tai draw*).³⁵ *Tŷ* also occurs in the prominent proper names *Tyddewi* (St Davids, literally "the house of David"), and *Y Tŷ Gwyn*, an early name for Whitland abbey (literally "the white, or blessed, house").³⁶

In contrast to the references to Valle Crucis as the house of Jesus, of "the prince" (its founder) or of St Benedict, much more common in Gutun's poetry are references to the abbey as the house or especially the houses of its abbot. Often the context involves hospitality and drinking, as in this couplet from a poem to Abbot Dafydd: *Nid âi fardd yn ei dai fo / Yn unsaig heb win Aensio* "A poet in his houses would not partake / of a single dish without the wine of Anjou" (9.17–18). The relationship between abbot and house(s) is often expressed with the possessive pronoun *ei* "his", but in one ode there are references to *tai Siôn* "Siôn's houses" and *tai annedd Siôn* "Siôn's dwelling-houses", again in contexts of hospitality and drinking (3.3, 17).³⁷ On another occasion the pronoun *dy* "your" is used, again referring to Siôn: *Dy dai 'n lâl nid ydyn is / No'r fan uchaf o'r Fenis* "Your houses in Yale are no lower / than the highest place in Venice" (5.37–38), the same poem comparing the abbey favourably

³³ See *GG.net* 17.24n, and compare the sense "one of a number of dwellings in a building, room, cell, chamber" in *GPC* s.v. *tŷ*. Compare also the usage of Irish *tech* and English *house* (*eDIL* 2019: *An Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, based on the Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language, Dublin 1913–1976 <www.dil.ie> s.v. *tech*, *teg*; *OED Online*, Oxford University Press <www.oed.com> s.v. *house*, n¹).

³⁴ See the sense "(house of) religious community", noted in *GPC*.

³⁵ *GG.net* 8.18, 75n, 9.5.

³⁶ Hywel Wyn OWEN and Richard MORGAN, *Dictionary of the Place-names of Wales*, Llandysul 2007, p. 431–432, 494.

³⁷ Further references with the possessive pronoun *ei* are (with *tai*) at 1.30, 58, 60, 9.57, 12.34, 15.43, 62, and (with *tŷ*) at 12.45.

with the houses of bishops (*tai'r esgobion*, line 40) and of Romans, perhaps with the Papal court in mind (*tai Rhufeinwyr*, line 42). Siôn is again the person meant in Gutun's reference to "the houses of the duke of the liquors of Yale" (*tai ddug gwirodydd Iâl*, 6.32), and likewise in the couplet *Ni weled, rhag yfed gwin, / Cau tŷ urddol Coed Hyrddin* "The closure of the nobleman's house of Coed Hyrddin / for the avoidance of wine-drinking has never been seen" (6.15–16).³⁸ *Coed Hyrddin* is the name of the wooded hill overlooking the abbey, with Yale being the commote in which it stands. The *tai* of Valle Crucis are again associated with Yale in the closing line of a later poem, which praises Abbot Dafydd as "the Nudd of the houses in Yale" (*Nudd y tai 'n Iâl*, 9.60), with the allusion to Nudd suggesting generosity.³⁹ The association with Yale is common in Gutun's poetry: Valle Crucis is "Yale's monastery" (*mynachlog Iâl*, 5.20), "Yale's heaven" (*y nef o Iâl*, 6.1) and "a heaven for poets in Yale" (*nef beirdd yn Iâl*, 5.58); it is also "the Rome of Yale", *Rhufain Iâl*, in a poem addressed to Abbot Thomas Pennant of Basingwerk.⁴⁰ Such references hint at the abbey's status and importance within that territory, and also its importance *for* that territory in both a spiritual and a worldly sense. Gutun's single reference to the abbey as "the people's house" (*tŷ'r bobl*, 2.57), in the context of hospitality and generosity, conveys a similar idea of its role in the wider community, and it is also worth comparing Guto'r Glyn's praise of Valle Crucis as *penty gwŷr Iâl* "the chief house of the men of Yale".⁴¹

In referring to the abbey in two poems as *tai'r dalaith* "the houses of the province", Gutun may have had a larger territorial unit in mind, perhaps the old kingdom of Powys. In Abbot Siôn's elegy the phrase is associated with the welcome Gutun himself received (*Tai'r dalaith fal tir dilys* "the houses of the province were like secure territory", 7.22); whilst in an earlier ode in praise of Siôn, Gutun groups himself with others who enjoyed the abbey's hospitality:

Yno'r awn, win llawn, iôn llwynau – Hyrddin,
I'w heirdion neuaddau,

³⁸ Compare also *tai sant* "the houses of a saint" (6.30), probably with reference to Basingwerk abbey and its abbot, Thomas Pennant.

³⁹ Nudd ap Senyllt was one of the "Three Generous Ones" of Welsh tradition; see Rachel BROMWICH, ed., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, fourth edition, Cardiff 2014, p. 5–7.

⁴⁰ *GO XXXII.2*.

⁴¹ *O aur un gost yw rhan gwesteion, / Achos tŷ'r bobl, â chost tŵr Bablion* [sic] "In gold, of the same expense is the guests' share / – the work of the people's house – as the expense of the tower of Babylon" (2.57–58); *GG.net* 112.58.

I dai'r dalaith, Duw a'r delwau,
Ac ynn bedwar gwin a bwydau.

“It is there that we go, replete with wine, lord of the groves of Hyrddin, / to his beautiful halls, / to the houses of the province, [and] of God and the images, / and there are four kinds of wine for us, and foodstuffs.” (3.37–40)

The reference to plural “halls” (*neuaddau*) might suggest that Gutun had in mind various chambers where guests were entertained and given lodging, which might help account for the preponderance of plural *tai* in the references under discussion. Possibly the phrases with singular *tŷ* conveyed a stronger, more official sense of a single institution. It is noteworthy that, as seen above, the singular form is used when associating the abbey with St Benedict, with “the prince” (Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor) and with Jesus.⁴² Similarly, Gutun refers to the cathedral or wider community at St Asaph as *tŷ Asa* (10.20), and – in a poem praising Syr Hywel ap Dai, rector of Whitford – to Santiago de Compostella as *tŷ Iago*.⁴³

By contrast, there is perhaps a particular significance to the plural *tai*, conjuring an idea of multiple buildings, in Gutun's reference to the ruinous state of Valle Crucis under Abbot Siôn's predecessor: *I'w swydd y bu Sais: wyllo a welais / A'i dai o falais yn adfeilio* “There was an Englishman in his office previously: I saw weeping / and his houses falling into ruin through malice” (1.59–60). Use of the plural noun might also be significant when referring to building works, as in the case of references to Abbot Dafydd's *tai newydd* “new houses” (15.62) and to expenditure on *brig tai* “the top of houses” (11.12). A further reference to *teg grysau i'w thai croesog* “fair garments [or “coverings”] for its [*i.e.* the abbey's] cruciform houses” (12.34) might suggest work was being done on the abbey church, with plural *tai* perhaps suggesting its separate interior spaces.⁴⁴ Another couplet, referring to a singular *edeilad* “building”, indicates work was being done on a feasting-hall: *Aur dalm â ar edeilad / Y ganno gwledd i gan gwlad* “A mass of gold is spent upon a building / that

⁴² Guto'r Glyn, like Gutun, referred to Valle Crucis as *tŷ Sain Bened* (*GG.net* 112.26). A poem addressed by Rhys Pennardd to Dafydd ab Owain, abbot of Aberconwy (died 1513), refers to *tai Sain Bened* “St Benedict's houses” but this could potentially refer to more than one abbey, since he had been abbot at Strata Marcella and, on the evidence of the poetry, also Strata Florida (*CTC* 21.25, and see also lines 7–10; and on Dafydd ab Owain, see WILLIAMS, *Welsh Cistercians*, p. 71–72; BURTON, “Home and Away”, p. 106–110; and the patron note in *GG.net*).

⁴³ *GO* LIX.30.

⁴⁴ The poet might have in mind the side chapels in the transepts, for example, or the separation of the nave from the monks' choir by the pulpitum; compare *GG.net* 112.52n (on *croestai*).

might contain a feast for a hundred lands” (11.17–18).⁴⁵ On the other hand, the singular form *tŷ* in another couplet relating to building works might refer either to a single structure or to the abbey complex more widely: *Ei dŷ addas glân, diddos glog, / A’i nen gywraint, a ’nâi’n gaerog* “His worthy, holy house with its weatherproof covering, / and its skilfully wrought roof, he made like a fortress” (12.45–46).

A reference to the abbey as *tai mur* could be interpreted as either “walled houses” or “fortified houses” (1.47), whilst the couplet *Cwrt Rhufain lle’n cartrefai, / Cwmpas a dinas o dai* “The court of Rome where he would provide a home for us, / an enclosure and city [or “stronghold”] of houses” (9.13–14) evokes all the buildings of the abbey complex, strong and united within their “enclosure” or “compass”. Further poetic references, too, reflect the idea of enclosure. In the poem that refers to *tai mur*, Gutun poses the rhetorical question *Oes ail i blas Siôn ... / ... wedi’i glosio?* “Has the like of Siôn’s palace ... ever been enclosed?” (1.57–58), referring in the same ode to the abbot’s *clos* “close” being frequented by poets and petitioners (lines 45–46). Specific reference to the cloister (*cloestr*) is to be found in this poem’s closing lines, *Ef a roes Duw fry, ar gloestr eglwysty / Arglwyddi Cymry, arglwydd Cymro* “God placed yonder a Welshman as lord / over the cloister of the church of the lords of Wales” (1.63–64). The word *clos*, too, could sometimes mean “cloister”, but the way Gutun uses it suggests he has a more general sense of enclosure in mind, encompassing more of the abbey complex.⁴⁶ In his elegy for Siôn, he laments that “My life was within his sheltered close” (*Fy mywyd yn ei glyd glos*, 7.25), and the idea of shelter or snugness is again to the fore in a later ode to Abbot Dafydd: *Yn ddiddos ei glos a’i gled – fynachlog* “His close and his sheltered monastery are weatherproof” (10.27).⁴⁷ We also find the abbey apparently envisaged as plural *cloesydd*, as Gutun praises Abbot Siôn, in a somewhat convoluted manner, as *Siôn glosydd Sin Eglwyseg* “Siôn of the closes of Eglwyseg’s Sheen” (5.2), and refers to his hospitality or feasting *i’w glosydd rhwng bedw gleision* “within his closes between verdant birches” (2.53).⁴⁸ Perhaps these plural “closes” suggest the various enclosed spaces

⁴⁵ Compare *GG.net* poem 112, and see the accompanying notes by Ann PARRY OWEN. It is likely that the building work praised by Gutun Owain and Guto’r Glyn included the conversion of the former monks’ dormitory in the east range, which provided a hall for the abbot and apartments that were probably used by his guests (EVANS, *Valle Crucis Abbey*, p. 42).

⁴⁶ *GPC* s.v. *clos*¹ “close, enclosed place ...; cloister, choir, court”.

⁴⁷ The same adjective (*clyd/cled*) is used in both references; see *GPC* s.v. *clyd*¹ and note the alliteration with *clos*.

⁴⁸ *Eglwyseg* is the name of the small river flowing past Valle Crucis, and of a township located further up the river-valley to the north-east. *Sin* refers to the royal palace of Sheen or Shene, in modern Richmond upon Thames, that was destroyed by fire in 1497 (and rebuilt as Richmond Palace soon after).

within the abbey complex, just as *tai* might denote individual buildings or interior compartments.

IV. THE ABBEY AS FORTRESS, CITY, GENTRY HOUSE OR PALACE

Also suggesting the idea of enclosure, though with a different emphasis, are Gutun's references to the abbey as a *caer*, which could mean "fortress", "castle", or "fortified town". His use of the related adjective *caerog* "like a fortress" with reference to Abbot Dafydd's building works has been noted above, and the abbey itself is *caer Ddafydd* "Dafydd's fortress" in another poem, in the context of praise and hospitality (9.15). An earlier poem in praise of Abbot Siôn refers to the abbey as *Caer â maenwaith côr Mynyw* "a fortress with the stonework of St Davids' chancel" (5.31), the comparison with the great cathedral church at St Davids conveying strong construction as well as sacred purpose. There are two instances where plural *ceyrydd* is used, as Gutun asserts that *Yng ngheyrydd Dafydd ... / Y cawn fawl Iesu cyn felysed* "In Dafydd's fortresses ... / we experience Jesus's praise just as sweetly" (10.37–38) and *Y mae gowared i mi i'w geyrydd* "There is a downward slope for me to his fortresses" (15.63), the latter being a figure of speech to suggest how eagerly Gutun would avail himself of any opportunity to visit the abbot. The wider context of these references suggests that, as with *tai* (and *closydd*), the plural form *ceyrydd* is being used to refer to the abbey complex. Its use may have been encouraged by the fact that the *-ydd* ending sustains the end-rhyme in the latter instance, and is used for an internal rhyme with the patron's name in the former.

These references implying fortification serve to praise the strength and quality of the abbey's fabric (and by extension, praise the abbots who maintained and renovated it), but there may also be an implication that the abbey is a figurative, spiritual fortress against the evils of the world. It is worth comparing, for example, the speech that Orderic Vitalis attributes to his father, urging Earl Roger de Montgomery to found an abbey (which became the Benedictine house at Shrewsbury) "as a citadel of God [*monachile castrum*] against Satan, where the cowed champions may engage in ceaseless combat against Behemoth for your soul".⁴⁹ St Bernard himself used similar military imagery, envisaging Clairvaux as "the fortress of God" and as a (fortress-like) "heavenly Jerusalem", and referring to the

⁴⁹ Marjorie CHIBNALL, ed./trans., *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol. 3, Oxford 1972, p. 144–147.

prospective daughter-house at Rievaulx as “an outpost of my Lord” which his “army” would occupy.⁵⁰ The Welsh verses addressed to the abbots of Valle Crucis, too, sometimes contain the kind of phrasing that poets had long used to praise warlike secular patrons: Abbot Siôn is a “soldier” in one of Gutun’s poems (*milwr*, 1.38), whilst Guto’r Glyn praised Valle Crucis as the houses of men who were “well-armed” (*tai arfogion*).⁵¹

Gutun’s two references to the abbey as a *dinas* might likewise be intended to convey the sense of its being a spiritual stronghold, but with, again, a slightly different nuance since as well as meaning “fortress”, *dinas* could also refer to a city or town.⁵² The phrase *dinas o dai* “city/stronghold of houses” (9.14) has been discussed above, in the context of enclosure. In another poem *dinas* is used in rhyming juxtaposition with *plas* “palace” (discussed below) in the context of hospitality, and could again be interpreted as either “stronghold” or “city” or some combination of the two (*I ba le o’i blas ydd awn, a’i ddinas?* “Where shall we go from his *plas* and his *dinas*?”, 1.49). The concept of a city suggests community and of course citizenship, and Gutun might also have intended to evoke ideas of the heavenly city or the city of God. It is interesting to compare, again, St Bernard’s references to a “heavenly Jerusalem”, as well as Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, and indeed the description in the Book of Revelation of “the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God”.⁵³

The word *plas*, a borrowing from Old French or Middle English *place*, was often used by poets to refer to the substantial dwellings of their gentry patrons, and could also mean “palace” or simply “place”.⁵⁴ The poets may at times have intended more than one meaning, but in the case of the poetry discussed here it is likely that the usual intention was to convey the idea of an edifice of cultured splendour. Most strikingly, in a poem apparently composed to welcome Dafydd ab Ieuan to his new office as abbot, the opening line praises or addresses the abbey as *Y plas mawr ei hap a’i lôn* “The *plas* of great prosperity and scholarship” (8.1). In earlier poems praising Abbot Siôn, Valle Crucis is *plas y dalaith* “the *plas* of the province”

⁵⁰ Janet BURTON and Julie KERR, *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages*, Woodbridge 2011, p. 199; and see Adriaan H. BREDERO, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Between Cult and History*, Edinburgh 1996, p. 266–275; Bruno Scott JAMES, trans., *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, reprinted with introduction by Beverly Mayne KIENZLE, Stroud 1998, number 95 (p. 141–142).

⁵¹ *GG.net* 111.51n.

⁵² *GPC* s.v. *dinas*.

⁵³ Revelation 21.2, and compare also (for example) the references to the city of God in Psalms 46.4, 48.1–2 and 87.3 (Vulgate 45.5, 47.2–3, 86.3). The Welsh Bible of 1588 uses the word *dinas* in each case, corresponding to the Vulgate’s *civitas*.

⁵⁴ *GPC* s.v. *plas*.

(5.45), and described as “St Pauls and York in one *plas*” (*Powls a Iorc yn un plas yw*, 6.25), with *Powls* being Old St Pauls cathedral in London and *Iorc* perhaps referring specifically to York Minster. A different comparison is made in a poem praising Abbot Dafydd: *Y plas fal y Siêp o liw* “the *plas* of the appearance of Cheapside” (9.11), referring to this thriving centre of trade, again in London. Such comparisons to prominent places in England or beyond (such as Cologne and Venice) were common in the poetry more widely, and though they were doubtless used formulaically at times, they reflect the eagerness of poets and patrons to associate themselves with the best that the wider world had to offer.

V. THE ABBEY AS A HEAVENLY OR OPEN COURT

By contrast, Gutun’s frequent references to the abbey as a *llys* “court” are deeply rooted in Welsh tradition, this being the word used for the royal courts where earlier generations of poets had praised Wales’s independent rulers. *Llys* could also mean “court” in other senses: a legal court, the home of a nobleman or bishop, or a church or heaven itself as the abode of God. The latter sense is sometimes to the fore in Gutun’s verses. In a poem addressed to Abbot Dafydd he refers to the monks of his choir as *Lleng o engylion y llys, / Llu i falu llef fellys* “a legion of the angels of the court, / a host to produce a sweet sound” (8.47–48), whilst in another poem, again with reference to the choir, the abbey is the holy court (*gwenlllys*) of St Bernard:

Os teg llef côr nef yn ei nawfed – sŵn,
 Unllais y barnwn wenllys Berned;
 Engylion gwynion, lle ganed – Iesu,
 A ddug i ganu, Dduw gogoned.
 Yng ngheyrydd Dafydd, lle’n dofed – yn llu,
 Y cawn fawl Iesu cyn felysed.

“If fair is the voice of the choir of heaven in its ninth sound, / I would judge the holy court of Bernard to be of the same voice; / the glorious God brought holy angels to sing / where Jesus was born. / In Dafydd’s fortresses, where we were made comfortable as a multitude, / we experience Jesus’s praise just as sweetly.” (10.33–38)

The element *gwen* in *gwenlllys* is the adjective *gwyn/gwen* (these are masculine/feminine forms) meaning “fair”, “holy” or “white”, and the passage uses the same word in plural form to describe the angels (*engylion gwynion*) who sang Jesus’s praise at His birth, likening the singing at Valle Crucis to theirs. Gutun may have had the white vestments of the Cistercians in mind; a similar connection is made in Walter Daniel’s *Life of Aelred of Rievaulx*: “as the angels might be, they were clothed in undyed wool spun and woven from the pure fleece of the sheep”.⁵⁵ There is doubtless also a play upon the various senses of *gwyn/gwen* in Gutun’s praise of the abbey in another poem addressed to Dafydd, in the context of his building activities (words corresponding to *gwyn/gwen* are underlined in the translation):

Yr haul yn y Rhiw o adail ydiw,
 A gwynlliw fal gwenlllog.
 Oes rhyw faenwaith is Rhufoniog,
 A’i wenllys hoyw-win llysieuog?

“As a building it is the sun in Y Rhiw [or “on the hill-side”], / and white-coloured as a holy abbey. / Is there such stonework this side of Rhufoniog, / with its fair court with fine aromatic wine?” (12.47–50)

The use of the word *gwynlliw* “white-coloured” suggests that the abbey was literally white, probably referring to a covering of lime-wash.⁵⁶

In contrast to the above comparisons to the heavenly court, Valle Crucis is a court “for the world” in an early poem praising Abbot Siôn: *Mae ynn ugain llyn ac un llys – i’r byd, / Lle cair bwydau melys* “We have twenty kinds of drinks and one court for the world, / where sweet foods are obtained” (1.25–26). In other instances, too, Gutun has feasting in mind when he refers to the *llys* of the abbots. In a poem for Siôn he interjects the phrase “I come to his court” (*dof i’w llys*) into a passage praising the patron and his hospitality, and refers to himself not only as Siôn’s poet but also as a courtier (*gŵr llys*) and soldier (6.39–44). Again, in his elegy for Abbot Siôn he reminisces that “One would have Siôn’s court and

⁵⁵ F. M. POWICKE, trans., *Walter Daniel: The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx & The Letter to Maurice*, reprinted in *Cistercian Fathers Series*, 57, Kalamazoo MI 1994, p. 97.

⁵⁶ Compare, for example, the reference in the Welsh version of the Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan to the “lime-washed churches” (*eghwysseu kalcheit*) of twelfth-century Gwynedd (D. Simon EVANS, ed., *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*, Cardiff 1977, p. 30).

his heart, / and their full capacity of joy” (*Llys Siôn a’i galon a gaid, / A llawenydd eu llonaid*, 7.39–40), and refers to Siôn’s “feasts and court” being remembered by “every social rank of the realm” (*Coffáu ei wleddau a’i lys / Oedd ran pob gradd o’r ynys*, lines 49–50). The court is again the abbot’s, specifically, in a later poem praising Dafydd ab Ieuan where Gutun asserts that “[all] the bees of our region would not make / one-third of his drink in his court yonder” (*Ni wnâi wenyn ein ynys / Draean ei lyn draw ’n ei lys*, 9.19–20).

In another poem addressed to Abbot Dafydd, Gutun uses the second-person possessive pronoun *dy* in asserting that “your court for me was secure territory” (*Dy lys ym tir dilys oedd*, 11.32), and in a third he even refers to the abbey as “my” (Gutun’s) court, a sign of how much he felt at home there, though it is still the abbot’s presence and generosity that are to the fore (*Fy llys rydd beunydd lle bai / A dalai wledd Nodolig* “my open court where he who daily / furnished a feast fit for Christmas would be”, 14.21–22). There is also a reference to “two courts” belonging to Dafydd: *I’w ddwylys deufwy ydd el oes Dafydd* “may Dafydd’s lifetime last twice as long within his two courts” (15.72). The possibility that the “two courts” might reflect Dafydd’s apparently concurrent responsibilities as abbot and bishop towards the end of his life (1500–1503) has been discussed, but there is nothing else in the poems considered here to suggest that any were composed for Dafydd so late in his career.⁵⁷ Moreover, comparison with another reference to two courts (*dwyllys*) in a poem by Guto’r Glyn suggests both poets may have had in mind separate areas within Valle Crucis itself, possibly contrasting the newly completed accommodation for the abbot and his guests in the east range with the lodgings of the monks elsewhere in the complex.⁵⁸ A further possibility is that Gutun was familiar with some other residence where Dafydd held court, perhaps his family home in Trefor.⁵⁹

The juxtaposition of *llys* with the adjective *rhydd* “free, liberal, open”, used in the reference to feasting fit for Christmas cited above, also occurs in later lines of the same poem: *Os rhoi a chynnal llys rydd, / Dafydd yw y pendefig* “If [it concerns] giving and sustaining an open court, / then Dafydd is the prince” (14.43–44). It is a phrase used by other

⁵⁷ *GO* p. 163; *CTC* p. 385–386.

⁵⁸ See discussion by Ann PARRY OWEN, *GG.net* 113.71n; and on the alterations to the east range, see EVANS, *Valle Crucis Abbey*, p. 42.

⁵⁹ *GG.net* 113.71n, and see also the introductory note for poem 113.

poets as well, often in the sense of a court that was freely open to visitors, as in the first stanza of one of Guto'r Glyn's odes to Abbot Dafydd:

Llys rydd ym y sydd, ansoddau – llu dalm,
Lle deliais y gwyliau;
Llys Dafydd a fydd yn fau,
Llys Bedr, lliaws abadau.

“Mine is an open court, delicacies for a great multitude, / where I have spent feast days;
/ the court of Dafydd which is accustomed to be mine, / the court of St Peter, numerous
its abbots.”⁶⁰

Gutun seems to have been particularly fond of the phrase, also using it in poems addressed to secular patrons, and in three further poems in praise of Abbot Dafydd.⁶¹ He describes the abbot as one “whose court and gifts are liberal” (*Sy rydd ei lys a'i roddion*, 10.22), expresses an intent to visit his *llys rydd* to “complain of winter's chill” in the opening lines of another poem (15.1–2), and in a third, praises Dafydd's expenditure on building works and a *llys rydd* (12.39).⁶² The phrase also occurs in the closing lines of Gutun's elegy for Guto'r Glyn, who received burial at Valle Crucis. Here again it refers to Abbot Dafydd's court, perhaps consciously referencing Guto's earlier poem:

Llys rydd Ddafydd, wledd ddyfal,
Oedd yn ei oes iddo 'n Iâl
A'r ail oes i gael yr aeth
Gwledd Dduw a'i arglwyddiaeth.

“Dafydd's free court in Yale / was open to him in his lifetime, constant feast, / and for
the next life he has gone to receive / God's feast and kingdom.”⁶³

⁶⁰ *GG.net* 113.1–4 (ed./trans. Ann PARRY OWEN); cf. line 88, and on the interpretation of *llys rydd*, see the note on line 1.

⁶¹ References relating to other patrons are in *GO* XXXIII.49, XXXV.53, XLI.12, 33 and LIII.1.

⁶² The passages from poems 15 and 12 are cited and discussed above with reference to the “Old Cross” and to Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor.

⁶³ *GG.net* 126.55–58 (ed./trans. Eurig SALISBURY).

The idea of a feast as part of the heavenly reward is not unique to Welsh poetry of course, but may have appealed to the poets particularly strongly since feasting was such an important part of their professional lives.⁶⁴ It is noteworthy, indeed, that in the passage by Guto'r Glyn quoted above, Valle Crucis is not only a *llys rydd* and *llys Dafydd* but also *llys Bedr* "Peter's court".⁶⁵ Guto, then, like Gutun Owain in the references discussed above, implies that the abbey's is a heavenly court, but this time in the context of feast-days rather than the music of the choir. Returning to the elegy for Guto, there is a particularly striking passage in an earlier section of the poem that praises the lavishness of his funeral feast and refers to giving wines "for his soul" (*Rhoi gwinoedd rhag ei enaid*, line 50), seemingly implying that the liberality of the wine may help the deceased poet gain salvation. As Dafydd Johnston states, there is here an "implied belief in the spiritual benefit of the hospitality" which is widespread in the poetry.⁶⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Gutun Owain uses a wealth of different names and phrases to refer to Valle Crucis, associating it in a variety of ways with the local landscape, with the founder-figures Benedict and Bernard, with its local founder, Madog ap Gruffudd Maelor, and with Jesus Himself. Both spiritual and secular power are evoked in the poetry and there is a strong sense of continuity, both in an institutional sense, with the abbey being linked repeatedly with "the (Old) Cross" (now the pillar of Eliseg), and in a personal sense, with the abbots being likened to Welsh saints with monastic credentials such as Beuno and Deiniol, as well as to Abbot Dunod of Bangor-on-Dee.⁶⁷ The international monastic saints are afforded great respect, being presented as figures wielding authority or proprietorship over abbots and abbey alike, but are mentioned relatively infrequently. It may be that Gutun was in general more interested in promoting his patrons' worthiness within a Welsh context; perhaps, too, he knew relatively little of Bernard and Benedict, in comparison with his extensive knowledge of Welsh tradition and historical narrative. It is interesting to consider whether those poems that do mention Bernard and Benedict, and especially a single ode that mentions both (poem

⁶⁴ For biblical examples, see Isaiah 25.6; Luke 13.29.

⁶⁵ *GG.net* 113.4n.

⁶⁶ JOHNSTON, "Monastic Patronage", p. 187. On feasting in the poetry, see also DAVIES, "Y Cerddi i'r Tai Crefydd", p. 350–356.

⁶⁷ Compare Guto'r Glyn's reference to Strata Florida abbey as *tai Gynfelyn* (*GG.net* 8.75), perhaps intended to suggest continuity with an earlier foundation at the site; see David AUSTIN, *Strata Florida: the History and Landscape of a Welsh Monastery*, Strata Florida 2022, p. 29.

10), might have been composed for occasions where it was felt that the abbey's Cistercian identity should be given particular emphasis, perhaps because there were guests present who were important members of the Order. The wider responsibilities that Abbot Dafydd ab Ieuan acquired within the Order on becoming a reformator for Wales in 1485 might be relevant in this regard.⁶⁸

The abbots themselves may well have had a role in determining the theme and content of the poems; indeed, Dafydd ab Ieuan was himself a poet, according to both Gutun Owain and Guto'r Glyn.⁶⁹ Certainly, both Dafydd ab Ieuan and his predecessor Siôn ap Rhisiart appear as prominent figures in the poetry. This article, focussing as it does upon a selection of references to the abbey, has touched only briefly on Gutun's extensive personal praise of the abbots, but their strong presence has been apparent, nonetheless. Often the abbey is *their* house or court, reflecting the tradition of secular praise, but doubtless also reflecting the real circumstances in which the poems were performed, in the abbot's feasting-hall and in his presence.

The emphasis on generosity and feasting in the poems may likewise be attributed in part to these circumstances of performance and to the conventions of praise poetry, but the sacred, religious role of the feast, and the importance of charity and hospitality as Christian virtue and monastic duty, should also be borne in mind. Significantly, there are references to the abbey as the house of Yale or of "the province" (*y dalaith*), and it might also be "the people's house" (*tŷ'r bobl*) or "a court for the world" (*llys i'r byd*). The frequent use of the phrase *llys rydd* "an open/liberal court" is similarly suggestive of links to the wider community, whilst the association of the abbey with heaven, seen in some of the *llys* references and perhaps implied by the terms *caer* "fortress" and especially *dinas* "city, fortress", not only praises its pleasant, welcoming surroundings and the sanctity and devout religious practice of its abbot and monks, but also hints at their ability to help others attain salvation.⁷⁰ The latter two terms also suggest the idea of the abbey as a spiritual stronghold against the evils of the world, where the God-fearing might find a haven. On a more mundane

⁶⁸ See the 'Introduction' and note 7, above.

⁶⁹ See the patron note in *GG.net* and the references cited there.

⁷⁰ Compare BREDERO, *Between Cult and History*, p. 266–275, on St Bernard's envisaging of Clairvaux both as a metaphorical "heavenly Jerusalem" and as the entrance to the real heavenly city. For further references by Gutun likening the abbey to heaven, see note 29 above.

level, such terms had a further significance in suggesting the splendid appearance of the buildings, and so too in the case of *plas* “palace, gentry house, place”.

Of the various terms discussed above, *tŷ/tai* is the most commonly used by Gutun in referring to Valle Crucis. Perhaps he favoured it because it is a word that includes “monastery” (as well as secular dwellings) within its usual range of meanings, and moreover, being short and having just one consonant it is easy to fit into strict-metre *cynghanedd*. It is worth noting that a word that specifically denotes a monastery, *mynachlog* (from *mynach* “monk” and *llog* “(consecrated) place”), occurs just three times in Gutun’s verses. Perhaps he found this word too obvious and prosaic, but he may also have found it unwieldy as far as *cynghanedd* was concerned. In two of the three instances where the word occurs it is positioned so that only its final -g or -og contribute to the *cynghanedd*, whilst in the third, Gutun has used and perhaps invented the otherwise unattested word *mynychle* in order to provide correspondence with all the required consonants: *Aur fynychle yw’r fynachlog* “the monastery is a splendid place of monks [or “a place abundant in gold”]” (12.29).⁷¹ Considerations of *cynghanedd* always played a role in the poets’ choice of words, though a professional poet such as Gutun would not allow this to adversely influence his artistic expression nor prevent him from saying what he wished to say.

The above discussion has offered just a sample of the range of descriptive language and allusions used by Gutun Owain to praise Valle Crucis. Much more could be said concerning his references to the abbey as heaven or paradise, for instance, or his descriptions of its sheltered valley location, or the comparisons he makes with other places and institutions in Wales and beyond. Still, it is hoped that this article has provided a glimpse of the richness of what the poetry has to offer. Gutun’s use of terms such as *tŷ*, *llys*, *caer*, *dinas* and *plas* reflects to some extent the Welsh poets’ general delight in employing varied and wide-ranging vocabulary, but also serves to make the poems more meaningful, allowing different aspects of the abbey’s “persona” to be explored. Valle Crucis is not only the welcoming court or house(s) of its abbots but also a sheltered “close” or “closes”, a fortress

⁷¹ The ambiguity in interpretation, which may be deliberate, results from *mynych* being not only a plural form of *mynach* “monk” but also an unrelated adjective meaning “frequent”. The other instances of *mynachlog* are *Â gwin ym mynachlog Iâl* “with wine in Yale’s monastery” (5.20) and *Yn ddiddos ei glos a’i gled – fynachlog, / A’i ddeuwin hafog ddoe’n eu hyfed* “His close and his sheltered monastery are weatherproof, / and his two abundant wines [are there], [we were] drinking them yesterday” (10.27–28).

or city, and a heavenly court. Such phrases – and many others – together serve to present the abbey as a thriving, welcoming monastic house that was an integral and important part of the wider community and landscape of north-east Wales. Significantly, continuity with Wales's early Church and associations with the secular power of the princes are often emphasized, yet there is also due acknowledgement of Valle Crucis's status within the wider Cistercian world.

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