

## Introduction

By the second quarter of the twelfth century, when Tintern, Whitland and Margam, the first Cistercian abbeys in Wales, were founded, the Anglo-Norman aristocratic élite from which their founders were drawn had succeeded in establishing firm control over lowland Gwent, Glamorgan, Gower and Pembroke, but Whitland and Margam were located on the fringes of these areas in the frontier zones between them and adjoining territory remaining under de facto Welsh rule, and Anglo-Norman governance in these zones was ‘frequently skeletal, nominal or non-existent’<sup>1</sup> and constantly being challenged by the Welsh. They were joined in 1147 by the two Welsh Savigniac abbeys, Neath and Basingwerk, which became Cistercian when the Order of Savigny merged with the Cistercian Order. Like Whitland and Margam, Neath was located in a frontier zone, and the Anglo-Norman hold on the area of north-east Wales in which Basingwerk was located was also tenuous by the time it became Cistercian.

Following the assumption of the patronage of Whitland and its first daughter-house, Strata Florida, by Rhys ap Gruffudd, the Lord Rhys (d. 1197), after he had succeeded in re-establishing Welsh hegemony in the kingdom of Deheubarth in the 1150s, the filiation of Whitland, which by 1201 numbered a further six Cistercian abbeys distributed throughout the length and breadth of *pura Wallia*, became clearly identifiable as native Welsh abbeys with Welsh patrons, choir monks and political sympathies, whereas the other Cistercian foundations in Wales all had French or English mother houses and choir monks, maintained close connections with their Anglo-Norman patrons, and were unable to establish Welsh daughter

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<sup>1</sup> R.R. Davies, ‘Frontier Arrangements in Fragmented Societies: Ireland and Wales’, in Robert Bartlett and Angus Mackay (eds.), *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 77-100, at p. 78.

houses. In the historiography of Welsh monasticism there has therefore been a tendency to view the Welsh Cistercian monasteries as falling into two distinct groups, one Welsh and the other Anglo-Norman, the patrons and benefactors and outlook of which reflected the ethnic and territorial divisions that had taken root in Wales as a result of the Anglo-Norman incursions,<sup>2</sup> in much the same way that, following the Anglo-Norman penetration of Ireland, the Irish Cistercian monasteries have been seen as comprising ‘two virtually separate Cistercian Orders’.<sup>3</sup>

But whereas Tintern and Grace Dieu, the last Cistercian abbey to be founded in Wales, may have conformed to the stereotype of the Marcher foundation, it is possible to demonstrate, utilising the surviving documentary evidence relating to Basingwerk, Neath and Margam, that the actual position was somewhat more complex than the traditional interpretation allowed and that, despite having been intended by their Anglo-Norman founders as symbols of their prestige and domination, these abbeys attracted benefactors from the Welsh ruling class as well as, in Neath and Margam’s case, individuals from lower down the social ladder.

The transfer of Welsh religious allegiance from their native *clas* churches to the monasteries of the Cistercians, whose Order’s sophisticated

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<sup>2</sup> This interpretation has been endorsed explicitly or implicitly by, for example, Rev. E.J. Newell, *A History of the Welsh Church to the Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London: Elliot Stock, 1895), pp. 304-5; J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 3rd. edn. 1939), pp. 593-604; Jeremiah F. O’Sullivan, *Cistercian Settlements in Wales and Monmouthshire 1140-1540* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1947) p. 25 and *passim*; Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976) p. 19; F.G. Cowley, *The Monastic Order in South Wales, 1066 -1349* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1987), pp.24-5 and p. 48; David H. Williams, *The Welsh Cistercians: written to commemorate the centenary of the death of Stephen William Williams (1837-1899) (The father of Cistercian archaeology in Wales)* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001), p. 3; and David M. Robinson, *The Cistercians in Wales: Architecture and Archaeology 1130 - 1540* (London: The Society of Antiquaries of London, 2006), p.24.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Stalley, *The Cistercian Monasteries of Ireland: An Account of the History, Art and Architecture of the White Monks in Ireland from 1142 to 1540* (London and Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 16.

organisational and administrative structure distinguished it from the other regular communities of the day and gave it a truly international dimension, was one aspect of the complex process by means of which the culture of the core of Latin Christendom was slowly assimilated by the Welsh. Another aspect of this process was the increasing use of charters, and it is the charters in which the founders, patrons and benefactors of Basingwerk, Neath and Margam granted them landed property and a variety of other rights and privileges during the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, together with relevant letters and other documents emanating from Welsh rulers<sup>4</sup> and the English crown, that form the primary source material. The most comprehensive corpus of charter evidence that has survived for any Welsh Cistercian abbey is the Margam Abbey charters, numbering more than twice the combined total of the charters that have survived for the remaining Welsh Cistercian houses.<sup>5</sup> Although by no means negligible, the surviving documentary evidence relating to Basingwerk<sup>6</sup> and Neath is less substantial, markedly so in the case of Neath, and the asymmetry between the material that survives for these abbeys and for Margam is inevitably reflected in the evidentiary examination that follows.

Religious devotion was frequently not the primary motive for the endowment of monasteries, and the pious verbiage in which charters granting endowments to them were often expressed, drafted as they invariably were by monks eager to emphasise the spiritual nature of the transactions being recorded, was not the whole story, but that is not to say that the spiritual aspect of monastic endowment was simply window

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<sup>4</sup> In respect of which extensive use has been made of *AWR*.

<sup>5</sup> Originals preserved in the *Penrice and Margam Estate Records* held in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth and the *Harley MSS* held in the British Library, London. Full texts published in *Cartae*.

<sup>6</sup> For Basingwerk *The Charters of the Anglo-Norman Earls of Chester, c. 1071-1237*, ed. Geoffrey Barraclough (Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1988) has been a useful source of information.

dressing concealing baser motives. The *mentalité* of medieval men throughout Western Christendom was permeated by fear of the next life. As Jacques Le Goff has emphasised:

If we do not keep the obsession with salvation and the fear of hell which inspired medieval men in the forefront of our minds we shall never understand their outlook on life.<sup>7</sup>

This dread of perpetual damnation created a need for reassurance,<sup>8</sup> and the basic motive common to the patrons and benefactors who flocked to endow monasteries was the alleviation of this anxiety. The involvement in violence, and other activities that were condemned as evil by the church, of the military élite from which the founders and many of the benefactors of Cistercian monasteries were drawn may have heightened their susceptibility to anxiety of this kind, and driven them to seek to make amends for their transgressions. The concern for the destination of their souls in the next world expressed in the charters issued by donors was therefore not necessarily counterfeit, but was frequently accompanied by more worldly motives that varied from one donor and one endowment to another.

The patronage of a monastery, its advowson, was an inheritable and transferable feudal property right, a tenorial relationship established between the monastery and its overlord and founder under which masses and prayers were owed in exchange for the endowment,<sup>9</sup> and this reciprocity was a fundamental characteristic of the relationship between

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization 400-1500*, trans. Julia Barrow (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), p. 187.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Wood, *English Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Thirteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 21-25.

religious houses, their lay founders, patrons and also their benefactors.<sup>10</sup> Gifts were a kind of spiritual investment made on the basis that donors would receive something in return; their purpose was rarely purely altruistic. They were born of self-interest as a means of exploiting the ability of the monks, in accordance with the doctrinal assumptions of the day, to do penance in perpetuity on behalf of donors and their living and dead relatives through intercessory prayers and masses, and by this means to vicariously make reparation for their sins and attain salvation for them.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the unmatched reputation for austerity and piety that the Cistercians had acquired by the middle of the twelfth century their intercessory prayers and masses were perceived as possessing greater potency than those of other regular communities, which made them attractive to potential donors and there was also around this time . These qualities seem to have resonated particularly strongly with Welsh religious sensibilities. As previously noted, daughter houses of Whitland were founded in every corner of native Wales, and several of the most prominent Welsh donors, including Owain Cyfeiliog of Powys, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth of Gwynedd and two of the sons of the the Lord Rhys entered Cistercian monasteries *ad succurendum* as they approached the end of their lives, taking the white habit and being interred within the monastic enclosure,<sup>12</sup> and there are numerous examples of other members of the Welsh ruling class similarly choosing burial in Cistercian monasteries.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Janet Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain 1000-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), pp. 69-74.

<sup>12</sup> Burton, *Monastic Orders*, p. 217.

<sup>13</sup> Some of whom are listed in Huw Pryce, 'Patrons and Patronage among the Cistercians in Wales', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 154 (2005), pp. 81-95, p. 85.

Martha G. Newman has shown that, although the Cistercians had no interest in the spiritual development of the laity in general, not only was gaining the goodwill and promoting virtuous conduct on the part of secular rulers entirely in keeping with Cistercian monastic culture as it evolved during the twelfth century, but it became an obligation placed upon them by their changing idea of their vocation as Cistercian monks.<sup>14</sup> The principal component of this evolution was the adoption, as the centrepiece of their culture, of a distinctively Cistercian interpretation of the Christian concept of *caritas*.

The Cistercian understanding of *caritas* differentiated the ideal of the union of each monk with the divine, the ultimate goal to be constantly striven towards but attainable only in heaven, and the necessity, as an indispensable element of achieving this goal, of dealing with the reality of life on earth by confronting the imperfections of Christian society as a whole. This distinction enabled the reform of Christian society to become an integral part of Cistercian culture without undermining the Cistercians' traditional commitment to a life of contemplative withdrawal from the world.<sup>15</sup> An issue about which Cistercian leaders expressed particular disquiet was the spectacle of Christians fighting among themselves,<sup>16</sup> and the in an area of recurrent conflict between rival Christian forces such as the frontier zones of the March of Wales there is therefore reason to believe that the Cistercians may have had ideological, as well as purely pragmatic, reasons for engaging with the leaders of the combatants whichever side they happened to be on.

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<sup>14</sup> Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098-1180* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 171-190.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183-4. Newman quotes Henry of Marcy's denunciation of Christian warriors who fight among themselves: 'They are not knights but evil men who deserve the inextinguishable fire and undying torture of worms' (Henry of Marcy, Letter 32, *Patrologia cursus completus, series latina*, ed. J.P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris, 1844-64. 204: 250).

The surviving documentary evidence relating to Basingwerk, Neath and Margam enables endowments, and the circumstances in which they were made, to be examined on an individual basis, and a speculative assessment to be attempted of the possible factors that induced members of the Anglo-Norman baronage to become their founders and persuaded Welsh rulers, nobility and freemen to endow abbeys established by their Anglo-Norman enemies, and suggests that, although the wish to obtain spiritual benefits was invariably present and was sometimes their main motivation, other considerations were often to the fore. Quite strong intimations can also be discerned within some of the evidence of the adoption of an empathetic approach by the Cistercians towards the Welsh, particularly their rulers, presumably designed to establish a rapport with the indigenous population and to transcend the identification of the monks as aiders and abettors of Anglo-Norman colonization.

A fourth Cistercian house, Strata Marcella, a daughter house of Whitland founded in 1170 by Owain Cyfeiliog, prince of Powys, was located in the middle March on the flood plain of the river Severn close to the Shropshire border in an area having mixed Welsh and English populations, an environment that was therefore very similar to the frontier zones in which the three Anglo-Norman houses were founded. It provides an opportunity to examine the extent to which a Cistercian house that was indisputably Welsh in its leanings was able to traverse the ethnic, linguistic and cultural divide in the opposite direction to the three Anglo-Norman foundations. The source material primarily drawn upon in relation to Strata Marcella comprises the three royal charters granted to the abbey and the charters, relatively few in number and confined to the second quarter of the

thirteenth century, recording land transactions between the abbey and Shropshire landowners.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Originals preserved in the *Wynnstey Estate Records* held in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, which has also published *The Charters of the Abbey of Ystrad Marchell*, ed. Graham C.G. Thomas (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1997).



## Chapter 1

### The Cistercians in Perfeddwlad - Basingwerk Abbey

From the time of the Normans' first entry into north Wales the lower Dee valley and its estuary fell almost immediately under the firm control of the earls of Chester and were incorporated, as the hundreds of Atiscross and Exestan, in the county of Chester. The foundation of Basingwerk Abbey was a reflection of that control and may well have been intended as a visible expression of it. Although the original of the foundation charter of Basingwerk has been lost or destroyed, the likelihood is that it was a charter referred to in a confirmation charter issued by Henry II on or between 1155 and May 1162<sup>18</sup> in which Ranulf II, Earl of Chester (1129-1153), one of the greatest tenants-in-chief of his day and a major Cistercian benefactor,<sup>19</sup> is stated to have granted to the abbey land at Lache in Marlston (near Chester), 100 shillings from the rents of Chester and 'the chapel of Basingwerk in which the monks originally remained'.<sup>20</sup> Ranulf was one of a number of members of the Anglo-Norman baronage who chose the Congregation of Savigny as the object of their endowments during this period, probably because it had received the endorsement of Stephen, Count of Mortain, a prominent courtier at the court of King Henry I and the future king of England,<sup>21</sup> although Ranulf may also have been influenced in his choice by his father-in-law, Robert, Earl of Gloucester,

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<sup>18</sup> *AWR*, p. 345.

<sup>19</sup> Ranulf II founded five Cistercian houses himself and helped to endow six others (Bennett D. Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Twelfth Century* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1968, p. 35), but has the reputation of having been less than generous as a patron (Burton, *Monastic Orders*, p. 223).

<sup>20</sup> W. Dugdale, ed., *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 6 vols. (new ed., London, 1846) vol. v. p.263, cited in Geoffrey Barraclough, ed., *The Charters of the Anglo-Norman Earls of Chester, c. 1071-1237* (Gloucester: Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1988), p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> Burton, *Monastic Orders*, p. 67.

who only a year earlier had given his approval for the foundation by his liegeman, Richard de Granville, of the Savigniac abbey of Neath.

The probable year of the abbey's foundation was 1131, and both the original site at the chapel of Basingwerk<sup>22</sup> and the nearby site at Greenfield to which the abbey was probably transferred in 1157 were located on the west bank of the Dee estuary in what had formerly been the *cantref* of Tegeingl (Englefield) which with Rhos, Rhufoniog and Dyffryn Clwyd were the four *cantrefi* that comprised the district between the Conwy and Dee estuaries known variously as Perfeddwlad ('Middle Country'), the Four Cantrefs and Gwynedd Is Conwy.

In addition to what is probably its foundation charter, Ranulf II is known to have made three further grants to Basingwerk during or before 1150: in a charter dated c. 1135 he granted to the abbey the manor of Fulbrook, which included a silver mine and which lay adjacent to nearby Holywell<sup>23</sup> (Holywell itself having previously been given to the abbey by Robert Pierrepont with Ranulf's consent)<sup>24</sup>; in a charter of 19 November 1135 x 1140 he granted it the manor of Caldý in Wirral;<sup>25</sup> and in a charter of c. 1140 x 1150 he granted it a salhouse in Northwich.<sup>26</sup>

Only one further grant to the abbey is known to have been made by an earl of Chester and it is from a different period, some half a century later, when

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<sup>22</sup> It has been argued that this was the chapel of Basingwerk castle, and that when the monks moved to Greenfield the name of Basingwerk was retained (G. B. Leach, 'Excavations at Hen Blas, Coleshill Fawr, near Flint - Second Report', *Flintshire Historical Society Publications*, Vol. 18, (1960), pp. 13-60, unnumbered, Appendix I).

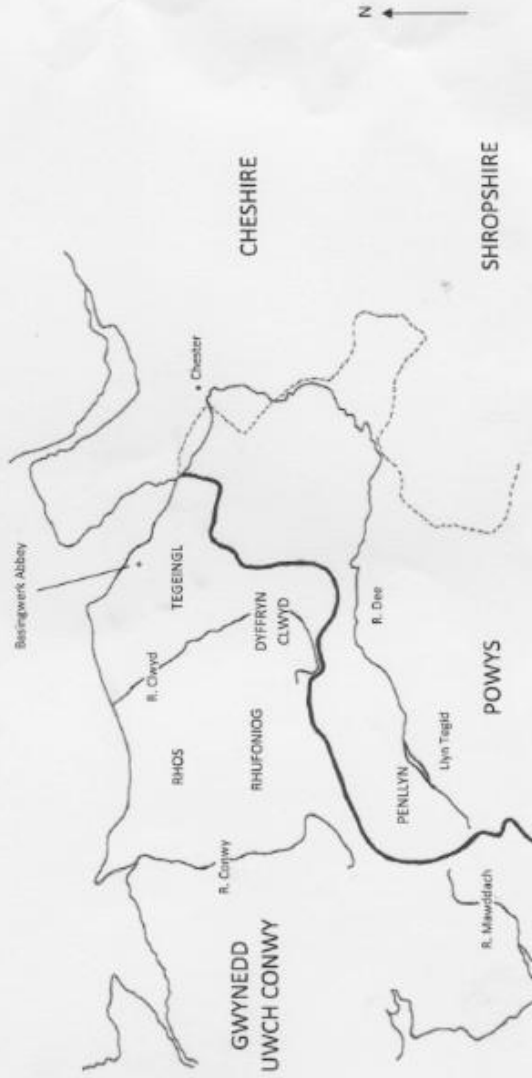
<sup>23</sup> *Chester Charters*, pp. 51-2, no. 36.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 52-3, no. 37.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 53-4, no. 38.

— The Boundary of Gwynedd



**PERFEDDWLAD AND NORTH-EAST WALES  
IN THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES**

(Adapted from R.R.Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000))

Ranulf II's grandson, Ranulf III (1181-1232), issued a charter datable to 1194 x 1204 exempting the abbey from toll throughout his lands.<sup>27</sup>

From the 1140s onwards, following a resurgence of native Welsh opposition to the Normans during the reign of King Stephen, the whole of Perfeddwlad became one of the most fiercely contested territories in the March of Wales. For almost 150 years, until the extinguishment of native rule as a result of the Edwardian Conquest, it continually changed hands between the princes of Gwynedd on the one side and the earls of Chester and the English crown on the other, but the periods of Welsh domination tended to be of considerably longer duration and it was during the first such period, following the original seizure of Perfeddwlad by the Normans, that Llywelyn ap Iorwerth became the first Welsh benefactor of the abbey.

Following the death of Ranulf II in 1153 the recovery of Tegeingl became the primary focus of the ambitions of Llywelyn's grandfather, Owain Gwynedd, and he eventually succeeded in achieving this objective after the failure of Henry II's final military expedition into Wales in 1165. This event, described by Sir John Lloyd as 'the grave of [Henry's] Welsh ambitions',<sup>28</sup> handed the initiative back to the Welsh princes and enabled Owain not simply to secure control of Perfeddwlad but also to exact a settlement from Henry that marked the beginning of an extended period of Welsh occupation during which it was assimilated both culturally and territorially into Gwynedd.

It was not until he had defeated his uncle, Dafydd ab Owain, in 1194 that Llywelyn ap Iorwerth became the undisputed ruler of Perfeddwlad, but

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 273-4, no. 275.

<sup>28</sup> J.E.Lloyd, *The History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (London : Longmans, Green, 1911) vol. 2, p. 558.

apart from a brief interruption between August 1211 and 1213, when he was forced to quitclaim the area to King John but was able to retrieve it soon afterwards, it remained under his control until his death in 1240. The benefactions Llywelyn made to the abbey began with a charter datable to 1194 x October 1202, referred to in an *inspeximus* of Edward I, in which he confirmed all the gifts of his predecessors, the site of the abbey with the mill before the gate, the land before the gate given by Ranulf (i.e. Ranulf II) and his brother Eneas, the land which Maredudd Wawer had in Holywell and the field in that township and the manor of Fulbrook with all its appurtenances, and made new grants to the abbey of common pasture in the mountains and of the properties known as *Hauotdeleweth* and *Creigrافت* (neither of which have been identified) with all their appurtenances.<sup>29</sup>

The other gifts Llywelyn made to the abbey were: a confirmation of all his lands at Mostyn, which lay in Tegeingl (together with a grant of osiers for making houses and hedges), in a charter issued at some point between 1194 and his death<sup>30</sup>; a grant, within the same time frame, of land and pasture at Gelli, which also lay in Tegeingl, to the west of the abbey in the parish of Whitford, and formed the basis of the monks' township of Tre'rabad;<sup>31</sup> and a grant of the church of Holywell, the date of which was probably no earlier than c.June 1196 and no later than c.October 1202.<sup>32</sup> The church of Holywell had been given to St. Werburgh's Abbey, Chester, in the early years of the twelfth century but had been included in Robert Pierrepont's gift of Holywell to Basingwerk already mentioned above. Earl Hugh of

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<sup>29</sup> *AWR*, pp. 344-5, no. 213.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.345, no. 214, mentioned in an *inspeximus* of Edward III. The date of the charter may have been at any time from 1194 to Llywelyn's death in 1240 apart from the period during which Perfeddwlad was quitclaimed to King John.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 345-6, no. 215, mentioned in a confirmation of Llywelyn's son, Dafydd ap Llywelyn, the date of which, like that of the previous charter, cannot be pinpointed.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 346-7, no. 216, mentioned in a contemporary enrolment of a letter reciting the charter presented in legal proceedings on behalf of Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1305.

Chester (1153-1181) granted the church a second time to St. Werburgh's in a charter, which has been dated between 1157 and 1166, apparently intended as an act of restitution.<sup>33</sup> Llywelyn's charter was therefore presumably intended to restore it to Basingwerk.

The charters in favour of Basingwerk issued by Ranulf III of Chester and Llywelyn ap Iorwerth reveal that an earl of Chester and a native Welsh prince of the ruling dynasty of Gwynedd were making benefactions to Basingwerk, and that the abbey was therefore regarded by both sides to the conflict as worthy of their support, roughly contemporaneously,<sup>34</sup> although it is probable that Ranulf III's charter was the earlier of the two and that Llywelyn ap Iorwerth had assumed the patronage of the abbey between its issue and the issue of his own charter.

There is likely to have been more than one reason for Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's patronage of the abbey. The monks would certainly have been eager to ensure that he committed himself to honour the endowments that had been made to their abbey before he became its patron, and one can well imagine them making representations to him to that effect. His first charter in favour of Basingwerk was therefore a confirmation of the gifts of his Anglo-Norman and Welsh predecessors, including those of its founder, Ranulf II of Chester, as well as a grant of further lands to the abbey.

But the context in which the charter was issued suggest that it was probably also designed to achieve a political purpose. Llywelyn had finally achieved the long-standing ambition of the princes of Gwynedd of recovering control of Perfeddwlad and the charter can therefore be seen as a

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<sup>33</sup> *Chester Charters*, p. 148.

<sup>34</sup> As previously stated Ranulf III's charter has been dated 1194 x 1204 and two of Llywelyn's charters have been dated 1194 x August 1202 and c. June 1196 x c. October 1202 respectively.

declaration that it was he who now held the overlordship and advowson of Basingwerk, and had ousted the earl of Chester from that position by dint of his reconquest of the territory in which the abbey lay, and as Wales was for Llywelyn an autonomous kingdom, not a feudal honour or liberty like the earldom of Chester, and he considered his position *vis à vis* the English crown to be equal in status to that of the king of Scotland,<sup>35</sup> it can also be seen an assertion by the house of Gwynedd of what he would certainly have regarded as its rightful dominion over a territory which had been illicitly seized from it by force of arms by the earls of Chester. A precedent for his actions had been set many years earlier by his cousin, the Lord Rhys, when he assumed the patronage of Whitland and Strata Florida after re-establishing control of the kingdom of Deheubarth.

It is also entirely credible in Llywelyn's case that this political objective was combined with motives of a genuinely spiritual nature for issuing the charter. By the time it was issued he had already made his affinity with the Cistercians clear as a result of his endowment of Aberconwy and subsequently underlined it more than once, not least, as we have seen, by making a series of additional gifts to Basingwerk.<sup>36</sup> He was also patron of a number of priories of Augustinian canons within his own principality and at Haughmond in Shropshire.<sup>37</sup> But that is not to say that he was above exploiting his position for entirely worldly purposes if the need or opportunity arose, as he did for example in the case of his annual demand of a food render from the abbey sufficient to provide victuals for a hunting party of 300 men.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ceri W. Lewis, 'The treaty of Woodstock, 1247 : Its Background and Significance', in *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 2, no. 1 (1964), pp. 37-65 at p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> He also issued a confirmatory charter in favour of Cymer Abbey in 1209, apparently at the request of the monks (*AWR*, pp. 378-384, no. 229).

<sup>37</sup> *AWR*, pp. 374-5, no. 225; pp. 376-7, no. 226; p. 377, no. 227; pp. 422-3, no. 258.

<sup>38</sup> David H. Williams, 'Basingwerk Abbey', *Cistercian Commentarii Cistercienses*, 32 (1981), p. 92.

It was not only from the house of Gwynedd that Basingwerk was able to attract support from the Welsh ruling élite. Five charters in total were issued in favour of the abbey in the period on or between c.1186 and August 1202 by Owain ap Madog (known by the sobriquet of Owain Brogyntyn), the lord of Penllyn and Edeirnion in northern Powys, and his brother, Elise ap Madog, two of the sons of Madog ap Maredudd, the last ruler of Powys before it was permanently partitioned on his death.<sup>39</sup>

The substantial pasture lands and other rights given to the abbey by Owain Brogyntyn and Elise were all in Penllyn, a commote of northern Powys which lay adjacent to Gwynedd, whose princes had long harboured ambitions to expand into the area.<sup>40</sup> These ambitions were realised in August 1202 when it was annexed by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, and from that point onward it remained under the control of Gwynedd until the Edwardian Conquest.<sup>41</sup>

Owain Brogyntyn's gifts to Basingwerk were of 'the whole of the township of Gwernhefin with the men of that township', which lay near the south-western extremity of Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake), and of various other pastures and places in broadly the same vicinity;<sup>42</sup> of land at *Kenereu* in Penllyn held of him by Rhys Crach and common of pasture;<sup>43</sup> of pasture rights in defined areas of, and common pasture throughout, Penllyn;<sup>44</sup> and of water rights in Llyn Tegid and various other easements and rights in Penllyn.<sup>45</sup> The sole charter by Elise ap Madog in favour of the abbey was a

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<sup>39</sup> *AWR*, p. 685, no. 486; pp. 688-9, no. 492; pp. 689-90, no. 493; pp. 690-1, no. 494; pp. 691-2, no. 495.

<sup>40</sup> *Age of Conquest*, p. 231.

<sup>41</sup> *AWR*, pp. 37 and 684.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 688-9, no. 492.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 689-90, no. 493.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 690-1, no. 494.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 691-2, no. 495.



confirmation of Owain's grant of Gwernhefin.<sup>46</sup> One may speculate whether the making of these gifts was influenced in some way by the impending subjection of their territory to the suzerainty of the princes of Gwynedd, the threat of which had certainly existed for many years before it became a reality, in other words whether it may have been a preemptive move designed to deny the territory given to the monks to their political enemies, but there is no evidence to support this as a possible explanation.

Two further charters in favour of Basingwerk issued by members of the ruling dynasty of Gwynedd other than Llywelyn ap Iorwerth are extant. One is a grant and confirmation by Dafydd ap Llywelyn, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's son and heir, dated 25 July 1240, in which Dafydd confirmed the various grants and confirmations made by his father, by Owain Brogyntyn and by Elise ap Madog and granted the abbey immunity from toll throughout his land and sea and tithes of fish caught in the fisheries of Rhuddlan;<sup>47</sup> the other is a confirmation by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth's grandson, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, dated 8 April 1247 confirming all the grants made by his grandfather, his uncle Dafydd ap Llywelyn, Elise ap Madog and Owain Brogyntyn.<sup>48</sup> The confirmations of the grants of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and the princes of northern Powys to the abbey contained in them were possibly intended as renewed declarations by the generations that succeeded Llywelyn ap Iorwerth of their dominion over Perfeddwlad and their overlordship and ownership of the advowson of Basingwerk.

Concrete evidence also exists in the case of Basingwerk of the monks having been entrusted by both the ruling dynasty of Gwynedd and the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 685, no. 486.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 460-1, no. 292.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 492-4, no. 321.

English crown to act in a supporting role in connection with the conduct of negotiations between them and for other purposes during the reign of King Henry III.

In August 1241 Henry launched from Chester what proved to be an extremely brief but devastatingly successful campaign against Dafydd ap Llywelyn which resulted in Dafydd's comprehensive defeat. A few days later, on 29 August, an agreement was concluded between Henry and Dafydd at Gwerneigrön, near Rhuddlan, and confirmed in London later in the year, imposing humiliating surrender terms on Dafydd including the relinquishment 'for ever' of Tegeingl to the king and his heirs.<sup>49</sup> In the weeks preceding the agreement the king is recorded first, on 19 August while still at Chester, as having conferred upon the abbot of Basingwerk power to conduct the bishop of St. Asaph and Master David, Dafydd ap Llywelyn's clerk, to the grange of *La Lith* 'to speak with those of the king's council whom they will',<sup>50</sup> and then, just over a week later, on 27 August, while Henry was encamped at Rhuddlan, as having given to a brother Gregory of Basingwerk power to conduct to Rhuddlan the harness of the Bishop of Bangor.<sup>51</sup>

The services of the abbot of Basingwerk were also utilised by Henry in the aftermath of Dafydd ap Llywelyn's death in 1246 while leading a Welsh revolt. On this occasion the abbot was deputed to receive Dafydd's widow, Isabella, who had temporarily been held prisoner at Diserth Castle, and to

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264. Royal control of Tegeingl was maintained until the whole of Perfeddwlad was overrun by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, and it was while it was under his control, in 1245, that King Henry III confirmed a gift made to Basingwerk by Henry II of 10 librates of land at Longendale and of the church at Glossop, Derbyshire (*Cal. Rot. Chart.*, 1226-1257, p.289).

<sup>50</sup> *Cal. Pat.*, Vol. III, 1232-47, p.257.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.258.

accompany her ‘in his own person’ to Godstow Abbey where she was to ‘live honourably’.<sup>52</sup>

A decade later it was Llywelyn ap Gruffudd who turned to the abbot of Basingwerk for assistance in making overtures to Henry III. Llywelyn had become undisputed ruler of Gwynedd in 1255 by defeating his brothers in the battle of Bryn Derwin, and in November 1256 he had expelled the English from most of Perfeddwlad. In a letter from Henry III to Llywelyn, dated January 1257, Henry acknowledged a letter from Llywelyn that had been carried to him at Merton by the abbot of Basingwerk, requesting a way to be opened by which Llywelyn could be reconciled with the king and receive his grace.<sup>53</sup>

The surviving documentary records relating to Basingwerk Abbey therefore show that there was a clear correlation between the pendulum swings in political and military fortunes in Perfeddwlad and patronage of the abbey, and that whereas it probably had distinct political overtones initially, a genuinely reciprocal relationship probably ensued between the abbey and both the earls of Chester and, subsequently, the ruling dynasty of Gwynedd which, in the latter case, continued up to the Edwardian Conquest. No records are extant indicating that the abbey received endowments from Welsh benefactors other than the princes of Gwynedd and the lords of the northern commotes of Powys.

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<sup>52</sup> *CR*, Vol. V, 1242-7, p. 415; Williams, ‘Basingwerk Abbey’, p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. X, 1256-59, p. 115.

## Chapter 2

### The Cistercians in Glamorgan and Morgannwg - Neath and Margam Abbeys

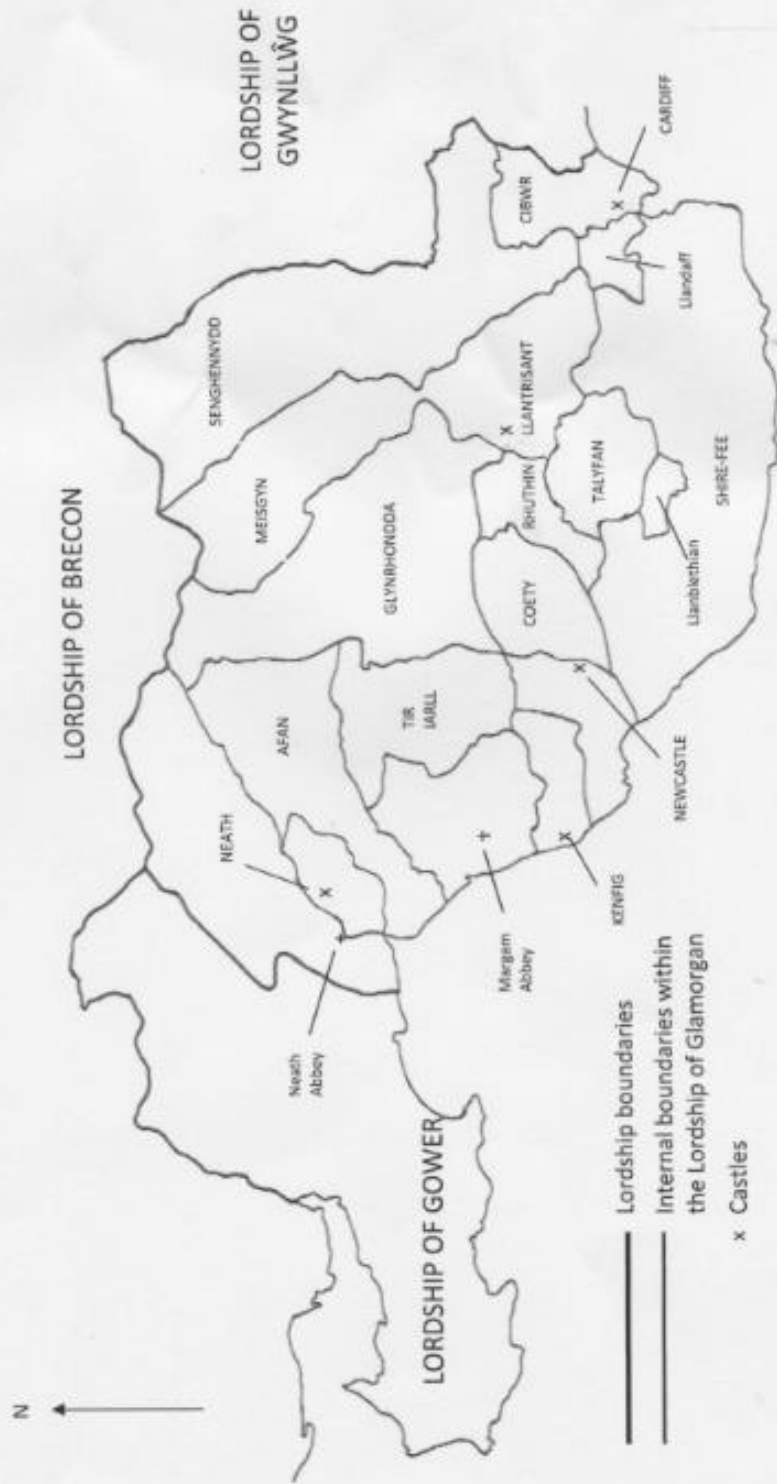
Neath and Margam Abbeys succeeded in expanding their patrimonies substantially during the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Anglo-Norman seigneurial and knightly donors played a major part in this process, but the source material relating to Margam provides copious evidence showing that the native dynasties that continued to hold sway in the north and west of the lordship of Glamorgan also became regular benefactors of the abbey before the end of the twelfth century and in the first half of the thirteenth. Although much of the documentary evidence relating to Neath has been lost sufficient material has survived to show that members of one of these dynasties were also its benefactors during the same period. Both abbeys also received benefactions from the section of native Welsh society that ranked next to the ruling dynasties, the *uchelwyr* or freemen.

The Welsh petty kingdom of Morgannwg was overrun in the closing years of the eleventh century by a Norman force led by Robert fitz Hamo (d. 1107), a friend and supporter of William Rufus. It was superseded, within approximately the same boundaries,<sup>54</sup> by the Marcher lordship of Glamorgan, but the fact that it remained the norm some two hundred years later to refer to the lordship as that of Glamorgan and Morgannwg,<sup>55</sup> was symptomatic of the persistence throughout most of the intervening period of a dichotomy within the lordship of areas in which Norman

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<sup>54</sup> With the exception of the manor of Kilvey, which although situated on the east bank of the Tawe formed part of the adjoining Marcher lordship of Gower.

<sup>55</sup> J.B. Smith, 'The Kingdom of Morgannwg and the Norman Conquest of Glamorgan', in *GCH*, pp. 1-43, p. 16.



**THE MARCHER LORDSHIP OF GLAMORGAN**  
 (Adapted from: Glamorgan County History, Vol. III, The Middle Ages, ed. T. B. Pugh)

control was firmly entrenched and those in which Norman overlordship was scarcely more than titular.<sup>56</sup>

Morgannwg had extended from the river Tawe in the west to the river Rhymni in the east and from the hills of Blaenau Morgannwg in the northern half of the kingdom to the lowland coastal plateau of Bro Morgannwg in the south, but the territory the Normans initially occupied and exploited directly had been confined to the fertile coastal lowlands between the Ogmere and the Rhymni.

The conquest of this area, which was parcelled into demesne land, mesne lordships, knight's fees and castleries and organised along similar lines to an English county, and became known as the *comitatus* or shire-fee, was reinforced by substantial colonization primarily by English and Flemish settlers.<sup>57</sup> Further territory was later brought under the firm control of the Normans to the west and the north of the shire-fee and temporarily in the area between the Tawe and the Neath, but outside these areas and the shire-fee itself, and particularly in the major part of Blaenau Morgannwg, throughout the twelfth century and for much of the thirteenth Norman authority was barely acknowledged.

In the second half of the twelfth century the uplands between the Neath and the Rhymni comprised the adjoining commotal member lordships of Afan, Glynrhondda, Meisgyn (Miskin) and Senghennydd. These were held by members of two indigenous Welsh dynasties 'with royal liberty', signifying that the authority of the lord of Glamorgan, although formally conceded, was notional rather than actual.<sup>58</sup> Grandsons of Iestyn ap Gwrgant (d. by

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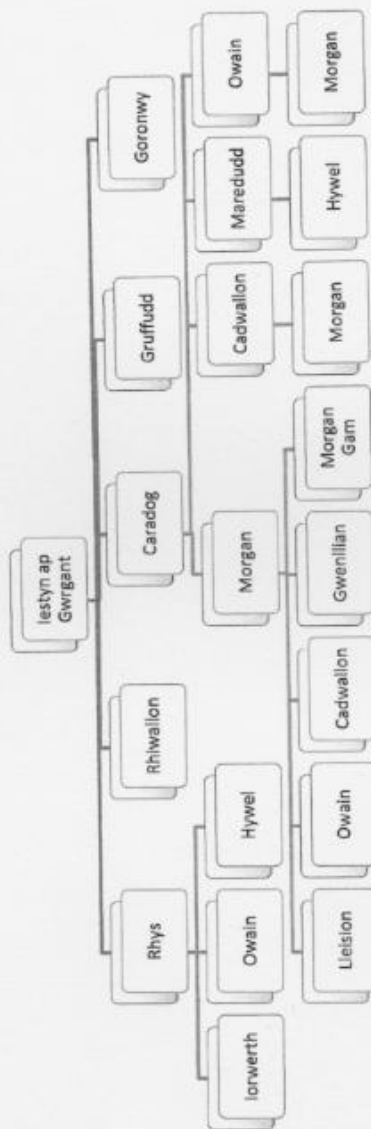
<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16; *Age of Conquest*, p. 96.

<sup>57</sup> *Age of Conquest*, pp. 97-100.

<sup>58</sup> Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p. 29; *Age of Conquest*, p. 96.

### The Descendants of Iestyn ap Gwrgant

(Taken from *The Acts of Welsh Rulers, 1120-1283*, ed. Huw Pryce with the assistance of Charles Insley (Cardiff: University of Wales, Press, 2005)



1127), who had probably gained ascendancy in all or most of Morgannwg immediately prior to the Norman invasion<sup>59</sup>, and whose son, Caradog, had ruled most of the uplands between the Neath and the Taff,<sup>60</sup> held three of the four member lordships: Afan was held by the eldest of the brothers, Morgan ap Caradog (d. c.1208), who also appears to have exercised overlordship over his siblings; Glynrhondda by Cadwallon ap Caradog (d. by Oct. 1191); and Meisgyn by Maredudd ap Caradog (d. 1211). Senghennydd, the lordship between the upper reaches of the Taff and the Rhymni, was held by the lineage of Ifor ap Meurig, better known by his nickname, Ifor Bach (*fl.* 1158; d. by c.1174).

### *The Foundation of Neath and Margam Abbeys*

The relationship between the Welsh dynasties and the Anglo-Norman intruders and their followers was one of mutual enmity and hatred, tempered to a degree as a result of the necessity of having to co-exist in close proximity,<sup>61</sup> and the examples throughout the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth of the fierce resistance of both dynasties to the Anglo-Normans in Glamorgan are legion.<sup>62</sup> Neath and Margam abbeys were founded in 1130 and 1147 respectively. The conventual buildings lay some ten miles apart, separated by the Welsh member lordship of Afan, in

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<sup>59</sup> Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', pp. 7-9; *Age of Conquest*, p. 59.

<sup>60</sup> The exception was the hill country granted to Margam Abbey by the earls of Gloucester as part of its original patrimony (Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', pp. 25-6.)

<sup>61</sup> *Age of Conquest*, pp. 100-1.

<sup>62</sup> In the twelfth century, for example, two of Iestyn ap Gwrgant's sons, Rhys and Rhiwallon, are said to have concluded a settlement 'pro bonis pacis' with Richard de Granville, probably in 1136 (*Rice Merrick*, pp. 39, 54, 108-9; *AWR*, p. 257); in 1158 Ifor Bach of Senghennydd famously kidnapped earl William of Gloucester, his wife and daughter in a raid on the earl's *caput* at Cardiff; and later in the century Morgan ap Caradog rebelled against earl William (Smith, J. B., 'The Lordship of Glamorgan', *Morgannwg*, Vol. 2 (1958), pp. 9-37, p. 23) and he and Gruffudd, the son of Ifor Bach, are recorded in *Brut Y Tywysogyon* as having been among the Welsh lords who had opposed King Henry II and who accompanied Rhys ap Gruffudd of Deheubarth, the Lord Rhys, to a royal council at Gloucester in 1175 (Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p. 34); and in 1183-4, in the period following the death of earl William, a major offensive, almost certainly led by Morgan ap Caradog, was mounted by the Welsh against Neath, Newcastle and Kenfig in particular as well as other Glamorgan strongholds, and as a result of which Morgan appears to have been enfeoffed with the fee of Newcastle (Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', pp. 37-9).



the narrow plain that skirted the coastline in the extreme west of the lordship of Glamorgan in territory hostile to the Normans, and deliverance from the penalties for their sins was probably not the uppermost consideration in the minds of their founders when they decided to endow the monks of Savigny and Clairvaux.

Neath's founder, Richard de Granville, a vassal of Robert, earl of Gloucester, the lord of Glamorgan (d. 1147), had established himself in the western extremity of the lordship in the territory between the adjoining lordship of Gower and the river Neath. By initially granting to Savigny<sup>63</sup> all the waste land between the Neath, Tawe, Clydach and Pwllcynan<sup>64</sup> and subsequently all the land that lay between the Tawe and the Neath, including the site of his castle,<sup>65</sup> de Granville in effect relinquished his member lordship of the territory, and did so with the approval of Robert of Gloucester who was a signatory to the abbey's foundation charter.

A number of reasons have been put forward for his decision to cede his lands to a religious house,<sup>66</sup> but whatever else may have persuaded him to do so defensive considerations must have played at least some part in it and they were probably the overriding factor. The fundamental goal of Norman territorial expansion was to gain control of economically valuable land that could be exploited profitably, but the terrain de Granville granted to the monks was unsuitable for the kind of intensive agricultural exploitation that

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<sup>63</sup> As already pointed out in relation to Basingwerk, the endowment of the Congregation of Savigny was popular among the Anglo-Norman baronage during this period, probably because it had received the seal of approval of a prominent courtier of King Henry I in the person of the later King Stephen.

<sup>64</sup> The original foundation charter is preserved in West Glamorgan Archives, Swansea (Ref. A/N 1); *Cartae*, i 74-5 (no. 67).

<sup>65</sup> Two subsidiary charters issued at about the same time as the foundation charter are referred to in an *inspeximus* and confirmation charter of 24 June 1468 issued by Richard, Earl of Warwick (*Cartae*, v 1677-90 (no. 1220)).

<sup>66</sup> One is that de Granville was requested to found the abbey by his dying, childless wife, Constance (*Rice Merrick*, p. 53); another that he was moved to do so by the prospect of dying without an heir (Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p.24).

they and their camp-followers prized most highly. It is therefore probable that a military rather than an economic objective lay primarily behind de Granville's occupation of the district.<sup>67</sup> The fact that it was strategically important to the Normans was underlined by the construction of a second castle by the earl of Gloucester in a portion of the lordship of Afan he had annexed on the opposite bank of the river Neath from de Granville's castle, that was probably completed at about the same time as de Granville's.<sup>68</sup>

The population of the territory de Granville withdrew from, like that of lowland Glamorgan as a whole, remained predominantly Welsh,<sup>69</sup> its western boundary was shared with areas of the lordship of Gower in which Norman authority was nominal<sup>70</sup> and it was bounded in the east by Morgan ap Caradog's lordship of Afan. Its abandonment would therefore have given rise to a potential security threat on the west flank of the lordship, and it can be reasonably assumed that de Granville and Robert of Gloucester would have preferred what was in any event land of predominantly low agricultural value from which they would have derived little revenue to be transferred to the monks of the burgeoning Norman Congregation of Savigny, upon whose loyalty they could rely, than simply allowing it to fall into the hands of the Welsh.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', pp. 23-4.

<sup>68</sup> David Lewis, 'Notes on the Charters of Neath Abbey', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, Fifth Series Vol. IV No. XIV April 1887, pp. 86-115, pp. 92-3; The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan. Volume III - Part 1a: Medieval Secular Monuments. The Early Castles from the Norman Conquest to 1217* (London: HMSO, 1991), p.136.

<sup>69</sup> *Age of Conquest*, p. 273.

<sup>70</sup> J.B. Smith and T.B. Pugh, 'The Lordship of Gower and Kilvey', in *GCH*, Vol. III., pp. 203-83, p.213.

<sup>71</sup> A strategy that seems to have worked at least to some degree, since as has been pointed out (Lewis, 'Notes', pp. 98-9), despite the twelfth century being a turbulent period in the history of Glamorgan, the absence of any entries relating to Neath Abbey in the *Annals of Margam* during this period suggests that the monks may have been allowed to pursue their devotions peaceably by the Welsh.

Margam was founded by Robert of Gloucester himself in a district which may at one time have been held as a Welsh member lordship by Owen ap Caradog, a fourth son of Caradog ap Iestyn, but which Robert had incorporated as an addition to his demesne land after Owain had been killed by his brother, Cadwallon. The abbey's foundation charter has not survived, but details of it are preserved in an *inspeximus* of Earl Hugh Despenser of 1338.<sup>72</sup> In it Robert granted to the monks of Clairvaux all the land between the Kenfig and the Afan 'from the brow of the mountain, as the aforesaid waters descend from the mountains to the sea, in wood and in plain' together with his Afan fisheries for founding an abbey.<sup>73</sup>

Margam's foundation may have been occasioned by similar considerations to those which were probably the main reason for the foundation of Neath. Its original endowment, like that of Neath, was located in a frontier zone that had retained its Welsh population. In the west it was bounded by the lordship of Afan, and in the east it lay immediately outside the *territoria* of Kenfig and Newcastle, which together formed an extension of the shire-fee beyond the river Ogmore that had been colonized and encastellated, probably during Earl Robert's day, as a first line of defence on its western flank.<sup>74</sup> The transfer of tract of land granted to the Cistercians would not have resulted in a significant loss of revenue as it was not of the highest quality agriculturally and most of it was unsuitable for the wheat

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<sup>72</sup> *Cartae*, iv 1213-4 (no. 968).

<sup>73</sup> Whether the 'brow' referred to in the description of the abbey's original endowment was intended to be the higher brow of the hills at the source of the Kenfig as opposed to the lower brow immediately overlooking the abbey appears to have given rise to a dispute later in the twelfth century between the abbey and Robert of Gloucester's son, Earl William, a dispute which was apparently resolved when Earl William notified his sheriff, barons and men in a charter within the date range 1147 x 1166 that he had granted the land between the lower brow and the higher brow to his son, Robert, and that his son had granted it to Margam (*Cartae*, i 147 (no. 148)).

<sup>74</sup> Smith, 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', pp. 31-2.

production to which the Normans and the settlers they encouraged into the areas they had conquered attached the highest value.<sup>75</sup>

The earl of Gloucester is unlikely, for this reason, to have had any inclination to attempt to colonize and garrison it on a permanent basis and it was vulnerable to offensive action by the Welsh, a threat which may have been heightened as a result of Welsh resettlement in the surrounding area during the chaotic conditions that prevailed during the reign of King Stephen.<sup>76</sup> Any prospective patron of a Cistercian foundation would also have known that he could be confident that the White Monks would impose a regime of rigorous estate management on their patrimony and that, as the Cistercians were ideologically committed to the direct exploitation of their lands, this would include over time the clearance of its potentially troublesome Welsh tenantry, whether bond, customary or free, and these factors are likely to have been among those that prompted him to convey the site to the monks of Clairvaux.

Robert of Gloucester's decision to found a Cistercian abbey would also have been in keeping with the fashion of the day. At the time of Margam's foundation the Cistercian Order was not only renowned for its commitment to simplicity and austerity, but it had reached the zenith of its prestige during St. Bernard's tenure of the abbacy of Clairvaux. Robert, as leader of the Angevin cause against King Stephen, may even have intended the foundation of Margam as a gesture of appeasement towards Bernard, whom he had previously offended and who was a potentially powerful ally.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> F.G. Cowley, 'Margam Abbey, 1147-1349', Vol. 42 (1998), pp. 8-22, p. 11.

<sup>76</sup> Max Lieberman, *The March of Wales 1067-1300: A Borderland of Medieval Britain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 45.

<sup>77</sup> Cowley, 'Margam Abbey', p. 10.

The net effect of the foundation of Neath and Margam Abbeys by Richard de Granville and Robert of Gloucester from a strategic standpoint, therefore, was that the lands comprised in their endowments effectively became militarily neutral zones interposed between their demesne lands and the Welsh of the surrounding districts and beyond, but over which they retained a hold by virtue of their feudal overlordship and their status as patrons and holders of the abbeys' advowsons.

*Neath Abbey's Benefactions from the Descendants of Iestyn ap Gwrgant*

Much of the charter evidence relating to Neath Abbey has been lost. The Register of Neath, a cartulary which is said to have contained not only copies of the abbey's charters and other documents but an extensive historical commentary and narrative,<sup>78</sup> was extant in the seventeenth century but does not appear to have survived beyond then. What evidence there is of Welsh benefactions is derived second-hand from confirmation charters issued by the crown, the church, successive members of the Anglo-Norman dynasties who exercised seigneurial power in Glamorgan and from historians and antiquaries who had sight of the Register, such as Rice Merrick. Although, compared with Margam, these documentary sources are exiguous, they provide sufficient evidence to suggest that, while local Welsh rulers and freemen undoubtedly became benefactors of the abbey, their benefactions were almost certainly on a far smaller scale than those Margam received from Welsh donors.

In his *Morganiae Archaiographia* Rice Merrick states that the Register of Neath Abbey referred to four sons of Iestyn ap Gwrgant as benefactors of

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<sup>78</sup> Ceri W. Lewis, 'The Literary Tradition of Morgannwg down to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century', in *Glamorgan C. H.*, Vol. III., pp. 449-554, p. 539.

the abbey,<sup>79</sup> but his assertion is not supported by the surviving documents recording Welsh benefactions to the abbey, the most important of which are confirmation charters of King John dated 6 January 1208<sup>80</sup> and King Edward III dated 8 April 1336.<sup>81</sup>

The sole reference in these charters to a benefaction by one of Iestyn's sons is to a grant, which is mentioned in both, by Rhys ab Iestyn (*fl.* c.1130 - c.1140),<sup>82</sup> with the consent of his sons, Iorwerth, Owain and Hywel, of the land and church of Llanilid. Llanilid lay in the lordship of Rhuthin, which was situated immediately to the north of the shire-fee. The date of the charter is uncertain, but it was probably given during the first twenty years of the abbey's existence as the Anglo-Normans are believed to have wrested Rhuthin from Rhys ab Iestyn at some point during the middle years of the twelfth century.<sup>83</sup> It may therefore be the earliest example of an endowment of one of the two Glamorgan abbeys by a member of either of the two Welsh dynasties whose rule persisted in parts of the lordship throughout the twelfth century.

Rice Merrick also mentions a reference in the Register of Neath to a chirograph, likely to be within a similar date range to Rhys ab Iestyn's Llanilid charter,<sup>84</sup> by which he exchanged with the abbey the land known as *Reses Lege* or *Risleg* (possibly located in the upper Neath valley on the east bank of the river at Resolven),<sup>85</sup> which had been given to him by

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<sup>79</sup> *Rice Merrick*, p. 13.

<sup>80</sup> *Rot. Chart.* p. 174; *Cartae*, ii 315-7 (no. 318).

<sup>81</sup> *Cal. Rot. Chart.*, Vol. IV, 10 Edward III Roll No. 131, m. 21.

<sup>82</sup> *AWR*, p. 257, no. 119; *Rice Merrick*, p. 39. Also mentioned in a confirmation charter of Henry of Abergavenny, Bishop of Llandaff (1193-1218), dateable to c.1200 (original preserved in the West Glamorgan Archives, Swansea (Ref. A/N 2)).

<sup>83</sup> Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p. 25.

<sup>84</sup> See *AWR*, p. 257.

<sup>85</sup> The land is identified as the manor of Resolven in *Rice Merrick* pp. 108-9, and therefore as lying between the Neath and the Afan in the lordship of Afan, whereas on p. 39 the land given to Rhys is described as lying between the Neath and the Tawe. Neath Abbey certainly held land in the vicinity of

Richard de Granville as a result of a peace settlement concluded between them probably in 1136,<sup>86</sup> for land in the Tawe valley at Cilybebyll.<sup>87</sup>

In the early years of the following century, in a charter dateable to 1205 x 6 January 1208 which has not survived but which is included in the list of endowments contained in both royal confirmation charters, Morgan ap Caradog, the lord of Afan, granted to Neath several parcels of land and common of pasture between the Afan and the Neath, and all his land between the Afan and the Thaw,<sup>88</sup> a grant whose confirmation by Lleision, Morgan ap Caradog's son,<sup>89</sup> probably issued during the same time frame as, and perhaps contemporaneously with, the original grant in anticipation of him inheriting the lordship of Afan, is also listed.

Apart from two gifts of land to the abbey by *uchelwyr*, regarding which more detail is set out below, the only Welsh donations referred to in the two royal confirmation charters are those relating to Llanilid and those made in the charters issued by Morgan ap Caradog and Lleision ap Morgan, all of which were made prior to the confirmation charter of King John. Although the charter of King Edward III is in part an *in speximus* of King John's charter of confirmation and other charters relating to Neath it also confirms a number of gifts of land to the abbey made by Anglo-Norman donors subsequent to King John's charter. Royal confirmation charters to religious houses were normally solicited, and the transactions to be confirmed in them enumerated, by religious houses themselves, which

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Resolven, as a grant of pasture land there to Margam in the early thirteenth century occasioned a dispute between the two abbeys that was resolved by commissioners appointed by the Abbot of Clairvaux, who apportioned the pasture land between them.

<sup>86</sup> See p. 24, note 62, above.

<sup>87</sup> *Rice Merrick*, pp. 39, 54, 108-9.

<sup>88</sup> *AWR*, p. 273, no. 140 (in a note to this charter Professor Pryce explains why the reference in it to the *Thawi* is likely to have been intended to mean the Thaw rather than the Tawe); *Cartae*, ii. 316 (no. 317).

<sup>89</sup> *AWR*, p. 287, no. 156.; *Cartae*, ii. 316 (no. 318).

would clearly have had every incentive to include all the significant benefactions they had received, and it is therefore a reasonable supposition that the benefactions confirmed in the royal charters issued to Neath represented the main benefactions to the abbey before 6 January 1208 and between then and 1336 respectively,<sup>90</sup> and that this was the sum total of significant gifts made to the abbey by Welsh donors during these periods.<sup>91</sup> Certainly no evidence exists of any new benefactions to Neath by either the descendants of Iestyn ap Gwrgant or *uchelwyr* after Lleision ap Morgan's charter of the first decade of thirteenth century.

Two factors that may well have contributed to this apparent curtailment of Welsh benefactions to Neath Abbey were its geographical proximity to Margam Abbey, which placed it in the position of having to compete with Margam for the attraction of new landed endowments and was the root cause of a number of disputes between the two abbeys, and the fact that Neath, because of dissatisfaction with its Glamorgan patrimony, had at one time planned to transfer to the site of its Somerset grange of Exford, but its plan had been thwarted by the foundation of another Cistercian abbey nearby and it was only following this event that it had been forced to concentrate on expanding its patrimony in south Wales.<sup>92</sup> By this time Margam had probably already succeeded in attracting a number of Welsh benefactions and, crucially, had begun to develop a rapport with Morgan ap

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<sup>90</sup> Although the omission of the benefactions by four of Iestyn ap Gwrgant's sons and the exchange of lands between Rhys ab Iestyn and the abbey that Rice Merrick claimed were referred to in the Register of Neath is perplexing given that he is a generally trustworthy source. Morgan ap Caradog is known in 1205 to have granted Neath pasture of part of his land in the mountains east of the river Neath for a period of two years for financial reasons, a grant which is discussed further below in relation to Margam, but this grant was probably not of sufficient duration to have been enumerated in the royal confirmation charters.

<sup>91</sup> Thus the confirmation charters issued by King John to Margam in 1205 and 1207 (*Cartae*, ii 291-2 (no. 287); ii 307-8 (no.305); ii 308-9 (no.306), ii 310 (no. 309)) appear to have included all the main Welsh benefactions to the abbey.

<sup>92</sup> F.G. Cowley, 'The Church in Medieval Glamorgan', in *GCH*, pp. 87-135, pp. 97-98; Cowley, *Monastic Order*, pp. 75-77. Its change of strategy proved to be highly successful as it secured numerous donations of land from Anglo-Normans benefactors during the course of the thirteenth century in the adjoining Marcher lordship of Gower, the demesne lordship of Kenfig, the member lordship of Coety and in the shire-fee.



Caradog of Afan and to lay the foundations for establishing what proved to be a genuinely reciprocal relationship with him which was the key to further benefactions from Morgan, his children and grandchildren and the *uchelwyr* who still regarded themselves as his vassals.

*Margam Abbey's Benefactions from the Welsh Ruling Dynasties of Afan and Blaenau Morgannwg*

Morgan ap Caradog was possibly the earliest, and was certainly the most prolific, benefactor of Margam among the Welsh rulers who retained control of much of Glamorgan in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, but what could be his first charter in favour of the Cistercians, within the date range 1158 x October 1191, was not a grant to Margam itself but a confirmation issued to Brother Meilyr and the brothers of Pendar, a short-lived Cistercian foundation in the lordship of Senghennydd that was apparently connected in some way with Margam.

In it Morgan confirmed with the consent of his brothers, Cadwallon and Maredudd, a grant to Pendar by Caradog Urbeis of land in Maredudd's lordship of Meisgyn.<sup>93</sup> The earliest date that can be attributed to any of Morgan's charters in favour of Margam is November 1186, so the charter in favour of Pendar may be an early indication that, during the period of approximately forty years that had elapsed since Margam's foundation, he and his brothers had come to regard the Cistercians in a favourable light and had ceased to perceive them as little more than accomplices of the Anglo-Norman intruders. The charter is also significant because Morgan's confirmation of a grant in the lordship of Meisgyn suggests that he was

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<sup>93</sup> *AWR*, pp. 258-9, no. 121.

preeminent among the three brothers in the area of upland Glamorgan ruled by them.<sup>94</sup>

In total Morgan issued twenty charters in favour of Margam between 1186 and his death in c.1208, the dates of most of which, as in the case of the Pendar charter, cannot be determined precisely. His endowments to the abbey therefore commenced at least forty years after it was founded. Sixteen of his charters granted land or pasture rights to the abbey,<sup>95</sup> three were confirmations of grants of land made to it by his vassals<sup>96</sup> and one was a notification that one of his subordinates had quitclaimed land he had previously claimed from the monks.<sup>97</sup> As one would expect, Morgan's endowments to the abbey were located mainly within his own lordship of Afan (eight charters), but a significant number related to land in the fee of Newcastle (six charters), which he had been granted by John of Mortain<sup>98</sup> as part of the settlement which followed a large-scale uprising in south Wales led by the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth in which Morgan had been a major participant.<sup>99</sup> The two remaining charters he issued to Margam reflected the convoluted settlement pattern then existing in both the shire-fee and other parts of Glamorgan as a result of which colonizers and native Welsh often owned land adjacent to, and frequently lived side by side with, one another.<sup>100</sup> In one he granted to the abbey a meadow in the marsh of

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<sup>94</sup> Morgan's confirmation charter was probably preceded by a charter of Gruffudd ab Ifor ap Meurig of Senghennydd, within the date range 1158 x c.1174, granting lands in northern Senghennydd 'for the making of a hermitage or abbey', presumably at Pendar.

<sup>95</sup> *AWR*, pp. 259-60, no. 122; pp. 265-6, no. 131; pp. 266-7, no. 132; p. 267, no. 133; p. 268, no. 134; p. 269, no. 135; pp. 269-70, no. 136; pp. 270-1, no. 137; pp. 271-2, no. 138; pp.272-3, no. 139; pp. 274-5, no. 142; pp. 275-6, no. 143; pp. 276-7, no. 144; pp. 277-8, no. 145; p. 278, no 146; p. 280, no. 148.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262, no. 127; pp. 262-3, no. 128; pp. 264-5, no. 130.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260, no. 123.

<sup>98</sup> Prince John having become the de facto lord of Glamorgan following the death without male issue of Earl William of Gloucester, his father-in-law, in 1183.

<sup>99</sup> Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', pp. 37-8.

<sup>100</sup> See Matthew Griffiths, 'Native Society on the Anglo-Norman Frontier: The Evidence of the Margam Charters', *Welsh History Review*, 14 (1988-9), pp. 179-216, pp. 208-213.

Afan (which lay to the south-east of the Afan estuary <sup>101</sup> and therefore formed part the original patrimony granted to Margam by Robert of Gloucester), and in the other the land of *Pultimor* in the vicinity of Llanfeuthin, near Llancarfan in the shire-fee.

There is firm evidence among the Margam charters that Morgan ap Caradog experienced financial difficulties and was not above indulging in double dealing in order to alleviate them. In a letter patent within the date range 25th March 1205 x 28th May 1208, written by him in connection with a dispute between Margam and Neath over pasture rights in the area between the rivers Neath and Afan, he admitted that almost thirty years previously he had granted Margam common pasture rights and easements over his land but that in 1205, ‘overcome by greed on account of poverty’, he had granted part of the same pasture to Neath.<sup>102</sup> Morgan’s shortage of money appears to have been persistent, certainly during the final decade of his life, and his grants to Margam during this period show that he frequently availed himself of the abbey’s convenient proximity as a source of ready cash, which given that the abbey does not appear to have been the recipient of many bequests or money donations was presumably derived from the profits of its agricultural production.

Although virtually all of the sixteen charters granting lands and pasture rights to the abbey identified above were expressed to have been made ‘in perpetuam elemosinam’ or similar wording, and under the terms of six of

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<sup>101</sup> *AWR*, pp. 276-7, no. 144; Walter de Gray Birch, *A History of Margam Abbey* (London, 1897), p. 385.

<sup>102</sup> *AWR*, pp. 273-4, no. 141. A second letter was written by Morgan addressed to ‘the father abbots and monks of the Cistercian order’, clearly intended to be put before the abbots appointed to adjudicate upon the dispute between Margam and Neath, also stating that he had granted pasture rights first to Margam and then to Neath but adding that the grant to Neath had been for a period of two years only and that the expiration of the two year period was imminent (*Ibid.*, pp. 279-80, no. 147).

them Morgan received no financial return from the abbey,<sup>103</sup> the remaining ten, within the date range 1199 x 1208, were in return for a money consideration in the form of an annual render, a considerable proportion of which the abbey was more often than not required to pay Morgan advance.<sup>104</sup> For example, a charter issued shortly after 29th September 1199 in which Morgan granted to Margam three coastal meadows located to the west of the Afan estuary records that an annual render of 1 silver mark was to be payable by the abbey for the meadows and that Morgan had received five years' render in advance;<sup>105</sup> another charter of approximately the same date granting the abbey land adjacent to *Pultscathan*, which was near to the coast west of the Afan, in return for a render of 5 shillings records an advance payment by the abbey of £10 and 16 pence;<sup>106</sup> and a charter issued shortly after September 1200 granting the abbey a second parcel of land adjacent to *Pultscathan* Morgan is recorded as having received another advance payment of £10 and 16 pence in respect of the annual render of 5 shillings payable for the land.<sup>107</sup>

It can be inferred from the first of these three charters that the abbey was concerned that these exactions might place an undue burden on its finances if they were allowed to continue without restriction, as Morgan was required, presumably at the abbey's behest, to stipulate that he would require payments of no more than three years' render in advance in future.

Among the six charters in which Morgan granted lands to Margam without apparently receiving any financial benefit is one that was made near the

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 265-6, no. 131; p. 269, no. 135; pp. 270-1, no. 137; pp. 271-2, no. 138; pp.272-3, no. 139; p. 278, no 146.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 259-60, no. 122; pp. 266-7, no. 132; p. 267, no. 133;. p. 268, no. 134; pp. 269-70, no. 136; pp. 274-5, no. 142; pp. 275-6, no. 143; pp. 276-7, no. 144; pp. 277-8, no. 145; p. 280, no. 148.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267, no. 133.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268, no. 134.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*,pp. 269-70, no. 136.

end of his life and in contemplation of his death. This was a grant of fifty acres he made to the abbey in the fee of Newcastle in a charter datable to 1203 x c. 1208 which he affirmed had been made for the souls of his mother and father and of all his ancestors for his own salvation when he ‘gave himself to Margam in the hands of Abbot Gilbert’, and which went on to provide that if he died ‘in the secular world’ his body should be buried at Margam. Morgan died in c. 1208 and the wording of this charter suggests that he may have decided either to spend his last years in the monastic community and perhaps even to take the monastic habit *ad succurendum*.<sup>108</sup>

There is also a charter within the date range October 1205 x c. 1208 relating to land which formerly belonged to Walter Lacheles in the fee of Newcastle, which at least partly charitable in intent. In it Morgan granted the land to Margam for an annual render of 2 shillings and granted 6 shillings and 4 pence, representing the balance of the render of 8 shillings and 4 pence previously receivable by the Earl of Gloucester for the land, to the abbey for feeding the poor on Maundy Thursday.<sup>109</sup>

Viewed as a whole this evidence suggests that Morgan had at various times, and sometimes probably had at the same time, economic, spiritual and benevolent motives for his donations to the abbey, and that over a period which may have been in excess of twenty years he and the abbey, between them, built up and maintained a mutually beneficial relationship which, towards the end of Morgan’s life, became a close personal one.

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 272-3, no. 139. The note to this charter in *AWR* mentions the possibility that the reference in it to Morgan having ‘[given] himself to Margam in the hands of Abbot Gilbert’ may have meant that Morgan had ‘become the (feudal) man of’ Abbot Gilbert, but the conditional clause in the succeeding sentence of the charter, which refers to the possibility of Morgan dying ‘in the secular world’ (‘quod si in seculo obiero’), implies that this might not occur and that he might therefore die not in the secular but in the religious world i.e. as a resident of the abbey or as a monk.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 277-8, no. 145.

Morgan ap Caradog's brothers, Cadwallon and Maredudd, were also benefactors of Margam, albeit on a very modest scale compared with him. Cadwallon (d. by October 1191) granted the abbey lands, pastures and easements in his lordship of Glynrhondda in a charter probably dateable to 1186 x 1191,<sup>110</sup> and Maredudd (d. 1211), like Morgan, appears to have developed a close relationship with the abbey as in a charter issued within the date range 1186 x 1199,<sup>111</sup> after stating that he had 'been received into full fraternity' and 'taken the monastery and all its possessions, and especially its grange of Llanfeuthin under his protection', he granted it the right to take timber and fuel and the use of common pasture for the benefit of Llanfeuthin, although Maredudd's gift was not made exclusively for the purpose of receiving spiritual benefits from the abbey as he received a counter-gift of 100 shillings from it.

The next generation of the dynasty of Iestyn ap Gwrgant are also prominent in the Margam charters. Morgan ap Caradog was the father of four sons, Lleision, Owain, Cadwallon and Morgan, and of at least one daughter, Gwenllian. Lleision (d. 1214 x 1217) issued seventeen charters<sup>112</sup> (three jointly with Owain)<sup>113</sup> in favour of the abbey, Owain (*fl.* c.1200 - c.1217) three<sup>114</sup> (in addition to those issued jointly with Lleision), and Cadwallon (*fl.* c.1200 - c.1217) and Gwenllian (*fl.* c.1200 - c.1217) one each.<sup>115</sup> Morgan's immediate successor as lord of Afan was his eldest son, Lleision, the majority of whose charters were confirmations of previous gifts that he, his brother Owain and his father had made to the abbey. A number were issued by him concurrently with charters his father had issued, and in

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 281, no. 149.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 281-2, no. 150.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 282-297, nos. 151-168.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3, no. 151; pp. 290-1, no. 160; p. 291, no. 161.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 298-300, nos. 170-172.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 301-2, no. 173; pp. 297-8, no. 169.

several instances he confirmed gifts of the same lands more than once. The charters reveal that tensions existed between the abbey and Lleision, and to a lesser extent Owain. Several refer to Lleision's claims and complaints against, and exactions from, the abbey and to acts of trespass he and his men had committed both against lands he and his family had previously granted to it and the abbey's animals, and record that he had sworn to relinquish his claims and not to interfere further with the abbey's property.

One example is a charter with the limiting dates 1205 x 1207 in which he quitclaimed 'all his complaints against, and exactions from, the abbey concerning all the lands which its monks [held] from him or his men in his fee' and swore on the holy relics placed on the abbey's high altar that henceforth he would not 'disseise them of any land, plough, sow, weed, reap or remove their lands, mow or plough their meadows, or harm any of their horses or other animals in pastures which they have in his fee on account of any anger or complaint which he has against them';<sup>116</sup> another is a charter issued on or shortly after 6 July 1213 in which, after confirming the previous gifts to the abbey, he stated that he had 'remitted all complaints and exactions at issue between himself and the monks', 'restored to them their land in Newcastle which he [had] unjustly ploughed and sowed' and had 'sworn on the relics of the church of Margam that he [would] faithfully observe all this for ever'.<sup>117</sup>

Like his father before him Lleision exploited his relationship with the abbey in order to obtain cash by securing payments in advance. In a charter dated 1193 x 1199, for example, in return for confirming his father's charter relating to *Pultimor*, near the grange of Llanfeuthin, he

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 287-8, no. 158.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 295, no. 166.

acknowledged receipt of ten years' rent in advance. That this practice caused difficulties for the abbey is exemplified by a charter issued in December 2013 confirming grants of lands in the fee of Newcastle to the abbey made by his father he made a further grant that 'he [would] never in future trouble the monks or their property in order to receive renders in advance from the lands they [held] in the fee of Newcastle nor [would] he receive renders from them for those lands before the term stipulated in their charters'.<sup>118</sup>

Most of Lleision's charters appear to be the culmination of a series of negotiations initiated by the monks aimed at extracting from him acknowledgements of the impropriety of his actions and assurances that they would not be repeated. Despite these strains on their relationships with Margam, however, both he and Owain granted their bodies for burial within the abbey precincts. Owain's own charters, like those of his brother, Cadwallon, and their sister, Gwennllian, were all confirmations of previous gifts.

Morgan ap Morgan, better known as Morgan Gam (d. February 1241), the fourth and probably youngest son of Morgan ap Caradog, exercised sole authority in the lordship Afan from 1217 until his death and was also buried at Margam.<sup>119</sup> The period of his tenure of the lordship was marked by attempts to assert his independence of the earls of Gloucester, to regain his father's preeminent position in the uplands between the Neath and the Taff and to recover Newcastle, which had again been absorbed into the demesne of the lordship of Glamorgan in the decade following his father's

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 295-6, no. 167.

<sup>119</sup> Huw Pryce, 'Patrons and Patronage', p. 85.



death.<sup>120</sup> It was also a time of intermittent warfare which included attacks on Margam itself and on Newcastle, the instigation of which has been ascribed to Morgan Gam.<sup>121</sup>

The eight charters he issued in respect of Margam, like those of his brothers, reflect the sometimes troubled nature of his relationship with the abbey, as he was obliged in a charter dateable to c. 1217 x 1240, for example, to solemnly swear on the relics not to exact any further renders in advance from the monks, commit any violence in or outside their granges, remove their sheep from their pasture or impede the cultivation of their lands in Newcastle even if he should wage war for it.<sup>122</sup> He was nevertheless entrusted, in conjunction with Elias of Radnor, Bishop of Llandaff (1230-1240), to adjudicate upon a dispute between Rhys Goch Fychan and the abbey regarding lands and forest rights in the uplands of the lordship of Ogmere, as evidenced by a charter dated c. April 1234.<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps the most noteworthy of Morgan Gam's charters was one issued in the time frame 1230 x 1241, in which he purported to confirm gifts previously made to the abbey by Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester, in the fee of Newcastle. Control of Newcastle, as noted above, had been lost by Morgan's family a decade or more previously, and in 1228 he had been captured, and for a time imprisoned, by Gilbert. Morgan's charter was issued after the earl's death in 1230, at a time when the lordship of Glamorgan was in royal custody, and Morgan, who had allied himself with Llywelyn ap Iorwerth of Gwynedd, participated in attacks led by Llywelyn

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<sup>120</sup> Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p. 39.

<sup>121</sup> M. Altschul, 'The Lordship of Glamorgan and Morgannwg, 1217-1317' in *GCH*, Vol. III., pp. 45-86, p. 46.

<sup>122</sup> *AWR*, pp. 303-4, no. 175.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 309-11, no. 181.

on Neath and Kenfig castles.<sup>124</sup> As was observed in the case of Basingwerk Abbey, the possession of an abbey's advowson could assume political significance in circumstances in which control of the territory in which the abbey's patrimony was situated was disputed,<sup>125</sup> and Morgan Gam's charter was at the very least a gesture of defiance effectively asserting his entitlement to the fee of Newcastle, and it has been suggested may even have been an indication of his intention to take over the patronage of the abbey.<sup>126</sup>

The remaining members of the dynasty of Iestyn Gwrgant recorded as benefactors of Margam were Morgan ab Owain (*fl.*1183-1246), son of Owain ap Caradog, and Morgan ap Cadwallon (*fl.*1191-1228), son of Cadwallon ap Caradog and his successor as lord of Glynrhondda. Owain's charters all related to the grange of Hafodhalog, which was situated alongside the upper reaches of the river Kenfig, and show that Margam found it necessary to obtain successive charters from him confirming the grant of the same land.<sup>127</sup> In two of them he was obliged to nominate pledges in support of his undertakings, suggesting that he had failed to honour his previous grants. His ultimate charter to the abbey issued in 1246, the year of his death, is described as a 'final concord' and was made in the presence of the bishop of Llandaff. In it he reduced the annual render for which the abbey was liable in respect of Hafodhalog from 20 shillings to 2 shillings 'on account of the enormous damages he [had] inflicted on the horses, cattle, sheep and countless other property of the monks' whose value had been estimated at £153 sterling.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Altschul, 'Lordship of Glamorgan' pp. 47, 49-50.

<sup>125</sup> See pp. 12-13 above.

<sup>126</sup> F.G. Cowley, *The Monastic Order in South Wales, 1066-1349* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1977), p. 197.

<sup>127</sup> Albeit in some cases with slight variations in the terms previously agreed with the abbey.

<sup>128</sup> *AWR*, pp. 316-7, no.187. When this damage occurred is not specified, but Morgan ab Owain is known to have attacked the abbey in 1224 (Smith 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', p. 46).

In Morgan ap Cadwallon's three charters in favour of Margam he confirmed the single grant his father is recorded as having made to the abbey,<sup>129</sup> granted the abbey common pasture throughout his lands in the lordship of Glynrhondda,<sup>130</sup> declared that he had taken the grange of Llangeinor under his protection and warranted that he and his men would defend it against those threatening it.<sup>131</sup>

The impetus for many of the charters of the fractious Welsh lords of Afan, Glynrhondda and Meisgyn must surely have derived from the monks themselves. They were issued at a time when the native dynasties of Glamorgan was seeking to maintain their independence of the Anglo-Normans and to re-establish themselves in areas lost to Anglo-Norman control. In this turbulent period the abbey was clearly seen by some of sons and grandsons of Caradog ab Iestyn as a convenient repository of cash which they could avail themselves of in hard times. They were also sometimes prepared to overlook the benefactions they and their predecessors had made to the abbey when they wished to make use of the its lands and animals, and on occasion to indulge in the wanton destruction of the abbey's crops and livestock. The Cistercians' relationship with them was therefore nothing if not challenging, but in keeping with their ideology, as well as no doubt for understandably pragmatic reasons, they were obliged to seek to resolve conflicts and establish a *modus vivendi* with their neighbours, and the charters in which benefactors who had transgressed announced, in some instances repeatedly, that they acknowledged their wrongdoing, made amends and gave assurances regarding their future

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<sup>129</sup> See p. 38 above.

<sup>130</sup> The earlier of the two charters granting pasture rights was issued before his father's death in anticipation of him inheriting the lordship of Glynrhondda.

<sup>131</sup> *AWR*, pp. 317-20, no.188-90.

conduct towards the abbey were the formal expression of the success of their determined and sustained efforts to do so.

The other native dynasty that ruled in the uplands of Glamorgan, that of Ifor Bach ap Meurig of Senghennydd, also made benefactions to Margam, although on nothing like the scale of the lineage of Iestyn ap Gwrgant. Mention has already been made of the abortive Cistercian foundation of Pendar and its connection with Margam,<sup>132</sup> and what was presumably the original endowment of that foundation, comprising lands in northern Senghennydd, was issued by Ifor Bach's son, Gruffudd ab Ifor (d. 1211), within the dating limits 1158 x c.1174.<sup>133</sup> Gruffudd ab Ifor's only charter directly in favour of Margam, dateable to 1193 x 1211, was a grant of 100 acres of arable land, 12 acres of meadow, common of pasture and fisheries in the river Ely, all in the manor of Leckwith, near Cardiff, and of common of pasture in part of his own lordship.<sup>134</sup> The probability is that, prior to the Norman invasion, Senghennydd had extended to the coast and had therefore included Leckwith, but had been annexed by the lord of Glamorgan as demesne.<sup>135</sup> Gruffudd ap Ifor's charter therefore seems to signify either that he or his predecessors had regained control of it or perhaps that he was simply laying claim to it. The tentative nature of the transaction is revealed by a clause providing that if Gruffudd cannot warrant the land he will give the monks 100 acres of arable and 12 acres of meadow in Senghennydd. The charter also declared that Gruffudd and his mother, Nest, the sister of Rhys ap Gruffudd, lord of Deheubarth, had granted their bodies to Margam wherever they should die.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> See p. 33 above.

<sup>133</sup> *AWR*, pp. 813-4, no. 616. The charter was issued under the hand of brother Meilyr Awenydd, who was presumably the same person as the brother Meilyr referred to in the confirmatory charter issued to him and the brothers of Pendar by Morgan ap Caradog .

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 814-5, no. 617.

<sup>135</sup> Smith, 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', pp. 13, 35.

<sup>136</sup> *AWR*, p. 814-5, no. 617.

What may well be the final charter in favour of Margam during the period under consideration emanating from a member of the two native Glamorgan dynasties, dateable to 1211 x 1256, was issued by Gruffudd ap Ifor's son, Rhys (d.1256) and was a notification that he had taken the abbey under his protection.<sup>137</sup>

Towards the middle of the thirteenth century the de Clare earls of Gloucester were able to extend their control over most of the lordship and bring it under comital control, and Afan and Senghennydd were the only former Welsh commotal member lordships to remain in existence, although their potency as centres of Welsh resistance had been undermined substantially.<sup>138</sup> The lords of Afan submitted to the earl of Gloucester's judicial authority<sup>139</sup> and were increasingly absorbed into Anglo-Norman society, even adopting the pseudo-French surname of d'Avene, and an intriguing question, but unanswerable on the basis of the documentary evidence known to have survived, is whether the long association of their dynasty with the monks of Margam contributed in any way to this example of cultural assimilation.

*The Uchelwyr of Glamorgan and Morgannwg as Benefactors of Neath and Margam*

Both Neath and Margam also received endowments from members of the stratum of native Welsh society immediately beneath the princes and other rulers, the *uchelwyr* or freemen. Although they did not constitute a distinct social class as such the *uchelwyr* shared a sense of identity and pride

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 815, no. 618.

<sup>138</sup> Smith, 'Kingdom of Morgannwg', pp. 51-2.

<sup>139</sup> *Age of Conquest*, p.283.

arising from their status as freemen, and in former times as an aristocratic warrior caste, which carried with it a number of characteristic privileges and duties, among which were their obligations to provide military service and to contribute towards communal renders in support of their lords. Their status was regarded as an expression of their nobility of blood and was entirely dependent on descent and kinship. Nowhere was this more evident than in the context of the ownership of land, which was based upon membership of a *gwely* or *gafael*, an agnatic or patrilineal descent-group,<sup>140</sup> and of the principle of partibility which governed the inheritance of land, by virtue of which it was divisible on death among all the members of the group entitled to inherit, a rule which by the late twelfth century had begun to erode the status of the *uchelwyr* by diminishing the individual shares held by each succeeding generation.<sup>141</sup>

There are only two documented examples of grants made by *uchelwyr* to Neath Abbey. The two royal confirmation charters of King John and King Edward III previously mentioned refer to donations by Roger and Cynwrig, sons of Owain, and by W[r]gan Droyn, the former of all the lands their father had held of Morgan ap Caradog in the marsh of Afan, and the latter of the arable land known as *Lampeder in Cumtioch* (possibly Cwmtwrch in the Tawe valley). The dates of these gifts are unknown apart from the fact that they pre-date King John's confirmation charter of 1208 and, as in the case of endowments by the local Welsh ruling dynasty, there are no recorded examples of further gifts by *uchelwyr* to Neath outside this period.

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<sup>140</sup> Although there clearly were circumstances in which women could acquire rights over land, as in the case of Gwenllian, the daughter of Morgan ap Caradog, referred to above, and Thatherech, the daughter of Ketherech ap John Ddu, referred to below.

<sup>141</sup> R.R. Davies, *Lordship and Society in the March of Wales 1282-1400* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 354-361; *Age of Conquest*, pp. 115-129.

The donations to Margam Abbey by *uchelwyr* were far more numerous, and show the extent to which the Margam monks were obliged to secure successive grants and confirmations in respect of the same parcels of land from different members and successive generations of the same descent-groups in order to ‘cleanse’ the title to the land but even in cases where land was acquired by means of a single transaction the endorsement of the members of the grantor’s descent-group was invariably required. From the Cistercians’ perspective ridding the land of encumbrances was essential, not simply to gain complete control of it but to ensure, in accordance with the Cistercian Order’s early statutes, that it was separated permanently from the surrounding land of the laity and its secular character was removed.<sup>142</sup>

Margam’s acquisition of the arable and pasture land at Gallt-y-cwm, situated in the hills some three miles due north of the abbey on the east bank of the river Ffrwdwyllt in Cwm Dyffryn, necessitated a series of transactions embracing three generations of the same descent-group. The land was originally held by Herbert, son of Godwinet, and in c.1183 was granted by Earl William of Gloucester to Herbert’s five sons,<sup>143</sup> Cynaethwy, Bleddyn, William, Cynwrig and Rhydderch.<sup>144</sup> Cynwrig then granted the abbey his fourth part,<sup>145</sup> and jointly with his brothers Bleddyn, William and Cynwrig granted it all the land they held of the earl of Gloucester for a rent of 10 shillings.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, pp. 67-82.

<sup>143</sup> *Cartae*, i 168 (no. 169). The service owed to the earl of Gloucester for Gallt-y-cwm was a kitchen rent, which was probably a commuted version of a food render owed in the pre-Norman era to a Welsh lord as a tribute rather than as a rent. A similar rent was payable for the land in the fee of Kenfig given to the abbey by Walaveth, son of William Gillemichel (*Cartae*, ii 480-1 (no. 482)).

<sup>144</sup> Rhydderch appears in none of the grants relating to Gallt-y-cwm and may therefore have died before they were made. Herbert and Godwinet’s names have a distinctly English flavour whereas those of Herbert’s sons and grandsons are unmistakably Welsh, which may point to a rare instance of integration into local Welsh society by an English settler family.

<sup>145</sup> *Cartae*, ii, 233-4 (no. 227), dated c. 1198 by Clark.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 243 (no. 238).

In the next generation there was a grant to the abbey by Gronw, the son of Bleddyn ap Herbert, a fourth part of the land;<sup>147</sup> a confirmation by Gronw and his brothers, Meurig and Rhys, of all the land formerly belonging to their father at Gallt-y-cwm;<sup>148</sup> a confirmation by Gruffudd ap Cynaethwy and his brothers, Madog, Cadaith, Anarawd and Ynyr, of the entire land at Gallt-y-cwm;<sup>149</sup> and another confirmation by the five sons of Cynaethwy both of that part of the land at Gallt-y-cwm that belonged to their father and of the part they had purchased from their uncle William.<sup>150</sup>

The land known as *Poitevin* in the territory of Kenfig was another acquisition by the abbey that necessitated multiple transactions with three generations, on this occasion, of two Welsh families connected by marriage, the descendants respectively of John Ddu and of Gistelard. They begin with two charters by Ketherech, son of John Ddu, dateable to *c.* 1170 x *c.* 1180<sup>151</sup> granting to Margam 5 and 15 acres respectively of his free tenement in the land.<sup>152</sup> There are three charters by Ketherech's daughter, Thatherech, the wife of Iorwerth ap Gistelard, in which she quitclaimed to Margam, with the consent of her husband, her claim and right to the land;<sup>153</sup> granted to the abbey all her land in the fee of *Poitevin* at an annual rent of half a mark during her life and of 4 shillings after her death, 2 shillings and 8 pence being remitted for her soul;<sup>154</sup> and granted to the abbey all the land of *Poitevin* that was her father's and had come to her by

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 202-3 (no. 196), dated *c.* 1190 by Clark.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 238-9 (no. 233).

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 300-1 (no. 246), dated *c.* 1205 by Clark.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, i 183-4 (no. 179).

<sup>151</sup> Walter de Gray Birch, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Penrice and Margam Abbey Manuscripts*, 6 vols. (London, 1893-1905), First Series, p.8.

<sup>152</sup> *Cartae*, ii, 483 (no. 485); i, 183-4 (176).

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 244 (no. 239).

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 232-3 (no. 226).



inheritance.<sup>155</sup> In a corresponding charter by Iorwerth ap Gistelard himself he quitclaimed, with the assent of his wife, his right in the land.<sup>156</sup>

Ketherech ap John Ddu's nephew, Espus, the son of Caradog Ddu, figures in a series of charters in which he granted all his land in the fee of *Poitevin* to the abbey at the rent of half a mark (with a proviso that if he died without an heir the abbey was to hold the entire land in frankalmoign but if he died with an heir 12 acres were to be quitclaimed to it), gave his body for burial in the abbey, confirmed his uncle Ketherech's grant of the land and made a further grant of 27 acres of his own adjacent land.<sup>157</sup>

There are also charters by Rhys Goch, the nephew of Espus, confirming his uncle's gifts to the abbey<sup>158</sup> and by Tudur, Caradog, Cynaethwy, Alaithur and Gronw, the sons of Iorwerth ap Gistelard and grandsons of Ketherech ap John Ddu, quitclaiming their right to the land of *Poitevin*,<sup>159</sup> and finally a charter by Iorwerth, son of Espus ap Caradog Ddu, in which he quitclaimed his right to the *Poitevin* land and to the 6 pence rent which the monks used to pay.<sup>160</sup>

Some of the *uchelwyr* who were Margam's benefactors either entered the abbey as *conversi* or secured the right to do so if they chose. Thus Cynaethwy, the son of Robert ab Einion, who had been blinded after being given to William, earl of Gloucester, as a hostage by Morgan ap Caradog, and to whom Morgan had granted land at Resolven as compensation,<sup>161</sup> gave the land to Margam with Morgan's consent and became a

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, vi 2310-1 (no. 1540).

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, vi 2310 (no. 1639).

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 245 (no. 240); ii 404-5 (no. 414).

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 365-6 (no. 368).

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 482 (no. 484).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 406 (no. 416).

<sup>161</sup> The location of Resolven is described on p. 30 above.

*conversus*;<sup>162</sup> and Gille Seis, whose brother and other kinsmen swore to observe his gift, granted 24 acres of land to the abbey in the fee of Cornelly in the demesne lordship of Kenfig and was received into full fraternity and given the option of taking the habit of *conversus* provided he was not prevented from doing so by marriage, debts or for any other reason.

There are also occasional examples of grants of land and payments of money to the abbey that appear to have been exacted compulsorily from families that probably participated in attacks on the abbey in the 1220s, 1230s and 1240s.<sup>163</sup> A quitclaim to Margam in 1234 by Rhys Goch Fychan of all his land in Llangeinor in the mesne lordship of Ogmores, for example, followed an adjudication by Morgan Gam and Bishop Elias of Llandaff which confirmed the abbey's right to the land, and was therefore mandatory,<sup>164</sup> and it was followed soon afterwards by an abjuration of all their claim to the same land by Rhys's brothers, Gruffudd, Rhys and Meurig.<sup>165</sup>

Thirteen years later, in 1247, between twenty and thirty individuals, as well in some instances as their mothers, wives and daughters, are recorded in a deed sealed by Bishop William de Burgh of Llandaff (1245-1253) as having admitted causing damage at the abbey's Llangeinor grange amounting to £60, having agreed to compensate the abbey by an annual

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<sup>162</sup> *Cartae*, ii 347-8 (no. 347). Morgan himself also granted a large tract of upland at Resolven to the abbey (Pryce, *Acts*, pp. 265-266, no. 131), and Cynaethwy's grant was confirmed in two charters, probably issued at or about the same date as his own, by his brothers, Rhiwallon and Einion, in one case (*Cartae*, ii 595-6 (no. 570), by three other brothers, Tudur, Cynwrig and Gronw, in another (*Ibid.*, iii 960 (no. 834)) and possibly yet again subsequently by Cynaethwy's nephew, another Rhiwallon (*Ibid.*, vi 2322 (no. 1602)).

<sup>163</sup> The *Annals of Margam* state, for example, that in 1223 the Welsh were responsible for burning a thousand sheep and two houses belonging to the abbey, and in 1224 for attacking the abbey's servants and killing a shepherd boy (*Annales de Margam*, printed in *Annales Monastici*, vol. I, ed. H.R. Luard, (Rolls Series, 1864), p.34).

<sup>164</sup> *Cartae*, ii 488-9 (no. 490). See also p. 41 above.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 368-9 (no. 372).

payment of one mark for six years and to provide twenty-four men to protect the abbey under pain of excommunication by the bishop.<sup>166</sup>

Between 1230 and 1240 Bishop Elias of Llandaff issued a notification that Owain, Rhys and Caradog, the three sons of Alaithur ap Idnerth, who rented a meadow in the marsh of Afan from their father, had quitclaimed the meadow to Margam in the presence of their father, and had undertaken to pay half a mark annually, on account of the damage they had inflicted upon the abbey,<sup>167</sup> and in 1246 the three brothers concluded an agreement with the monks whereby in consideration of the damage they and others had caused to the abbey's property, totalling £324 in value, they undertook to allow the monks free use of their woodland for necessities, to pay an amount of 60 marks within three years and an annual rent of 20 shillings, and not to commit further acts of trespass against the abbey's property, for which their lord, Lleision ap Morgan Gam, and his heirs stood as surety.<sup>168</sup>

The fact that Owain ap Alaithur is recorded in another charter as having granted Margam 'in pure and perpetual almoign' a tract of land in the hill country to the north of the abbey stretching west from the source of the river Ffrwdwyllt to the abbey's grange of Penhydd, is a further indication of the complexity of the abbey's relationships with some of its benefactors.<sup>169</sup>

The grants to Margam by *uchelwyr*, exemplified by the selection summarised above, included substantial tracts of land not only in the abbey's hinterland but also in the lordship of Afan, the *territoria* of Kenfig

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 544-6 (no. 534).

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 474 (no. 476).

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, ii 534-6 (no. 527).

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, vi 2316 (no. 1596).

and Newcastle, the lordships of Ogmore and Coety and the shire-fee,<sup>170</sup> and together with the endowments made by the lineage of Iestyn ap Caradog, particularly those by Morgan ap Caradog and his descendants, must have represented a sizeable proportion in aggregate of the abbey's total patrimony.

Reference has already been made to the importance attached to status and kinship in medieval Welsh society; another of the main ties that bound the higher echelons of that society together was that between *uchelwyr* and their prince or overlord.<sup>171</sup> The close bonds between *uchelwyr* themselves, and between specific families of prominent *uchelwyr* and the lords of Afan, are demonstrated by the frequency with which they appear as witnesses to each other's charters,<sup>172</sup> and Morgan ap Caradog's endorsement of the Cistercians seems to have been of particular significance in opening the door to the endowments that followed from both the other descendants of Iestyn ap Gwrgant and *uchelwyr*. Although it is probable that no specific requirement for a descent-group of freemen to obtain the prior consent of their lord for the alienation of land was embodied in Welsh law in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it is nevertheless likely that in practice lords would have exercised control over the alienation of land by *uchelwyr* by way of frankalmoign tenure as this would have entailed a loss of the services owed to them.<sup>173</sup> It would therefore in all likelihood have been regarded as necessary for Morgan ap Caradog's own tenants in the lordship of Afan to obtain his prior consent for their benefactions to the abbey, and it is not inconceivable, given the bond that existed between *uchelwyr* and

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<sup>170</sup> Griffiths, 'Native Society', contains a detailed review of the benefactions made to Margam by *uchelwyr*.

<sup>171</sup> *Age of Conquest*, pp. 135-138.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194-197.

<sup>173</sup> Huw Pryce, *Native Law and the Church in Medieval Wales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 204-5.

their native Welsh lords, that even in those areas of Glamorgan from which they had been ousted but hoped to re-establish themselves descent-groups could still in practice have continued to seek the approval of their former lords before effecting such alienations.

Although the Cistercians refused to accept responsibility for the pastoral care of the laity in general, which they believed to be the province of the secular clergy, the charters by which Margam received its numerous endowments from *uchelwyr* not only demonstrate the abbey's assiduousness in pursuing successive generations of the patrilineal descent-groups in which its landed endowments had previously been vested for the purpose of ensuring that the abbey's right to them was immune from challenge, but suggest that they carefully managed their often difficult relationships with this section of Welsh society as well their leaders, and when this entailed bringing them to book for past transgressions against the abbey they often sought the assistance of the diocesan, the close relationships they developed with prelates, particularly bishops, being another facet of their modified monastic culture<sup>174</sup> and one of the characteristics that distinguished the Cistercians from other regulars.

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<sup>174</sup> Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity*, pp. 140-169.

### Chapter 3

#### **The Cistercians on the Powys-Shropshire Border - Strata Marcella Abbey**

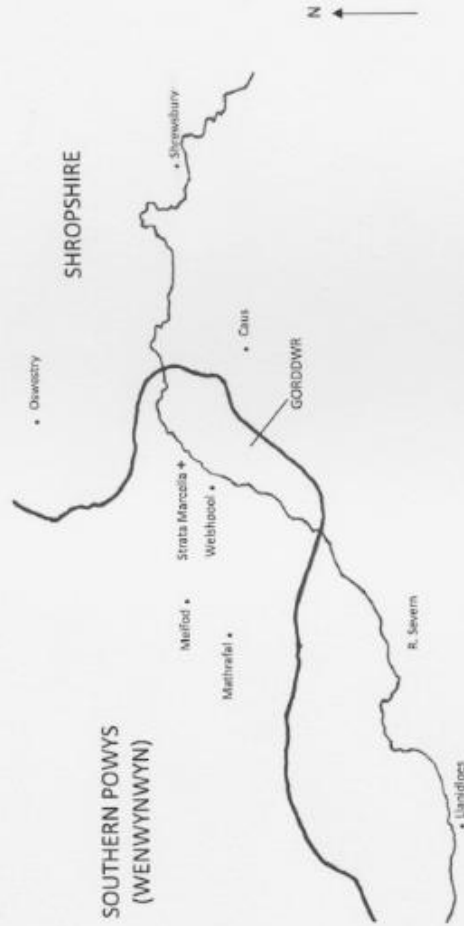
The Strata Marcella charters reveal that, during the course of the thirteenth century, the abbey was granted three English royal charters and that there were sporadic examples of real property transactions having been concluded between the abbey and baronial, knightly and ecclesiastical landowners in adjoining Shropshire.

The abbey was located on the west bank of the river Severn near to the castle recently constructed at Welshpool by its founder, Owain Cyfeiliog (d. 1191). Castle and abbey supplanted Mathrafal and Meifod as the dynastic and ecclesiastical centres respectively of the dynasty of southern Powys, and Owain Cyfeiliog entered it as a monk near the end of his life and was buried in the abbey church. Extensive donations were made to it by other members of Owain's family, particularly his son, Gwenwynwyn (d. 1216),<sup>175</sup> who was its principal benefactor. Strata Marcella was therefore the *Eigenkloster* of the princes of southern Powys.

In the year of the abbey's foundation Powys was a weakened and diminished kingdom as a consequence of having been partitioned on the death of Madog ap Maredudd among five members of his four-generation patrilineal descent group in accordance with the Welsh law of succession. Its geographical position also meant that it was threatened from the north and west by the kingdom of Gwynedd, from the south west by the kingdom

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<sup>175</sup> Another benefactor was Elise ap Madog, Owain Cyfeiliog's cousin, who also issued a charter confirming the benefactions of his brother, Owain Brogyntyn, to Basingwerk Abbey.



— The Boundary of Powys

**THE SOUTHERN POWYS / SHROPSHIRE  
BORDER IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY**

(Adapted from R.R.Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000))

of Deheubarth and from the east by the Anglo-Normans and English, and the threats from these sources naturally waxed and waned according to their own political fortunes and dynastic challenges.

This vulnerability encouraged the rulers of Powys, beginning with Owain Cyfeiliog, to seek to appease their potential enemies, particularly the English crown and the Marcher lords of Shropshire, as a means of ensuring the continued existence of Powys as an independent principality, and their willingness to cultivate friendly relations with their potential enemies chimed with royal policy towards Wales which, subject to the native Welsh princes acknowledging the king as their overlord, was generally aimed at containment rather than confrontation, but during the reign of Richard I this rapprochement disintegrated.<sup>176</sup>

In 1197, during this period of resumed hostilities, Gwenwynwyn, hoping to capitalise on the death earlier that year of the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth, attempted to attain hegemony in Wales and to challenge the English in the southern central March,<sup>177</sup> and the nature and timing of the first two royal charters granted to Strata Marcella by King John suggest his reasons for issuing them may have been influenced by considerations similar to those which dictated his policy response to Gwenwynwyn's challenge.

Gwenwynwyn suffered an emphatic defeat at the hands of an English army at the battle of Painscastle, and the following year, shortly after his accession, King John demonstrated that he intended to revive the royal policy towards the Welsh of containment rather than confrontation that had prevailed before his brother's reign, while putting his own personal stamp

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<sup>176</sup> *Age of Conquest*, pp. 223, 292.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 227-236.



on it, by issuing a charter confirming Gwenwynwyn in all his territories, in whatever territory he might win from the king's enemies and granting him lands in England. John's objective was hegemony and clientage rather than conquest, and his apparent magnanimity is likely to have been a political manoeuvre calculated to gain Gwenwynwyn's support while simultaneously, in a departure from the previous practice of the crown, intensifying John's status as Gwenwynwyn's overlord by spelling out his liability for homage to the king in a formal written document.<sup>178</sup>

Soon afterwards, in 1200, John granted Strata Marcella quittance of toll throughout his lands with the exception of the city of London<sup>179</sup> and, by a second charter of the same date, confirmed all the gifts made to the abbey by Owain Cyfeiliog, Gwenwynwyn and all its other benefactors.<sup>180</sup> John was therefore clearly prepared to grant a valuable economic privilege to an abbey that was unambiguously Welsh in character and orientation and closely associated with the dynasty of southern Powys, but this combination of an act of generosity towards the abbey and the confirmation of the gifts it had received from Gwenwynwyn, his father and other benefactors, which was effectively a re-assertion of John's authority as overlord, suggests that the rationale for these charters may have been founded upon similar logic to those which John had granted to Gwenwynwyn the previous year, and this is equally true of a charter issued to Strata Marcella a generation later, in 1232, by John's son, Henry III, in which he effectively renewed his father's grant of exemption from tolls.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>179</sup> *Ystrad Marchell Charters*, p. 167 (no. 24).

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168-9 (no. 25).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222 (no. 81).

The Strata Marcella charters also provide intermittent but unambiguous evidence, derived primarily from the second quarter of the thirteenth century, of real property transactions between the abbey and English landholders, most of which relate to land identifiable as having been located in Shropshire. In the 1220s part of the vill of Picklescott in the Shropshire parish of Smethcott, which Robert ap Madog had given to Strata Marcella, was the subject of a quitclaim by the son of Richard de Linley, also named Richard, and by Richard the son's daughter, Alice. Picklescott had been part of the fee of Alice's ancestors and the interests quitclaimed had been inherited from Matilda, Richard's wife and Alice's mother and one of the three co-heiresses of William de Smethcott.<sup>182</sup>

In 1229 the abbey exchanged the portion of Picklescott which had been given to it by Robert ap Madog for a portion of *Haye desuper Cauhos* (Hay above Caus), which lay on the southern slope of the Long Mountain in the parish of Worthen in Shropshire.<sup>183</sup> The other party to the exchange was Thomas Corbet (d. 1274). The Corbets were a leading Anglo-Norman baronial family which had held the frontier lordship of Caus since the 1070s, Thomas having succeeded to the lordship in 1222. A marriage alliance was concluded between the Corbets and the dynasty of southern Powys when Margaret, the sister of Thomas Corbet, became the wife of Gwenwynwyn.

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p.207 (no. 66). The widow of the Robert ap Madog was nurse to the daughter of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, the prince of Gwynedd, and his wife Joan, the sister of King Henry III (*ibid.*, p.87), an example of how intertwined relationships might become in this particular part of the March of Wales. Llywelyn had annexed Powys and effectively deposed Gwenwynwyn in 1216.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 215-217 (no. 72). The usual practice of the Cistercians was to seek to acquire land unencumbered by joint or third part interests. It is therefore unlikely that they would have been content with a part share in the land at Picklescott given to them by Robert ap Madog, and given the terms of the exchange with Thomas Corbet, the land at Picklescott may have been cleared of the interests of Matilda's co-heirs either before the date of the quitclaim by Richard de Linley and Alice or by means of later transactions for which no record has survived.

Also in the second quarter of the thirteenth century Robert son of Rufus, who was probably Robert Pigot, lord of the manor of Great Wollaston in the barony of Caus,<sup>184</sup> confirmed to the monks of Strata Marcella ‘all the lands and gifts which they had ever acquired or possessed from him or his ancestors’ in *Bronrotpol*,<sup>185</sup> which lay within the township of Wollaston in the parish of Alberbury.<sup>186</sup>

The Shropshire district on the opposite bank of the Severn from Welshpool and Strata Marcella in which both Hay above Caus and *Bronrotpol* were located<sup>187</sup> formed part of the Corbet estates, and by the beginning of the thirteenth century had come to be known by its Welsh name, the Gorddwyr, meaning ‘the land beyond the water’. The district was an area of mixed settlement with fluctuating Welsh and English populations, and was the subject of competing claims by the Gwenwynwyn dynasty and the Corbets for most of the thirteenth century.<sup>188</sup> It eventually became predominantly Welsh and a so-called Welshry of the lordship of Caus.<sup>189</sup> This designation signified that it was administered separately from the adjoining districts within the lordship whose populations were primarily English, and was an indication that the Marcher lords had been able to bring their Welsh subjects under control.<sup>190</sup>

A 1322/3 *inspeximus* records a charter datable to 1228 x 1249 in favour of Strata Marcella in which the grantor appears to have been Anglo-Norman. In this charter William Hunalt sold a third part of the land called *Hohtwey*

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p.220 (no. 78). The charter has been dated 1229 x 1248.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126.

<sup>187</sup> *Bromrochpol* was described in the ‘Red Book of St. Asaph’ as lying within the commote of Gorddwyr (Thomas, *Charters of Ystrad Marchell*, p. 126).

<sup>188</sup> Max Lieberman, *The Medieval March of Wales: The Creation and Perception of a Frontier, 1066-1283* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 217.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7 and 216.

<sup>190</sup> *Age of Conquest*, p. 283-4.

(Heathway) to the abbey.<sup>191</sup> The location of *Hohtwey* is unknown, but William Hunalt was lord of the Shropshire manor of Frodesley.<sup>192</sup>

In 1234 Ralph de Lahee, son of William Ketel, granted and confirmed to Strata Marcella ‘for the salvation of his soul and those of his parents and successors’ and on condition that two pairs of spurs were kept for him and his heirs on the feast of St. Peter ad Vincula (1 August) the land called *Bahcwillim* (possibly Bachwillim, the location of which has not been identified) which he had previously sold, ‘because of his need’, to Ieuaf ap Gruffudd ap Iorwerth and which, with Ralph’s ‘licence, consent and desire’, Ieuaf’s two sons, Ieuaf’s uncle, and his uncle’s three sons had sold to the abbey.<sup>193</sup> Ralph de Lahee also received 6 shillings and 8 pence both from Strata Marcella and Ieuaf’s descent group for his ‘gift’ and the spurs were to be in return for ‘all feudal service, exaction and demand’ in respect of *Bahcwillim*. No additional details beyond what is contained in the charter are known regarding Ralph de Lahee or William Ketel, but neither name is Welsh and the name Ketel originated in Scandinavia and was commonly found in the north of England.<sup>194</sup>

Strata Marcella also held shops, land and a dwelling in Shrewsbury. By a charter datable to 1225 x 1230, the abbot, Goronwy, acknowledged that he and his successors were bound to pay to the abbot and convent of Shrewsbury Abbey a rent of 13 pence and a halfpenny for three shops

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<sup>191</sup> *Ystrad Marchell Charters*, p. 220 (no. 79). This transaction is a further example of Strata Marcella acquiring a part share in land, and for the reason referred to on page 58, note 183, above there may well have been other transactions involving the abbey and the owners of the other third parts of Heathway in respect of which no documentary evidence has survived.

<sup>192</sup> R. W. Eyton, *Antiquities of Shropshire*, 12 vols. (London, 1854-60), vi, 291-294, cited in *Ystrad Marchell Charters*, p.89.

<sup>193</sup> *Ystrad Marchell Charters*, pp. 222-4 (no. 82).

<sup>194</sup> P.H. Reaney, *A Dictionary of British Surnames*, 2nd. edn. (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1976), p. xxvi. Hereditary surnames were not commonly in use until the end of the thirteenth century (*ibid.*, pp xl-xlv and Richard McKinley, *A History of British Surnames* (Harlow: Longman, 1990), pp. 25-35), which accounts for the difference between Ralph de Lahee’s by-name and that of his father.

adjacent to the house of Roger Ruffus, a prominent burgess of Shrewsbury,<sup>195</sup> the shops having been given to Strata Marcella by Richard Pouncer, son of Agnes,<sup>196</sup> and the rent having been given by Richard to Shrewsbury Abbey.<sup>197</sup> The shops were located in Shrewsbury Market Place.<sup>198</sup>

Another charter dated 1283/4 records an agreement between Strata Marcella and Haughmond Abbey whereby the rent of land at Rosehill which Strata Marcella held of Haughmond but had assigned to Laurence the chaplain for a term of six years, and which up to that point had been received by Haughmond, was thereafter to be shared between Haughmond and Strata Marcella; and an undated deed of the second half of the thirteenth century is also extant recording the sale of a messuage above Rosehill in Shrewsbury which is described as having been situated between a messuage of the abbot of Strata Marcella and another messuage.<sup>199</sup>

The evidence for Anglo-Norman and English benefactions to Strata Marcella is therefore fragmentary and it is also ambiguous. King John's charters in favour of the abbey appear to have been occasioned by political expediency, and the real property dealings between the abbey and Shropshire landholders in the thirteenth century to have been mainly, if not exclusively, what might be termed arm's length business transactions which from the abbey's perspective were designed to consolidate its patrimony by replacing land it had acquired in Shropshire with land closer

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<sup>195</sup> *Ystrad Marchell Charters*, p. 96.

<sup>196</sup> Una Rees, ed., *Cartulary of Shrewsbury Abbey*, 2 vols. (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1975), p. 161-2, no. 188; Thomas, *Ystrad Marchell Charters*, pp. 207-8 (no. 67).

<sup>197</sup> Rees, *Cartulary of Shrewsbury Abbey*, p. 149, no. 173.

<sup>198</sup> In a charter dated c. 1229 John, son of Agnes, gave to Shrewsbury Abbey and its kitchen 'three shops in the marketplace between the shops of the Abbot of Strata Marcella and the door of his house which is beneath the upper room' (Rees, *Cartulary of Shrewsbury Abbey*, p. 146, no. 171).

<sup>199</sup> Shropshire Records and Research Service 6000/3979 cited in *Ystrad Marchell Charters*, p. 127.

to the abbey and to secure access to the important market at Shrewsbury for its agricultural produce.

The only evidence of Anglo-Norman or English benefactions is the charter in which Robert, son of Rufus, confirmed the grant of *Bronrotpol* to Strata Marcella, which was expressed in terms which implied that the grantor may have previously made gifts to the abbey; and the charter of Ralph de Lahee relating to *Bahcwillim*, the purpose of which appears to have been to clear the land of any feudal service by the abbey as the charter makes it clear that Ralph had previously sold the land to a Welshman whose successors had, with Ralph's consent, sold it to the abbey.

The fact that even business transactions occurred between a Welsh abbey and Shropshire landholders was probably a reflection of the prevailing political climate both in the lordship of Caus and the March of Wales in general during this period. The increasing tendency in the thirteenth century for the Marcher aristocracy to divide their lordships into Welshries and Englishries for administrative purposes showed that they had come to accept the reality of a permanent Welsh presence within their territories and were beginning to regard their Welsh subjects simply as tenants rather than as enemies.<sup>200</sup> To this limited extent they indicate a softening of relations between the Welsh and Anglo-Norman border communities, but these arrangements also entrenched the separation of the English from their Welsh neighbours and embodied an attitude of exclusivity and cultural superiority towards the Welsh that was shared by the English crown, Marcher lords and all sections of settler society in the March,<sup>201</sup> an attitude that may explain why it appears to have been so difficult for Strata

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<sup>200</sup> Davies, *Age of Conquest*, pp.282-4; Lieberman, *Medieval March of Wales*, pp. 215-17.

<sup>201</sup> Max Lieberman, *The March of Wales 1067-1300: A Borderland of Medieval Britain* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2008), pp. 83-87.

Marcella to engage with potential benefactors from the other side of the Severn.

## **Conclusions**

The Cistercians were highly effective at adapting to the widely-differing physical environments and political circumstances they encountered in the areas of Europe in which they settled, and despite the occasional setback (in the context of the districts of the March of Wales examined above the failed attempt to found an abbey at Pendar in Glamorgan is an example), they were usually able to forge and maintain relationships with the secular rulers and nobility upon whose landed endowments they depended in order to attain economic self-sufficiency.

Their engagement with the Anglo-Norman and Welsh leaders of the warring parties in the frontier zones of the March of Wales in which their abbeys had been founded, while undoubtedly aimed at attracting these landed endowments, may also have had ideological overtones, as during the course of the twelfth century the strict interpretation of the Rule of St. Benedict the Cistercians had initially followed, which envisaged a life of contemplation for their monks based on cenobitic seclusion from the outside world, gave way to a more outward-looking ethos. This predicated the establishment of good relations with secular rulers not simply as necessary for economic reasons, but as essential for the purpose of furthering the reform of Christian society as a whole through the encouragement of meritorious behaviour on their part, which was especially important if they were belligerents in armed conflicts with other Christians.

Three Cistercian abbeys situated in the March of Wales in areas in which an Anglo-Norman and English population was juxtaposed or intermingled with an indigenous Welsh population, Basingwerk, Neath and Margam,



attracted Welsh benefactions despite being Anglo-Norman foundations. This fact was overlooked in the traditional historiography of the Welsh Cistercian plantation, which divided all the Cistercian monasteries within Wales into two groups: those that were founded by Anglo-Normans and remained Anglo-Norman in character, and those that were founded in native Wales whose loyalties were entirely Welsh. The Cistercian monasteries that attracted both Welsh and Anglo-Norman benefactions therefore give the appearance of comprising a third, hybrid, group, but closer analysis reveals that there were significant differences in the nature and pattern of their Welsh endowments.

The events surrounding the foundation of Basingwerk Abbey suggest that its founder, Ranulf II of Chester, was prompted at least in part by a wish to proclaim his ascendancy within Perfeddwlad, and the appropriation of its patronage by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth on behalf of the house of Gwynedd is also likely to have been an overt political act intended to achieve a similar purpose by announcing that the patronage of the earls of Chester had been replaced with his own and that he was the new ruler of Perfeddwlad.

Both Ranulf II and Llywelyn made a series of further gifts of land to the abbey in addition to their original endowments which there is no cause to believe were inspired by anything other than a desire to honour their reciprocal obligations as patrons, and suggest that they probably regarded the abbey as more than just a vehicle for the proclamation of their supremacy and prestige. The monks of Basingwerk were also entrusted with what may broadly be termed diplomatic duties, albeit of a fairly mundane nature, on behalf of both the English crown and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd during the reign of Henry III. A picture therefore emerges of them having gained the trust of both the Anglo-Norman and Welsh ruling

élites, and of having secured a series of endowments from both, but almost certainly consecutively during two distinct phases interrupted by the reconquest of Perfeddwlad by the Venedotian ruling dynasty, and the context in which Llewelyn ap Iorwerth effectively appropriated the advowson of Basingwerk, after establishing himself as the undisputed ruler of Perfeddwlad, bore a distinct resemblance to the circumstances in which Rhys ap Gruffudd had assumed the patronage of Strata Florida and Whitland some thirty years or more earlier.

In contrast to Basingwerk, Neath and Margam's Welsh benefactors were the lesser Welsh lords who retained power in Glamorgan and the descent-groups of freemen who ranked immediately beneath them in the social hierarchy. Despite both abbeys having been founded in circumstances suggesting that their *raison d'être* was inextricably connected with the maintenance of Anglo-Norman supremacy in Glamorgan, and as symbols of Anglo-Norman power it is reasonable to suppose having been objects of Welsh animosity, they were nonetheless able, unlike Basingwerk, to win over Welsh donors while continuing to enjoy the support of their Anglo-Norman patrons and receiving new benefactions from the lesser Anglo-Norman nobility. This process appears to have been rather abruptly cut short in the case of Neath, however, and the scale of Welsh benefactions to Margam, the extended period over which they were made and the closeness and continuity of the relationships that were established between the abbey and its Welsh donors, particularly the descendants of Iestyn ap Gwrgant, mark it out as exceptional.

Conclusive proof of Margam's deep-rooted connections with the ruling dynasties of upland Glamorgan is provided by the number of dynastic family members who in their final years were received into the fraternity of

Margam, some of whom may have taken the monk's habit, or who granted their bodies for burial within the sacred spaces of the conventual church or abbey precincts. They included Morgan ap Caradog, his brother Maredudd, Morgan's sons, Lleision, Owain and Morgan Gam, Rhys ap Gruffudd of Senghennydd and his mother, Nest.

The Margam charters offer some indications as to how the upsurge in Welsh support for the abbey may have occurred. The enduring association between the abbey and Morgan ap Caradog, the leader of Welsh resistance to the Anglo-Normans in most of upland Glamorgan, clearly took some decades to blossom and seems to have been something of a watershed which paved the way for the rash of further benefactions by his descendants and by *uchelwyr* that followed. From which side the initiative came in forging the relationship is unknown, but the charters give the distinct impression that the abbey went to considerable trouble to nurture and cement not just its relationship with Morgan but its subsequent relationships with his children as well. These relationships were often fraught with tensions undoubtedly attributable to the civil strife that erupted periodically in the western half of Glamorgan, and sustaining them appears to have called for the exercise of a high degree of patient diplomacy on the part of the abbey as well as fairly regular outlays of cash to those donors experiencing straitened circumstances or perhaps in need of funds to finance their military activities, and that the Margam monks clearly succeeded in large part in overcoming Welsh mistrust was no mean achievement.

A number of factors may have predisposed Morgan ap Caradog, lord of Afan, and his counterpart in Senghennydd, Gruffudd ap Ifor Bach, towards the Cistercians and led to them becoming benefactors of Margam.

Cistercian religiosity appears to have possessed a special allure for the Welsh population in general, and ties of kinship and of hierarchical dependence between ruler and subject and lord and vassal were deeply ingrained in Welsh society. The transcendent political figure in the southern half of Wales during the final quarter of the twelfth century was Rhys ap Gruffudd, lord of Deheubarth, who was also instrumental in providing the basis for the Cistercian expansion in native Wales through his patronage of Whitland and Strata Florida, and it was during the period of his political ascendancy, and some forty to fifty years after the abbey was founded, that Morgan ap Caradog and Gruffudd ap Ifor Bach became benefactors of Margam. In addition to being political adherents of the Lord Rhys who had pledged their allegiance to him, they were both also close blood relatives of his as their mothers, Gwladus and Nest, were his sisters. Either directly or by example, Rhys may therefore have influenced their apparent penchant for the Cistercians.

A combination of several factors may therefore have resulted in Margam receiving significant numbers of Anglo-Norman, English and Welsh benefactions concurrently over an extended period, and being the only Cistercian monastery in the March of Wales to do so. It was therefore *sui generis* in this respect as opposed to being one of a discrete, homogeneous group of three, and it is difficult to avoid the impression that, although circumstances were undoubtedly in its favour, the signal success it achieved in attracting endowments from all quarters was attributable in no small part to the agency of the monks themselves.

Strata Marcella stands out among the four Cistercian abbeys examined as having secured few if any benefactions from non-Welsh sources despite, uniquely among native Welsh Cistercian monasteries, having been installed

in a border location with an ethnically mixed population comparable to the frontier zones in which Basingwerk, Neath and Margam had been founded. The abbey was heavily identified with its patrons, the princely dynasty of southern Powys, and the evidence contained in the surviving documents is clear that its benefactors were overwhelmingly, if not necessarily exclusively, Welsh. The support the abbey received from by King John appear to have been aimed at furthering his strategic political objectives, and its dealings with Anglo-Norman and English landowners were almost without exception business transactions. The evidence for Anglo-Norman or English endowments is slight, and one possible explanation for this paucity is the effect of the practice of the Marcher aristocracy in the middle March, which deliberately entrenched the separation of the Welsh and settler communities and which was accompanied by an attitude of mind that may have prevented the abbey from attracting donors from this source.

Viewed overall what is perhaps most striking about the pattern of endowments to the four abbeys, in terms of the ethnicity of their donors, is their dissimilarity, no doubt accounted for in large measure by the considerable variations in the specific circumstances with which the abbeys were presented in the various locations in which they were founded. This was even true of Neath and Margam, which to all intents and purposes were located in the same area, a fact which, paradoxically, was probably one of the main reasons for the considerable disparity between the volume of Welsh donations they respectively received.