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OWAIN GLYNDŴR AND THE SIEGE OF COITY CASTLE, 1404-1405

Ralph A. Griffiths

The celebrations at the village of Coity to mark the Millennium included a re-enactment of the siege of Coity Castle in 1404-5: 'Local history brought to life', announced the attractive leaflet of the 'Coity Village Association'. The re-enactment was prefaced by a genuine attempt to understand the 'significant and historic event' which took place at Coity almost 600 years earlier. This essay is based on a lecture given on the evening before the re-enactment (24 and 25 June 2000).

The siege of Coity was indeed significant for its length and its importance, and it was indeed historic, because it is the most famous event associated with the castle in the entire 900 years of its existence. Yet we know very little about the siege and the circumstances surrounding it, even though it lasted for a good part of two years. No detailed account of it has ever been published. This is partly because the entire revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr (c.1400-10), of which the siege was an interesting episode, is far from easy to understand; and partly because the historical records of Glamorgan in the Middle Ages – Coity included – have mostly disappeared. It is not even known whether or not Glyn Dŵr himself was present at the siege, though he probably was.

The revolt was a complex movement, which historians have had difficulty in reconstructing. Particularly difficult to gauge are the extent of its appeal in different parts of Wales; the attitudes of the various peoples of Wales, native and immigrant, to Owain's call to rise against King Henry IV (1399-1413); and the quality of Owain's plans and strategy for a successful revolt. In 1931, J.E.Lloyd established an authoritative chronology of the events of the revolt; and in 1995 R.R.Davies's *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* sought to advance our understanding of some of the fundamental issues, and especially to

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arddangos y deunydd hwn.

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Plate 1. Coity Castle, from the air. The outer bailey with its northern wall (left) showing the uneven line of its reconstruction after the siege. The disturbed ground outside this wall is thought to represent in part the remains of the besiegers' fortifications. (Cambridge Coll. Aerial Photography)

place Owain and his revolt firmly in 'the context of contemporary society in Wales and indeed beyond'.¹ Owain himself seems to us today – as he seemed to many at the time – a shadowy figure, a wil o' the wisp, despite the sternly heroic statue of him placed in Cardiff City Hall in 1916. Moreover, in Wales his movement has been hi-jacked by each succeeding age since the fifteenth century, including our own – and for its own cultural and political purposes. That has not aided understanding either.² As for contemporaries, their reactions to, and passions about, the revolt produced distorted or myopic attitudes in both England and Wales towards Owain as its acknowledged leader.

The Importance of South Wales

The first task is to identify what contemporary evidence exists to locate the siege of Coity castle in the story of Glyn Dŵr's revolt as it affected south Wales. We may begin with establishing what Owain believed he was doing – or said he was doing – by the time his forces appeared in front of Coity castle in 1404. Here we are helped by remarkable letters which he sent to the king of France in 1406, letters which are still to be found in the French national archives in Paris.³ The longer of the two letters, which was written by Owain and his advisers at Pennal, in Merioneth, on the last day of March 1406, was the centrepiece of the Glyn Dŵr exhibition in the National Library of Wales during the year 2000. It began by outlining the context of Owain's revolt against the English and their king, Henry IV:

Most serene prince, you have deemed it worthy on the humble recommendation sent, to learn how my nation, for many years now elapsed, has been oppressed by the fury of the barbarous Saxons; whence because they had the government over us, and indeed, on account of that fact itself, it seemed reasonable with them to trample upon us.

He then went on to outline why some of his plans depended on his extending his revolt to south Wales and overrunning lordships like Glamorgan:

And because, most excellent prince, the metropolitan church of St David's was, as it appears, violently compelled by the barbarous fury of those reigning in this country, to obey the church of Canterbury, and *de facto* still remains in this subjection. Many other disabilities are known to have been suffered by the church of Wales through these barbarians, which for the greater part are set forth fully in the letters patent accompanying.

Owain's purpose was to enlist the support of the French king in approaching Pope Benedict XIII, who was the pope living at Avignon in southern France and who claimed the allegiance of all Christendom, as against the pope in Rome whom the English supported. Understandably,

Owain felt that he would gain more from Pope Benedict than from the Roman Pope. He wanted a number of things in order to establish an independent principality for himself in Wales. Among these objectives were two which required that he control south Wales:

Whereas, most illustrious prince, the underwritten articles especially concern our state and the reformation and usefulness of the Church of Wales, we humbly pray your royal majesty that you will graciously consider it worthy to advance their object, even in the court of the said lord Benedict: ...

Again, that the Church of St David's shall be restored to its original dignity, which from the time of St David, archbishop and confessor, was a metropolitan church, and after his death, twenty-four archbishops succeeded him in the same place, as their names are contained in the chronicles and ancient books of the church of Menevia ... For being crushed by the fury of the barbarous Saxons, who usurped to themselves the land of Wales, they trampled upon the aforesaid church of St David's, and made her a handmaid to the church of Canterbury....

Again, that we shall have two universities or places of general study, namely, one in North Wales and the other in South Wales, in cities, towns or places to be hereafter decided and determined by our ambassadors and nuncios for that purpose.

And for good measure, he wanted Pope Benedict to outlaw King Henry IV from the Church.

Again, that the lord Benedict shall brand as heretics and cause to be tortured in the usual manner, Henry of Lancaster, the intruder of the kingdom of England, and the usurper of the crown of the same kingdom, and his adherents, in that of their own free will they have burnt or have caused to be burnt so many cathedrals, convents, and parish churches; that they have savagely hung, beheaded and quartered archbishops, bishops, prelates, priests, religious men, as madmen or beggars, or caused the same to be done.

It is strong stuff: we do not need to accept all its details at face value, but it does reflect Owain's public frame of mind. In writing this

letter, Owain was pandering to the inclinations of the French king, who was then engaged in the long Hundred Years War with England and was only too happy to conclude an alliance with an English rebel. We must also remember what Owain's aim was in sending this letter: it was to seek papal and French aid in his struggle against the English and their king, in order to establish an independent principality, two elements of which would be an independent church headed by the bishop of St Davids, not the archbishop of Canterbury, and two universities which could educate Welsh men for the priesthood and for the civil service of his new principality, whereas they presently went to Oxford or Cambridge.

What did the people of Wales make of Owain and his plans? This is not an easy question to answer, and it depends on what we mean by 'the people of Wales'. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, there were marked differences in Wales between country dwellers and townsfolk in the hundred or so towns (like Neath, Swansea and Kenfig). There were marked differences between northerners and southerners in Wales, as there still are today, and between those who lived in west Wales and the eastern borderlands, and between coast and vale communities and those of the hill country and the central mountains. As Owain himself discovered, in such a country with no tradition of political unity today's historian cannot expect to identify many shared or common attitudes among the peoples of Wales in the turbulent circumstances of 1404-5.

A third question is this: what did the advisers of King Henry IV and his parliament make of Owain? The king was lord of Wales: his principality of Wales covered six counties in the west, north and north-east of Wales, and these were normally governed by the king's representatives or by those of his eldest son as prince of Wales. In 1404-5, Prince Hal, the king's eldest son and heir (later to be Henry V), born in Monmouth, had been prince of Wales since 1399. The rest of Wales, in a broad arc from the north-east to Pembrokeshire in the south-west, was known as the March of Wales, composed of numerous lordships like Glamorgan and Gower that were ruled by Marcher lords who were mostly English nobles. These were the famous Marcher lordships. The advisers of Henry IV and his Parliament responded to the revolt in 1401 and 1402 with panic, and Parliament passed extreme

measures against Welsh people that not even the king could fully support.⁴ For example, Welsh people were banned from carrying weapons, and occupying offices in Wales, and supplying the rebels with arms and food, and from holding castles in Wales; and Parliament tried to outlaw poets and wandering propagandists who stirred up the population. These measures were out of proportion and to some degree were unworkable, and of course it was inappropriate to apply them generally to all Welsh people in country, town, vale and mountain, east and west, north and south. These English reactions give a distorted view of what the revolt meant in Wales.

Unfortunately, no chronicles are known to have been written anywhere near Coity during the revolt: not even in the great monasteries of Neath, Margam and Ewenni which, like all monasteries, had their writing departments. Had any one of them produced a history of the monastery in the early fifteenth century it would have been a godsend to the historian investigating the siege of Coity and trying to estimate the impact Glyn Dŵr had on the locality.⁵

Only one chronicle is known to have been written in south Wales just at this time, though it was written in south-east Wales which had its own differences from the lordship of Glamorgan. This was the chronicle of an opinionated cleric called Adam of Usk, composed in the form of an autobiography that describes his activities and travels and whom he met.⁶ He seems to have met both Henry IV and Owain Glyn Dŵr, but his chronicle suffers from two disadvantages as far as the siege of Coity is concerned. In the first place, he was in Rome between 1402 and 1406, visiting the court of the pope whom the English supported. The second disadvantage coloured his writing. Adam came from the lordship of Usk, in an especially cosmopolitan part of Wales, and he was university educated at Oxford. He had the prejudices of an Anglicised native of the south-east and these showed through when he commented on Owain's revolt and the northerners who mainly supported him. Thus, although he shared the common Welsh belief that the kingdom of the original inhabitants of Britain was once laid waste by the Saxons, forebears of the English, his own experience led him to speak about 'our side, the English', and to refer to the English king as 'our king'. He regarded 'Snowdonia in the north of Wales' as 'the source of all the evils in Wales'. As for Owain's

revolt, he disliked 'Owain's unprecedented tyannies' and noted how, especially outside the north, 'the people silently cursed his flagrant barbarities'.⁷ Above all, he feared for the consequences of the revolt, including those in south Wales:

And, as God is my witness, the previous night [before Parliament passed its harsh resolutions in 1401] I was roused from my sleep by a voice ringing in my ears saying, 'The plowers plowed upon my back' etc., 'The righteous lord' etc., as in the psalm, Oft did they vex me. As a result of which I awoke with a sense of foreboding that some disaster might occur that day, and in my fear I committed myself to the special protection of the Holy Spirit.⁸

Thus, it is not easy to gauge the different, and often conflicting, reactions which contemporaries had to Glyn Dŵr's revolt.

Nor are those who wrote about the revolt later on of much help, until we come to the twentieth century. One exception may be William Shakespeare, whose play, *King Henry IV, Part I*, has a good part for Owain Glyn Dŵr and a prominent place for his revolt in the turbulence of Henry IV's reign. In memorable verse, Shakespeare portrays Owain as a mysterious and threatening, but not unattractive, figure:

... at my nativity
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
Of burning cressets, and at my birth
The frame and huge foundations of the earth
Shak'd like a coward. ...
... give me leave
To tell you once again that at my birth
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
The goats ran from the mountains and the herds
Were strangely clamorous to the frightened fields.
These signs have mark'd me extraordinary,
And all the courses of my life do show
I am not in the role of common men.
Where is he living, clipp'd in with the sea
That chides the banks of England, Scotland, Wales,

Which calls me pupil or hath read to me? ...
 Three times hath Henry Bolingbroke [Henry IV] made head
 Against my power, thrice from the banks of Wye
 And sandy-bottom'd Severn have I sent him
 Bootless home, and weather-beaten back.⁹

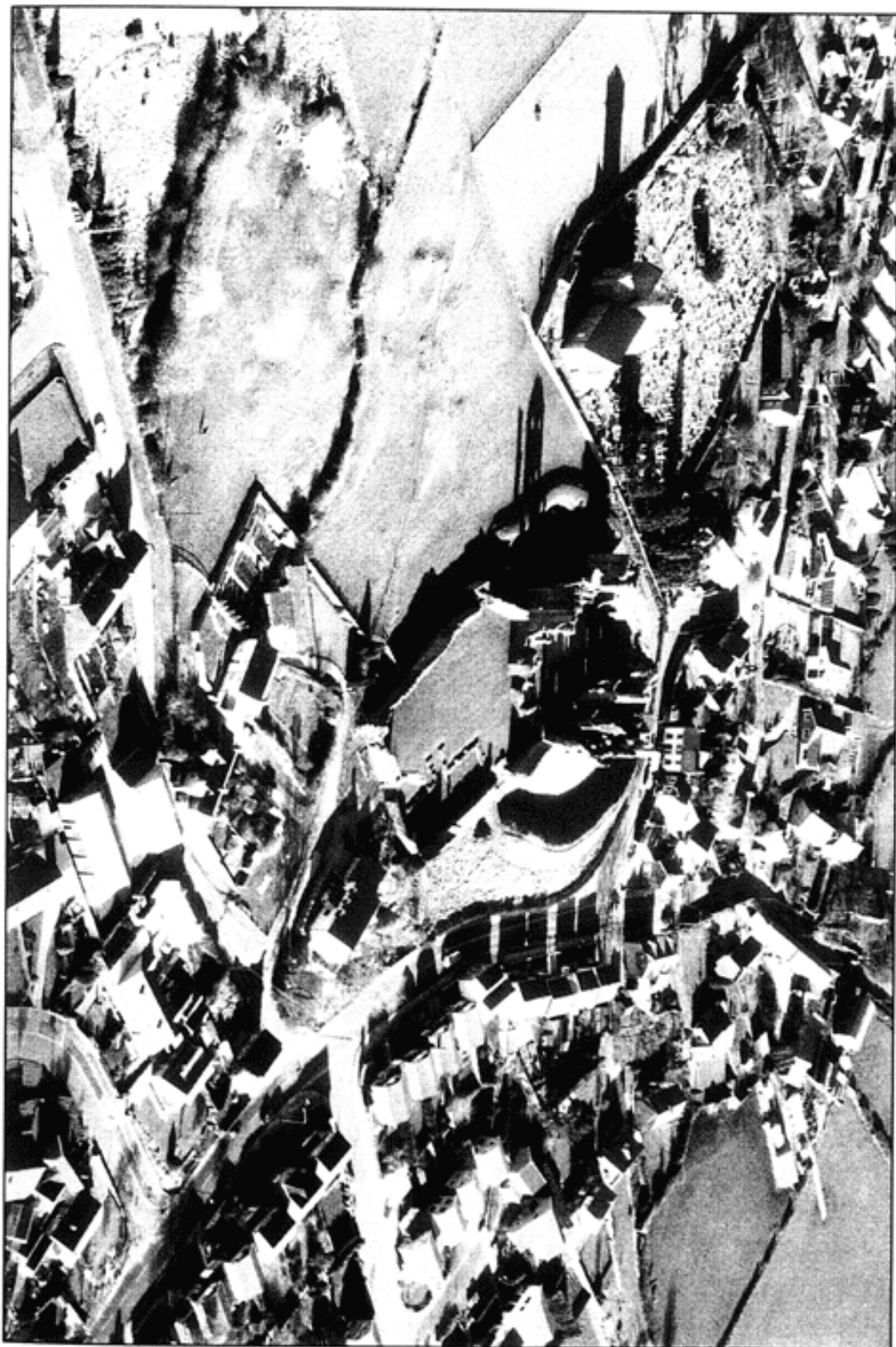
Before we dismiss Shakespeare's portrait, including its awareness of Owain's excursions into south Wales and Henry IV's attempts to resist him there, it is worth remembering that, although he wrote the play in 1597, he may have gained information about Glyn Dŵr from the Welsh communities living or working in London and in central and southern England, including along the drover routes through Warwickshire.¹⁰

The romantic revival at the end of the eighteenth century, with its antiquarian passion for the Middle Ages, showed an interest in Wales. But it was a romantic interest in the landscape and in history and was not above invention; whilst in the nineteenth century the nationalist revival in Wales cast its own interpretation round Glyn Dŵr's revolt. Each age has tended to look at Glyn Dŵr with its own needs and prejudices in mind and interpreted his revolt accordingly.¹¹

Only four major studies of the revolt, based on the scientific study of the past and its surviving evidence, have been written since the beginning of the twentieth century. Several specialised studies of particular topics have complemented them over the past generation or so.¹² But none of these has concentrated on the siege of Coity or has given it more than a passing mention, and there had been no re-enactment of the siege until the year 2000.

So much for the difficulties: what, now, is it possible to say about Owain Glyn Dŵr and the siege of Coity? Glyn Dŵr himself was born in the late 1350s, though we do not know precisely when. His adversary, King Henry IV, was born in 1366. Owain took his name from his residence at Glyndyfrdwy – hence Glyn Dŵr and Shakespeare's Glendower – situated in the Dee valley, not far to the west of Llangollen. He had princely blood in his veins, though it was more pronounced from Powys and Cardiganshire than from the princes of Gwynedd, who had been eliminated by Edward I's conquests of

Plate 2. Coity Castle, from the north-west, showing the much disturbed ground (left) beyond the castle. (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW)



1282-3. His family intermarried with immigrant families of the north-east, and Owain was raised in the landowning society of the region. He entered the service of English marcher lords, and he married a daughter of Sir David Hanmer, a noted royal justice whose family had migrated to the region generations before.¹³

Owain's revolt was a complex movement – how could it be otherwise when it tried to appeal to the various sectors of the population in Wales? He had his own personal grudges, particularly against Lord Grey of Ruthin, one of the local marcher lords who also happened to be a friend of the king. The times in which he lived were times of more general unrest. There was the unrest arising from the dethronement of King Richard II in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster, for Richard seems to have been popular in Cheshire and perhaps in parts of north-east Wales where he held several lordships. There was deeper unrest arising from a longer period of discrimination against the Welsh inhabitants of Wales in church and state. Moreover, the decades since the 1350s were years of economic depression in England and Wales, made worse by recurrent attacks of plague. The Peasants' Revolt in England in 1381 had been symptomatic, and in these difficult times the crown and the marcher lords exploited their Welsh sources of income more harshly than in the past. The attendant social changes included a greater degree of social mobility, and these factors together created a greater air of uncertainty and oppression for ordinary folk. Moreover, there was a lingering doubt about the loyalty and the 'lightheadedness' of the Welsh, just a century after the final conquest of Wales in the 1280s.

Pulling all these factors together helps to explain the widespread nature of Owain's revolt and how he was able to emerge as its leader.¹⁴ They also explain why there were different reactions to his revolt in different parts of Wales, among different social groups, for economic circumstances are rarely uniform in their effects. They explain too how later centuries could see things differently at different times and so interpret the revolt in different ways.

The Revolt in South Wales

The revolt began in September 1400 with an announcement made at Glyndyfrdwy by Owain and his closest friends and kinsmen that he was the rightful prince of Wales. It is not clear what exactly they meant by that declaration and, of course, no prince of Wales in recent centuries had exerted or claimed rulership over the whole of Wales.

In 1400 it was presumably intended as a rallying cry. To rally to his cause those parts of Wales south of a line from Cardigan and the valley of the Teifi in the west to the vale of Wye and the Herefordshire plain in the east presented a large challenge to Glyn Dŵr. The rebels did not penetrate central Wales until May 1401, when there was a clash – which Owain won – in the borderland between Cardiganshire and Montgomeryshire, high up in the Plynlimon mountains. As a result, the infection of revolt spread to west Wales and later in the year, in October, King Henry IV intervened in south Wales in person and took an army as far as the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida in Cardiganshire, via Llandovery. It had no spectacular achievements: the Welsh rebels melted away and the king reasserted his authority by executions and confiscations of property.¹⁵ Owain's wider ambitions were signalled in November 1401 by appeals for aid which he sent to other rulers in the Celtic lands – to the lords of Ireland and the Scottish king – who might be expected to respond to their sense of a common British heritage and to support a revolt against the English king.¹⁶ All this suggests that Owain and his advisers regarded the south of Wales as important to the success of their movement, certainly to substantiate his claims to be a prince of Wales. The south, after all, had the largest concentration of population, and probably the greatest wealth in the lowlands and southern towns; though its cosmopolitan people would require careful handling and a distinctive appeal – as we have seen. In this Owain was ironically assisted by Parliament's arbitrary measures in 1401-2 that risked alienating many southerners, Adam of Usk among them.

It was in August 1402 that Owain's men, having defeated a Herefordshire force at Bryn Glas, near Knighton (Radnorshire), a few weeks earlier, descended for the first time into Gwent and Glamorgan – the south-east. Abergavenny, Usk, Caerleon, Newport and Cardiff were all attacked and in Glamorgan a number of the Welsh inhabitants

rose in sympathy with Owain's followers. The bold move prompted a further royal expedition which had little success; indeed, at one point the king avoided death when his tent blew down in a sudden storm only because he was sleeping in his armour.¹⁷

By 1403, therefore, Owain's revolt had spread throughout Wales, north and south. He had established links with other rulers, and with other rebels against Henry IV, especially the Percy family, earls of Northumberland and Worcester, and he was doubtless formulating those objectives for an independent principality that later emerged in his letters to the king of France. In 1403, accordingly, he laid siege to Aberystwyth castle and, in July, he descended into the Tywi valley: he attacked Llandovery and Dinefwr castle, and made for Carmarthen, which briefly fell to his forces.¹⁸ However, he had to halt his further advance into Pembrokeshire. He consulted the highly respected scholar, poet and seer, Hopkyn ap Thomas ab Einion of Ynys Forgan in the upland part of Gower, about his situation;¹⁹ perhaps as a result, Owain did not advance eastwards. Nevertheless, his local sympathisers rose in the lordship of Kidwelly and attacked the king's own massive castle at Kidwelly itself, whilst Cardiff and Cardigan were threatened towards the end of the year. It seems evident that from 1403 Owain made a determined and concerted effort to raise a number of communities in south Wales in his cause, though to sustain his successes in this whole region was a major challenge. Once again King Henry responded swiftly, in August, with an expedition that made its way up the Usk valley (where Brecon had also been attacked earlier in the year) and down into the Tywi valley to Carmarthen. It was a seemingly uneventful march but it did at least reassert royal authority once again in southern Wales before the king returned to Hereford in October.²⁰ Before the end of the year, a French squadron had appeared in the Channel, and in July 1404 Owain negotiated a treaty in Paris with the French king for substantial further aid. The south and south-east were difficult nuts to crack even with French help: this is the context in which the siege of Coity castle fits.

Coity Castle and its Siege

The lordship of Glamorgan was a huge lordship; south of the mountains, it was comparatively rich and well populated, with a long coastline and cross-channel communications that had been flourishing

for centuries. Without controlling Glamorgan, how could Glyn Dŵr hope to hold the south of Wales? Glamorgan was the gateway to and from England, and the southern road to Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire from the English border counties ran through it. What were the prospects for Owain's success in securing its loyalty?

In 1400, the lord of Glamorgan was Thomas Despenser, Earl of Gloucester, who was executed in that year for rebellion against the new king, Henry IV. His widow Constance was the king's relative and she had been allowed to keep most of her husband's lands and custody of their young son and heir. This confidence in Constance was misplaced, for by February 1405 she was conspiring against the king and probably was in league with Glyn Dŵr. She may even have been negotiating with him earlier, and Owain in 1404 might have been hoping for her support along with that of some at least of her Glamorgan tenants, both Welsh and non-Welsh.²¹

Within Glamorgan was the lordship of Ogmore, a relatively small coastal lordship that belonged to the king as duke of Lancaster. It had been inherited by the king's forebears from the Chaworth family some

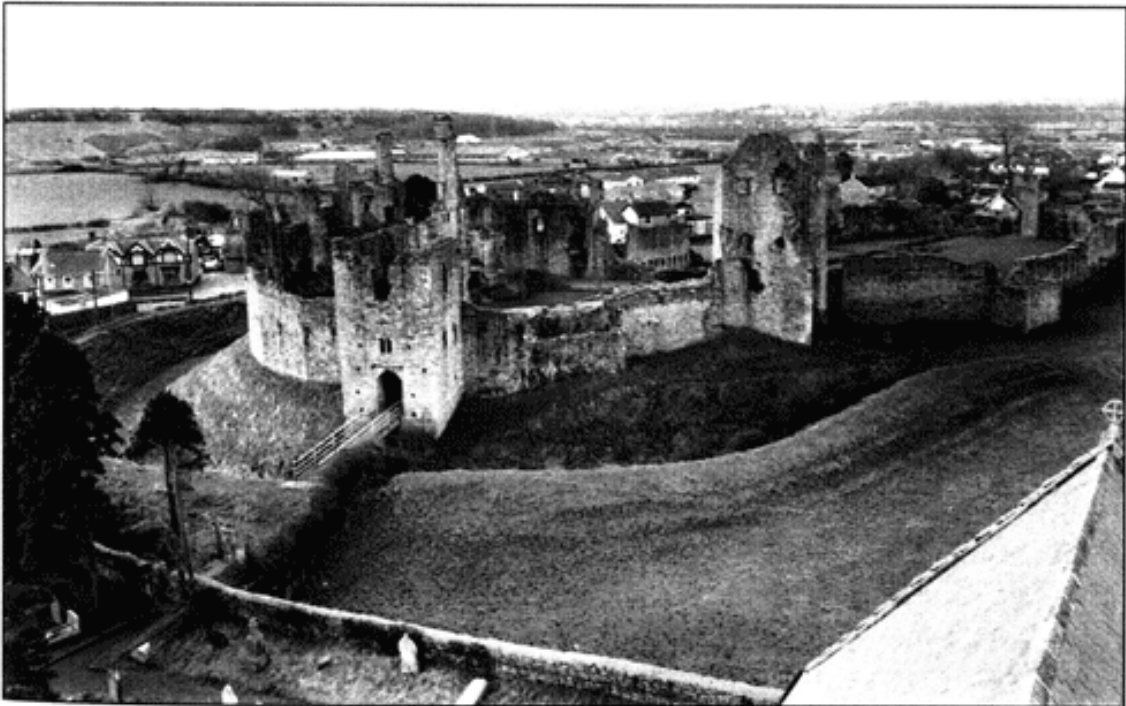


Plate 3. Coity Castle, looking south-west, from the tower of the medieval church. Notice the fifteenth-century gatehouse (centre), the moat and bank fortification of the inner ward, and the substantial remains of the later medieval apartments.
(Crown Copyright: RCAHMW)

150 years earlier. Ogmore castle lay just seven or eight km. (5 miles) from Coity, and with direct access to the sea. It was therefore important for Glyn Dŵr to neutralise Ogmore if he wanted to move into the south-east of Wales; otherwise to have the two castles in hostile hands would make his lines of communication and supply vulnerable.²²

Coity, too, was a comparatively small lordship but, like Ogmore, it was a significant one for Owain. Dating from about 1100, the castle was strategically placed on the frontier between lowland and upland Glamorgan. The castle was not large and it stood on a modestly elevated shelf of land which was not particularly well defended to meet an attack from the north, where it was overlooked by the Cefn Hirgoed rise. But it dominated the lordship southwards and especially the main Roman road, the so-called portway, that ran from east to west through Glamorgan and was still in use in 1400. It was a modest, compact castle, well defended and up-to-date in style, even luxurious by the standards of 1400. Both the Turbervilles and the Berkerolles, lords of Coity, may have been responsible for renovating it during the fourteenth century. Richard II had called there in September 1394 on his way to Pembrokeshire to cross to Ireland. To leave Coity unsubdued on Owain's flank if he were hoping to control south-east and south-west Wales would be sheer folly. The lordship of Coity had distinctive English and Welsh areas, though geographically these were close to one another (unlike comparable areas in the lordship of Ogmore) and there had been a good deal of social interpenetration in the past: Welsh farmers were farming in the Englishry by 1400. Thus, the population of Coity was mixed and fairly cosmopolitan. Coity's castle stood in the Englishry in the southern part of the lordship.²³

The Welsh tenantry of Coity had risen in rebellion at least once before, in 1316, in support of the lord of Senghennydd, Llywelyn Bren. After this rising was crushed, many Welsh folk were displaced by Payn Turberville, who was then lord of Coity, to the north of the lordship. Payn had been a harsh lord and a century later Owain may have hoped that the hostility he had aroused lingered in the local memory.²⁴ So, not only was it important strategically for Owain to capture Coity, but he may have anticipated support among the Welsh people of the lordship. If the castle had not been stoutly defended

against him, it is doubtful if we would have heard about it at all during the revolt.

In 1400, the lord of Coity was Sir Lawrence Berkerolles, who had been living in the castle as his main residence since 1384. He had inherited the lordship from his mother Katherine, one of the Turberville heiresses, along with Newcastle, Newland and Llanharry. The Berkerolles family had been in south-east Wales since about 1100, when they arrived from Somerset. They had acquired property in Glamorgan by the 1180s, and during the thirteenth century were established at East Orchard, Merthyr Mawr and Lampha (near Wick) in the lordship of Ogmore. The tombs of members of the family, including Lawrence's mother and father, may still be seen in St Athan church, at East Orchard.²⁵ Coity was the most wealthy of his estates, almost double the value of all his other Glamorgan estates put together. The family was a prominent one and at the height of its power and wealth under Sir Lawrence.²⁶ It had links with the Gamages of Cowbridge, the Stradlings of St Donat's, and the de la Beres of Weobley, and it had contacts across the Severn, just like the Stradlings who were also Somerset landowners. Sir Lawrence therefore had much in common with the knights and gentry of the west country as well as of southern Wales.²⁷ Sir Lawrence was a middle-aged man in 1404, though he personally put up a very stout resistance to Glyn Dŵr's forces which was the talk of the court and Westminster. He died in 1411, confident in the knowledge that Glyn Dŵr had been defeated, if not captured.²⁸

The recent building work at the castle had included completion of the walls and towers of the two wards, thereby improving its defensive capability. Domestic quarters had been added, especially the southern range, as well as a latrine tower of three storeys (which was something of a luxury) and an extension to the keep that augmented its residential quarters. This was the castle that underwent an unusually lengthy siege in 1404-5.²⁹

In the first half of 1404 there were further Welsh attacks on the Herefordshire border and by June Abergavenny stood in great danger. Although these attacks were checked by a battle not far from Abergavenny, soon afterwards an English force was put to flight up to

the very gates of Monmouth. The Welsh of Glamorgan, in indeterminate numbers, are said to have risen in sympathy.³⁰ Coity castle was under siege by the autumn. Sir Lawrence led the defenders in person. The castle was supplied with grain and other foodstuffs from Ogmore and the sea, by Bristol merchants who still had the run of the Channel. This may have been the occasion when an esquire of Sir Lawrence Berkerolles arranged that the Bristol merchant, Robert Duddebrook, should provide foodstuffs for the sustenance of Coity castle costing £26 19s.8d.³¹ Meanwhile, Cardiff had fallen and was burnt before the rebels withdrew – possibly towards Coity.³² Owain may have been with them.

In October 1404 Parliament met at Coventry in Henry IV's presence. It realised the significance of Coity and the precarious position of its lord bottled up inside the castle. The Commons asked the king to send a relief expedition for what was described as 'the rescue' of Coity. The government had to resort to substantial borrowing to meet the cost. The city of London provided a loan of £733 as part of a wide appeal to bishops, royal servants and officials, and towns.³³ The steward of the household (Sir Thomas Erpingham), the king's secretary (Master John Prophete), the keeper of the great wardrobe (William Loveney), two of the king's most intimate clerks (Nicholas Bubwith and Thomas Langley, both destined for the episcopate), as well as a clutch of archbishops and bishops, were induced to set a good example by each lending £20 to the cause.³⁴

The petition presented in the Commons may have owed much to the advocacy of the border English MPs (Wales, after all, had no representation in Parliament at this time), and especially to Sir John Greindor of Abenhall in Gloucestershire. He had been MP for Herefordshire and sheriff of Glamorgan since 1400 and he had much in common with Sir Lawrence Berkerolles whom he would have known. Greindor was the main organiser of the defence of the Monmouth region and was responsible for two defeats of the Welsh rebels in the summer of 1404. He was also a member of the household of Prince Hal, who was now taking an increasing role in the king's operations against Glyn Dŵr.³⁵ Equally vociferous in this Parliament about events at Coity may have been Thomas Walwyn of Much Marcle in Herefordshire, Greindor's fellow MP for Herefordshire; he had been

charged with raising forces in Herefordshire in October 1404 and with organising the garrisons of south Wales castles against Glyn Dwr.³⁶ Thus, Sir Lawrence had fellow gentry and personal acquaintances in this Parliament to look to his dire situation.

The royal forces were part of an army 2,500 strong, composed of men-at-arms, armed men and archers, mostly raised in the shires of the west Midlands. It assembled at Hereford on 13 November 1404, and was charged with relieving both Sir Lawrence and his castle, as well as Cardiff. Overall command was given to the prince of Wales and his younger brother, Thomas; indeed on 26 October Parliament asked that Thomas should be made a duke in view of his abilities, though Henry IV for the moment demurred. The army was seemingly successful at Cardiff but not at Coity.³⁷

Coity was still in danger in 1405, and it was in February that Lady Despenser's conspiracy came to light.³⁸ Although the Welsh attacks on Grosmont and Usk, in Gwent, were repulsed during the spring, the siege of Coity continued, perhaps as some of Owain's forces retired westwards. Moreover, French ships now appeared at the entrance to the Severn channel and attacked Haverfordwest and Tenby. Carmarthen was again captured by Owain, and in August he and his French allies made a bold thrust through Glamorgan and Gwent to within a few miles of Worcester before retiring before yet another royal army.³⁹ The king's forces, assembled at Hereford early in September, were now directed to relieve the persistent siege of Coity. Bristol merchants supplied the king and the castle.⁴⁰ Henry IV's expedition on this occasion was scarcely more successful than others had been in the past, and in one spectacular way it was a humiliation for the king. In its withdrawal, the royal baggage train of forty or fifty carts crammed with provisions, jewels (including the king's crown!) and valuables was captured and plundered; confusion was all the greater because of the violent storms and flooded streams and rivers with which the expedition had to cope and which disrupted the bringing of provisions from ships at anchor at Ogmores.⁴¹ But by the end of September the royal forces had returned to Hereford: the king had been away only from 10 to 29 September but he may have succeeded in raising the siege. The rebels of Glamorgan are reported to have submitted by the end of 1405, 'except a few who went to Gwynedd to their master'.⁴²

Who were the besiegers? They were not simply invaders from elsewhere in Wales. Among them was John Fleming of Cowbridge, none other than deputy steward of the king's lordship of Ogmores whose family had been in Glamorgan since the twelfth century. So too was John Merlawe of Sutton, who may have had similar forebears; and Isabelle Lanfey, owner of land in Coity and Colwinston, who was of immigrant stock – was she pressurised into joining Owain as others may have been?⁴³ Sir Lawrence Berkerolles himself had had friendly relations with Welsh tenants before the siege and he and his wife employed some of them as witnesses in his business affairs.⁴⁴ This was far from being an ethnic conflict. The story of the siege helps us to understand the social complexities of the revolt.

After the Siege

Coity castle did not figure further in the rebellion. In any case, French aid to Glyn Dŵr ended by 1406, and his allies deserted him. Outlying regions of support were gradually reconciled to the crown – Gower and the Tywi valley especially, in south Wales – and Prince Hal was able to focus on reducing the northern heartland of Welsh support during the next two or three years.⁴⁵ Yet, the effects of this long siege which caught Henry IV's and Parliament's attention were significant. Immediately to the north of the fortress, the Welsh dug lines of entrenchments, slight traces of which still survive on the northern slope of the rising ground which has since been largely levelled; they lay on a line from the church westwards and parallel to the castle walls. The besiegers made large breaches in the north wall of the outer ward, which was repaired after the siege on the original line. Greater breaches were made in the north-facing flank of the inner ward, and these too were repaired afterwards, though their line was slightly withdrawn closer to the inner ward.⁴⁶

As to the lordship of Coity, we know little about it in detail, but we do know that the king's lordship of Ogmores was devastated.⁴⁷ There were evidently some Welsh sympathisers in the vicinity for during the siege attempts were made to prevent supplies from being delivered to Coity castle. As a result of the dislocation, the lordship of Ogmores produced no income for the king in 1403-5, there was some depopulation of the lordship and continuing disorder after the siege

was raised. Many of the inhabitants were either killed or fled to England because relatively few seem to have actually sided with the rebels. Ogmores castle was damaged and its mills burnt to the ground. On 28 February 1410 the king offered his pardon to the residents of Ogmores especially for rebellion and for adhering to his enemies before 6 September 1407, and lands that had been forfeited to the king were restored to their owners.⁴⁸ These effects on Ogmores were felt for a generation thereafter, when rents were still said to be low, mills had not been rebuilt, and farms were deserted. Some villages like Sutton and Northdown were left virtually empty.⁴⁹ Ogmores may have suffered more severely than Coity because there was greater resistance to the rebels in the lordship. The priory of Ewenni likewise fared badly: its property was wasted by the Welsh and in 1406 it was given Llangennydd priory in Gower to help its recovery.⁵⁰ As to Coity itself, few records survive, though there are signs of depopulation here too and the cattle enclosures near the castle were said to be still ruinous in 1412. Sir Lawrence was more wary about consorting with Welsh tenants in the remaining years of his life.⁵¹



Plate 4. Latrine Tower and adjacent domestic apartments at Coity Castle, south side. (Crown Copyright: RCAHMW)

The siege had failed. As a military operation, it illustrates some of the weaknesses of the Welsh in battle and in set sieges as opposed to their successes in guerrilla warfare. As a series of mobile forces, they do not seem to have had large siege engines at Coity; if they had, the siege would not have lasted so long. The incident has its interest, therefore, in the history of warfare and of rebel strategies in early-fifteenth-century England and Wales. After the revolt, further building works took place during the fifteenth century to strengthen the castle's defences and elaborate its residential quarters. A new chapel was added; the imposing north-east gateway and gatehouse were built opposite the church, and the weaker west gatehouse of the outer ward was replaced by a mere doorway. A large barn was erected inside the outer ward, and it was of such dimensions that it became known as 'the Westminster Hall of Coity Lordship' (1814). Its foundations are still visible. It had a mill nearby and sluices were incorporated in the stone bridge of the south gatehouse at either end of the barn – all designed to make the castle more self-sufficient in the event of another siege. The south cross-wall was rebuilt in stone with cross loops, perhaps for more modern guns rather than for archers.⁵² Having proved itself in 1404-5, the castle's ability to withstand a siege was yet further enhanced.

Sir Lawrence himself died in 1411 and quarrels took place between his heirs over his estates. It was this dispute which revealed the extent of the revolt's impact on the lordship of Coity. Within a week or so of Sir Laurence Berkerolles's death in mid-October 1411, the royal chancery ordered the sheriff of Gloucestershire to make the customary enquiry (or inquisition *post mortem*) into his property and his heirs. This took place at Newnham in Gloucestershire on 23 November. Its report indicated that among his extensive properties in south Wales, Coity was worth 84 marks, Newcastle £5, Newland £2 and Llanharry also £2. The heirs were his sister Joan and the heirs of his other sisters, namely Thomas de la Bere (who was nine years old and therefore in the king's charge), William Gamage, and Edward and John Stradling. The king's interest in the Berkerolles estate helped to give some urgency to the enquiries.

The estate valuation made on 23 November may have been sufficiently startling to warrant further action. On 7 December the

chancery recorded who the heirs were and, therefore, how the estate should be divided, and it noted that Thomas de la Bere's share should be taken into the king's hands. On 20 December responsibility for this quarter-share was given to two royal servants with knowledge of south Wales, Hugh Mortimer and Sir John St John, in return for £10 16s.8d. per annum, and an added increment of £5 3s.4d., expressing the doubts about the accuracy of the valuation or in expectation that Coity would recover economically in the following years before Thomas de la Bere reached his majority. Two days earlier a new inquisition was ordered, and this took place at Thornbury in Gloucestershire on 16 January 1412. From the heirs' (and the Crown's) point of view, it established a more satisfactory valuation for Coity, probably in line with the value of the lordship before the siege began. On this occasion, Coity itself was assessed at 200 marks, Newcastle at £10, Newland at £5 and Llanharry also at £5: in short, according to the inquisitions, the financial value of the estate around Coity had been reduced by about 60 per cent by the time of Sir Lawrence's death. Accordingly, on 28 January the earlier valuation was annulled and the crown's expectation was that the estate would recover. Such prospects may explain why William Gamage in particular resented the fact that Sir Lawrence's sister Joan had been assigned the castle and manor of Coity as her part of the divided estate and he took steps to besiege the castle once again. The castle eventually passed to the Gamage family for the next 150 years but, first, the siege by William Gamage in 1412 drew the king's intervention and an insistence that the heirs should go to law, not to war, in their quarrel.⁵³

Owain Glyn Dŵr's movement had been ambitious with some clear objectives that embraced south as well as north Wales, but attitudes to it were complex and support in Wales was far from unanimous. In 1931, Sir John Lloyd, his most notable biographer, called him the 'father of modern Welsh nationalism', which may have been true in one sense, but it raises the questions as to who were the Welsh at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and who responded to his appeal and who did not. In 1995, in his comprehensive analysis of the revolt, R.R. Davies judged Owain 'a truly national hero, however we define that concept', and his caution was echoed at the re-enactment of the siege of Coity castle in 2000: 'Come and show your allegiance! Who will you support – Owain Glyn Dŵr and the Welsh rebels, or Sir

Lawrence Berkerolles and his royal supporters?’⁵⁴ The organisers put their collective finger on the dilemma and the differing attitudes of the inhabitants of Coity in 1404-5 and of Wales more generally during this remarkable revolt.

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NOTES

- ¹ J.E. Lloyd, *Owen Glendower* (Oxford, 1931); R.R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford, 1995).
- ² *Ibid.*, 325-42 ('Epilogue'); E.R. Henken, *National Redeemer: Owain Glyndwr in Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1996), especially ch.5 ('Local Hero and Nationalist Symbol').
- ³ T. Matthews (ed.), *Welsh Records in Paris* (Carmarthen, 1910), 40-54 (translated 83-99, from which the quotations are taken). For a comment, see Davies, *op.cit.*, 169-72.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 284-92, with the parliamentary statutes conveniently translated in I. Bowen (ed.), *The Statutes of Wales* (London, 1908), 31-7.
- ⁵ Neath and Margam were centres of learning in the second half of the fifteenth century, but little historical writing has survived, not even the Register of Neath: G. Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (2nd edn, Cardiff, 1976), 393-6.
- ⁶ C. Given-Wilson (ed.), *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377-1421* (Oxford, 1997), with a substantial introduction on Adam and the nature of his chronicle.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 150-1, 161, 172-3, 254-5.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 126-7.
- ⁹ Act III, scene 1, ll.11-14, 35-43, 60-3.
- ¹⁰ For the Welsh in England, see R.A. Griffiths, 'After Glyn Dŵr: An Age of Reconciliation', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, forthcoming; E. Jones (ed.), *The Welsh in London* (Cardiff, 2001), ch.1.
- ¹¹ Henken, *op.cit.*, 95-7, 119, 166 (for Iolo Morgannwg's tales), 160ff (on Owain as 'National Hero').
- ¹² A.G. Bradley, *Owen Glyndwr and the last struggle for Welsh Independence* (New York, 1902); Lloyd, *op.cit.* (1931); G. Williams, *Owen Glendower* (Oxford, 1966); R.R. Davies, *op.cit.* (1995). For an authoritative bibliography of recent works on the revolt, see *ibid.*, 379-89.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, ch.5 ('Owain Glyn Dŵr')
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, especially ch.3 ('Tensions and Aspirations').
- ¹⁵ Lloyd, *op.cit.*, 40-3.
- ¹⁶ Adam of Usk preserves these letters in his chronicle: Given-Wilson, *op.cit.*, 149-53.

- ¹⁷ Lloyd, *op.cit.*, 50, 54-5; R.R. Davies, *op.cit.*, 107, for the significance of the battle of Bryn Glas.
- ¹⁸ Lloyd, *op.cit.*, 61, 63-7.
- ¹⁹ R.R. Davies, *op.cit.*, 55, 160.
- ²⁰ Lloyd, *op.cit.* 73-6, 81. R.R. Davies, *op.cit.*, 112-13, 200-1, describes the attack on Kidwelly in August and October 1403 in some detail.
- ²¹ T.B. Pugh (ed.), *The Glamorgan County History*, vol.III: *The Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 1973), 180-2.
- ²² The best account of medieval Ogmore is by R.R. Davies in *ibid.*, 285-311.
- ²³ The most recent accounts of the castle and its site are in *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Glamorgan*, vol.III, part 1a: *The Early Castles* (The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (London, 1991), 218-58; J.R. Kenyon and C.J. Spurgeon, *Coity Castle, Ogmore Castle, Newcastle (Bridgend)* (Cadw: Welsh Historical Monuments, Cardiff, 2001), 21-38.
- ²⁴ R.A. Griffiths, 'The Revolt of Llywelyn Bren, 1316', in S. Williams (ed.), *Glamorgan Historian*, II (Barry, 1965), 186-96, reprinted in *idem*, *Conquerors and Conquered in Medieval Wales* (Stroud and New York, 1994), 84-101. See also, Pugh, *Glamorgan County History*, III, ch.2.
- ²⁵ R.A. Griffiths, 'The Twelve Knights of Glamorgan', in S. Williams (ed.), *Glamorgan Historian*, III (Barry, 1966), 153-69, reprinted in *idem*, *Conquerors and Conquered*, 19-29 (especially 25); G. Orrin, *Medieval Churches of the Vale of Glamorgan* (Cowbridge, 1988), 329-31.
- ²⁶ *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, XIX, no.989-90; *Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1405-13*, 226-7.
- ²⁷ For these links, see R.A. Griffiths, 'The Rise of the Stradlings of St Donat's', *Morgannwg*, VIII (1963), 15-47, reprinted in *idem*, *Conquerors and Conquered*, 30-48 (especially 32, 34).
- ²⁸ He died on 15 or 18 October 1411: *Cal. Inquisitions P.M.*, XIX, no. 989-90 (where the two dates are given).
- ²⁹ *Early Castles*, 218-58. See also Kenyon and Spurgeon, *op.cit.*, 22-37.
- ³⁰ Lloyd, *op.cit.*, 87-9.
- ³¹ The cost had not been met by the time the king authorised Duddebrook, now mayor of Bristol, to take what was owing to him from the customs revenue of the port of Bristol on 1 September 1408: PRO, E404/23/544. For supplies from Bristol and the south-west counties in support of English-held castles in south Wales, see Rhidian Griffiths, 'Prince Henry's War: Armies, Garrisons and Supply during the Glyn Dŵr Rising', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 34 (1987), 171-2.
- ³² Lloyd, *op.cit.*, 89.
- ³³ For the financial background, see Rhidian Griffiths, 'Prince Henry, Wales and the Royal Exchequer, 1400-13', *Bull. Board of Celtic Studies*, 32 (1985), especially 209-11, 214 ; *idem*, 'Prince Henry's War', *ibid.*, 34 (1987), especially 166ff; *idem*, 'Prince Henry and Wales, 1400-1408', in M.Hicks (ed.), *Profit, Piety and the Professions in later Medieval England*

(Gloucester, 1990), especially pp.57-9.

- ³⁴ PRO, E404/20/186, 220, 268, 270, 290 (May-June 1405); 21/265 (June 1406), showing that the king was still arranging their repayment in 1405-6.
- ³⁵ For Greindor, see R.A. Griffiths, *The Principality of Wales in the Later Middle Ages*, vol.I: *South Wales, 1277-1536* (Cardiff, 1972), 235-7; J.S. Roskell, L. Clark and C. Rawcliffe, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1386-1421* (4 vols., London, 1992), III, 243-6, and references cited in both.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 765-6, and references cited.
- ³⁷ *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, III, 547; J.H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry the Fourth* (4 vols., London, 1884-98), I, 462.
- ³⁸ Lloyd, *op.cit.*, 92.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 95-6, 101-4.
- ⁴⁰ PRO, E404/23/544; Wylie, *op.cit.*, II, 304-6.
- ⁴¹ F.S.Haydon (ed.), *Eulogium Historiarum* (3 vols. Rolls Series, 1858-63), III, 408; H.T.Riley (ed.), *Annales Ricardi Secundi et Henrici Quinti* (Rolls Series, 1866), 414.
- ⁴² Lloyd, *op.cit.*, 152, from the so-called 'Annals of Owen Glyn Dŵr'; Wylie, *op.cit.*, IV, 295.
- ⁴³ Pugh, *Glamorgan County History*, III, 635 n.119. For the early Flemings in Glamorgan, see Griffiths, *Conquerors and Conquered*, 24, 26. Isabelle Lanfey still had a messuage and 10 acres in Coity in 1412: PRO, C47/9/32.
- ⁴⁴ G.T. Clark (ed.), *Cartae et alia munimenta quae ad dominium de Glamorgancia pertinent* (6 vols., Cardiff, 1910), IV, 1356-7 (dated at Merthyr Mawr), 1372-3, 1446-7 (at Coity).
- ⁴⁵ Lloyd, *op.cit.*, 129.
- ⁴⁶ *Early Castles*, 218-58; Kenyon and Spurgeon, *op.cit.*, 22-37.
- ⁴⁷ R.R.Davies in *Glamorgan County History*, III, 300-4.
- ⁴⁸ *Cartae*, IV, 1461-2.
- ⁴⁹ *Glamorgan County History*, III, 301-2.
- ⁵⁰ Wylie, *op.cit.*, II, 304-6.
- ⁵¹ *Cartae*, IV, 1462-3 (grants at Coity on 1 October 1411, a couple of weeks before Sir Lawrence died). The social and economic structure of the lordship of Coity at the time of the division of the Berkerolles estate among the heirs in 1412 can be analysed from the partition details in PRO, C47/9/32, though there is no comparable survey dating from before the revolt.
- ⁵² *Early Castles*, 218-58; Kenyon and Spurgeon, *op.cit.*, 22-37.
- ⁵³ *Cal. Inquisitions P.M.*, XIX, no.989-90.
- ⁵⁴ Lloyd, *op.cit.*, 146; R.R. Davies, *op.cit.*, 342.