

# Offa's Dyke Journal



Volume 4

Borders in Early Medieval Britain

Edited by Ben Guy, Howard Williams and Liam Delaney

## Aims and Scope

*Offa's Dyke Journal* is a peer-reviewed venue for the publication of high-quality research on the archaeology, history and heritage of frontiers and borderlands focusing on the Anglo-Welsh border. The editors invite submissions that explore dimensions of Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke and the 'short dykes' of western Britain, including their life-histories and landscape contexts. *ODJ* will also consider comparative studies on the material culture and monumentality of frontiers and borderlands from elsewhere in Britain, Europe and beyond. We accept:

1. Notes and Reviews of up to 3,000 words
2. Interim reports on fieldwork of up to 5,000 words
3. Original discussions, syntheses and analyses of up to 10,000 words

*ODJ* is published by JAS Arqueología, and is supported by the University of Chester and the Offa's Dyke Association. The journal is open access, free to authors and readers: <http://revistas.jasarqueologia.es/index.php/odjournal/>. Print copies of the journal are available for purchase from Archaeopress with a discount available for members of the Offa's Dyke Association: <https://www.archaeopress.com/>

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**Front cover:** The River Dee looking east from the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct. Here, the Offa's Dyke Path traverses the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct & Canal World Heritage Site (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2022, with thanks to Rose Guy for assistance). Cover and logo design by Howard Williams, Liam Delaney.

# Offa's Dyke Journal

*A Journal for Linear Monuments, Frontiers and  
Borderlands Research*

Volume 4 for 2022

Special issue: Borders in Early Medieval Britain

Edited by Ben Guy, Howard Williams and Liam Delaney



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# The Changing Approaches of English Kings to Wales in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

Ben Guy

*This article examines how political relations between England and Wales evolved during the tenth and eleventh centuries. During this period, the newly enlarged English kingdom ruled by Alfred the Great's descendants became more sophisticated and better able to exploit its inhabitants. At the same time, Wales came to be dominated by a smaller number of more powerful and wide-ranging kings. The combined effect of these changes was a move away from the complete domination over Wales sought by English kings of the earlier tenth century to a pattern of more sporadic intervention exercised through client lords active in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands.*

*Keywords:* early medieval Wales; Anglo-Welsh border; Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, Bleddyn ap Cynfyn, Gwent

## Introduction

During the tenth century, the English-dominated lands south of the River Tees underwent two fundamental transformations, each with wide-reaching consequences. The first was the emergence of political unity under King Alfred's immediate descendants, a process that led to the West Saxon dynasty accruing unprecedented power to itself. The second was the extension of an increasingly sophisticated system of governance across this new vast territory. Although the chronology of this latter process is difficult to discern in detail, most of the structures of authority that characterised Domesday England in 1086 (shires and hundreds, a coordinated network of mints, etc.) can be seen to emerge in surviving written sources by the end of the tenth century (Molyneux 2015). These processes inevitably had a profound impact upon relations between the emergent 'kingdom of the English' and its neighbours to the west and north. Not only was the English king able to position himself with increasing dominance at the apex of an island-wide political hegemony, but there also came to be a sharpening distinction between the nature of the intensive domination exercised by the English king within the English kingdom and the extensive domination exercised outside it (Molyneux 2011b). Probably between 888 and 892, Anarawd, king of Gwynedd, had submitted voluntarily to Alfred, by now king of the West Saxons and Mercians, on the same terms as Æthelred, ealdorman of the Mercians (Asser: chap. 80; cf. Charles-Edwards 2013: 493–494; Thomas 2020a: 584–585); but by 1064, when Edward the Confessor appointed Bleddyn and Rhiwallon to rule Wales in the place of their vanquished half-brother Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, there could be no question that the relationship between the king of the English and the new Welsh rulers would work in the same way as that between Edward and his earls. Manuscript D of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

reports Edward's arrangement as follows (ASC (D), s.a. 1063; translation adapted from Whitelock 1961, s.a. 1063 (D); cf. manuscript E, which emphasises Harold's role):

*se kyng Eadward betæhte þæt land his twam gebroþran Bleþgente 7 Rigwatlan, 7 hig aþas sworon 7 gislas saldan þæm cyngre 7 þæm eorle þæt heo him on allum þingum unswicende beon woldon, 7 eighwar him gearwe on wætere 7 on lande, 7 swylc of þam lande gelæstan swylc man dyde toforan ær oþrum kyngre.*

And King Edward entrusted the country to his [Gruffudd's] two brothers, Bleddyn and Rhiwallon, and they swore oaths and gave hostages to the king and the earl, promising that they would be faithful to him in everything, and be everywhere ready on water and on land, and likewise would pay such dues from that country as had been given before... *oþrum kyngre*.

Bleddyn and Rhiwallon swore oaths and gave hostages; they promised to be faithful to Edward and provide military support; and they promised to pay customary dues. Unfortunately, the ambiguity of the phrase *oþrum kyngre* (either 'to any other king' or 'to the other king') clouds our understanding of whether such dues were fixed by reference to a specific previous English king. Still, this is a far cry from the enormous power that the English king, by the mid-eleventh century, exercised over his earls, whose comital lands were loaned to them by the king and could, in theory, be revoked at any moment (Baxter and Blair 2006; Baxter 2007).

This article asks how the approach of kings of the English towards Wales changed during the tenth and eleventh centuries to reflect these evolving circumstances. It is argued that initial efforts to dominate Wales gave way to more granular and regional approaches aimed at management and containment. This was achieved by English kings and lords sponsoring local aristocratic families in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands, who in turn could alter the balance of power within Wales in favour of the English. This is exemplified by three case studies, concerning the families of the Welsh kings Bleddyn ap Cynfyn, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, and Rhydderch ab Iestyn. Explanations for this shift in approach might be found within both England and Wales. In England, the political urgency of island-wide imperial domination was gradually eroded by the growing sophistication of systems of exploitation within the kingdom of the English, which provided more enduring means of upholding the power and wealth of English kings. In Wales, the increasing regularity with which Welsh kings could exercise power across all Wales outside the south-east posed greater challenges for English kings who sought direct domination over them, causing the English to look instead to intervention into the more easily manageable border districts as a means of exerting wider influence in Wales. The complex interaction between English and Welsh authorities in these largely Welsh-speaking border districts forms an important precursor to the later March of Wales, even though the piecemeal conquests of Norman lords carved out a new and wider space in which such interaction took place (cf. Brady 2017: 15–16).



## Background: Patterns of Domination

During the early decades of the tenth century, the West Saxon dynasty of King Alfred (d. 899) gradually extended its sway over Southumbrian England, broadening the concept of the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ that Alfred had bequeathed to his son Edward. From the 880s to the 920s, this was largely a matter of rebranding and securing Alfred’s double kingdom of Wessex-Mercia, but Æthelstan’s conquest of southern Northumbria in 927 heralded another ideological shift: from now on, Æthelstan and his successors presented themselves as ‘kings of the English’, claiming paramount authority across the English people. It is in the triumphalist context of the post-927 kingdom that one finds the clearest evidence for these same kings also seeking regular domination over the greater kings of Wales. This is demonstrated most forcefully by two notable groups of English royal diplomas: the charters of ‘Æthelstan A’ and the so-called ‘alliterative’ charters (Keynes 2014, with earlier references cited therein). The two agencies responsible for these documents regularly saw fit to notice the presence of Welsh kings at the English royal assemblies where the grants recorded in the charters were enacted. The surviving charters of Æthelstan A were produced between 928 and 935, and the surviving alliterative charters between 940 and about 955. During this time, all the major Welsh kings are attested: Hywel Dda, king of Dyfed 909–950 and Gwynedd too from 942, appears as premier Welsh ruler from 928 to his death in 950, and his son and successor Owain appears in 955; Idwal Foel, king of Gwynedd 916–942, appears from 928 to 935, and his son and successor Iago appears in 955; and Morgan ab Owain, king of the south-eastern kingdom of Glywysing c. 930–974, can be seen rising up the pecking order of Welsh kings between 931 and 955. Other minor rulers appear too, including Tewdwr, king of Brycheiniog, in 934, and a certain Gwriad in 928 and 932. These Welsh kings attended English royal assemblies at locations right across southern England, from Exeter in the South West to Nottingham in the East Midlands. Two charters imply that Hywel, Idwal, and Morgan accompanied Æthelstan on his expedition to attack Causantín mac Áeda, king of Alba, in 934. Such activity no doubt underscored the claims of Æthelstan and his immediate successors to be not only ‘kings of the English’, but even, on occasion, ‘kings of Britain’, as is so vividly encapsulated by the title disseminated on Æthelstan’s coins after 927: *rex totius Britanniae*, ‘king of all Britain’ (Molyneux 2011b: 60).

The position of the Welsh kings after Eadred’s death on 23 November 955 is unclear. One further charter in the alliterative sequence (S 633), apparently issued in 956 by Eadwig, includes *Morgant regulus* in its witness list. The document was adapted in the eleventh century, though it seems likely that this detail derives from an authentic exemplar (Tinti 2002: 253–254; cf. Snook 2015: 138–143). Either way, with the cessation of the alliterative charters, Welsh rulers disappear from English royal diplomas. This creates a conundrum for the historian: did Welsh kings stop attending English royal assemblies, perhaps due to a slackening of domination over them during the difficult years of Eadwig’s reign, or is this a mirage conjured by the changing nature of the evidence? The answer may lie somewhere in between. It is highly probable that some visits by Welsh kings to English

royal assemblies are hidden from view by the less inclusive approach to the construction of witness lists adopted by other agencies of charter production (Roach 2013: 39). On the other hand, it is notable that several northern rulers, who, like the Welsh kings, were active outside of the English king's direct sphere of authority, appear sporadically in King Edgar's charters: Eadwulf *Yvelcild*, lord of Bamburgh, four times between 968 and 970, and Máel Coluim, probably king of Strathclyde, in 970 (McGuigan 2018: 127; Keynes 2002: table 56; curiously, Máel Coluim appears in S 779, the 'Ely foundation charter', the authenticity of which has yet to be determined with certainty). One might have expected the presence of Welsh kings to receive occasional notice in the same way if they had indeed been present.

However regularly we might imagine Welsh kings to have attended English royal assemblies after 955, English kings of the second half of the tenth century were certainly employing imperial imagery that was intended to conjure a vision of hegemony over other rulers in Britain, most notably in the case of Edgar, self-styled *basileus* of Albion (Crick 2008). Edgar's image of power was reinforced by the famous proceedings at Chester in 973, when several kings from northern and western Britain and the neighbouring islands were compelled to commit themselves to a military alliance headed by him (cf. Barrow 2001, who underestimates the significance of Chester as a centre of English royal power: Molyneux 2011b: 66–67; Roach 2013: 52–53). The names of these kings are recorded in twelfth-century sources, and although there is reason to doubt the extant lists, they probably provide a reasonably reliable guide to the likely attendees (Williams 2004). Among them were Iago ab Idwal, king of Gwynedd, who had previously attended a royal assembly of Eadred in 955, as well as Iago's nephew and later successor Hywel ab Ieuaif (Thornton 2001: 67–68; Charles-Edwards 2013: 543–545). Yet the dramatic nature of this event, resulting in much comment from contemporary and later chroniclers, might suggest that such meetings were no longer routine in the way that they had been in the first half of the century. Instead, relations between English and Welsh leaders during Edgar's reign seem to be characterised by regular but petty military interventions. Ælfhere, ealdorman of the Mercians (956–983), ravaged Iago's kingdom of Gwynedd in 967, while in 983, possibly as a consequence of the alliance established at Chester (Williams 2004: 239–240), Ælfhere supported Iago's successor Hywel in an attack on Brycheiniog and other lands in south Wales (Charles-Edwards 2013: 539 and 548–549; for Ælfhere, see Williams 1982). However, only two years later Hywel himself was killed by the English. This type of factionalism, encouraged by English lords, seems to reveal a lack of political will (or perhaps ability) on the part of English kings to maintain direct domination over the greater kingdoms in the west of Wales.

The other significant factor in this relationship was the changing situation in Wales itself, where political structures by no means remained static. Ninth-century Wales was a land of many kings, as Asser attests; eleventh-century Wales, much less so. This was a result of conquests by the sons and grandsons of Rhodri Mawr (d. 878), culminating in Hywel Dda's rule over all Wales (outside the south-east, which retained its independence)

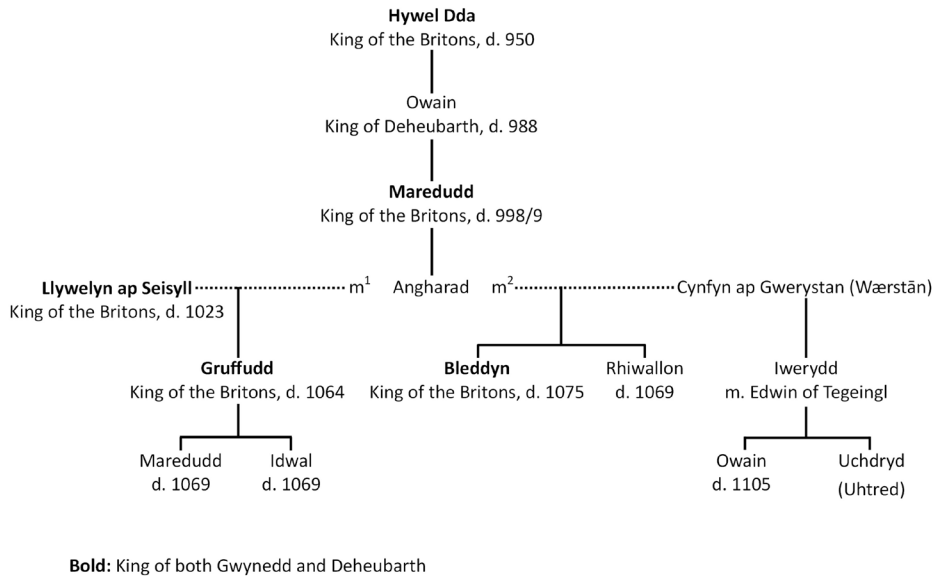


Figure 1: Kings of Gwynedd and Deheubarth, 942–1075

from 942 to 950. This process fundamentally reconfigured the geopolitical dynamic of Welsh politics (see especially Davies 1990: 41–44). With the exceptions of Glywysing and Gwent in the south-east, most of the earlier, smaller kingdoms fade from view. In their place, one finds an increasingly coherent political realm divided into a northern half, usually called Gwynedd or simply ‘North Wales’, and a southern half, which came to be known as Deheubarth (literally ‘the southern part’). Sometimes, these halves were ruled separately, as in the years immediately following Hywel Dda’s death; but at other times, they were ruled together, as during the reign of Hywel’s grandson, Maredudd ab Owain, from 988 to 998/9 (Thornton 1997; cf. Russell 2017: 21–24), and later the reign of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn’s father, Llywelyn ap Seisyll, until his death in 1023. The new political dispensation is strikingly reflected in the annals. On Llywelyn’s death in 1023, the Cottonian chronicle comments, without further specificity, that *Rederch regnum dextralium Britonum tenuit* (‘Rhydderch held the kingdom of the southern Britons’, AC: c346). When Rhydderch died ten years later, the same chronicle states that *Iacob et filii Eruin [recte Eduin], id est Howel et Maredut, tenuerunt regnum* (‘Iago and the sons of Edwin, namely Hywel and Maredudd, held the kingdom’, AC: c356). Even when divided into two halves, with Iago ruling Gwynedd in the north and the sons of Edwin ruling Deheubarth in the south, this domain was increasingly being perceived as a single *regnum*. Thus, in the eleventh century, English kings were generally required to deal with Welsh rulers from the west of Wales who wielded greater power, and ranged over wider territory, than their ninth-century predecessors. While Alfred extended his lordship across



Wales through complex negotiations with as many as six named kings, Edward could reconfigure Welsh politics at a stroke by killing and replacing a single opponent, albeit one who could be defeated only by a large-scale military campaign (cf. DeVries 2001; for the date, see Hudson 1994). During the intervening years, English kings had been required to find new methods for exerting power in Wales.

### Case-study I: Bleddyn and Rhiwallon

The first case study concerns the family of the brothers Bleddyn and Rhiwallon. Why did Edward choose them as Gruffudd's successors? As Gruffudd's younger half-brothers, sharing the same mother, it is likely that Bleddyn and Rhiwallon had been important members of Gruffudd's household. Gruffudd's mother, Angharad, had probably remarried shortly after the death of Gruffudd's father, Llywelyn ap Seisyll, in 1023 (Davies 2016: 10–11). Presumably her new husband, Cynfyn ap Gwerystan, the father of Bleddyn and Rhiwallon, was a powerful lord at that time. Through Angharad, Bleddyn and Rhiwallon could claim royal status of the highest order: Angharad was the daughter of Hywel Dda's grandson, Maredudd ab Owain, who, as mentioned above, had ruled across much of Wales between 988 and 998/9 (cf. Guy 2020b: 41–42). From one perspective, Bleddyn and Rhiwallon may have seemed the natural successors to Gruffudd, even within Wales.

But this was almost certainly not what Gruffudd had intended. Gruffudd had two sons of his own, Maredudd and Idwal, who had reached maturity by no later than 1069, when they appear in the annals as challengers to Bleddyn and Rhiwallon (*AC*: b1091/c392).<sup>1</sup> During Gruffudd's lifetime, Maredudd appeared alongside his father in a surviving charter of privileges for the episcopal church of Llandaf. The charter is preserved in the Book of Llandaf, and it seems likely that it reproduces at least some matter from an authentic document (*LL*: 269–270; Davies 1979: 129; doubts are expressed by Maund 1991: 202–203, who nevertheless accepts the likelihood of an original eleventh-century source text). Encouragingly, one interpolation in the text is fairly obvious, suggesting that a twelfth-century editor based his work on an earlier source. When Gruffudd is first mentioned, he is called *Grifudi regis Britannie, & ut sic dicam totius Gualie* ('Gruffudd king of *Britannia*, and thus as I should say of all Wales'): this is probably a twelfth-century gloss on an original eleventh-century text, since *Britannia* was a typical term for Wales in Gruffudd's time, whereas *Gualia* came into fashion among Welsh writers only in the time of the Book of Llandaf (Pryce 2001: 777–781). In the witness list of this document, the first two lay witnesses are listed as *rex Grifud* and *Margetud filius eius* ('King Gruffudd' and 'Maredudd his son'). Given that Maredudd is always named before his brother in the annals, he was probably the eldest son, and this witness list may imply that he was Gruffudd's designated heir.

<sup>1</sup> Note that both versions of the vernacular *Brut y Tywysogyon*, alongside the closely related *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, name Gruffudd's second son as Ithel, rather than Idwal: *BT* (PRS), *s.a.* 1069 (I refer to Jones's corrected dates throughout this article). In this instance, it is probable that the two Latin chronicles preserve the form of the underlying eleventh-century St Davids annals more accurately than the vernacular chronicles.

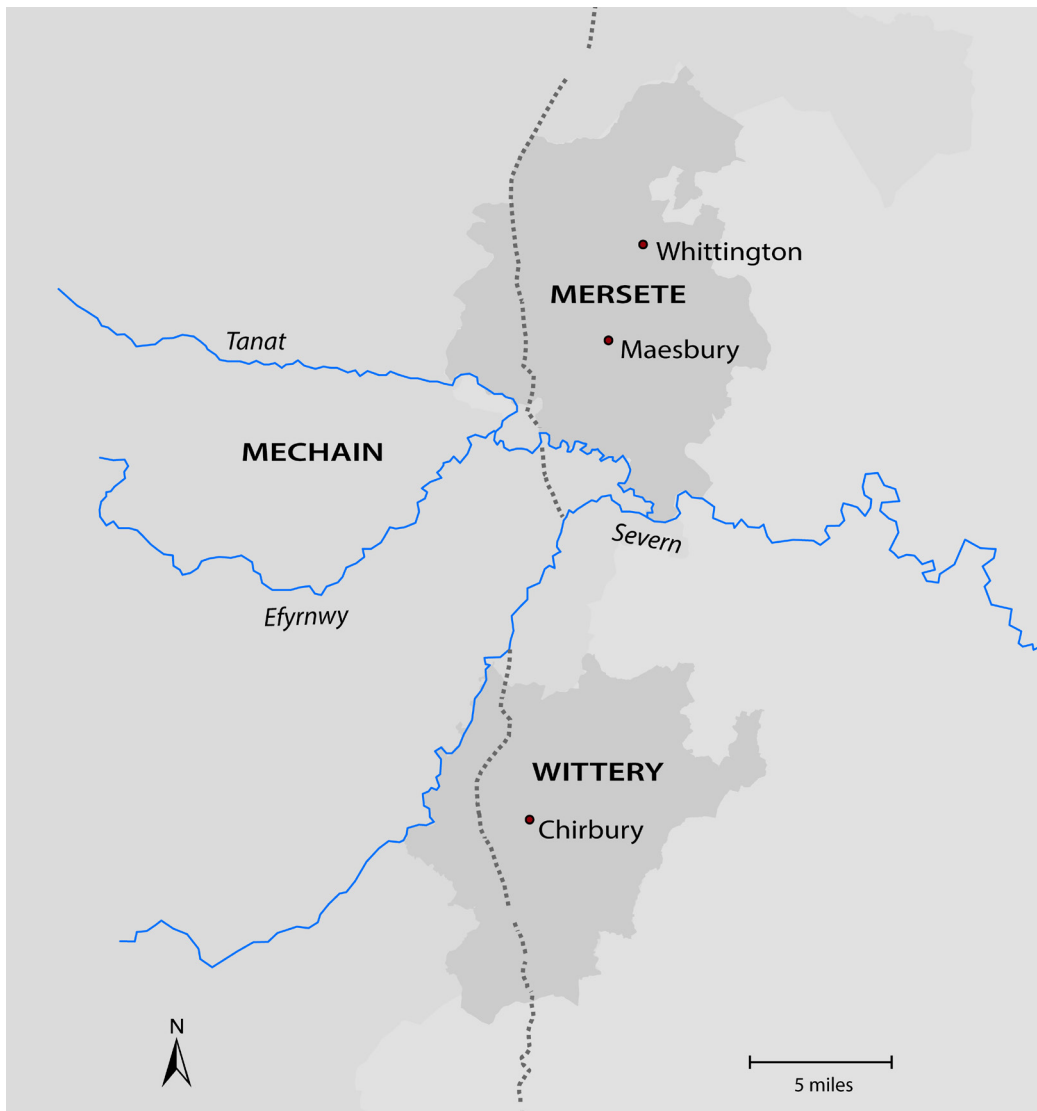


Figure 2: Merseyte hundred, Wittery hundred, and Mechain, contextualised with rivers, Offa's Dyke and the modern English-Welsh border

By appointing Bleddyn and Rhiwallon to succeed Gruffudd, Edward was clearly disrupting the legacy of his defeated rival, as one would expect; but again, why Bleddyn and Rhiwallon? A hint of an answer might be discovered by considering the family's background. In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, Bleddyn's sons and grandsons were major political actors on the Welsh stage, and their activities are amply evidenced by the fulsome account of the contemporary chronicler at Llanbadarn Fawr, whose work is preserved in *Brut y Tywysogyon* (Stephenson 2007: 183–189; 2016: 25–28; Jones 2014; Guy 2020a: 98–100). Although Bleddyn's foremost heir, his son Cadwgon,

ranged widely across Wales during these years, and established his primary court in Ceredigion, it is clear that Bleddyn's sons had inherited, and divided between them, a patchwork of lands centred on the mid-Wales territories of Powys (Stephenson 2016: 33–35). Bleddyn's family may indeed have originated in this area, considering that, when the sons of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn challenged Bleddyn and Rhiwallon in 1069, the resulting battle was fought in Mechain, a territory located in the heart of Powys immediately adjacent to the English border, roughly between Oswestry and Welshpool (cf. Stephenson 2016: 28–29; see Figure 2). Perhaps Cynfyn ap Gwerystan had been a prominent lord in or around Mechain at the time that he married Angharad after Llywelyn ap Seisyll's death in 1023.

There is another indication of growing Welsh power in this area around the time of Cynfyn's marriage to Angharad. A note in Domesday Book recalls that the three manors of Chirbury, Maesbury, and Whittington in Shropshire had paid half a night's farm during the reign of King Æthelred (*DB Shropshire*: 253c; for the 'night's farm', a render notionally to support the king and his household for a single night, or an equivalent commuted monetary payment, see Stafford 1980; Lavelle 2003). All three manors were located adjacent to the Welsh border: Chirbury was the head manor of Wittery hundred, Maesbury was the head manor of Mersete hundred, and Whittington was another important manor in Mersete hundred (for Mersete hundred, see Lewis 2007: 134–136, and Parsons elsewhere in this volume). Not only that, but all three manors lay immediately to the east of Mechain. Domesday Book shows that these manors had ceased to generate revenue between Æthelred's reign and 1066: by the latter date, they were deemed to be 'waste'. It is possible that the organisation of these manors for the provision of the night's farm, uniquely in north-western Mercia according to Domesday Book, was related to Æthelred's visit to Shropshire in mid-Winter in 1006, where he is said to have taken his *feorme* (*ASC (C)*, s.a. 1006; cf. Whitelock 1961, s.a. 1006 (CDE)). If so, it may have been in the troubled later years of Æthelred's reign, or shortly thereafter, that these estates stopped generating revenue for the king. This circumstance has been attributed to the vicissitudes of border warfare (Darby 1986: 267; *DB Shropshire*: note to 4,1,12), and it has even been suggested that the Welsh acquired these lands during Æthelred's reign (Charles-Edwards 2013: 555 and n. 94, referring to Lewis 1985: 147–149). Given that Mersete hundred lies immediately to the east of Mechain, and that Cynfyn seems to have risen to prominence at exactly this time, it is likely that his family should be implicated.

The position of Cynfyn's family as powerful border magnates was probably a key factor influencing Edward's decision to entrust royal power in Wales to Bleddyn and Rhiwallon in 1064. One might even push it further. If the brothers were indeed influential in Chirbury, Edward's attitude towards them might have been shaped by the deeper association of that place with English efforts to manage border affairs. As early as 915, Æthelflæd had established a *burh* at Chirbury (Blake and Sargent 2018: 129–130, 133, 136, and 138). Provisions for the organisation of this *burh* might indeed

explain why Chirbury was grouped with Maesbury and Whittington for the purposes of royal exploitation by Æthelred's time. Considering the next case-study, one might even speculate that Cynfyn's family had been associated with this *burh* prior to c. 1023. The fact that Cynfyn's father bore the English name *Wærstān* (rationalised in later Welsh sources as 'Gwerystan': Thornton 2007: 149) might suggest that the family had previously straddled Welsh and English interests.

### Case-study 2: Gruffudd ap Llywelyn

Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's family first emerges into view in c. 1017, when his father Llywelyn killed a certain Aeddan ap Blegywryd and his four sons (AC: b1039/c341; BT (PRS), s.a. 1018). This incident has been identified as the subject of an early Welsh poem called *Echrys Ynys*, which concerns the death in battle of a certain *Aedon*, a lord from Anglesey (Charles-Edwards 2013: 665–668; for text and translation, see Gruffydd 1999). The poem suggests that *Aedon* met his death at the mouth of the River Conwy facing an enemy coming from the east, seemingly placing Llywelyn ap Seisyll in north-east Wales. It is usually thought that this event marked Llywelyn's first acquisition of power over the kingdom of Gwynedd, just as his defeat of Rhain the Irishman at Abergwili in 1022 is thought to represent his first acquisition of power in Deheubarth (Charles-Edwards 2013: 555–556). The evidence, however, is ambiguous; Llywelyn could conceivably have ruled in both the north and the south prior to 1017 (cf. Maund 1991: 59–60).

Further support for the idea that Llywelyn's powerbase lay in north-east Wales can be found in English accounts of Harold Godwinson's campaign against Llywelyn's son Gruffudd in 1063–1064. Harold is said to have set out from Gloucester to attack Gruffudd in Rhuddlan, in north-east Wales, after Christmas 1063 (Whitelock 1961, s.a. 1063 (D); John of Worcester, vol. 2: 592–593; for the contrasting presentation of this and other events of Gruffudd's reign in Welsh chronicles, see Thomas 2020b: 290–297). Harold presumably knew that Gruffudd would be celebrating Christmas and New Year at Rhuddlan, implying that Rhuddlan was one of Gruffudd's chief courts (Charles-Edwards 2013: 555 and 566). Gruffudd, like his father, may have had his primary powerbase in north-east Wales, perhaps specifically in Rhuddlan. As at Chirbury, a *burh* had been founded at Rhuddlan in the early tenth century, and this may hold the clue to the origins of Gruffudd's family. According to an annal in the 'Mercian Register', Edward the Elder established a *burh* at *Cledemutha* in 921, and this has generally been understood to refer to Rhuddlan, near the mouth of the River Clwyd, since Wainwright first proposed the identification in 1950 (Whitelock 1961, s.a. 921 (Mercian Register); Wainwright 1950; for the Mercian Register, see Stafford 2008; 2020, chap. 4). Excavations at Rhuddlan have revealed activity in the tenth century, though there is little firm evidence for any tenth-century burghal defences (Quinnell and Blockley 1994: 209–213; Griffiths 2001: 171–174).

After 1066, Rhuddlan remained significant as a western outpost of English power. All of the unhidated land, north-west of Wat's Dyke, pertaining to the Cheshire hundred of Ati's

Cross was grouped together as a part of a large manor centred on Rhuddlan: this territory was called 'Englefield' (Welsh 'Tegeingl'). By 1086, the manor of Rhuddlan was divided between Hugh, Earl of Chester, and his cousin Robert of Rhuddlan, who functioned as Hugh's deputy in Wales. Rhuddlan was the base from which Robert extended his dominion across North Wales, forming what Chris Lewis has aptly termed the 'Norman principality of Gwynedd' (Lewis 2019). After Robert's death in 1093, this broader principality seems to have been assigned to Earl Hugh, who granted lands in it as far afield as Anglesey to his new Benedictine house of St Werburgh's in Chester (*Chart. St. Werburgh*, vol. 1: no. 3; *Charters... Earls of Chester*: no. 3). But even after a Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd had been re-established under Gruffudd ap Cynan in the years after 1099 (Lewis 1996: 72–73), Rhuddlan and its hinterland continued to adhere to the Norman administration in Chester. In the wake of Robert's death, it seems that political leadership in Chester's Welsh hinterland of Englefield passed to the family of Edwin of Tegeingl. Edwin should most probably be identified with the Domesday tenant of the same name who held land in Ati's Cross and Exestan hundreds in 1066, and who still held one hide at Coleshill in Ati's Cross in 1086 (Harris and Thacker 1987: 315 and 322; Thornton 2007: 146 and 164). By the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Welsh families claiming descent from Edwin emerge in record evidence as some of the most important landholders and administrators in the newly formed county of Flintshire (Carr 1979: 141–145; 2003; 2017: 49–50, 65, 82–84, and 124–125). Earlier, in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, Edwin's sons and grandsons were significant political players in North Wales, where they usually acted in concert with the Normans. In 1098, Edwin's son Owain guided a Norman expedition to Anglesey, though he apparently later turned against the Normans and led a rebellion of the men of Gwynedd (so *BT* (PR), *s.a.* 1098; *BT* (S), *s.a.* 1098 claims, quite plausibly, that Owain was installed as ruler of Gwynedd by the Normans prior to the rebellion; the underlying Latin source may have been ambiguous). More striking is an incident twenty years later. In 1118, Hywel ab Ithel, Lord of Rhos and Rhufoniog, supported by Maredudd ap Bleddyn and his relatives, fought a battle against Owain's sons, themselves supported by their uncle Uchdryd (OE 'Uhtred') and the 'French from Chester' (*BT* (PR), *s.a.* 1118; Uchdryd's sons are implicated in *BT* (S), *s.a.* 1118). The battle was fought in the territory of Dyffryn Clwyd, immediately to the south-west of Englefield. Although Hywel and his allies won the battle, the *Brut* recounts that 'Maredudd and the sons of Cadwgan returned home without daring to take possession of the land, because of the French, even though they had obtained the victory' (*BT* (R), *s.a.* 1118). This is a strong indication that Edwin's family held land and authority, probably in Englefield, under the lordship of the earls of Chester.

It is usually thought that 'the Welsh' took Rhuddlan from the Mercians at some point between 921 and 1063/4, explaining why Gruffudd ap Llywelyn came to be holding court in a former Mercian *burh* (or perhaps before *c.* 1017, if Llywelyn ap Seisyll already held it by that date) (e.g. Lewis 1991: 3–4 and 14; 2007: 137; Griffiths 2001: 181; Charles-Edwards 2013: 565–566). However, considering the post-1066 history of Rhuddlan and its lords, another possibility suggests itself: that Gruffudd's family originated as English royal



agents associated with the *burh* at Rhuddlan. The immediate hinterland of Rhuddlan would have been predominantly Welsh in language and culture at this date, despite the presence of English place-names to the north-west of Wat's Dyke by 1066 (for which, see Owen 1997). It might have been considered appropriate to entrust the management of this borderland zone to a family of mixed Anglo-Welsh background, as with the family of Edwin of Tegeingl by 1098. This may explain why Llywelyn ap Seisyll was able to acquire such power within Wales by c. 1017 from an unlikely base in the north-east, which was not a traditional centre of Welsh political power. Initially, this arrangement may have worked to the advantage of the English, even if circumstances then worked against them during the reign of Llywelyn's son Gruffudd.

One might compare this hypothesised scenario with the situation of Archenfield, now in south-western Herefordshire, by 1066. Archenfield, another territory that was predominantly Welsh in language and culture, had been annexed to Herefordshire but remained separate from it administratively, even in 1086 (Lewis 1988: 8–9; 2007: 132–133; *DB Herefordshire*: note 1). In 1066, most of Archenfield remained in the hands of Welsh landowners, including such prominent individuals as the 'Cadian' who held the extensive territory of Kilpeck (Baxter and Lewis 2017: 358); he should almost certainly be identified as the 'Cadien Ddu' associated with Kilpeck in a Book of Llandaf document concerning churches in Archenfield consecrated by Herewald, Bishop of Llandaf, in the period 1056–87 (*LL*: 275–278; *DB Herefordshire*: note to 1,53; Thornton 2007: 160–163). According to the customs of Archenfield recorded in Domesday Book, it was customary in 1066 that the men of Archenfield should form the vanguard of English armies advancing into Wales, and their rearguard on the return (*DB Herefordshire*: 179b). Presumably, prominent landholders like Cadien Ddu would have led the men of Archenfield in such situations. A comparable arrangement with the Welsh of Englefield may well explain why the Norman army of Earl Hugh of Chester and Earl Hugh of Shrewsbury was led to Anglesey by Edwin's son Owain in 1098. Did Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's family play a similar role in Englefield in the late tenth or early eleventh centuries? If so, it complicates our understanding of 'Welsh' and 'English' interests in this area. It would have been useful, perhaps essential, for the English kings and earls to exert their power in this district through the intermediary of a family of Welsh border magnates; in turn, initial English support in this Mercian outpost may have been the decisive factor in the rise of Llywelyn and his son to power in a Welsh context. At first, Llywelyn's rise may have been seen as advantageous among the English, even if events transpired otherwise thereafter.

### Case-study 3: Rhydderch ab Iestyn

The third and final case study concerns Rhydderch ab Iestyn, who ruled South Wales, and possibly much of North Wales too, for a decade following the death of Llywelyn ap Seisyll in 1023. It seems that Rhydderch hailed from Gwent in south-east Wales, where two of his grandsons, Caradog ap Gruffudd and Rhydderch ap Caradog, ruled a patchwork of small territories during the reign of William I (*LL*: 278–279; Charles-

Edwards 2013: 557–558). Rhydderch ab Iestyn is the first known member of his dynasty, and, just as with his predecessor Llywelyn, his sudden rise to a position of dominance across at least half of Wales requires some explanation. A coincidence of events might suggest that he had the backing of Cnut and his earls in the east. In 1022, the year before Llywelyn's death and Rhydderch's rise to power, one of Cnut's earls launched a raid into south Wales. This was Earl Eilifr, who attested Cnut's charters between 1018 and 1024 and who may have been responsible for a part of Mercia roughly equating to Gloucestershire (Keynes 1994: 59). Annals maintained at St Davids report that Eilifr ravaged Dyfed in the west and violated St Davids itself (AC: b1043/c345; BT (PRS), *s.a.* 1022). The same incident seems to be recalled in a posthumous miracle story added to Lifris of Llancarfan's *Life of St Cadog*, written about 1100 (*Vita sancti Cadoci*: §40; cf. Emanuel 1952: 219–220; Brooke 1986: 86–87 and n. 164). According to the story, Eilifr came with his followers to plunder Morgannwg, whereupon the clergy of Llancarfan fled with Cadog's shrine and other relics. Curiously, they fled eastwards for safety, to the monastery of Mamheilad in Gwent Uwch Coed. It seems likely that, in 1022, Gwent Uwch Coed was ruled by Rhydderch ab Iestyn, perhaps indicating that the clergy of Llancarfan expected Eilifr and Rhydderch to be on friendly terms. In the event, a certain *predonum multitudo Dacorum atque Anglorum* ('horde of plunderers, Danes and English'), of uncertain affiliation, did indeed seek to steal Cadog's shrine in Mamheilad, but they failed to anticipate the dire consequences that await those who rouse Cadog's posthumous wrath.

It would be possible to read these events as being connected, and to speculate that Earl Eilifr attacked Dyfed (then ruled by Llywelyn ap Seisyll) as well as Morgannwg in order to prepare the way for Rhydderch ab Iestyn of Gwent to take control of the south. At first sight, this is no more than speculation, but the proposition gains credence when one considers the other evidence for the relationship between Gwent and the English kingdom in this period. Foremost among such evidence is the Old English legal text known as the *Ordinance concerning the Dunsæte*, which has been dated convincingly to the late tenth or eleventh centuries (Molyneaux 2011a). The text concerns the regulation of relations between English and Welsh communities living either side of a river (cf. Lambert 2018; for a useful introduction to the text, see Brady 2017: 1–6). Although the text may be read as indicating that the Dunsæte comprised either both parties or the Welsh party only, there is a case to be made in favour of the former interpretation (Guy forthcoming; see also Brady this volume). Either way, the Dunsæte appear to have dwelt in a territory adjacent to Gwent in south-east Wales (most probably a portion of south-western Herefordshire centred on the hundred of Dinedor; cf. Lewis 1988: 7; 2007: 142). This is strongly implied in the following statement:

*Hwilan Wentsæte hyrdan into Dunsætān, ac hit gebyrēð rihtor into Westsexan; ðyder hy scylan gafol , gislas syllan. Eac Dunsæte beþyrfan, gif heom se cyning an, þæt man huru friðgislas to heom læte (Duns 9–9.1).*

At one time the Wentsæte belonged among the Dunsæte, but that district belongs more justly to the West Saxons; they [the Wentsæte] should deliver tribute and hostages there. The Dunsæte also consider it necessary, if the king will grant it to them, that at least peace-hostages [of the Wentsæte] should be given them (adapted from Charles-Edwards 2007: 59).

The term ‘Wentsæte’ refers to the people of Gwent, who, according to the text, were habitually subordinated to the West Saxons. The arrangement, whereby the people of Gwent regularly rendered tribute and hostages to the West Saxons, is reminiscent of the terms of submission imposed on Bleddyn and Rhiwallon in 1064 in the context of defeat. Nevertheless, that the people of Gwent maintained an independence of action within this relationship is implied by the continued threat that they posed to the Dunsæte, who required peace-hostages from them. This relationship between Gwent and the West Saxons could conceivably have endured from the 880s, when the brothers Brochfael and Ffernfael, kings of Gwent, submitted to Alfred (Asser: chap. 80).

It is instructive to place the *Ordinance* alongside the witness lists of the Llandaf charters. Recent work has continued to uphold Wendy Davies’s thesis that the majority of the Llandaf charters reliably preserve the core elements (and especially the witness lists) of authentic documents dating from between the seventh and eleventh centuries (Sims-Williams 2019; Guy 2020c). A striking but understudied feature of the witness lists is the distribution of English names in them. In ‘Sequence III’ of the charters, dating from the mid-ninth to the late eleventh century, English names at first appear only sporadically: thus, a certain *Edilfred* is found as a clerical witness to the only charter of bishop Gwyddloyw in the mid-ninth century (LL: 168–169; Sims-Williams 2019: 168–171), while a certain *Dunna* appears in the entourage of Hywel ap Rhys, king of Glywysing, around 872 (LL: 227–228; Davies 1979: 121). But the incidence of English names markedly increases from about the second quarter of the tenth century, during the time of Bishop Wulfrith, the first bishop in south-east Wales with an English name (cf. Sims-Williams 2019: 173, n. 117). The tendency is especially noticeable in the charters of a local royal dynasty associated with Gwent that emerges in the middle of the tenth century, beginning with one Nowy ap Gwriad. For example, the lay witness list of one of Nowy’s charters reads: *Nougui rex, Guoraul filius Brechiaul, Edilhirth* [OE Æthelheard?] *filius Edrit* [OE Eadred], *Mailseru filius Duta* [OE Dudda]’ (LL: 217–218, dated c. 960 in Davies 1979: 120). Similarly, the lay witness list of a charter of Nowy’s son, Arthfael, reads: ‘*Arthmail filius Nogui, Nogui filius Guriat, Merchiaun filius Riderch, Brichmar* [OE Beorhtmær], *Gurci filius Gurcimanu, duo filii Albrit* [OE Ælfred] *Sigrit* [OE Sigered] *et Hiucid* (LL: 244–245, dated c. 980 in Davies 1979: 125). These charters attest to an elite culture in tenth-century Gwent that looked to the onomastic repertoires of both Welsh and English for its name forms. Changes went in both directions: the Ælfred of the last-named charter had sons called Sigered and Hyfaidd, while a clerical witness to the first-named charter is called *Osulf filius Cinuelin* (‘Oswulf son of Cynfelin’). The regular dominance over Gwent exercised by the West Saxons, as described in the *Ordinance concerning the Dunsæte*, could plausibly explain the emergence of this situation during the tenth century.

Like the secular rulers of Gwent, there is good evidence that the local bishops maintained close relations with the English kings. The episcopal church of the tenth-century bishops attested in the Book of Llandaf, including Bishop Wulfrith, was arguably located at Llandogo in Gwent during this period (Charles-Edwards 2013: 594–595; Sims-Williams 2019: 173–174). When one of the bishops, Bishop Cyfeillig, was captured by viking raiders in 914, it was Edward the Elder who ransomed him back for £40 (Whitelock 1961, *s.a.* 914 (ABCD)). The Canterbury list of Llandaf episcopal consecrations credibly claims that Bishop Cyfeillig, who appears in late ninth-century charters, had been consecrated by Æthelred, Archbishop of Canterbury (870–889) (Davies 1974–6: 62, with text at 70; Sims-Williams 2019: 171). Some of Cyfeillig's successors may similarly have been consecrated by English archbishops, as the various consecration lists claim. The Book of Llandaf's notice of the death of Bishop Gwgon in 982 is accompanied by a description of his consecration at Edgar's court by Archbishop Dunstan, which, remarkably, preserves an entirely credible English witness list of four bishops, two abbots, and three ealdormen, who can be dated as a group to 963–72 and who all witnessed charters of Edgar together in 968, 969, and 970 (LL 246; Davies 1974–76: 62–63 and 67–68; Keynes 2014: 112). This witness list may well derive from a contemporary record of the consecration. Strikingly, Ælfsige, bishop of St Cuthbert's community, made a comparably rare appearance at the court of the southern English king in 970 (S 781; McGuigan 2018: 130 and 143).

Against this background, the possible scenario outlined above, which posited that Earl Eilífr's raid on South Wales in 1022 was intended to facilitate Rhydderch's rise to power, seems highly plausible. There is every chance that Gwent's habitual relationship of subordination to the English kings continued into the early eleventh century, to Rhydderch's own time, and perhaps beyond (compare the relationship between the Welsh rulers of Gwent and Earl William fitz Osbern and his son Roger: Crouch 2008: 1–6). Rhydderch, as a ruler of a partially anglicised territory subjected to the English king, would have been an ideal candidate for English support in the competition for power further west in Wales; this, in turn, may help to explain how Rhydderch was able to rise to power so dramatically from a position of relative obscurity. Rhydderch may be an example of a petty Welsh king who was helped to gain wider power by his English overlord as a means for that overlord (in this case, Cnut) to achieve a greater degree of influence in Wales than would otherwise have been possible. The ruler whom Rhydderch replaced, Llywelyn ap Seisyll, may have begun his career in a similar position in Rhuddlan. During the course of Rhydderch's reign, from 1023 to 1033, his actions may have tended away from English interests, perhaps explaining why Cnut attacked Wales in 1030 in alliance with Sihtric Silkbeard of Dublin (AT, *s.a.* 1030.11; cf. Downham 2003: 63–64). Nevertheless, a memory of Rhydderch's former cooperation with Cnut's regime may have influenced the form of Rhydderch's alleged charter of confirmation for Bishop Joseph of Llandaf, which, despite showing signs of twelfth-century fabrication, may be based on an authentic document (Davies 1979: 126; Davies 2003: 17–18; cf. Maund 1991: 188–189, who is more sceptical). According to the text, the grant was made *ammonitione*

*Ælnoð archiepiscopi Cantuariensi simul cum litteris commendatiis Cnut regnantis Angliam* ('with the advice of Æthelnoth archbishop of Canterbury as well as with a letter of commendation of Cnut ruler of England', LL: 253–254).

## Conclusion

The three case studies examined above seem to suggest a pattern in the approach of English kings towards Wales between the late tenth century and 1064. During the first half of the tenth century, English kings deemed it important to maintain direct domination over the greater kings of Wales. The impetus for this may have been eroded thereafter, and such regular relationships become more difficult to discern outside of one-off spectacles like the Chester event of 973. In its place, a more granular and regional approach to Wales, focussed on the borderlands, emerges into view. In the south, Gwent assumed the status of a discrete client kingdom, ruled by its own Welsh kings but obliged to recognise the authority of English kings. This situation may have encouraged Cnut and Earl Eilifr to support Rhydderch ab Iestyn's bid for the kingdom of Deheubarth in 1022–1023. By contrast, the Welsh district of Englefield in the northern borderlands, centred on the *burh* of Rhuddlan, was not a discrete client kingdom, but was instead annexed to Cheshire, much as Archenfield came to be annexed to Herefordshire. English interests in North Wales could be pursued through intermediary border magnates holding power in this area. The power of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's family may have originated in this context, just like Edwin of Tegeingl's family during the Norman period. Against this background, King Edward's selection of the border magnates Bleddyn and Rhiwallon to replace Gruffudd ap Llywelyn in 1064 would have seemed natural, especially if the same family had become dominant in the former Mercian border *burh* of Chirbury. Edward might have assumed that Bleddyn and Rhiwallon could be more easily controlled than other candidates whose centres of power lay deeper within Wales. It would be misleading to claim that there was deliberate 'consistency' in this new approach to Wales, especially since English authorities intervened in Wales only sporadically and for specific purposes, but it remains instructive to recognise the contrast in approach by comparison with the earlier period.

The same idea may have held sway during the first years of Norman rule in England. In 1069, following Bleddyn ap Cynfyn's narrow victory over Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's sons in Mechain, a certain Maredudd ab Owain ab Edwin took control of Deheubarth. Maredudd's uncles had previously held the kingship of Deheubarth between the death of Rhydderch ab Iestyn in 1033 and Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's decisive seizure of power there in 1044. However, Maredudd's family had also held lands in Herefordshire since the early eleventh century, and it may have been from there that he launched his bid to conquer Deheubarth in 1069 (Thornton 2007: 157–160). According to Domesday Book, William fitz Osbern, earl of Hereford (d. 1071), had given the two manors of Lye in Herefordshire to Maredudd when the latter was king, presumably between 1069 and 1071, and King William remitted the land's geld to him (*DB Herefordshire*: 187c). Did Maredudd seize power in 1069 with the support of William fitz Osbern and William I? If so, he may have been the last Welsh ruler to benefit



from this policy. In subsequent years, the Normans' approach to Wales would rapidly turn to outright conquest, overturning the unspoken pre-Conquest consensus about dominating Wales via Welsh intermediaries. The 'borderlands' would be extended and transformed into a new political space that came to be known as the March, ruled by quasi-independent Norman marcher lords (Lieberman 2010). Yet, there was an Anglo-Welsh march before the March, and it was arguably a central factor in the approach of English kings towards Wales during the late tenth and eleventh centuries. This earlier march consisted of disparate, Welsh-speaking territories ruled by minor Welsh kings and lords who were obliged to maintain varying relationships of subordination with the English kingdom. Sometimes they would be promoted by the English as candidates for the emerging bipartite *regnum* of North and South Wales to the west. In this way, English manipulation of the Anglo-Welsh borderlands, though partial and discontinuous, profoundly affected the development of dynastic politics in Wales in the century before the advent of the Normans.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rebecca Thomas and Rory Naismith for kindly commenting on earlier drafts of this article, David Parsons for creating the excellent map, and Robinson College for supporting my work on the Anglo-Welsh borderlands through a research fellowship.

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