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The Desire to Corrupt: Convent and Community in Medieval Wales[1]

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the history of the Welsh nunneries and to examine the possible roles women played in relation to religious life in medieval Wales. The objective is not to present any definitive conclusions, but to explore tentative interpretations in the light of the extant sources. Relatively little is known about communities of religious women in medieval Wales. Although, as we have seen, Wales boasts a wealth of native female saints (from the fifth to the seventh centuries), the importance of contemporary holy women in medieval Wales appears to have been negligible. Indeed, there were remarkably few formal communities of religious women. An attempt will be made here to shed some light on the convents of medieval Wales, by examining the documentary and literary evidence, and suggestions will be proposed to explain their scarcity. This will involve studying and attempting to interpret possible social and cultural attitudes, within the wider community, concerning nuns and female religious activity more generally. In addition to considering all the extant documentary evidence available for the nunneries, we will also focus on the Poets of

the Gentry and the poets' perception of the female religious as corruptible virgin. Poetry forms a vital source as it represents a tradition that lies outside of the direct province of religious activity and, thus, may provide some insight into a more secular mentality. The Bardic Grammars suggest that nuns should be praised for their devotion to God and their holy way of life, yet medieval poetry reflects nothing but a desire to pollute the brides of Christ. More frequently it is the secular Christian wife who is praised for her piety and Christian virtue. Women may have been too important within the social, political and economic concerns and interests of the secular community to have been actively encouraged to retreat to more isolated and rarefied religious environments. This chapter examines the possibility that private devotion rather than claustration was the mode of religious expression preferred for Welsh women.

Female monasticism: the convents of medieval Wales

If we are to begin to build up a picture of the nature of female monasticism and the kind of religious opportunities available to Welsh women, it is necessary to review the data relating to the number and type of religious establishments within medieval Wales. It is informative to compare and contrast this evidence with that available for England, Ireland and Scotland. It has often been noted by medieval historians that there were fewer monastic establishments for women than there were for men.[2] It is not surprising, then, that there were fewer nunneries than monasteries in medieval Wales.[3] Yet the lack of provision made for women wishing to follow a religious vocation in Wales is quite astonishing. Whilst there were approximately one hundred and fifty nunneries in late medieval England,[4] about sixty-four in Ireland[5] and fifteen in Scotland,[6] there appear to have been only three enduring nunneries in post-Conquest Wales: two Cistercian abbeys and a Benedictine priory.

Let us consider the evidence for these Welsh nunneries in greater depth. The Cistercian abbey for women at Llanllŷr in Ceredigion was founded before 1197 by the Lord Rhys as a

daughter-house to Strata Florida abbey. There was another Cistercian house for women at Llanllugan in Cydewain (now Powys), founded by Maredudd ap Rhobert probably some time between 1170 and 1190, although possibly later. It appears that there were strong links between the Cistercian nunneries of Wales and particular male abbeys. Llanllugan was placed under the jurisdiction of Strata Marcella. Before 1135 Richard de Clare settled Benedictine nuns at Usk and Richard Strongbow later granted an important charter to the priory which was confirmed in 1330 by Elizabeth de Burgh.[7]

The above nunneries seem to be safely vouched for by contemporary documentary and/or material evidence. However, further contenders are less reliable. Leland, writing *c.*1536–9, notes a ruined building at Llanrhystud and suggests that this may have been a nunnery.[8] However, it appears that he was referring to the ruins of Llanrhystud castle and buildings that had belonged to the Knights Hospitallers.[9] He also, incorrectly, suggests that Llansanffraid Cwmteuddwr was the location of another nunnery mentioned by Gerald of Wales. According to Gerald of Wales there was a Cistercian nunnery at Llansanffraid-yn-Elfael. In three different works he recounts the tale of how Enoc, abbot of Strata Marcella, assembled a community of virgins at Llansanffraid-yn-Elfael. Tempted by the beauty of one of the nuns, Enoc entered into a 'sordid' affair and eloped with the nun, only to regret bitterly his 'misdemeanour' and return repentant to his abbey.[10]

The three versions of the Enoc story, given by Gerald of Wales, vary in detail. Only in *Speculum Ecclesiae* is it stated that the nunnery was at Llansanffraid-yn-Elfael;[11] the other two versions do not mention the location of the nunnery. Whilst according to *Itinerarium Kambriae* Enoc is abbot of Strata Marcella, *Gemma Ecclesiastica* suggests that he is abbot of Whitland and *Speculum Ecclesiae* mentions only that he was an abbot from Powys. All these variations and vagaries do not enhance the confidence which we can place in Gerald's account as a historically rigorous record. As D. H. Williams points out, a Cistercian nunnery at Llansanffraid-yn-Elfael would probably have come under the auspices of Cwmhir abbey – not Strata Marcella.[12] There are also other

contradictions in the tale which lead to a questioning of its historical utility. Whilst in the *Itinerarium* and *Speculum* Enoc elopes with a nun, in *Gemma Ecclesiastica* he also manages to impregnate a number of virgins at the convent, before throwing off the ecclesiastical habit:

> There is a story about an abbot Enoc who gathered together in Wales during our own time a group of virgins for the service of Christ. He at length succumbed to temptations and made many of the virgins in the convent pregnant. Finally, he ran around in a comical manner, throwing off the religious habit, and fled with one of the nuns. After he had spent many years in the service of the devil, he at last returned to his Order and the mother-house from which he had fled. The monastery [he returned to] was called Whitland. He was taken back, not without great compunction, and performed his penance with fitting devotion, according to the rigors of the Cistercian rule.[13]

The context of the Enoc tale within Gerald's texts should also be taken into account, as should the possible motives and meanings of Gerald's writings in relation to his social and cultural context. In *Itinerarium Kambriae* it is used to illustrate the wizard Meilyr's psychic powers, since he knew of the scandal before anyone else. In *Gemma Ecclesiastica* it is recounted amidst a number of other 'stories relevant to these matters of not fixing your gaze on and not living with women'.[14] In one such 'story' Gerald relates how Eliah, chaplain and steward of a community of women, was tempted with carnal desires and had to flee from the convent he had founded. Having witnessed three angels sever his testicles in a dream, he returned to the convent untroubled by lust. Gerald notes that his successor had the good sense not to live with the nuns, but to instruct them through the window of his cell. In this context, the narrative in which the Llansanffraid nunnery features can be seen as yet another example serving to illustrate the dangers felt to be involved in caring for a community of women. It is, perhaps, more indicative of male prejudice and of the fear felt by medieval clergy that religious women were a threat to their reputation, than it is of an eagerness to record the history of an otherwise unknown nunnery. Is it not plausible that sometimes fictional

or semi-fictional characters and places were preferable within such tales of scandal and criticism? This is particularly likely if such criticism was too close to the mark for comfort and primarily designed to warn and instruct rather than to aggravate.

It is also possible that Gerald aimed to entertain rather than offend. Tales of sexually active nuns and pregnant abbesses were immensely popular in the Middle Ages, for example: the tale of the abbess who dons her lover's trousers on her head instead of her veil in Boccacio's *Decameron* and the history of the nun of Watton (although the latter does draw on historical events).[15] As we have seen in the chapter on the Welsh cult of the Virgin Mary, the tale of the pregnant abbess who was comforted by Mary was translated into Welsh and included in *Gwyrthyeu e Wynvydedic Veir* (The Miracles of the Blessed Virgin). The earliest extant Welsh text is found in Aberystwyth, NLW, MS Peniarth 14 (second half of the fourteenth century), although the miracles appear to have been translated into Welsh in the thirteenth century. The tale of the pregnant abbess was one of the most popular of the Virgin's miracles and is included in almost every collection.[16]

It is possible to interpret the 'history' of the Llansanffraid nunnery as belonging to a particular tale type. Whilst not wishing to state categorically that there was never a nunnery at Llansanffraid-yn-Elfael, it is worth questioning the validity of Gerald's tale and pointing out the contradictions within it. It has, perhaps, been too frequently recounted by modern historians who amalgamate the three versions into a neat tale of sexual scandal and avoid highlighting any of the contradictions in this unique source for another Welsh nunnery. It is recounted by J. E. Lloyd in his classic *History of Wales*[17] and thereafter it is a temptation to quote Lloyd's neat version, rather than refer to the various versions in Gerald of Wales's texts.[18] Saunders Lewis built up a complete picture of how a Dafydd ap Gwilym poem, which expresses the desire to corrupt one of the nuns of Llanllugan, was sung to the monks of Strata Marcella, where the tale of the errant abbot and the nun from Llansanffraid was still fresh in the memory.[19]

Somehow, this weaving together of sources and speculation produces a picture that is too simplistic and, possibly, quite inaccurate.

Economy and provision

The discussion so far has demonstrated that there were very few nunneries in post-Conquest Wales: probably only three long-standing establishments and possibly a fourth short-lived community. Let us now turn to a closely related feature of our evidence that also has a strong bearing upon our attempt to build up a picture of female monasticism in medieval Wales and the nature of provisions made and opportunities provided for female religious activity. Not only were Welsh nunneries few in number, but there appear to have been relatively few nuns in these communities despite the fact that Llanllugan and Llanllŷr are, rather surprisingly, given the status of abbeys.[20] It is possible that this can be attributed to the notion that all Cistercian houses were designated as abbeys.[21] However, this certainly does not seem to have been the case in England where only two Cistercian nunneries, Marham and Tarrant, were officially recognized as abbeys. The others, although sometimes described as abbeys in early charters, appear to have been priories.[22] This blurred categorization in relation to status can, perhaps, be attributed to the lack of official cognizance of the Cistercian nunneries. At any rate, regardless of their status, the Cistercian nunneries of Wales do not appear to have been large communities.

At the time of the suppression there were only three nuns at Llanllugan. Although the number of inmates at the suppression is usually substantially lower than the actual number reached at an earlier period, an assessment of 1377 reveals that there were only four nuns and an abbess at Llanllugan at that time.[23] Knowles and Hadcock suggest that there were sixteen nuns at Llanllŷr and about eight at the suppression, but, unfortunately, do not list documentary sources.[24] According to Dugdale's *Monasticon* the priory at Usk was founded for five nuns, but there certainly appear to have been more inmates than this at the time of Archbishop Peckham's

Visitation in 1284.[25] If we take Knowles and Hadcock's more optimistic estimate of thirteen, then we can precariously suggest that there were, at most, roughly thirty-five women living in religious communities in medieval Wales. Obviously, because of the paucity of primary sources, exact numbers are impossible to calculate. However, it is interesting to compare this rough estimate of the number of female religious in Wales with Eileen Power's estimate of the number of nuns in England at the Dissolution – between 1,500 and 2,000.[26] Before the end of this chapter we will examine why there were so few nunneries in Wales and suggest possible reasons for the lack of provision made for Welsh religious women.

Not only was female monasticism neglected in medieval Wales, the resultant paucity of sources has a legacy. Hence, nuns have also been neglected within much modern Welsh scholarship. Recent studies on the female religious highlight previous neglect of nunneries in more general studies of medieval monasticism – noting that the role of religious women has frequently been ignored or marginalized.[27] Gilchrist points out that the nunneries have often been dismissed as poor or failed monasteries and that, because of this, they have received little attention.[28] This is certainly true of the Welsh nunneries. Gerald of Wales described Llanllŷr as a small and poor house and Leland referred to Llanllugan as 'a veri little poore nunneri'.[29] In the nineteenth century Morris Charles Jones dismissed Llanllugan as 'an insignificant establishment'[30] and in the 1920s Eileen Power included Usk in her list of medieval English nunneries and only mentioned Llanllŷr and Llanllugan in her corrigenda.[31] In 1999 Lawrence Butler in an article on 'The Cistercians in Wales and Yorkshire' noted that Wales and Yorkshire had a similar number of Cistercian houses for men, but chose not to explore the reasons why there were fewer nunneries in Wales than Yorkshire:

> By contrast Wales had only two houses for Cistercian nuns while Yorkshire had twelve; their slight remains, especially in Wales, means that these nunneries will not be discussed here. Concentrating instead upon the houses for men, it is a question of exploring common trends or else highlighting disparate developments.[32]

Significant contributions to the study of the Welsh nunneries have been made by D. H. Williams and Helen Fulton who have published articles on the history of the nunneries and medieval Welsh poems to nuns respectively and my own work on the Welsh nunneries has also been published in Welsh.[33] R. Morgan has published an early Llanllugan charter and Madeleine Gray has considered the significance of the dedications to SS. Radegund and Mary Magdalene at Usk.[34] Whilst there is nothing to compare with Gilchrist's study of the archaeology of religious women in England, some excavation work has taken place at Usk.[35] Nevertheless, the Welsh nunneries, on the whole, have attracted little published research – possibly because there were so few and possibly because poverty has been considered a sign of insignificance.

The Welsh nunneries do appear to have been relatively poor. The net incomes of the convents of Llanllugan, Llanllŷr and Usk *c.*1535 were £22, £57 and £55 respectively.[36] Of the thirteen Cistercian abbeys in Wales whose net income *c.*1535 has been recorded, eight had incomes of £100–£200 and only two had incomes of less than £50.[37] This is constant with Gilchrist's findings concerning net incomes of Benedictine nunneries and monasteries in England *c.*1535: nunneries were generally poorer than monasteries for men.[38] Adequate endowment was, no doubt, difficult to sustain over long periods – in particular during times of political and economic upheaval. It is likely that nunneries were better endowed at certain periods than at others. War damage affected the Welsh nunneries, as it did other monastic establishments. In 1284 Llanllŷr was awarded forty marks' compensation for damage done to the nunnery during the Edwardian Conquest. Two Latin letters confirm that the abbess acknowledges receipt of the reparation.[39] Interestingly one of the letters is written on her behalf by John of Caeau, a monk of Strata Florida, and sealed with the seals of the abbots of Strata Marcella and Valle Crucis, because John of Caeau did not have the seal of the abbess with him at the time. Adam of Usk notes that 'none but virgins of noble birth' were received at the priory of

Usk and that, before the Glyndŵr Uprising, the priory had been sufficiently endowed.[40] However, in 1404 Adam of Usk petitioned the pope requesting that indulgences be granted in order to attract alms at St Radegund's chapel in the Benedictine priory of Usk. He states that:

> owing to the burnings, spoilings and other misfortunes which have been caused by the wars which raged in those parts, or otherwise, this same monastery hath come to such want that, unless ready help be forthwith found by your holiness, the sisterhood will be forced to beg for food and clothing, straying through the country, or to stay in the private houses of friends; whereby it is feared that scandals may belike arise.[41]

Interestingly, the success of his petition rests on the pope's desire for strict active enclosure and fear of scandal (again highlighting male preconceptions concerning the female religious).[42]

One of the complaints in Archbishop Peckham's visitation record in 1284 was that the nuns of Usk were wandering outside the confines of the nunnery and staying with layfolk. Other criticisms are mainly to do with economic affairs and he suggested the appointment of two Treasuresses.[43] In 1299 the abbess of Llanllŷr was acquitted by Queen Margaret of a fine for illegally felling an oak.[44] Criticism for felling trees appears in the visitation records of some of the English nunneries described by Eileen Power.[45] Once again it is likely that this illegal activity was brought about by financial hardship. John Nichols warns of the dangers of depending too heavily upon visitation records when building up a picture of life in the convent. As he points out, it is very easy to use the visitation records to create a negative impression of monastic standards, since the purpose of episcopal visitations was to criticize and suggest improvements – not to document achievements.[46]

So far we have considered evidence relating to the number of nunneries in medieval Wales, their population and economic status. We have also found it increasingly necessary to refer to social and cultural attitudes and relations of power when attempting to construct a picture of female monasticism. Let us now focus much more directly upon these social

and cultural attitudes and the possible motives and purposes they represent, within both the religious and the secular communities of Wales, communities which were, of course, dominated by male concerns and power structures. It is easy to use the extant information available on the Welsh nunneries to build up a very negative picture of the few religious communities of women in medieval Wales; small communities of women who failed to manage their financial affairs, who chopped down trees illegally, wandered outside the convent, caroused with layfolk, eloped with abbots and, as we shall see, kept exotic pets, revealed one of the most erotic parts of their bodies – their foreheads – and agreed to make love in Welsh woodlands! Yet were the Welsh nunneries really this morally lax? What of the spiritual nature of their religious vocation – their contemplative lifestyle and their devotion to God? One of their saving graces is a bishop's licence which granted permission, as late as 1530, for an Augustinian nun of Limebrook (Katherine Dodd) to transfer to Llanllugan because she wished to lead 'a holier life'. The rule at Llanllugan was said to be 'stricter' and the religious life 'better and [more] frugal'.[47] This document, although late, provides a rare glimpse of a genuinely monastic lifestyle.

Sadly there are no descriptions of monastic life recorded by the nuns themselves. All extant evidence appears to have been recorded by men: the *vox feminae* is non-existent. This perhaps explains why so much of the extant evidence throws little light on the devotional nature of the nunneries. No devotional literature or mystical works by Welsh women have survived and it is quite possible that none were ever composed. It is not known whether the female religious received any kind of education – whether formal or informal, written or oral. It is not known whether nuns in Wales were Latin-literate or indeed literate at all. It is worth recalling that one of the letters sent to acknowledge the receipt of reparation for damage done to the nunnery at Llanllŷr, was written by a monk (John of Caeau) on behalf of the abbess.[48] It is not clear whether the other letter was written by the abbess herself or by someone else on her behalf. However, it appears to have been standard practice for a proctor to write letters of acquittal for war damages on behalf of abbots and abbesses.

A comparison of John of Caeau's letter with a similar letter, written on behalf of the abbot of Strata Florida, reveals the formulaic nature of this form of correspondence.[49] The only reference to religious literature being translated from Latin into Welsh for a Welsh woman is found at the beginning of the thirteenth-century Welsh translation of *Quicumque Vult* (Credo Athanasius Sant). Brother Gruffudd Bola notes that he is translating the text into Welsh for Efa ferch Maredudd so that she may read and understand it and that it might be spiritually beneficial to her.[50] Although she was not Latin-literate, Efa certainly seems to have been able to read. It is not known whether Efa was a nun, but interestingly, she was a descendant of the Lord Rhys who founded the nunnery at Llanllŷr.

Poems to nuns

Whilst there are no poems written by nuns in Wales and there are no *chansons de nonnes*, there are a number of *cywyddau* written to nuns and one fifteenth-century *cywydd gofyn* supposedly written on behalf of the abbess of Llanllŷr. *Cywyddau gofyn*, poems requesting gifts from patrons and Welsh nobility, occur frequently in the poetry of *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* (The Poets of the Gentry).[51] One such poem by Huw Cae Llwyd requests a pet ape from Sir William Herbert, earl of Pembroke, as a gift for Annes, abbess of Llanllŷr. This particular *cywydd gofyn* is very unusual in that rather than praise the gift requested (as usually happens in a *cywydd gofyn*) the poet heaps scorn and derision on the animal:

Cythraul llwyd, crinllwyd yw'r croen,
Cleiriach gruddgrach, garweiddgroen.
Gwrach foel yw goruwch y fainc,
Gyrrai ofn i'r gwŷr ifainc.
Gwar ymylgrach gŵr moelgryg,
Ac ysbryd llun gwas brawd llyg.
Mynach brwnt gyfeillach breg,
lddew heb gael ei oddeg.
Lledryn o bryf, lleidryn brwnt,

Lledrith goesfrith atgasfrwnt . . .
. . . Bryntach, anafach na neb,
Byr einioes ys bo i'r wyneb[52]

(Grey/brown[53] devil with crinkly brown skin,
old man with scabby cheeks and rough skin.
A bald witch above the bench,
used to frighten the young men.
Tonsured man with scabby sides on the nape of his neck,
with a spirit that resembles a lay brother's serving boy.
Foul monk, false friend,
Jew who hasn't been loved.
Infested animal skin, dirty, petty thief.
Odious, foul apparition with mottled legs . . .
Dirtier and more blemished than anyone.
May his face have a short life!)

Rather than wishing the animal a long life, as is customary in a *cywydd gofyn*, the closing line wishes him a short life. Although the poem is unusual within its genre, it is not unique. A similar poem by Robert Leiaf requests a pet ape for Huw Lewys and contains a similar derogatory description of the animal.[54] It appears, then, that the poem belongs to a particular topos and is, perhaps, satirical. It seems unlikely that Annes was present at the court of Sir William as Leslie Harries suggests: 'rhaid mai rywbryd rhwng 1461 a 1469 yr ymwelodd y lleian o ddyffryn Aeron â'r marchog enwog hwn yn ei lys ym Mrycheiniog'[55] (it must have been sometime between 1461 and 1469 that the nun from the Aeron valley visited this famous knight at his court in Breconshire). Not only would it have been inappropriate for an abbess to be visiting Sir William's court at Rhaglan – since she would have been breaking the rule of strict claustration – but it would also have been unseemly for her to request such a pet. Nevertheless, exotic pets, such as apes, do seem to have been popular in the Middle Ages and nuns were reprimanded for keeping them.[56] One needs to ask whether the abbess of a poorly endowed nunnery would have been in a position to sponsor poetry, and, if she was, whether she would have condoned a *cywydd* that cast her in such a negative light. However, since both William Herbert and the abbess are

named, it is unlikely that the poem is purely a piece of fabrication on behalf of the poet. There must have been some connection between Sir William and Anne's or her family. Since the abbess of a nunnery would have been of gentle birth, one can easily imagine that William Herbert, who was, no doubt, acquainted with Abbess Annes's family, would have appreciated the humour of the *cywydd* – regardless of whether Annes genuinely expected to receive a pet ape.

A number of *cywyddau gofyn* written on behalf of men of the Church request gifts such as a goshawk, bows, a book on the Holy Grail and a poem praising God.[57] However, the majority of *cywyddau gofyn* written in connection with religious men request gifts from them. The most heavily requested gifts are horses and no less than eight *cywyddau* are extant which request horses from Dafydd ab Owain, abbot of the Cistercian abbey of Aberconwy.[58] No poems are extant which request gifts from abbesses or nuns. Considering how few nuns there were in Wales, this is not at all surprising. Furthermore, it is unlikely that they would have had the financial stability to offer gifts. Although the Bardic Grammars suggest that nuns should be praised in much the same way as religious men, vast differences exist between Welsh poetry to nuns and to men of the church. Whilst at least a hundred *awdlau* and *cywyddau* praise specific, named churchmen,[59] hardly any of the poems to nuns name their subjects – thus failing to identify them as historical characters.

According to the Bardic Grammars a nun should be praised for her holiness and pure way of life, her chastity and heavenly love of God and other spiritual virtues, just as a religious man is praised.[60] However, rather than praising nuns for their religious virtues, the *cywyddau* to nuns reflect only a desire to corrupt the brides of Christ. In the Dafydd ap Gwilym *cywydd*, mentioned above, the poet attempts to entice the abbess or one of the nuns into the leafy grove.[61] The poem is usually interpreted as seeking out the abbess, but Helen Fulton reinterprets the poem and suggests that the real target is the chantress – one practised in the art of love.[62] Given that there were so few nuns at Llanllugan in the fourteenth century, it is, of course, also possible that Dafydd

was happy to entice any one of them. He refers to the sisters as 'Chwiorydd bedydd bob un i Forfudd' (god-sisters are they every one to Morfudd). Dafydd ap Gwilym mentions Morfudd, a married woman who appears frequently in his poetry.[63] Thus we are reminded that the poet is not merely eager to commit adultery against *Y Gŵr Eiddig* (The Jealous Husband), but that in this poem Dafydd's blasphemy increases in magnitude: he wishes to adulterate the brides of Christ.

Another *cywydd* which belongs to the Dafydd ap Gwilym apocrypha attempts to persuade a female religious to give up her monastic lifestyle:

> Er Duw, paid â'r bara a'r dŵr
> A bwrw ar gasau'r berwr.
> Er Mair, paid â'r paderau main
> A chrefydd mynaich eryfain.
> Na fydd lân yn y gwanwyn,
> Gwaeth yw lleianaeth na llwyn,
> Gwarant Morwyn, â mantell
> A gwerdd wisg, a urddai well.
>
> Dyred i'r fedw gadeinog,
> I grefydd y gwŷdd a'r gog –
> . . . Duw a fyn, difai annerch,
> A saint roi pardwn i serch.
>
> (For God's sake give up the bread and water
> and strive to hate cress.
> For Mary's sake, dispense with stone beads
> and the religion of carousing monks.
> Do not be chaste in the spring-time,
> a nun's life is worse than the grove:
> the Virgin's guarantee, with mantle
> and green gown, would confer greater honour.
>
> Come to the spreading birch trees,
> to the religion of the trees and the cuckoo –
> God and the saints will want, perfect greeting
> to give pardon to love.)[64]

The nun here is not so much an object of praise as the object of the poet's lust. In true courtly love tradition she is enticed into the woodland to make love. As Helen Fulton points out, the nuns' vows 'are not taken seriously by secular poets and they are wooed with offers of romantic love into abandoning their virginity, abandoning what amounts to a separatist position, and serving the patriarchy instead'.[65] Some late manuscript versions of the poem quoted above include the phrase 'gwra oedd well' (it were better to marry) thus promoting married life rather than a life of claustration.[66] In some manuscripts the poem ends by suggesting that the poet and the nun have had sexual relations whilst on pilgrimage to Rome and Santiago de Compostella.[67]

In another poem to a nun by Phylib Emlyn, the poet once again attempts to persuade the girl in question that she has chosen the wrong career.[68] Embittered by the fact that she has chosen claustration and turned her back on the life that she used to lead, he appears to attempt to win her back, or at least make her whole again. The nun is described as 'unllawog' (one-handed) and this rather unusual imagery extends throughout the poem, perhaps implying that the nun is somehow incomplete without her natural partner – not Christ, the eternal husband chosen by all female religious women – but the poet himself. The description of the 'lleian unllawog' (one-handed nun) appears to refer to Matthew 5:30: 'And if your right hand is your undoing, cut it off and fling it away; it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to go to hell.'[69] The nun appears to have cut her losses, repented of her former life and now 'ni wrhëir' – she no longer seeks a male partner, which saddens the poet as he imagines her in heaven physically maimed.

Other *cywyddau* suggest that the nuns are already sexually active. The Dafydd ap Gwilym *cywydd* mentions a nun with forehead revealed, friend of some sixty other darlings, and another poem from the Dafydd ap Gwilym apocrypha uses the rhetorical device of *occupatio* to deny that the poet has been having sexual relations with a nun. The more frequently that this is denied the stronger the suggestion that it is true.[70]

Another poem attributed to Hywel ap Dafydd ab leuan ap Rhys in some manuscripts plays on the juxtaposition of black

and white in a nun's colouring – her black veil and her white skin suggesting both purity and potential sinfulness.[71] The poem consists mainly of a detailed description of the girl's face, framed by her black clothing. The poet laments that she has been blackened around her face and that he cannot see her forehead. Nowhere in the poem is it specifically stated that the girl is a nun, one can only infer this from the description of her clothing.

Clothing is all important when identifying the subjects of other more ambiguous *cywyddau* which may, or may not, describe women who belong to religious Orders. The main problem here is to establish to what extent uniformity of religious habit was current within the Cistercian and Benedictine Orders and within what period. Whilst the Benedictines are traditionally thought of as wearing black, the Cistercian habit is usually described as white – 'rhai lliwgalch' (chalk-white ones) according to Dafydd ap Gwilym.[72] However, Thompson points out that nuns described as 'moniales albae' (white nuns) do not necessarily belong to the Cistercian Order. One could add that women described as wearing black are not necessarily Benedictine nuns. Some attempts to establish uniformity of habit are apparent in the thirteenth century when the Cistercian General Chapter decreed that a cowl should be worn, or a cloak, but not both and that nuns' veils must be black.[73] A fifteenth-century stained-glass window at Llanllugan depicts a female religious wearing a white gown and wimple and a blue hooded cloak – presumably blue represents black (Plate 24).[74]

A complex poem attributed to Dafydd ab Edmwnd describes a woman, called Gwenonwy, dressed in pure black.[75] The poet, who is pining for the woman's love, laments the woman's choice of black clothing (as in the poem mentioned above) and suggests that it would be better if she wore green. This particular idea is reminiscent of one of the poems in the Dafydd ap Gwilym apocrypha: 'A gwerdd wisg, a urddai well' (green gown would confer greater honour). However, the fact that the woman is dressed in black does not necessarily mean that she is a nun. Another possible interpretation of this rather ambiguous poem is that it may

describe a widow who is unobtainable because she is still mourning her husband.[76]

Gilbert Ruddock suggests that a *cywydd* by Iolo Goch to a young girl, 'I Ferch', describes a nun.[77] Although she wears a pale headdress and carries a rosary it does not necessarily, follow that she is a nun. Headdresses, wimples and veils were all worn by secular noblewomen, who also possessed rosaries.[78] The remaining description of her attire – scarlet gown,[79] fur-trimmed garment, golden sleeves and rings – certainly seems to suggest that she is not a member of a religious Order. As Ruddock points out, nuns were often criticized for wearing their own clothing, but the unorthodoxy of this attire does little to suggest that the young girl described here is a nun. No phrase in the poem implies that this shy girl, with lowered eyes, is sexually experienced or rebellious, as one might expect if she were wearing clothing unsuited to her vocation.[80] The fact that she has never known a man implies only that she is a virgin:

> Brwynengorff heb rin ungwr . . .
> . . . Duw a'i gwnaeth, arfaeth eurfab,
> Myn delw Bedr, ar fedr ei Fab.
> Pentyriais gerdd, pwynt dirym,
> Puntur serch, pond trahaus ym
> Dybio cael, bu hael baham,
> Gytgwsg â'm dyn lygatgam?
>
> (Reed-like body which no man has ever known . . .
> God made her, golden son's purpose,
> by Peter's image, for His son.
> I have heaped up poetry, helpless state,
> pencil of love, is it not presumptuous of me
> to imagine getting, it was a noble reason,
> to sleep with my girl with the lowered eyes?)[81]

The suggestion that God made her especially for His son is more suggestive of a bride of Christ, but again this may simply refer to her pure, virginal state.

'Pererindod Merch', another Dafydd ap Gwilym poem, describes a pilgrimage from Anglesey to St Davids.[82] The girl in this poem is referred to as a nun and, whilst this is a strong

possibility, it may also be interpreted as metaphor. In the same way that the girl has not literally killed the poet, she is, perhaps, not literally a nun. As with many of these ambiguous poems, it is virtually impossible to decide with any authority whether the girl referred to actually belongs to religious Orders; nor, perhaps, is it important to do so since the poet may not have a particular female in mind. Since most of the 'nuns' described in Welsh poetry belong to the *Canu Serch* tradition (courtly love poetry) rather than *Canu Mawl* (more formal praise poetry) they are not identifiable as particular individuals. Instead, they pertain to a virginal type: pure and potentially corruptible, yet often unobtainable.

The corruptibility of virginity is depicted not only in poems to nuns (or possible nuns) but in *cywyddau* to young devout virgins. In a fifteenth-century *cywydd* by Hywel Dafi the poet looks through a keyhole and sees a young girl reciting psalms, kneeling in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary. The blasphemous nature of the imagery is startling:

> Rhwng dwy lenlliain feinon
> och fis haf na chefais hon,
> a'i bwrw rhwng dau bared
> i'r llawr a'i dwyfraich ar lled;
> offrwm, liw blodau effros,
> ar dalau y gliniau'n glos,
> a hon o'i bodd yn goddef,
> a rhoddi naid rhyddi a nef;
> disgyn rhwng ei dwy esgair,
> addoli fyth i'r ddelw Fair.
>
> (Between two fine bed-curtains
> if only I could have her in a summer month,
> and throw her between two walls
> to the ground with her arms outstretched;
> I'd offer, colour of euphrasy flowers,
> on my knees up close,
> and she'd let me willingly,
> and I'd leap between her and heaven;
> coming down between her legs
> I'd worship forever Mary's image.)[83]

The type of religious location in which the girl is viewed is not clear. Does Hywel Dafi see the girl through the keyhole of a convent church, a parish church or a private chapel? The reference to 'her speech in a golden book' possibly suggests that she is holding a psalter or a Book of Hours often used by women for private devotion. However, despite the fact that much of the contents of Books of Hours was translated into Welsh in the Middle Ages, no Books of Hours in the vernacular are extant.[84]

Poems to married noblewomen

Bearing in mind that there were so few nunneries in medieval Wales, it seems likely that private devotion rather than claustration was the mode of religious expression generally preferred for Welsh women, Although Welsh poetry to nuns does not take their religious vocation seriously, a number of praise poems and elegies to married noblewomen, for example, Elsbeth Mathau, Mabli ferch Gwilym, Gwladus ferch Syr Dafydd Gam and Annes of Caerleon, praise their Christian virtues, their generosity, chastity and religious devotion.[85] Many are compared to female saints and from some are requested gifts that would have been considered appropriate gifts for women of the church to offer. For example, Lewys Glyn Cothi requests a curtain depicting the Virgin Mary, Christ, the twelve apostles and both male and female saints from Annes of Caerleon and in an *awdl* he thanks Efa ferch Llywelyn for a rosary.[86] Unlike the vast majority of the poems to nuns, these poems specifically identify their subjects: they are 'real' women and their lineages can frequently be traced in the Welsh genealogies.

Two *marwnadau*, or elegies, to Welsh noblewomen – Nest Stradling and Gwenllian ferch Rhys – seem to suggest that they retired to the convent after the death of their husbands.[87] Nest, the wife of Siôn Stradling from Westplas, is described as a nun from Gwent and it is emphasized that she was chaste when she passed away:

> Y wraig falch orau ag fu
> oedd ddiweirferch pan ddarfu.
> Lleian o Went â llu Non,
> lletyodd dillad duon.[88]
>
> (The proud wife – the best that ever there was –
> was a chaste girl when she passed away.
> Nun from Gwent, with Non's host;
> she gave shelter to black clothes.)

No mention is made of any particular religious house and the reference to her as a nun may be taken to mean that she remained chaste – that is, that she did not remarry – after the death of her husband. In her *marwnad* her body is described as going to join her husband's but, rather confusingly, in Siôn's *marwnad* Nest is also described as being in heaven.[89] There seems to be some confusion, then, over who died first. It seems likely that Nest died shortly after her husband and if she did spend any time in religious Orders, it is unlikely to have been for long. The elegy places great emphasis on her Christian beliefs, her charity work and her importance as a wife and mother. It is probable that most of her charitable acts took place whilst she was married and religious devotion and marriage are portrayed as compatible and harmonious.

Gwenllian ferch Rhys, like Nest, is described as joining her husband after death and both elegies link the women with St Non.[90] Although it is said that Gwenllian ascends to the rank of virgins, she is also mentioned as joining Non's choir in heaven. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Non, the mother of St David, is one of the few female saints who was not a virgin, since her sanctity was closely related to her maternity. By comparing these women with Non, the poets place emphasis on both their holiness and their maternity. E. D. Jones suggested that Rhys ap Dafydd was Gwenllian's father and that, although she was engaged to Dafydd, she died young before getting married.[91] However, as Dafydd Johnston has shown, Rhys ap Dafydd was her son, not her father, and this opinion is supported by the genealogies.[92] Poems to Gwenllian's son, Rhys, are extant by Lewys Glyn Cothi and there are also poems to her husband, Dafydd ap Tomas, by Guto'r Glyn.[93] Gwenllian is not referred to as a nun in the poems to her son, and it is debatable whether she ever spent any period of time in a nunnery during widowhood. The word 'lleianaeth'

(female monasticism), which occurs in her elegy may be used metaphorically to refer to her piety and chastity after she lost her husband. She is portrayed as having been particularly devout from an early age, and this is perhaps why E. D. Jones incorrectly assumed that she had died a young virgin:

> Ymarfer o'i phaderau,
> hynny a wnaeth honno'n iau.
> Tua'r nef troi a wnâi,
> tua'r eglwys y treiglai.[94]
>
> (Practising with her rosary,
> this is what she did when she was younger.
> She would turn towards heaven.
> She would wander towards the church.)

In a *cywydd* to Rhys ap Dafydd Gwenllian is praised for healing the poet Lewys Glyn Cothi. No mention is made of any formal religious vocation in this poem and the main aim of the *cywydd* is to praise Rhys ap Dafydd and the household at Blaen Tren, Llanybydder.[95]

Pious noblewomen are frequently compared to female saints in Welsh poetry – often to Non and Elen (Helen), the mother of Constantine, who is accredited with finding the true cross.[96] Ann, countess of Rhaglan, is compared to SS. Martha, Mary and Anne and, as she takes responsibility for the court at Rhaglan following the death of her husband, she is described by Guto'r Glyn as 'Elen wych Raglan . . . Ac ail gwraig i gael y groes'[97] (Great Elen of Rhaglan . . . And the second woman to find the cross). Nest of Caeo, the wife of Dafydd, is likened to SS. Non, Ffraid (Brigid), Anne and Frideswide in her elegy and she is praised for her generosity and charity work, providing the poor and sick with food and money.[98]

One could argue that one might expect the poets to compare married noblewomen to female saints in their elegies and praise their generosity and charitable acts. Afterall, the Bardic Grammars recommend that poets praise noblewomen for their 'haelioni' (generosity).[99] Nevertheless, one is frequently given the impression that the descriptions are not merely reinforcing poetic stereotypes and that in many

instances where the woman is named we are given some insight into her reputation and, on occasions, allowed to glimpse her genuine religious beliefs and witness instances of private devotion. Mabli ferch Gwilym, for example, is praised for giving to the poor and caring for the elderly, but the poet also refers to her Christian knowledge: 'a gair y Iesu a garasoch' (and you loved the word of Jesus), 'a galw y Iesu a glywasoch' (and you heard Jesus's call), 'â gwersau Iesu ymgroesasoch' (and you welcomed the lessons taught by Jesus).[100] It would simply be unnecessary for a poet to praise a woman's religious devotion in detail, if she were not a devout Christian.

Occasionally the Poets of the Gentry refer to pilgrimages made by medieval women, for example, when Elliw ferch Henri goes on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella[101] or Elsbeth Mathau of Radyr visits the Virgin's holy well at Pen-rhys and leaves a substantial offering. At her court in Radyr Elsbeth offered hospitality to other pilgrims visiting Pen-rhys and her unwavering devotion to this particular holy site led to her salvation according to the poet Rhisiart ap Rhys:

> Pen-Rhys o'i llys a'i llaswyr,
> pwys dau gant mewn pyst o gŵyr.
> Diffrwyth oedd weled offrwm
> dieithr ei haur da a thrwm.
> Ei mawr fraint gyda Mair fry,
> y mae'i henaid am hynny.[102]
>
> (From her court and psalter Pen-Rhys [received]
> two hundred pounds in wax candles.
> It was futile to see her unusual offering
> of good, heavy gold.
> Her great reward is that her soul
> is with Mary on high because of this.)

As we saw in Chapter 3, Lewys Glyn Cothi provides a valuable description of Edudful ferch Gadwgan's pilgrimage to St Non's well and chapel near St Davids and witnesses the acts of devotion she performed there before progressing to the cathedral where she kisses St David's relics.[103] The poem is an

important witness to medieval women's religious devotion and the practice of pilgrimage in medieval Wales. Interestingly, the poet is keen to emphasize not only Edudful's religious faith, but also her maternity. She is associated with Non and the Virgin Mary, two maternal saints, and the fact that she calls upon the saints every Sunday is claimed by the poet to ensure that her sons will enjoy longevity. Assigning one's daughter to a nunnery was frequently seen as a spiritual investment: the daughter's prayers would benefit the souls of all the family who had made this commitment and sacrifice. In the poem to Edudful the mother's spirituality extends spiritual rewards to her sons and the whole family is blessed as a result of her religious devotion – devotion which, nevertheless, does not involve retiring to a nunnery. Edudful's faith is depicted as sincere, since she comes 'i wir weddïaw' (to truly pray or sincerely pray) and her genuine religious convictions are portrayed as being incorporated naturally into her everyday life.

In a stained-glass window at the Church of St Cadwaladr, Llangadwaladr, Anglesey (*c.*1490) Elen, the wife of Owain ap Meurig ap Llywelyn, is depicted kneeling behind her husband with her hands together in an attitude of prayer (Plate 25). The image crystallizes many of the attitudes and desires of the Welsh gentry during this period. Owain is depicted dressed in military regalia illustrating his respectability and social status as well as hinting at his bravery and confirming his masculinity and military prowess. Elen, on the other hand, is depicted wearing simple clothing and a white veil suggesting humility, chastity and piety as she kneels obediently near her husband. Owain's parents, Meurig and his wife Marged, are depicted in the same window and it would appear that the portrait was commissioned during Owain and Elen's lifetime, shortly after Meurig died *c.*1480–90. The idealized image, therefore, depicts the pair in exactly the manner they wished since they, no doubt, approved the portraits. There is not a great deal of difference between the way in which Elen is portrayed (Plate 25) and the way in which the female religious depicted in stained glass at the convent church at Llanllugan is depicted (Plate 24). However, Elen is a married woman who had fourteen children and her religious devotion is here depicted

as being compatible with marriage. Elen outlived her husband and her grief on losing Owain is described in an elegy by Lewys Daron.[104] The poets Tudur Aled and Lewys Môn also commemorate the couple.[105] It is also worth noting that it was not unusual for the Boduan family to sponsor their parish church at Llangadwaladr rather than make a more permanent commitment to a religious house, a point which will be discussed in more detail below when we consider why there were so few religious houses for women in Wales.

Women who are described as healing the poets, or their husbands, are frequently compared to Mary Magdalene – 'meddyges lesu' (Christ's physician). As we saw in Chapter 4, in two separate *cywyddau* Guto'r Glyn compares both Elen wraig Hywel o Foelyrch and Siân wraig Syr Siôn Bwrch to Mary Magdalene. Elen is praised for her special healing ointment which will heal her husband's injured knee and Siân is also compared to St Gwenfrewy.[106] The hospitality, wine and mead that Siân offers the poet is said to be medically more effective than the healing waters of Gwenfrewy's well.[107] Guto'r Glyn appears to have turned either to married noblewomen or to Welsh abbots for healthcare, but not to the female religious. When the poet breaks a rib he turns to Dafydd ab Ieuan, abbot of Valle Crucis, for support and it was to this abbey that Guto'r Glyn retired in old age.[108] Although he wrote a number of poems to men of the church, none of his works are addressed to specific religious women.

As we have seen, many of the native Welsh saints are associated with healing and their holy wells were popular places of pilgrimage for the sick. However, the role of healer is not recorded as being performed by medieval Welsh nuns and the poets turn either to the hospitality of male abbots or married noblewomen for their healthcare.

The Hospitallers: women and healing

Gilchrist observes that in medieval England hospitals offered a more flexible religious life to a wider spectrum of women: some were semi-monastic and more akin to the *via media* of the beguines.[109] Whilst women's contributions to the healing

of the sick are apparent in medieval England, there is, as yet, no concrete evidence of similar institutions in Wales being run specifically by religious women, but is this due to a lack of extant sources?[110]

The 'Sister's House' which belonged to the commandery of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem at Slebech, Pembrokeshire, has been interpreted in a variety of different ways and scholars have failed to reach a consensus regarding the function of this complex of ruined buildings. The ruins at Minwear are positioned on the south bank of the Eastern Cleddau directly opposite the Hospitallers' church at Slebech, but separated from the main site by the river. The main building has been variously interpreted as a barn, a hospice or a hostel for female pilgrims.[111] The name 'Systerne House' was recorded in 1546 and this gave rise to the suggestion that there must once have been a cistern on the site which fed a mill, although there are no longer any remains of a mill. The fact that the site is known locally as the 'Sisters' House' has also lead to the assumption that it must have been specifically associated with women, but if this were the case, were these female members of the Order, women who helped nurse the sick or female pilgrims seeking accommodation? Is the name 'Sisters' House' merely a corruption of 'Systerne House'?

The Royal Commission Inventory for Pembrokeshire dismissed the idea that there was ever a house for females of the Order of St John at Slebech, concluding instead that female pilgrims on their way to St Davids may have been housed separately in the 'Sisters' House' away from the main site.[112] Helen Nicholson, who has carefully surveyed the site and analysed all previous interpretations of the 'Sisters' House', demonstrates that the main building does share certain characteristics with other European hospices or infirmaries and argues that these were multifunctional, providing accommodation for pilgrims, caring for the sick and elderly and providing medical care. She, however, rejects the idea that the 'sisters' were women employed by the Order to nurse the sick and favours instead the hypothesis that women who were associated with the Hospitallers at Slebech, but who were not fully professed members of the Order, dwelt in the 'Sisters' House':

> There is no evidence in the report of 1338 that the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem at Slebech employed women to help to look after the sick or pilgrims. It is possible that the 'sisters' of the 'Sisters' House' were female associates, such as female corrodary-holders, women who had given gifts to the order and were now living in a house belonging to the order and under the order's protection, but not on the main site, to keep them segregated from the male members of the order. In this respect they were in a similar position to the pilgrims: under the order's protection and care, but segregated from the order. It would have been logical to place all these dependent but segregated persons together in the same complex of buildings. If the 'sisters' at Slebech lived in the same complex of buildings as the pilgrims, it was reasonable to name the pilgrims' complex 'the Sisters' House.[113]

The argument that women associated with the Hospitallers at Slebech were not fully professed members of the Order and that they were, therefore, likely to be overlooked in official records is convincing.[114] Comparisons with Ireland, where documents reveal that there were 'sisters' belonging to the Order, although officially there were no houses for Hospitaller sisters in Ireland, are particularly pertinent here.[115] One does not necessarily need to reject the notion that women nursed the sick in Wales on the ground that no written references to this are extant. If there were women living at Slebech/Minwear who had chosen to associate themselves with the religious Order, but had not officially taken vows, then they were unlikely to be leading a purely contemplative lifestyle and I see no reason why they would not have nursed the sick or assisted at the hospice where they resided. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the notion that women were associated with the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem at Slebech hinges only on the name of the associated site at Minwear, and it is a pity that more substantial evidence to corroborate this does not appear to be available at present.

Why were there so few nunneries in medieval Wales?

The poetic evidence suggests that the vast majority of Welsh women were encouraged to lead chaste but not celibate religious lives within marriage, whilst a few may have retired to the convent after the death of their husbands, having reached the end of their reproductive careers. On the whole, though, there does not seem to have been much encouragement for Welsh women to devote their virginity to Christ and retire to the convent at an early age – for virginity was both a precious and a saleable commodity.

One must exercise great caution when dealing with native Welsh law. It is not certain to what extent it reflects actual practice and it is also difficult to date with any accuracy, since late manuscripts contain archaic elements.[116] However, it is worth noting that according to the tractate *Cyfraith y Gwragedd* (The Law of Women) a fee, called *amobr*, was payable to a woman's lord on the loss of virginity.[117] This fee varied according to the woman's status:

> Amobyr merch maer kyghella6r, punt. Amobyr merch maer, chweugeint. Amobyr merch penkenedyl, chweugei*n*t a phunt. Amobyr merch uchel6r, chweugeint. Amobyr merch mab eillt, pedwar ugeint. Amobyr merch alltut, pedeir ar ugeint. Amobyr merch pob pe*n*ns6yda6c, herwyd rei punt, herwyd ereill chweugeint. Amobyr merch pob un o'r s6ydogyon ereill, herwyd rei chweugei*n*t, herwyd ereill tri ugeint. Amobr merch kaeth, deudec k*einya6c*.
>
> (The *amobr* of a *maer cynghellor's* daughter, a pound. The *amobr* of a *maer's* daughter, six score pence. The *amobr* of the daughter of the head of a kindred, a pound and six score pence. The *amobr* of an *uchelwr's* daughter, six score pence. The *amobr* of a villein's daughter, four score. The *amobr* of a foreigner's daughter, twenty-four. The *amobr* of the daughter of any chief official, according to some a pound, according to others six score. The *amobr* of the daughter of any of the other officials, according to some six score, according to others three score. The *amobr* of a slave's daughter, twelve pence.)[118]

It is probable that *amobr* was payable more than once – for illicit sexual relations as well as loss of virginity.[119] R. R. Davies suggests that this became a lucrative source of income for the territorial lord. If this really were the case, then it is little wonder that Welsh lords were reluctant to establish foundations in which women could remain perpetual virgins. In 1334 the surveyor of Denbigh calculated the return on *amobr* at £41 annually and in 1395 in Kidwelly it was calculated at £21. 6*s*. 8*d*.[120] These sums are substantial – especially considering that the net incomes of the nunneries at Llanllugan, Llanllŷr and Usk in 1535 were £22, £57 and £55 respectively.[121]

Women were instrumental in the founding of a number of medieval English nunneries.[122] Wealthy widows seem to have been particularly fond of patronizing religious houses: often retiring to the convent after the death of their husbands. Thompson notes that several nunneries founded jointly by husband and wife were, in fact, located on land that had formed part of the wife's dowry.[123] Although women in England had minimal rights to inheritance, according to feudal law daughters could inherit land and property in the absence of male heirs. In 1317 Elizabeth de Burgh inherited one-third of the Clare lands in the partition of her brother's inheritance.[124]

Elizabeth de Burgh, who confirmed an important charter to Usk priory in 1330, is also recorded as entertaining the Benedictine nuns of Usk and she also remembered them in her will, leaving the sisters £6 13*s*. 4*d*. and two cloths of gold.[125] According to Welsh law women could not inherit land nor could they receive a dower in land on their husbands' death.[126] The Welsh equivalent of dowry – *argyfrau* – appears to have consisted of moveable goods, rather than land and property. Despite the fact that some families managed to circumvent the laws of inheritance,[127] it seems likely that Welsh women, on the whole, were not in a position to offer land for the founding of nunneries.

Nevertheless, there are examples of Welsh women and Anglo-Norman women who married Welsh nobility who managed to procure land and there are even occasionally

documented cases when women who were landowners benefited from collecting *amobr*.[128] Gwenyth Richards in her fascinating thesis on women in thirteenth-century Wales discusses instances when women of the upper classes – often female relations within the Welsh royal families – sought to protect their families' interests and safeguard their lands or have their own lands and rents returned when they had been seized by a third party.[129] Gwenllian, Gwladus, Elen, Margaret and Angharad, the five daughters of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (1173–1240), all possessed land: whilst the first four daughters married Anglo-Norman barons, Angharad appears to have married a Welshman, Maelgwn Fychan, son of Maelgwn ap Rhys Gruffudd.[130] Although no documents are extant which indicate whether the women ever made donations to religious houses for women, Margaret Clifford left a will requesting that her heart be buried at Aconbury priory church near Hereford and she made a bequest to cover alms and funeral expenses.[131] Clearly these women were needed by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth to form political alliances via marriage and he sought to arrange the best possible marriages for all of his daughters (whether they were legitimate or illegitimate). There were no superfluous or unwanted daughters who could be assigned to nunneries. As we shall see below, the only women of the Royal House of Gwynedd who were committed to nunneries were sent there by the English monarchy, following the demise of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (*c*.1225–82).

In 1273 Angharad (the granddaughter of Angharad ferch Llywelyn ap Iorwerth) was granted the commote of Anhuniog by her husband Owain ap Maredudd of Ceredigion. Although Owain was keen to see that dower provision was made to his wife, the deed also set out that if Angharad took another husband, died without an heir by Owain or took religious vows, then she would forfeit the commote.[132] The charter is interesting not only because it is another example of a husband making territorial provision for his wife which appears to contradict the Welsh Law of Women, but it also indicates that it was at least conceivable that Angharad might consider entering a religious community. Nevertheless, Angharad was not granted the freedom of choosing to become a

nun and grant dower lands to a nunnery and following the death of her husband Owain she married Walter de Pedwardyn.[133]

Jennifer Ward proposes a variety of relationships that existed between English noblewomen and religious houses. She suggests that whilst women of the higher nobility often preferred to exercise patronage over religious houses, women of the lower nobility and of the gentry turned their attention to their parish churches.[134] Given that there were so few wealthy women of the higher nobility and so few nunneries in medieval Wales, one could speculate that the parish church rather than the convent was more likely to receive religious patronage. Women who wished to share in the spiritual benefits of religious endowment and arrange, for example, for prayers or requiem masses to be said for their souls or for their families' souls may well have made donations to their parish churches, given gifts, set up or been included in chantries. Sustained endowment of religious houses was, perhaps, out of reach of most Welsh women's capabilities.

Many reasons can be proffered as to why there were so few nunneries in medieval Wales. The Order most favoured by the Welsh princes and the Welsh nobility was the Cistercian Order and Cistercian hostility towards the creation of new foundations for women has frequently been noted by medieval historians.[135] In 1220 and 1225 the Cistercians attempted to ban the admission of existing nunneries to the Order and in 1228 the building of entirely new Cistercian nunneries was forbidden.[136] Communities of religious women were dependant upon the services of a priest for Mass and confession and there were strong links between the Cistercian nunneries of Wales and the male abbeys responsible for them. In 1222 Cistercian abbots petitioned the pope requesting that they should not be forced to send monks to live at women's houses, as this endangered both their souls and the reputation of their Order.[137] No doubt, the tale of the Llansanffraid nunnery did little to promote the establishment of further communities of women in Wales. In 1216 the Cistercians laid down restrictions on how near a nunnery could be to a male abbey and how near it could be to another nunnery.[138] The accumulation of land was also an important feature of the

Cistercian Order and the creation of more nunneries would have meant greater competition for land and appropriated churches. Gerald of Wales records that Strata Florida stole some of the property of Llanllŷr after the death of Lord Rhys.[139]

The Benedictine Order, popular in England, does not seem to have been favoured by the native Welsh princes and nobility. It is quite likely that the Benedictine nuns of Usk were of Norman rather than of Welsh descent. In Wales there was not the same diversity of Orders open to women as there was elsewhere. Ironically, one of the few Welsh women we know of who joined another Order was Gwenllian, daughter of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last Prince of Wales.[140] According to *Brut y Tywysogyon* (The Chronicle of the Princes) after her father was killed she was sent, against her will, to a convent in England. In fact, this was the Gilbertine Order at Sempringham (the only Order to have originated in England):

> Ac yna y gwnaethpwyt priodas Lywelin ac Elienor yg Kaer Wynt, ac Edwart, vrenhin Lloegyr, yn costi y neithawr ehun yn healaeth. Ac o'r Elienor honno y bu y Lywelin verch a elwit Gwenlliant. A'r dywededic Elienor a uu varw y ar etiued; ac y hagkladwyt ymanachloc y Brodyr Troetnoeth yn Llann Vaes yMon. A'r dywededic Wenlliant, gwedy marw y that, a ducpwyt yg keith[i]wet y Loeger; a chynn amser oet y gwnaethpwyt ynn vanaches o'e hanuod.
>
> (And then the marriage of Llywelyn and Eleanor was solemnized at Winchester, with Edward, king of England, himself liberally defraying the costs of the wedding banquet. And by that Eleanor Llywelyn had a daughter called Gwenllïan. And the said Eleanor died in childbirth; and she was interred in the monastery of the Barefooted Friars at Llan-faes in Anglesey. And the said Gwenllïan, after the death of her father, was taken into captivity to England; and before coming of age she was made a nun against her will.)[141]

She remained there all of her life and died in 1336 at the age of fifty-five. Her cousin Gwladus ferch Dafydd ap Llywelyn was sent to the Gilbertine priory of Sixhills and died one year before Gwenllian. Dafydd ap Llywelyn's other five daughters,

of whom very little is known, all appear to have been forced to enter the same religious Order, either at Sixhills or Alvingham priory also in North Lincolnshire.[142] Brian Golding in a section on involuntary residents of the Gilbertine Order notes that: 'saddest of all the inmates of Gilbertine priories were the daughters of enemies of the realm placed there for safekeeping.'[143] Clearly Edward I wanted to ensure that none of the daughters of Llywelyn or Dafydd had offspring and the lineage of the Welsh rulers of Gwynedd came to an abrupt end. Unlike the Cistercian Order which had close links with Welsh nobility and sponsored Welsh literature, the Gilbertine Order was firmly rooted in England and North Lincolnshire was far enough away from Wales to sever any links, particularly when this was coupled with the strict enclosure that the priories offered. Gwenllian and Gwladus may not have chosen a religious vocation of their own volition, but it is certainly likely that reared from a tender age in a spiritual environment, religion became their genuine vocation.

As of yet no evidence exists to suggest that Welsh women followed less orthodox religious vocations such as those of the beguine, the sister in a hospital, the hermit or the anchorite. Considering that medieval Wales had a thriving tradition of Welsh women saints (Dwynwen, Gwenfrewy, Melangell, Non, Tegfedd and Eluned, for example),[144] most of whom were consecrated virgins, astonishingly little provision was made for those who wished to follow in their footsteps.[145] Whilst numerous men of the Church are named in Welsh praise poetry, the religious vocation of the nebulous nuns is not taken seriously. Nuns – the ultimate in forbidden fruit – made excellent subjects for Welsh courtly love poetry because not only did they remain anonymous, but they barely existed. They belonged more to the erotica of the imagination than to any social reality. It can be postulated that Welsh women were generally encouraged to worship within the confines of marriage, rather than in a community of religious females. Women of the upper echelons of society appear to have been too important in the political and economic life of Wales to be allowed to retire to a convent, since they were needed to form valuable marital alliances. Unless new evidence is uncovered to suggest alternative, less institutionalized

forms of religious activity in Wales – such as anchoritic activity – then it appears that the monastic life was rarely a genuine vocation for Welsh women.

Spirituality Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works, trans. and intro. Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), pp. 268–73.

120 Williams, 'Buchedd Catrin', 265.

121 See Chapter 4.

122 Lewis, 'Model girls?'.

123 For a detailed discussion of the motif of St Katherine's virginity see Bernau, 'A Christian *Corpus*'.

124 Williams, 'Buchedd Catrin', 268.

125 Ibid., 268.

Chapter 6

1 This chapter is a revised and updated version of an article which first appeared in Diane Watt (ed.), *Medieval Women in their Communities* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 20–48.

2 For example, Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 61, notes that in later medieval England monasteries for men and friaries outnumbered nunneries by six to one.

3 Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, list sixty-three monastic establishments for men in Wales (including abbeys, priories, alien priories, friaries and cells). Williams, *The Welsh Church*, p. 347, notes that there were forty-seven religious houses left in Wales by the beginning of the Tudor period (including the three nunneries). He points out that there were far fewer monasteries in Wales than in England and that Wales was probably supporting as many monastic houses as it could manage due to economic and geographical constraints.

4 Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 36–9. There were also eighteen double houses, six nuns' cells attached to male houses and four 'quasi-double' houses. In all, Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp. 251–89, list 184 entries under 'Houses of Nuns' and thirteen double houses. Some houses were ephemeral and others may be counted several times since they were attributed to more than one Order. Often no one official Order was adhered to, as some nunneries swapped allegiance between Benedictine and Cistercian. Of the many female houses in England that claimed to be Cistercian, only two were officially recognized by the Order: Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 99, but see also Constance Hoffman Berman, 'Were there twelfth-century Cistercian nuns?', in Constance Hoffman Berman (ed.), *Medieval Religion: New Approaches* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 217–48.

5 G. Carville, 'Cistercian nuns in medieval Ireland: Plary Abbey, Ballymore, County Westmeath', in J. A. Nichols and L. T. Shank (eds), *Medieval Religious Women III, Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995),

pp. 63–84 (p. 65). Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 40, states that there were sixty-two. More are listed in A. Gwynn and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1988), pp. 307–26. Again, some were short-lived. The vast majority of female houses in Ireland were Arrouasian and followed the Augustinian Rule.

6 D. E. Easson, 'The nunneries of medieval Scotland', *Scottish Ecclesiological Society Transactions*, 13.2 (1940–1), 22–38 (22). More are listed in D. E. Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland* (London: Longmans, 1957), pp. 12–30, and Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 39, states that there were thirteen.

7 D. H. Williams, 'Cistercian nunneries in medieval Wales', *Citeaux*, 26 (1975), 155–74 (157 and 163); D. H. Williams, *The Welsh Cistercians*, 2 vols (Caldey Island: Cistercian Publications, 1984), vol. 1, p. 11; D. H. Williams, 'Usk nunnery', *Monmouthshire Antiquary*, 4 (1980), 44–5 (44); F. G. Cowley, *The Monastic Order in South Wales 1066–1349* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1977), pp. 37–8; Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns', 94. Morgan suggests *c.*1216–17 as a date for Maredudd ap Rhobert's charter. Maredudd's charter may have acted as confirmation of Llanllugan's lands rather than as a foundation charter: R. Morgan, 'An early charter of Llanllugan nunnery', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 73 (1985), 116–19 (117–19).

8 Leland, *The Itinerary*, pp. 123–4.

9 George Owen, *The Description of Penbrokshire*, ed. H. Owen, 4 vols (London: Cymmrodorion Record Series, 1892–1936), vol. 4, p. 459.

10 Cambrensis, *Opera*, vol. 2, p. 248; vol. 4, pp. 168–9; vol. 6, p. 59.

11 Cambrensis, *Opera*, vol. 4, pp. 168–9. I am grateful to Professor John Percival for his translation of *Speculum Ecclesiae*.

12 Williams, 'Cistercian nunneries', 156.

13 Giraldus Cambrensis, *Gerald of Wales: The Jewel of the Church, a translation of Gemma Ecclesiastica*, trans. J. J. Hagen (Leiden: Lugduni Bavatorum, 1979), pp. 188–9. For the Latin text see Cambrensis, *Opera*, vol. 2, p. 248.

14 Cambrensis, *Gerald of Wales: The Jewel of the Church*, pp. 185–9.

15 For details on the former see Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, pp. 522–3, and on the latter see G. Constable, 'Ailred of Rievaulx and the nun of Watton: an episode in the early history of the Gilbertine order', in D. Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), pp. 205–26.

16 Angell, '*Gwyrthyeu*', pp. 15, 66. On this legend and the Welsh *Gwyrthyeu* see Chapter 1 in the present volume.

17 J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1911), vol. 2, p. 599.

18 See, for example, Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns', 95.

19 Saunders Lewis, 'Dafydd ap Gwilym', *Llên Cymru*, 2 (1953), 199–208 (205–6).

20 Williams, 'Cistercian nunneries'; Williams, *Welsh Cistercians*, vol. 1, 10–11. They are listed as priories in Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, p. 272.

21 M. Fontette, *Les Religieuses à l'âge classique du droit canon. Recherches sur les structures juridiques des branches féminines des ordres* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Société d'Histoire Ecclesiastique de la France, 1967), p. 34.

22 Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 97–100.

23 D. R. Thomas, *The History of the Diocese of St Asaph*, 3 vols (Oswestry: Caxton Press, 1908–13), vol. 1, p. 485; Williams, 'Cistercian nunneries', 158.

24 Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, p. 274.

25 Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. 4, p. 591. See also Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, p. 267. On Peckham's visitation, see *Registrum Epistolarum Fratris Johannis Peckham Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis (1279–92)*, ed. C. T. Martin, 3 vols (London, 1882–5), vol. 3, pp. 805–6; Williams, 'Usk Nunnery', 44; Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, pp. 223–4.

26 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 3. For an estimate of the number of Welsh clergy, 1377–81, see J. C. Russell, *British Medieval Population* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1948), p. 326, and for details of the number of monks in Wales at the end of the Middle Ages see Williams, *The Welsh Church*, pp. 561–3.

27 Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 1; P. D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 3; J. Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain 1000–1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 85.

28 Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 22–5.

29 Cambrensis, *Opera*, vol. 4, pp. 152–3; Leland, *Itinerary*, p. 55.

30 M. C. Jones, 'Some account of Llanllugan nunnery', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 2 (1869), 301–10 (301).

31 Power, *Medieval Nunneries*, p. 692.

32 Lawrence Butler, 'The Cistercians in Wales and Yorkshire', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 148 (1999), 1–21.

33 Williams, 'Cistercian nunneries'; Williams, 'Usk Nunnery'; Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns'; Cartwright, *Y Forwyn Fair*, pp. 134–76.

34 Morgan, 'An early charter'; Madeleine Gray, 'Women of holiness and power: the cults of St Radegund and St Mary Magdalene at Usk', *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*, 18 (2002), 13–22.

35 See N. Maylan, 'Excavations at St Mary's Priory, Usk', *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*, 9 (1993), 29–41; G. Mein, 'Usk Priory: an unrecorded excavation', *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*, 9 (1993), 43–5.

36 Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp. 255, 272.

37 Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp. 112–15, Abbey Dore on the medieval ecclesiastical boundary between England and Wales could also be considered. Its income *c.*1535 was £101.

38 Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture,* pp. 41–4, 61.
39 *Littere Wallie*, ed. J. Goronwy Evans (Cardiff: Cardiff University of Wales Press, 1940), pp. 89, 132–3. I am grateful to Professor John Percival for translating these letters.
40 Adam of Usk, *Chronicon Adæ de Usk*, ed. and trans. Sir Edward Maunde Thompson (London: H. Frowde, 1904), p. 268.
41 Ibid., p. 268.
42 On strict claustration see Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, 'Strict active enclosure and its effects on the female monastic experience (500–1100)', in J. A. Nichols and L. T. Shank (eds), *Medieval Religious Women I: Distant Echoes* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), pp. 51–86.
43 *Registrum Epistolarum*, vol. 3, pp. 805–6; Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, 223–4, 348; Williams, 'Usk Nunnery', 44.
44 Williams, 'Cistercian nunneries', 164.
45 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 205.
46 J. A. Nichols, 'Medieval Cistercian nunneries and English bishops', in Nichols and Shank (eds), *Medieval Religious Women I*, pp. 237–49 (p. 245).
47 A. T. Bannister, '*Registrum Caroli Bothe*', *Canterbury and York Series*, 28 (1921), 241–2; Williams, 'Cistercian nunneries', 159.
48 *Littere Wallie*, pp. 89, 32–3.
49 S. W. Williams, *The Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida: Its History and an Account of the Recent Excavations Made on its Site* (London: Whiting & Co., 1889), pp. xlviii–l; *Littere Wallie*, pp. 90–1. Compare also *Littere Wallie*, pp. 76, 84, 96–7, 174.
50 S. J. Williams, 'Rhai cyfeithiadau', in Bowen (ed.), *Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith*, pp. 304–5.
51 On the *cywydd gofyn*, see Bleddyn Owen Huws, 'Astudiaeth o'r canu gofyn a diolch rhwng *c.*1350 a *c.*1630' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wales, Bangor, 1994) and *Detholiad o Gywyddau Gofyn a Diolch*, ed. Bleddyn Owen Huws (Felindre, Swansea: Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 1998).
52 Catrin T. B. Davies, 'Cerddi'r tai crefydd', 2 vols (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Wales, Bangor, 1972), vol. 1, p. 95. See also *Gwaith Huw Cae Llwyd ac Eraill*, ed. L. Harries (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953), pp. 69–71.
53 'Llwyd' can mean grey or brown. It can also mean sacred and the poet, aware of this ambiguity, is perhaps hinting at its rather ironic religious connotations.
54 *Detholiad o Gywyddau Gofyn*, pp. 59–60.
55 *Gwaith Huw Cae Llwyd*, p. 17.
56 For example, Archbishop Peckham forbade the abbess of Romsey to keep monkeys or dogs in her chamber. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 306.
57 Davies, 'Cerddi'r tai crefydd', vol. 1, pp. 132–3, 142–4, 223–47.
58 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 64–77, 81–2; Huws, 'Astudiaeth', p. 82; *Detholiad o Gywyddau Gofyn*, pp. 66–8.

59 See Davies, 'Cerddi'r tai crefydd'.
60 *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*, pp. 16, 35, 56.
61 *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, pp. 298–9; Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns', 105–7.
62 Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns', 88–9.
63 See, for example, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, pp. 216–17, 227–9, 266–7.
64 Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns', 107–8.
65 Ibid., 103.
66 Ibid., 101, n. 30.
67 *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*, ed. Thomas Parry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 106–7; *Cywyddau Dafydd ap Gwilym a'i Gyfoeswyr*, ed. I. Williams and R. Thomas (Bangor: Evan Thomas, 1914), pp. 10–11.
68 *Gwaith Syr Phylib Emlyn*, pp. 25–8.
69 Ibid., p. 62.
70 Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns', 93–4.
71 Ibid., 103.
72 This may refer to the colour of their skin rather than their habit.
73 Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 100.
74 Lewis, *Stained Glass in North Wales,* p. 68. It is possible that the figure represents the donor of the window. I am grateful to David O'Connor for his comments on photographs of the window.
75 London, BL, MS Additional 14999, fol. 104 r-v.
76 I am grateful to Graham Thomas of the National Library of Wales for help while transcribing the poem. I am also grateful to Dafydd Johnston for sharing with me his ideas on this poem and for many helpful comments on other aspects of the poetry discussed in this article.
77 G. Ruddock, 'Cywydd i grefyddes?', *Llên Cymru*, 12 (1972), 117–20; *Gwaith Iolo Goch*, pp. 101–3.
78 See N. Truman, *Historical Costuming* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1936; 1966 edn), pp. 41–2; M. Sichel, *Costume Reference 1: Roman Britain and the Middle Ages* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1977), p. 1. Numerous references are made to rosaries in Welsh poetry. Lewys Glyn Cothi thanks Efa ferch Llywelyn for providing him with a rosary and Syr Dafydd Trefor composed a *cywydd gofyn* requesting a rosary from Marged ferch Wiliam ab Wiliam: *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, pp. 406–7; *Gwaith Syr Dafydd Trefor*, pp. 61–3.
79 'Ysgarladwisg' may refer to the type of material rather than its colour, *Gwaith Iolo Goch*, p. 325, n. 42, but see also *Canu Maswedd yr Oesoedd Canol/Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry*, ed. and trans. Dafydd Johnston (Cardiff: Tafol, 1991), p. 589.
80 Compare the reference to 'dyn eglur dâl' – the nun with forehead revealed – in the Dafydd ap Gwilym *cywydd*, Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns', 106.
81 *Iolo Goch Poems*, pp. 100–3.
82 *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, pp. 269–70.

[83] *Canu Maswedd*, pp. 58–61.
[84] See the discussion on the Llanbeblig Hours in Chapter 1.
[85] For these poems, see *Gwaith Rhys Brydydd a Rhisiart ap Rhys*, pp. 50–2; *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, pp. 137–9, 247–8, 268–9.
[86] *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, pp. 268–9, 406–7.
[87] *Gwaith Rhys Brydydd a Rhisiart ap Rhys*, pp. 34–6; *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, pp. 107–8.
[88] *Gwaith Rhys Brydydd a Rhisiart ap Rhys*, p. 34.
[89] The poem to her husband is described as a praise poem, rather than an elegy, in the manuscript, *Gwaith Rhys Brydydd a Rhisiart ap Rhys*, pp. 33–4, 77, nn. 53–5.
[90] *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, p. 108.
[91] *Lewys Glyn Cothi (Detholiad)*, ed. E. D. Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1984), p. 171.
[92] *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, p. 545; *Welsh Genealogies*, vol. 2, Elystan Glodrydd 51.
[93] *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, pp. 100–6; *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn*, pp. 32–7.
[94] *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, p. 108.
[95] Ibid., p. 100.
[96] On the Welsh version of St Helen and the Holy Cross, see Jones, '*Ystorya Addaf a Val a Cauas Elen y Grog*'.
[97] *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn*, pp. 139–41.
[98] *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, p. 97. On Welsh women donating clothing see Haycock, 'Defnydd hyd Ddydd Brawd', pp. 58–66.
[99] *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*, p. 56.
[100] *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, pp. 137–8.
[101] Ibid., p. 189. On Elliw ferch Henri's sea journey, see Chapter 4.
[102] *Gwaith Rhys Brydydd a Rhisiart ap Rhys*, p. 51.
[103] *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, pp. 371–2.
[104] *Gwaith Lewys Daron*, ed. Cynfael Lake (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), p. 44.
[105] *Gwaith Tudur Aled*, vol. 2, pp. 365–7; *Gwaith Lewys Môn*, pp. 28–35. See also Dafydd Wyn Wiliam, *Plasty Prysaeddfed Bodedern, Braslun o'i Hanes* (Llangefni: O. Jones, 1984).
[106] *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn*, pp. 118–19, 123–5.
[107] Ibid., pp. 123–5.
[108] Davies, 'Cerddi'r tai crefydd', vol. 1, pp. 130–1; *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn*, p. xvi.
[109] Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 172–6. On the beguine religious life see also Dor, Johnson and Wogan-Browne (eds), *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality*.
[110] For a list of hospitals in medieval England and Wales see Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp. 313–410.
[111] Edward Laws *et al.*, *An Archaeological Survey of Pembrokeshire 1896–1907* (Tenby: John Leach, 1908), p. 121; RCAHMW, *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire VII – County of Pembroke* (London: HMSO, 1925) pp. 232–4; Helen Nicholson, 'The Sisters' House at Minwear, Pembrokeshire: analysis of the documentary and archaeological evidence', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 151 (2002), 109–38 (112–13).
[112] RCAHMW, *An Inventory*, p. 234
[113] Nicholson, 'The Sisters' House', 132.
[114] Ibid., 132.
[115] National Library of Malta, Valetta Archives of Malta 321, fol. 147^{r-v}; Nicholson, 'The Sisters' House', 132.
[116] M. E. Owen, 'Y Cyfreithiau – (1) Natur y testunau', in Geraint Bowen (ed.), *Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith yn yr Oesau Canol* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1974), pp. 196–219. A list of the manuscripts (twelfth–fifteenth century) is provided by Owen (pp. 201–2).
[117] For a definition of *amobr*, see Jenkins and Owen (eds), *The Welsh Law of Women*, p. 190; see also pp. 73–5.
[118] Ibid., pp. 172–3.
[119] At least, this certainly seems to have been the case in the March, where *amobr* was paid for each sexual encounter until the woman's family declared her a common prostitute; see R. R. Davies, *Lordship and Society in the March of Wales 1282–1400* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 137. See also Jenkins and Owen (eds), *The Welsh Law of Women*, pp. 88–90.
[120] Davies, *Lordship and Society*, p. 137.
[121] Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp. 255, 272.
[122] See details given in Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 167–76; Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 50; Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain*, pp. 91–3. For a discussion of English noblewomen and religious patronage see Jennifer C. Ward, 'English noblewomen and the local community in the later Middle Ages', in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 186–203 (pp. 192–3).
[123] Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 177.
[124] Ward, *English Noblewomen*, p. 6. Edward I arranged that the Clare estates be held jointly by husband and wife when his daughter, Joan of Acre, married Gilbert, earl of Gloucester, in 1290, Ward, *English Noblewomen*, pp. 26–7.
[125] PRO E101/93/4, m. 5. Ward, 'English noblewomen', discusses Elizabeth de Burgh's relationship with other religious houses, such as the Minoresses' convent, and it appears that this became the home of a number of other noblewomen. In her will Elizabeth's main bequests went to the London house of Minoresses and de Clare Hall: Jennifer C. Ward, 'Elizabeth de Burgh and Usk castle', *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*, 18 (2002), 13–22 (22).
[126] R. R. Davies, 'The status of women and the practice of marriage in late-medieval Wales', in Jenkins and Owen (eds), *The Welsh Law of Women*, pp. 93–114 (pp. 100–2).
[127] Ibid., pp. 100–2; A. D. Carr, *Medieval Anglesey* (Llangefni: Anglesey Antiquarian Society, 1982), pp. 156–60.
[128] *Calendar of Ancient Petitions relating to Wales*, ed. William Rees

(Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), p. 441; *The Welsh Assize Roll 1277–1284*, ed. James Conway Davies (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1940), pp. 287–8.

129 Gwenyth Richards, 'From footnotes to narrative: Welsh women in the thirteenth century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, 2005).

130 Ibid., pp. 46–76. Rhys ap Gruffudd was the Lord Rhys, founder of Llanllŷr nunnery. There is some ambiguity concerning the daughters of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and whether they were the daughters of Joan or Tangwystl. The Patent Rolls suggest that he had another daughter called Susanna: *Patent Rolls of the Reign of Henry III Preserved in the Public Record Office A. D. 1225–1232* (London: HMSO, 1903), p. 230.

131 M. Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), Appendix B; Richards, 'From footnotes to narrative', pp. 70–2.

132 J. Beverley Smith, 'Dower in thirteenth-century Wales: a grant of the commote of Anhuniog, 1273', B, 30 (1983), 348–55.

133 At least this was certainly to be discouraged, as one might expect, during her husband's lifetime, since the lands were to revert to him according to the charter. The commote of Anhuniog was amongst lands forfeited to the Crown. Ibid., p. 353.

134 Ward, 'English noblewomen', p. 196.

135 Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 213; Sally Ward, 'Why English nunneries had no history: a study of the problems of the English nunneries founded after the Conquest', in Nichols and Shank (eds), *Medieval Religious Women I*, pp. 131–49; Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns', 96–7.

136 Williams, 'Cistercian nunneries', 155.

137 Thompson, 'Why English nunneries had no history', p. 134. On the differences between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the practices of the Cistercians in relation to nunneries, see Hoffman Berman, 'Were there twelfth-century Cistercian nuns?'.

138 Williams, 'Cistercian nunneries', 155.

139 Cambrensis, *Opera*, vol. 4, pp. 152–3. On Cistercian lands owned by the different religious houses, see D. H. Williams, *Atlas of Cistercian Lands in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990).

140 Efa, daughter of William Marshall, earl of Pembroke, may have retired to the priory of the Augustinian nuns at Cornworthy in Devon after her husband, William de Braose, was hanged in 1230 by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth: Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 172.

141 *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes*, ed. and trans. Thomas Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955), pp. 262–5.

142 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 642, fol. 149. J. Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd Prince of Wales* (Cardiff; University of Wales Press, 1998), pp. 579–80; Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order c.1130–c.1300* (Oxford: Clarendon

Press, 1995), p. 153. For a more detailed profile of these women, see Richards, 'From footnotes to narrative', pp. 210–24.

143 Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham*, p. 153.

144 According to William Worcestre (1415–*c.*1485), the body of St Elvetha (Eluned) lay in the priory church at Usk: Worcestre, *Itineraries*, p. 155. On Eluned and the native female saints of Wales see Chapter 2.

145 Wales had to wait until the eighteenth century for its next prominent religious woman – Ann Griffiths (1776–1805).