

The abbots of Cistercian monasteries in Wales in the later Middle Ages AHSK6002

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Aims and Objectives

I started by reading lots of books on Cistercians. I quite liked the idea of writing about them. They were not exactly fun but I was looking for a dissertation not fun. Anyway I thought as I been to a few of these places I should look at them a bit more closely. Abbots seemed like a good idea. They were the guys in charge. I wondered if we could find out more about them. So I decided to investigate the abbots of Wales in the late medieval period, focussing on a number of research questions



Research questions

- Origins: Do we know anything of their geographical origins?
- Ethnicity: Do we know if they were of Welsh or English origin? The significance of 1284.
- Previous careers: Do we know what offices abbots held before their promotion?
- Movement: Were abbots ever transferred from one monastery to another?

Why?

These guys had a bad press. Traditional historiography of the Cistercians in Wales sees the late medieval period as an era of decline in which unworthy abbots held office. Surely they could not have been all bad.

Traditional historiography has suggested that the Edwardian Conquest culminating in 1284 saw the replacement of all Welsh abbots by English ones. How do we know?

It has been argued that the Cistercians ceased to operate as an 'order' in medieval Wales.

Starting my research

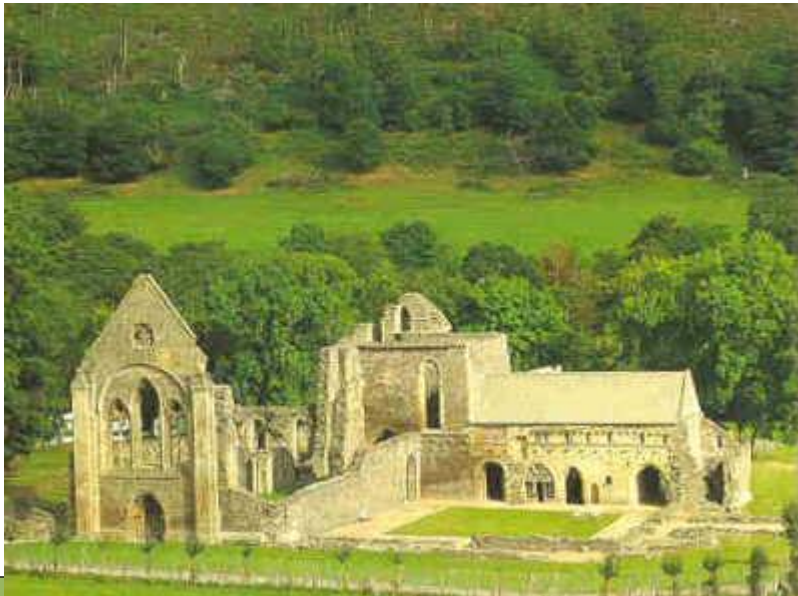
- Basic data on abbots found in the three volumes of *Heads of Religious Houses England and Wales*.
- *This was a bit tedious and took a long time. Most of the time it was just a load of names. And there were a lot of them.*



Focussing my research

The topic was too wide and I had to narrow my study to just three abbeys:

- Strata Florida
- Abbey Cwmhir
- Valle Crucis



Sources

- Narrative histories, such as the *Brut y Tywysogion*
- Charters
- Petitions from Welsh monasteries to the English crown
- Other governmental records

- Literary sources such as the poetry of "Iwan Iwan"



Findings so far

- Origins
 - Sources show that abbots were drawn from a wider geographical region
 - They suggest that the abbots of north and central Wales were likely to be of Welsh origin
- 1284
 - They suggest that the evidence for the replacement of Welsh abbots by English ones has been overestimated

Movement

- There is considerable evidence to suggest that abbots were regularly promoted from one house to another, which further suggests that the Cistercians continued to think of themselves as a distinct group



- **Conclusion** My research is showing that I can challenge traditional interpretations. It suggests that there was greater diversity in the origins, ethnicity, experience and careers of Welsh Cistercian abbots than has been thought.

- My research also suggests that the Cistercian Order in Wales was alive and well right up to the Dissolution.

