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Towards a History of Women in Late Medieval Wales

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I

Da Duw fo i'r gwrda doeth,
dydd da i'r wreigddda rywiogddoeth.

(The blessing of God upon the wise nobleman, Good day to his
good wife of honourable lineage)

These were the words in which the poet Lewys Glyn Cothi saluted Ieuan ap Llywelyn Fychan and Edudful, his wife, master and mistress of the house of Llanifan, in the lordship of Radnor in the mid-fifteenth century. In form and structure as well as in the equal attention lavished on husband and wife, the *cywydd* represents not only the poet's awareness of the strength of the conjugal bond but also of the social persona of the wife in marriage. Equal in lineage and nobility, the couple stand together as co-operative partners and as joint respondents to the obligations of largesse and patronage.¹ This resonant and compelling image of mutuality, interdependence and equipoise in the relations of husband and wife invites further investigation of the rôle and status of women in late medieval Wales, a subject which, with some notable and honourable exceptions, has not hitherto commanded extensive attention.² Women are far from invisible in the period's literary and record sources; indeed, in some important respects, it is not the dearth but the sheer volume of the surviving information and the many problems of analysis and interpretation which it presents that has inhibited rigorous study.³ For while a good deal can be said about the

fortunes of individuals, the generalities of women's experience and the influences that helped shape the rhythms of their lives are not so easily reconstructed. Which of the many and often conflicting descriptions of the status of women in other medieval societies best typifies the place of the woman in late medieval Wales? A *bon vieux temps*, a 'precapitalist Utopia', a golden age of 'rough and ready' equality between the sexes, a complementary but unequal partnership, or a bounded, circumscribed world where men 'travailed abroad' and women 'tarried at home'?⁴

Although no clear idea of the wealth and material status enjoyed by Ieuan and Edudful can now be formed, there is little doubt that both were of prosperous gentle stock, as the poet's deferential obeisance to the honour, nobility and hospitality of his patrons makes clear. By contrast, a smaller, albeit significant body of poetry whose themes evoke the *pastourelle* and the *fabliau*, not to say the themes of the *querelles des femmes* of the European tradition, reveals the virago of robust and aggressive sexuality, the denizen not of the hearth and the home but of the raw, transactional realm of the tavern and market-place.⁵ Such contrasting literary presentations must serve as reminders that, although women undoubtedly shared many common experiences, gender alone is a very blunt instrument with which to dissect the history of women in late medieval Wales. For one thing, social, legal and marital status exercised profound influences on the public rôle which a woman might hope to enjoy. Likewise, her property rights were regulated not by one but by several bodies of law – by canon law, English common law, native Welsh law, local custom and, increasingly at the end of our period, the courts of equity – whose principles sometimes flowed together but also exerted contradictory pressures.⁶ Nor does our period constitute a clear and definable whole in so far as it concerns the history of women. On the contrary, it has been well said that the economic and social status of women in the pre-industrial period in its entirety 'was not one that appears either uniform and unchanging or subject to a simple linear development'.⁷ The period between the conquest of 1282 and the Union was punctuated by decades of profound shortage of labour which may have served to enhance the importance of female productive employment while, conversely, by the latter part of our period the rhythms of women's work were deeply affected, so it is claimed, by an 'altered ideology of gender

and labour' when economic recession began to erode the work opportunities available for women.

Geographical and ecological setting may also have played their part in helping to shape the role and status of women. Pastoral economies may well have presented females with greater work opportunities and the means to accumulate wealth, just as women were increasingly drawn as productive members into urban communities. But moral sentiments and entrenched social attitudes and the interaction of both with economic forces must also be taken into account.⁸ Besides, the investigator of the role of women in late medieval Wales is confronted with the extreme unevenness of the primary sources, both over time and in geographical range. Conclusions drawn on the basis of the experiences of the north-east March, an area of relatively rich documentation, may not necessarily apply to the country in its entirety, while, equally, theories of regional contrast and chronological 'change' suggested by the available sources may not accurately reflect the state of affairs on the ground. Bearing this in mind, a start can best be made with those issues which are most amenable to investigation, that is to say, the legal status, the property rights and the economic role of women, even if many of the arguments advanced in this chapter undoubtedly need to be tested by further research.⁹

We may begin with the question of status, for men and women alike an issue not only of pride and prestige but of very considerable practical consequence. In earlier times, a person's honour or worth, measurable in material or monetary terms, was directly linked to his or her status, but in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in many regions of Wales, legal and racial considerations – the distinctions between free and unfree and between English and Welsh – remained major determinants of obligations and rights. Despite its importance, however, status was never subjected to critical, learned analysis and its governing principles must be assembled from a number of disparate and sometimes conflicting cases when status was the matter at issue.¹⁰

Broadly speaking, in late medieval Wales a woman's racial and legal status depended on those of her father and husband, although her own lineage and pedigree were clearly important matters of pride and even of practical consequence to her own issue.¹¹ For an unmarried woman, it was her father's status which counted and it was his status that determined that of his daughter.

When in 1372 the *amobr* (virginity fine) payment of a young girl was claimed by the lord of Dyffryn Clwyd on the grounds that the girl was a Welshwoman and thus liable to pay, the woman retorted that her mother was English, and no payment was due. Not so, said the lord, for a Welshman, one Madog Sclatier by name, had acknowledged her as his daughter and the due should therefore be levied. At the end of the fifteenth century, likewise, a woman was dunned for *amobr* because it was shown that she was the daughter of one of the lordship's Welsh freemen (*uchelwyr*) while another was explicitly excused the payment because she could prove that her father was English. Such evidence, culled from the prolific Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls, may be replicated elsewhere. Beyond the north-east March and in a quite different cultural milieu, the same principle seems to have operated. In the manor of Porthcseg, for instance, which formed part of the territorial endowment of the abbey of Tintern, a woman attached to answer the lord for her first payment of *leyrwite* (pregnancy fine) argued in court that, although her mother was bond, her father's status as a newcomer (*adventicius*), and therefore a freeman, to the manor exonerated her from the burden of payment. Marriage, and especially remarriage, however, might raise several knotty problems of status. In general terms, a woman's marriage attached her status to that of her husband, although even then and especially when seigniorial financial advantage was at stake, exceptions might be admitted. The father's status might remain the determinant of that of his widowed daughter as was the case for a Dyffryn Clwyd woman whose English status, on account of her inheritance, after her first husband's death, of the English lands of her father, was upheld although she had married a Welshman. So too, a bondman's widow, a burgess's daughter, was allowed to retain the liberty of a burgess. *Per contra* it was also maintained that the status of a woman's first husband should be the touchstone of her own status until such time as her status was 'changed by the lord' or by her remarriage. Without doubt, a woman's status might be the subject of tricky legal conundrums but, for the most part, it was the status of her menfolk which counted in determining her own.¹²

Nowhere was the issue of status – marital as well as legal and racial – of greater importance than in determining the property rights of a woman. The result was a bewildering tangle of rights and restrictions compounded not only by local practice and

profound regional contrasts in the tempo of change but also by the deliberate steps taken by families to provide for their wives and daughters as they saw fit. In so far as her right to inherit land was concerned, in no system of law in operation in Wales was a woman allowed priority over, nor even parity of inheritance rights with, her male siblings. Unlike the legal practice of some European communities which accorded the right to inherit land to the eldest child irrespective of sex, by the common law of England and by the manorial customs of the Welsh localities, males were invariably favoured over females of the same degree, although female lineal descendants were normally allowed to inherit in preference to collateral males. In the customary holdings of south-east Wales, for example, it was usual for daughters to inherit only in the absence of sons, as is shown by the custom of the manor of Rumney (where borough English prevailed), which provided that the youngest daughter or the youngest next of kin should inherit 'if ther be no man childe heir'.¹³ Where Welsh laws of succession prevailed, however, the exclusion of women from rights of inheritance was complete, as is clear from the prolific Dyffryn Clwyd evidence. When Ieuan ab Einion Wyndout who held by both English and Welsh tenure in the commote of Colion died during the first visitation of plague, leaving no sons, nor indeed, any heirs within four degrees of his blood to inherit, his Welsh lands fell to the lord as escheat, but his English lands fell to Dyddgu, his daughter and heir. Equally revealing is the contrasting fate of the lands of Llywelyn ap Madog, whose English tenements after his death in 1342 were divided between his daughters and grandson (the latter inheriting as the heir of his deceased mother) while his Welsh estates in the lordship devolved on his male kinsmen and collateral heirs. Equally, when the son of Tudur ap Ieuan ap Einion of Colion died in 1451, his widowed mother, left destitute and with six 'yonge maydchildren' to raise, petitioned the lord to be granted the land although by right it should fall to the lord 'for lack of eyr male'. So too, when a Welsh landowner died leaving a pregnant wife, the court might postpone its decision on legitimate succession until the sex of the child could be ascertained. If the child were a male, his succession would be allowed, but if female, the collateral male heirs of the father would be preferred. Even in areas where the Welsh law of succession prevailed, however, there was some variety. Bondwomen in Dyffryn Clwyd, for example, were

often allowed their rights of inheritance and both daughters and sisters of bond tenants may be seen paying the customary *ebediw* and succeeding to the lands of their male consanguines. By contrast, in the lordship of Chirk, bond and free tenements alike were subjected to laws of succession which prescribed their division on the death of the tenant among male co-heirs alone.¹⁴

Just as important as a woman's right of succession to her family patrimony were her legal rights in the land that was hers by inheritance and, if she were married, in those of her husband. A widow with lands of her own inheritance or an unmarried heiress might, in theory, dispose of their lands as they thought fit, although in practice such unfettered freedom was doubtless controlled by the advice of relatives or family friends who might be charged with their 'guiding' or 'keeping'.¹⁵ The landed inheritance of a married woman, however, fell under the guardianship of her husband who was entitled to profit from it during the marriage and, on his wife's death, if a child had been born of the marriage, to enjoy it 'by the curtesy of England'.¹⁶ If an action were brought by a third party in respect of the wife's inheritance, such an action would need to be sued against husband and wife and, likewise, husband and wife were, together, required to sue for the land which was held in the right of the wife. Even so, the husband did not secure unlimited rights in his wife's inheritance.¹⁷ If land had been given with the wife in marriage (a not uncommon practice in late medieval Wales) the grant might specify that the land should descend only to the legitimate heirs born of the wife and if no heirs had been born to her, the estate, subject to the husband's life interest, should revert to the wife's family. Likewise, had the husband disposed of his wife's lands without her consent, a writ of *cui in vita* was available to her for her redress and such writs were, not infrequently, prosecuted in the royal and seigniorial courts in Wales.¹⁸ In addition, if part or the whole of the wife's inheritance were being conveyed, it was necessary for her to be separately and especially examined to ensure that her consent be given 'neither coerced by force nor led by fear, but of her own free wish'.¹⁹ The wife's interests were also upheld where there were no direct heirs of the marriage. If the lands were the wife's, it was her relatives who stood to inherit to the exclusion of those of her husband.

A wife joined to her husband in lawful wedlock, unless she had committed adultery and remained unreconciled to her spouse at

the time of his death, was entitled to a part of his lands to sustain her during her widowhood.²⁰ Although a husband could endow his wife with such dower lands on the occasion of the marriage (to take effect on his death if he were survived by his wife), by the end of the thirteenth century it had become established in common law that a widow was entitled to a life estate in a reasonable share of her husband's lands, normally fixed as one-third.²¹ Customary tenants, however, had different entitlements whose precise details show considerable regional differences. The customary law of some manors allowed the widow the right to the whole of her husband's lands while she lived, although several added the proviso that she should remain chaste and unmarried, or, in the quaint phraseology of the custom of the manor of Boverton, that wives should 'enjoy their widowhood and no longer', a rule which was exercised also in the manor of Rumney where, in 1447, three widows gave up their lands on remarriage.²² In the manor of Aston, a constituent manor of the lordship of Oswestry and a region of rich agricultural land, where the widow's right to the customary holding of her spouse may be surmised, at least six widows took up their late husbands' tenements between 1380 and 1400, although why some chose to exercise their right while others did not, opting instead for tenancies or cottages or to swell the ranks of the lord's avowry tenants, is not entirely clear. Personal aptitude, family circumstances, the ease of subletting or obtaining hired labour must have been material considerations.²³ It must also be noted that, during the course of the fourteenth century, provisions other than dower came into increasingly widespread use to provide for the widows of free and bond tenants alike.²⁴ At the highest social levels, a marriage settlement might be arranged so as to provide the wife with a jointure of land while she survived, in lieu of her rights to a dower. When, to take one example, Owen ap John Owen of Ystumcegid in Eifionydd took as his wife Lowri daughter of Madog ap Ieuan ap Gruffudd, in 1530, the groom's father undertook to make a 'sufficient estate' of lands to the yearly value of 33s. 4d. to the bride for the time of her life, 'for and in the name of her joynter'. Within the ranks of the peasantry, too, a landowner might also arrange that his spouse, should she survive him, should receive land for the term of her life, sometimes with the proviso that she should remain chaste after his death. Another device to which increasing recourse was had was the joint tenure by

husband and wife of all or part of a landed estate. Such an arrangement might be effected when land was acquired or might be accomplished by means of a conveyance by the husband alone to a group of feoffees who would reconvey to the conjugal pair. Many advantages accrued to the wife by these means and its use may be seen at all social levels and tenures. By the fifteenth century, too, if not earlier, some tenants of customary land were being admitted on a lease for three lives, to the husband and wife successively and to one of their children, and with the growing use of written copies of such admissions, such an arrangement might offer the widow a more favourable estate than her entitlement to the customary dower would allow.²⁵ To these general practices of providing an interest in land for the wife and the widow, however, there was one notable and important exception. Just as land held under the terms of indigenous law was not heritable by women, so was a woman precluded from being endowed with a dower of land. The rule is proclaimed starkly and without an iota of compromise in the statute promulgated by Richard Arundel for his lordship of Bromfield and Yale in 1391, but its effects may also be witnessed in a number of lordships in Wales. While the widows of those who held land under English tenure were to be allowed their dower of land, those of the tenants of Welsh tenures were to enjoy no such rights. A Dyffryn Clwyd woman was, likewise, debarred from her dower of land because the land in question was 'Welsh land and of Welsh tenure and thus she should not have her dower'.²⁶

Despite regional and chronological variations, a steady and sustained progression towards the right to hold land was a major development in the history of the property rights of Welshwomen in the late Middle Ages. By the end of our period the right of women to inherit and to be endowed with land was clearly established. In the king's shires of north Wales, it was the statute of 1284 which initiated the change. By its provisions, women, on the failure of male heirs of their ancestor might, by the king's special grace, have their portions of their ancestor's land assigned to them in his court, while the same enactment provided for women the writ of dower, although 'heretofore women have not been endowed in Wales'.²⁷ Within very few years of its issue Welshwomen of the principality lands, like the daughters of Anian ap Caradog, were staking their claim to their paternal inheritance after the death of their brother 'by virtue of the king's statute', while the writ of

dower was regularly pursued through the courts, as the records of the county of Flint make abundantly clear. In the royal lands of the south, likewise, women were granted the right to inherit, although in the early fourteenth century the heirs of a freeman could still demand an inquiry 'whether they ought to dividé their lands with the heirs of a woman or not'.²⁸ Elsewhere, however, the establishment of female rights to inherit was more slowly and patchily achieved and nowhere was the geographical diversity more graphically illustrated than in the north-east March. In the small lordship of Whittington, which protruded into the lordship of Oswestry, effectively dividing the latter into Duparts and Traian, female inheritance appears to have achieved full recognition in the course of the fourteenth century, and heiresses were successfully claiming and being admitted to lands in the courts. By contrast, in the lordship of Oswestry, not until 1429 was the right of female inheritance formally acknowledged by seigniorial charter and a surviving survey of parts of the lordship shows the persistent and decidedly masculine flavour of the lordship's tenurial structure at the end of the fourteenth century.²⁹ Further to the south, the enduring strength of agnatic kinship in so far as land is concerned may be seen in the lordship of Deuddwr where, in the early sixteenth century, its lord, Edward Sutton, Lord Dudley, was granting some of the escheated lands of his lordship to new tenants and 'the male heirs of [their] bodies lawfully begotten . . . according to the law and custom of Powys'.³⁰ Indeed, even within the confines of a single lordship, much variety could exist. In the lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd, although Welshwomen were increasingly enjoying the right to inherit, a plaintiff as late as 1469–70 could successfully challenge the claims of a man to inherit his grandfather's lands through the female line by alleging that his opponent's 'modre may not enherite no Welshe londe'.³¹ None the less, by dint of seigniorial provision, by individual petition as well as by changes of tenure, Welshwomen, by the eve of the Union with England had attained property rights in land which were broadly comparable with those of women in England. By the end of the fifteenth century, indeed, John Edwards of Chirk could express in the Welsh language several important principles of the common law of England in relation to the landholding rights of women, a clear indication of the way in which women had come to inherit their families' lands and had acquired the right to be endowed with their husbands' estates.³²

It is tempting to ascribe these important extensions to the property rights of women solely to the liberating effects of English common law. However, native arrangements had been undergoing an independent process of adjustment and accommodation to a new social milieu. For instance, already during the thirteenth century among the highest social echelons, an assignment of land was being made by husbands to wives on the occasion of marriage. In several cases such grants were made to women of English or Marcher lineages and may reflect the practices of their families of origin, but, even so, the records convey that the gifts were sometimes construed as ones made 'according to the law and custom of Wales'.³³ When, for example, inquiry was made into the circumstances in which Gruffudd ap Madog, prince of Powys Fadog, endowed his wife, Emma, with lands, the grant was specifically associated with the custom of Wales which, it was claimed, allowed any Welshman 'at his own wish to give his lands and tenements to his wife either before or after espousals', while an earlier assignment of dower was, likewise, described as one made 'according to the law and custom of Wales'. Equally revealing is the use made by landowners of the device of *prid* (a form of gage) to provide for their daughters a landed endowment. Land held in *prid* was, not uncommonly, used to provide a daughter with an estate in land, just as it was also a practice to mortgage or *prid* the land to a son-in-law on the occasion of nuptials.³⁴ Sir John Wynn of Gwydir refers to the practice in his family memoirs and surviving deeds show its use at all social levels. Although the endowment of daughters with land cut clean across the strictest rules of Welsh inheritance law, the *prid* device, a protean and supple instrument, allowed landowners to provide for their daughters whilst at the same time paying lip-service to the norms of a patrilineal society. Such examples certainly teach us to be on our guard lest the emancipation of Welshwomen from the tenurial shackles of an outmoded and conservative inheritance law be attributed entirely to the liberating forces of English land law.

Despite the increasing importance of the Welsh heiress and dowager in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Wales, it was moveable property – household chattels, livestock, clothing, ornaments and cash – that formed the bulk of most women's wealth in the period. The *maritagium* of land, it is true, is sometimes encountered. For instance, on the marriage of a Whittington

woman in 1322, her father granted to her at the church door (*ad portas ecclesie*) an estate of land in free marriage; some time before 1486 a messuage and eight acres of arable land in Hiraddug, with seigniorial permission, had been made over to a Flintshire bride by her parents, while in early fifteenth-century Llannerch (Dyffryn Clwyd) reference was made to a recent grant of land 'in frank marriage' in the commote.³⁵ But daughters were normally the recipients not of land but of chattels. Such an arrangement did not of necessity disadvantage the women, and many benefits might accrue to her from the possession of liquid assets rather than land. The relative value of land and moveable wealth in earlier agricultural societies was often much closer than is true of today.³⁶

A dowry or portion, however, represented far more than a transfer of assets or a conspicuous display of a family's wealth and esteem. For, as a token and symbol of the woman's prized sexual honour, it constituted a public statement of the greatest importance. The point may be vividly illustrated by the circumstances surrounding the elopement of Margery, daughter of Rowland Gruffudd of Porth-aml with Hugh ap Robert ap Rhys sometime before 1539. She was subsequently reconciled with her father by means of an elaborate and detailed arbitration award, and the payment by Rowland of the dowry of clothing and livestock prescribed by the doomsmen not only signalled the resumption of normal, loving relations between father and daughter but also the reinstatement of her sexual credit in the eyes of the world.³⁷ Most parents, whatever their legal or material standing, sought to ensure that their daughters were fittingly stocked with appropriate goods on their marriage. The provision of items of clothing or measures of cloth, bedding and linen were common endowments. Hywel ap Hywel Young of Newport in the lordship of Cemais delivered to his daughter's prospective husband a quantity of satin, velvet, kersey and holland along with a number of blankets, sheets and pillows, a substantial dowry amounting to £16 in value; a royal bondman of north Wales sought and secured permission to endow both his daughters with six cows and ten ewes apiece, a not inconsiderable gift, while more lavish still was the dowry of eighty oxen, kine, heifers and bullocks which Kathryn, daughter of John ap David ab Ithel, brought to her marriage with Edward, son of Ebulo Thelwall, in 1491.³⁸ Likewise, several wills of the period contain specific injunctions to furnish bequests, in cash or in kind,

for the donor's kinswomen or servants on marriage. Sometimes, indeed, well-to-do donors considered it part of their moral duty to provide for the marriages of poor maids of their parish and such bequests may also be found in the wills of the period.³⁹

Just as single or widowed women possessed very considerable rights in their landed endowments so, too, were they able to exercise substantial control over their moveable wealth. Unmarried women and widows, for instance, might bequeath their chattels as they saw fit and the small number of women's wills that have survived from our period are almost exclusively those of widows and maidens.⁴⁰ If, however, we are to understand fully the rights of married women in Wales with regard to their moveable property, some attempt must be made to identify the several ways of regarding the property rights of husband and wife in the period. The principles which governed the marital property system in native Welsh law are revealed with some care in the legal recensions. Briefly stated, both a common pool of moveables and the separate right of the partners to particular items were acknowledged. While the union endured, the husband retained much control over his wife's property as well as his own, but when the union was ended, by death or divorce, the notional rights of each partner over the stock of chattels and livestock were activated. As far as the wife was concerned, provided the union had lasted seven years, separation entitled her to half of the household moveables and, in addition to her clothing and ornaments, to any identifiable items of dowry (*argyfrau*) that she had brought to the partnership. The ending of unions by death would, likewise, precipitate the division of moveable goods, the dying partner, so the law texts reveal, with the aid of the parish priest, dividing and the surviving one choosing. The wife's share, we must emphasize, represented her entitlement to the common property of the union and was not hers by the gift or bequest of her husband.⁴¹ In marked contrast stood the common law of England, already a profoundly important influence on the law of marital property in several regions of Wales by the fourteenth century. Although, as Maitland surmised, the common law of the thirteenth century was one which had not 'decisively made up its mind' against a community of chattels between husband and wife, the developed law of marital property unequivocally vested the ownership in the husband alone.⁴² The 'conglutination of persons in baron and feme', as a later authority

referred to the legal relationship of husband and wife, served to subsume the woman's property rights within those of her spouse. A married woman, save when she enjoyed the privileged status of *feme sole* was covered (*couvert*, *cooperta*) at law by her husband. Moveable property that she brought to the marriage or that she acquired during the course of the marriage fell under her husband's control and, excepting her personal ornaments or *paraphernalia*, might be disposed of as he thought fit. As *feme covert*, moreover, she could not make contracts nor might she sue or be sued independently of her husband, while by the fifteenth century, if not earlier, it was assumed that her testamentary powers extended only so far as her husband was pleased to allow and only the testaments of married women specifically permitted by their husbands to make them were regarded as valid. Despite the moving protestations in wills and in epitaphs of the joining of mind and body in marriage, the union of flesh and of spirit clearly did not extend to the common ownership or control of earthly possessions.⁴³

That such was the lot of many late medieval Welshwomen is amply confirmed by the evidence, as a few illustrative examples make clear. Women in Wales were often described as covered (*cooperta*) by their husbands: a Dyffryn Clwyd man, accused by his wife of eloigning her livestock and grain, advanced the defence that, as his espoused wife, he did her no injury; William Edwards of Chirk claimed that his wife had sought his permission to bequeath 'such apparel that belongyth to hyr body', but had not his permission to bequeath the rent from her lands which he 'did never agre nor assent thereto'.⁴⁴ This draconian regime was tempered, however, in several important respects. We may suspect that some of the notions enshrined in indigenous law were not entirely forgotten. We hear of the common goods (*bonis communibus*) of the couple, of the division of chattels after divorce 'in the accustomed manner' (*modo debito*), of the enjoyment of a mother's bequest and of the return of a dowry.⁴⁵ How strong and persistent such notions may have been we are not now in a position to judge. More visible in our sources is the effect of *legitim*, or the division of the deceased person's moveable goods into part or aliquot shares – one for his wife, if she survived him, one for his children, if he had issue, and a third reserved for his own disposition.⁴⁶ The custom's antiquity is not to be doubted even if

its origins in secular custom or, as Maitland suggested, as 'the temporal side of an ecclesiastical fact', cannot now be determined.⁴⁷ Its survival in late medieval Wales can, however, be amply confirmed. A Dyffryn Clwyd widow petitioned her lord for the right to remarry and undertook also not to remove from the lordship the goods of her first husband, neither the part which pertained to her nor the part of her sons (*nec de parte sua nec de parte filii sui*) while a sixteenth-century petition to Chancery referred to the 'equal division of the goods, chattels and substance' of every man dwelling within the lordship of Denbigh 'between the wife and children of the party so dying'.⁴⁸ Ecclesiastical records, likewise, refer to the custom's importance. A note on testaments included in a valuable volume of legal precedents compiled in the north-east March in the early sixteenth century enjoined the partition of the goods of any testator who had a wife and children into three equal parts and such a division is sometimes encountered in the wills of the period.⁴⁹ Nor was the custom confined to the northern regions of Wales. A fragment of the record of the consistory court of the deanery of Cemais in the Diocese of St David's reveals how one Alice Large claimed for herself a third part of her father's chattels on the ground that a custom obtained in the diocese, and especially so (*prescipue*) in the deanery of Cemais, which obliged a testator to divide his possessions into three equal parts, retaining one for his own disposition and assigning the other two-thirds to his wife and his children.⁵⁰

The enduring strength of *legitim* in Wales after its general demise in the province of Canterbury has long been acknowledged by many historians. But there are grounds for believing that the fate of the practice in Wales was also one of gradual withering before its formal annulment in 1696. The process was, it is true, an uneven one, but by the reign of Elizabeth, George Owen of Henllys bore witness to its decline in his own native shire. Despite the 'manie ripe wyttes' and the 'readye tongues' of the Pembrokeshire wives, Owen remarked how the custom 'for weomen to haue the thirds of all their husbands goods and leases . . . hath beene of late sore shaken and yet languisheth verie weake', although he was also able to add how 'many have yt without deniall'. In Glamorgan, likewise, while a threefold division is sometimes encountered in wills, the custom's decline must also be noted. A Lisvane widow who laid claim to a third of the goods and chattels of her dead

husband as her reasonable part, 'according to the custom hitherto in use in the county', was answered by the defendant's retort that such a custom was unknown in Glamorgan. None the less, while the custom survived, it provided a widow with some measure of certainty that she could not be left destitute by the capricious whims of a vindictive spouse and, to that extent, the rigours of common-law notions of marital property were softened in Wales to a woman's advantage.⁵¹

Customs such as *legitim*, combined with the residual influence of concepts of marital property derived from native traditions, provided the late medieval Welshwoman with some guarantee of her right to share in the wealth of the household. But women also took practical steps to ensure that their rights were respected. The argument has been advanced that the informal or 'free' unions of which abundant evidence survives were consciously entered into by women with the specific intent of safeguarding their property rights. Such irregular, unblessed unions, so it is argued, avoided the worst excesses of coverture, but their incidence in Wales, as elsewhere, should be more properly regarded as a deeply ingrained social habit rather than an intricate calculus of material advantage.⁵² Far more important in ensuring a woman's rights was the property contract made on the occasion of marriage. The marriage contract survives, in the main, in two forms, the first being a simple agreement between the bride's kinsmen on the one part and the bridegroom or his consanguines on the other for the transfer of money or chattels, with contingency clauses obliging the defaulting party to pay a substantial financial penalty, usually divided in two between the lord and the party so wronged. A second, more commonly used towards the end of our period, took the form of the conditional bond which might be sued in a court of law as a debt *sur obligacion* and, indeed, it is in this way that many property contracts entered into at marriage are revealed in our sources. The marriage contract, it is now increasingly realized, was not the sole prerogative of women of high social status (although the contracts drawn up at the marriage of gentlewomen are often elaborately and skilfully contrived) but may be encountered at all social levels. A relatively early example, one dating to 1357–8, is revealed in the extant court rolls for the town of Caernarfon, and many more are to be found in the court rolls of the lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd in our period.⁵³ Although the property

arrangements enshrined in a marriage contract vary considerably – if the contracting parties were children, their care and sustenance might be prescribed in the contract, and if the man or the woman were the heir to family lands, especial provision would need to be made – the majority obliged the bride and her kinsmen to honour the payment of dowry while the groom and his kinsmen undertook to provide for the woman in the event of the death of her spouse or the ending of marriage by separation or divorce.⁵⁴ Sometimes the dowry itself was reclaimed by the bride's kinsmen and we may presume that the costs of maintaining the widow might then be at issue. When Dafydd ap Llywelyn ap Tudur of Abergele took to wife the sister of Dafydd Lloyd ap Bleddyn, a payment of 20 marks was made to the groom on condition that he should provide for his wife by means of goods or chattels or lands to the equivalent value. His failure to do so and his subsequent death involved a suit between Dafydd Lloyd and the surety to the transaction, the outcome of which was the return of the 20 marks to the bride's brother.⁵⁵ On other occasions a divorce might prompt a payment of money by an erring husband to his discarded wife or her kinsmen or, if the wife herself were at fault, she and her kinsfolk might be held liable for any financial penalty which should be incurred.⁵⁶ Where no formal property contract can be shown, it may well be that an informal agreement governed the disposition of property. In some of the wills of the period, for instance, a bequest of the dowry which she had brought to the marriage might be made by the testator to his wife. When Thomas ap William ap Jankyn drew up his will in 1526–7 he left to his wife the beasts and the sheep 'which I had with her', just as a later testator bequeathed to his wife all the household stuff and bedding she had brought with her at marriage 'for and in the name of her *gwatholl* goods'.⁵⁷

One of the clearest indications of the property rights of a Welshwoman, however, derives not from the record evidence nor from the wills of the period but from the corpus of poetry. A genre of *cywyddau* addressed to both sexes survives where the poet, flaunting his prowess at imagery and fanciful metaphor, solicits gifts for himself or on behalf of a mentor.⁵⁸ From men, steeds, oxen, hounds, hawks or armour and weapons – objects associated with the virile and vigorous pursuits of the chase and the battlefield – were commonly sought. But an important, albeit smaller, body of poems also solicits gifts from the poet's female

benefactors. A mantle (*ffaling*) was sought by the poet, Lewys Glyn Cothi, from Elen, the wife of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn ap Gruffudd which, claimed the poet, would earn her a song in return. An intricately embroidered coverlet, a 'woman's handiwork' (*gwaith dwylaw merch*) was desired from one and an exquisite tapestry bed-curtain, lavishly and punctiliously described by the poet, was sought from another. Two milch cows, cunningly disguised in the poem as two barrels of Weobley ale, were sued of two Maelienydd ladies, a gift which, so the poet maintained, could not be denied by their husbands (*ni wrafun un o'ch dau ūr*). We may assume that these were the items which a woman was at liberty to give without let and, not unexpectedly, compare very closely indeed with the items of clothing, bedding, personal ornaments and livestock which regularly constituted a Welshwoman's dowry.

II

So far in our discussion, the issue of a woman's property rights has been framed almost entirely in terms of the possessions bestowed on a woman by family and kin or which accrued to her from her husband in consequence of her marriage. This however, begs the important question of a woman's own productive and earning capacity. That women are visible in the labour market in the period after the plague is beyond any dispute. Over a half of those who made fine for infractions of the Statute of Labourers in the county of Flint in 1355–6, were women who had 'taken excess' for their labour, while in Dyffryn Clwyd, nearly twenty years later, women constituted a smaller, but by no means insignificant proportion (one-quarter) of those similarly fined.⁵⁹ Whether or not the female wage-earner was a novel phenomenon, why apparent contrasts are visible in contiguous areas and whether the proportion of females indicted and fined reflects the proportion of women in the workforce in its entirety are, of course, important questions which cannot at present be answered with any certainty.⁶⁰ Indeed, in our attempt to identify the working roles of medieval Welshwomen, one caveat has at once to be entered. No comprehensive and unambiguous source giving a clear indication of the economic role of women survives from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and some occupations, like brewing and weaving, the retail trades and

prostitution, which will loom large in our discussion do so because these were the ones which were regulated and controlled by secular and ecclesiastical authorities and may or may not be the ones in which women were mainly engaged.⁶¹ The assize of bread and the assize of beer operated in several Welsh jurisdictions from the late thirteenth century, yielding detailed lists of those engaged in baking and brewing, just as the civic control of the meat trade and the regulations concerned with regrating and forestalling the food supply reveals the names of those concerned with the occupation of butcher and huckster (*aucciauatix*). Likewise, an assize of weaving was implemented in several jurisdictions and sometimes provides valuable lists of those involved in the production of cloth in a given locality.⁶² Again, servants and wage-earners are conspicuous in our sources because the regulation of contracts of service and the exercise of control over wages were matters of serious concern to the secular powers, while both they and the organs of ecclesiastical discipline attended to the sexual comportment of women (for the former, indeed, there were financial profits in the form of *amobr* and *leyrwrite* to be made from the sexual delicts of females), with the result that the prostitute (*meretrix communis*) is unusually visible in our sources.⁶³ By contrast, callings which may have absorbed a high proportion of females are more obscure. Most difficult of all to identify is the woman's contribution to the work of the family holding and the nature of her domestic endeavours. The word 'housewife' (W. *hyswi*, *hwswi*) had not the connotation of domesticity which the term later acquired and suggestions of a clear division of labour, with distinct gender-specific spheres of activity, derived in the main from the coroners' rolls of the period, have been challenged as an 'optical illusion' based on a 'flawed methodology'.⁶⁴ In this sphere, too, our literary sources, so effusive in their praise of the gentlewoman's domestic proficiencies, fail us almost completely, and those few which portray the work patterns of ordinary women do so in ways which are often contradictory and puzzling. A scabrous poem, drawing its themes from the genre of the *fabliau*, for instance, portrays the woman minding the house on her own while the husband and his co-ploughman (*cyfarwr*) are at work in the fields; another, by contrast, invokes the traditional and highly suggestive image of the man and the woman sharing the guidance of oxen and plough.⁶⁵ For all the necessary qualifications, however, some

firm impressions of the world of the medieval Welshwoman's work can be presented.

We may begin with brewing, an activity traditionally associated with women. The increased consumption of ale has been identified as one of the critical changes in diet experienced in the late Middle Ages, a trend also reflected in the concentration of brewing in the hands of better-off householders retailing their surplus and the advent of permanent alehouses and regular transters in town and country alike.⁶⁶ Although the brewing industry in late medieval Wales needs to be studied in detail, the developments witnessed elsewhere were also quite evident here. Brewing for domestic consumption was ubiquitous throughout much of our period, as the references in surviving household inventories to mash-tubs, to vats and lead weights for brewing amply bear witness. Indeed, the traditional requirement that households should brew by Candlemas (2 February) and known in several localities by its Welsh name of *cwrw gŵyl San Ffraid* was an obligation commonly set on villein communities.⁶⁷ Brewing for sale, however, was mainly confined to the towns, and several seigniorial regimes attempted to set up monopolies in the urban centres of their domains and severely proscribed not only the brewing and illicit sale of ale in the countryside but also the use of measures other than those of the individual town. In the lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd, for example, only those resident within the borough of Ruthin or who had liberty to brew by charter were permitted to do so, under penalty of forfeiting the ale and the vessels and of imprisonment; several Clynnog residents were amerced for brewing and selling ale in the township 'contrary to the regulation and the liberty of the town of Caernarfon', while in Carmarthenshire, likewise, those who brewed ale or mead within 5 leagues of the town of Carmarthen were punished.⁶⁸ True, the beers of Weobley and Shrewsbury were highly regarded, the esteem of the latter attested by the ban imposed by the earl of Arundel on its sale in the town of Oswestry and within its adjacent manors and by the poet's affirmation that Shrewsbury beer was the favourite tippie of the Sycharth ménage, just as the ale of Weobley was imbibed at the Maelienydd houses visited by Lewys Glyn Cothi.⁶⁹ The bulk of the ale consumed was, however, undoubtedly produced by domestic brewers, who brewed in the towns and larger villages for local consumption.

Amercements for breaching the assize of ale were so regular a source of seigniorial income by the fourteenth century that they must be considered, to all intents and purposes, as a licensing fee. The names of those regularly amerced suggest that brewing, a virtually female monopoly at the start of our period, became progressively masculinized over the ensuing decades.⁷⁰ But this may also reflect changes in recording procedures whereby husbands were held liable for the fines which were, in practice, incurred by their wives. We may suspect, indeed, that brewing remained a predominantly female activity. Sometimes the records refer specifically to brewsters (*braciatores, pandoxatrices*), as was the case when the ale-tasters of Ruthin were accused of taking with them on their ale-tasting rounds three or four comrades 'to taste the ale to the impoverishment of many women'; on other occasions, a tenement might be let with specific permission for the wife to brew on the premises, while women may also be found hiring out brewing implements or appearing in court, alone if they were widowed, or with their husbands, when married, as plaintiffs demanding payment for ale sold by them to others.⁷¹ Very frequently, too, in our evidence, widows of men who were regularly presented for brewing may be encountered, clearly continuing their husband's trade, a fact which suggests that they may well have been joint partners if not entirely responsible for the production of ale in their households while the spouse was alive. True, our evidence also suggests the active involvement of menfolk as brewers and, if the ale-tasters of Ruthin are typical of those in the country at large, the monitoring of standards was virtually exclusively a male preserve.⁷² The production of ale in late medieval Wales was, however, if not entirely a female monopoly, certainly dominated by women. Here, it seems clear, the productive capacities of women were used to full strength.

Slightly less evident, but by no means insignificant, was the presence of women bakers, as peasant diet shifted from the boiling of grains in pottages to baking and eating more bread.⁷³ In several towns an assize of bread operated, and the appearance of regular bakers signalled the growing importance of bread in the urban diet. Although their numbers never equalled those of the brewers, a town of relatively modest size, such as Ruthin, could in the 1390s support some twenty regular bakers.⁷⁴ As might be expected, too, there was much overlap between bakers and brewers and, among

the former, there was a small but consistent minority of women. Most were the wives or widows of bakers and brewers, many clearly pursuing their late husband's trade. The close connection between women and victualling is also exemplified by the regular presentment of females for the offences of regrating and forestalling. Indeed, of the victualling trades, only butchery was, apparently, not open to women. No woman was presented in Ruthin for breaching the assize of meat nor, it would seem, were the wives and widows of butchers encouraged to share in their husbands' ventures.

Just as brewing provided a major outlet for the business acumen and productive capacities of townswomen, so in town and country districts alike the production of cloth – both woollen and linen – and the numerous processes involved in the work absorbed a high proportion of female labour. If reliance may be placed on the occupational labels accorded to women – in Latin, English and Welsh – the processes of combing and spinning the wool were undertaken almost exclusively by women, while the occasional female lister or dyer is also revealed. Not only are by-names like kempster, *cribwaig* and spinster often encountered but references to distaffs as well as the prevalence of spindle-whorls on excavated sites, in locations of both permanent and seasonal settlement, suggest the ubiquity of spinning.⁷⁵ Spinning wheels too, which, unless they were hired, almost certainly involved a greater capital outlay than the cheaper distaff, were in use by the end of the fourteenth century and used by women.⁷⁶ More difficult to determine, however, is the relative importance of women as weavers. The impressive preponderance of female weavers is certainly suggested in some of our sources. When in April 1330 presentments were made of those who had contravened the assize of weaving in Dyffryn Clwyd, all save two of the 138 persons presented were women and, unless female weavers were being especially targeted, this betokens a highly feminized industry. *Per contra*, a very substantial number of men are also described as weavers (W. *gwehydd*, *weeth*, L. *textor*) and incurred penalties for taking excess wages for their work.⁷⁷ Too little is known of the technology and of the exact organization of clothmaking in late medieval Wales to speak with complete confidence of the internal dynamics of the weaver's household. But the strong impression conveyed is that weaving, for women, was an activity ancillary to the work of their

husband, if he were a weaver, or a seasonal by-employment to an agricultural household rather than a full-time means of support.⁷⁸

Victualling, weaving and spinning apart, a whole range of female occupations are also revealed. Laundresses (L. *lotrix*, *lavander*), sempsters, kellmakers (kell or caul was a woman's headcovering), nurses – activities traditionally associated with women – were common, as were female servants, even if we cannot be certain to what extent these were lifecycle servants and resident in the homes of their masters.⁷⁹ The records of secular and ecclesiastical courts, despite the difficulties of distinguishing simple promiscuity from the exchange of sexual favours for payment, likewise reveal the ubiquity of the prostitute (*meretrix communis*) within urban and rural communities.⁸⁰ Women may also be found on the building sites of the period. Thirty-six formidable ladies, drawn from the towns and villages of Radnor, Brecon and Herefordshire were working as hodwomen for 6d. a week on the castle of Builth in 1282 and it may well be that the manual labour of women is concealed among the *minuti operarii* of the period's building accounts.⁸¹ Just as evident is the range of agricultural routines in which women participated. In agrarian economies, women are recorded as cleaning the seed, weeding, winnowing and gleaning and taking charge of the poultry, while in pastoral and agrarian economies alike the dairy maid (*daye*) was charged with the care of the livestock.⁸² Most impressive of all is the evidence for female participation as harvest workers. Such activities, although they were not entirely novel in the period after the plague, can be securely documented from the mid-fourteenth century onwards and records of Michaelmas court leets or turns, where they survive, almost invariably reveal how women were joining the bands of itinerant harvest workers and leaving the lordships to seek temporary employment in autumn. Although much work remains to be done, both on the sexual division of agricultural labour and on the wage rates of women, it would seem that, where men and women were engaged in similar tasks, an equivalent remuneration was earned. In the lordship of Monmouth, to take one mid-fifteenth-century example, whereas mowers were exclusively male and paid 6d. per day for their labour, men and women were employed as reapers, both *sexes* earning 2d. per day for their work.⁸³

III

What conclusions, then, may be drawn about the rôle and status of women in late medieval Wales? In several important respects the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, if not a 'golden age', were a period in which Welshwomen secured important advancements. A society once resolutely patrilineal in its stance towards land, slowly but inexorably came to accept the rights of women to a share of the patrimony. Indeed, there are some grounds for believing that devices such as the entail, increasingly used in the course of the fifteenth century, were deployed to favour direct female heirs over more distant collateral males and the 'defeat of the cousins' was a policy actively espoused by many Welsh landowners. In the same way, in so far as their moveable goods were concerned, the safeguards accorded to women by the ecclesiastical courts and by the residual influence of indigenous law were bolstered by increasing resort at all social levels to the marriage contract, which helped to ensure to married women a measure of control over the property brought to the union. Increasingly, too, women were drawn into remunerative employment – the victualling trades, the production of cloth, the institution of service, agricultural labour, as well as the occupations traditionally associated with women. But too sharp a distinction should not be drawn between the private, domestic sphere and the great public forum beyond. On the contrary, as the poetry amply reveals, the gentlewoman stood, not as a remote and peripheral figure, but as one at the centre and core of those hospitable gestures of charity, sociability and reciprocity which transcended the realm of the household and home and helped to link kinsmen, neighbourhoods and communities with each other. Moreover, if the choice of a wife as her husband's executrix stands as one of the clearest 'tributes to the practical and economic competence of women and to the trust placed in them by their husbands', here, too, the acumen of Welshwomen – bolstered, admittedly, by kinsmen and sons – was being displayed.⁸⁴ Another indication of the enhanced public profile of women, albeit one that requires careful and sensitive analysis, is the increasing visibility of the scold in our sources. From the mid-fourteenth century onwards, town communities in particular were presenting the scold or the chider (*rixatrix*, *tensatrix*, *litigatrix*, *obiurgatrix*, *garulatrix* are some of the terms employed to describe her) with some

regularity, as the court rolls of towns such as Ruthin and Clun make abundantly clear. By the mid-fifteenth century the authorities of the lordship of Raglan were finding it necessary to legislate against the presence of the *dispersonatrix* within the bounds of the lordship, while, by the time of the Union, the scold was more widely identified in the *dramatis personae* of the popular literary tradition. Just as Thomas ab Ieuan ap Rhys of Glamorgan bemoaned the 'upper hand' (*llaw'n ywcha*) of his wife and her stinging and wounding remarks, so did a contemporary refer to the scold (*ysgowld*) as a woman of 'sword sharp tongue' and as one best avoided. Although it would be wrong to interpret such evidence solely in terms of a 'crisis of gender relations' – the barbs of the scold, after all, were not exclusively directed at men – much less as a patriarchal conspiracy to silence the discourse of women, in encouraging the rise of the scold and her verbal assertiveness, the intensified presence of women in business and market-place and the burgeoning sense of independence and self-sufficiency on the part of some women must surely be relevant.⁸⁵

It is right that such confident, even progressive, resonances should receive their due recognition. At the same time, formidable structural obstacles remained to frustrate the advancement of women. For one thing, the practical benefits which accrued to the heiress of lands may be questioned. The exploitation of land remained primarily a masculine preserve and rarely did women, unflanked by the support of husbands or kinsmen, undertake the active management of lands that was theirs by inheritance. Nor did the unmarried woman or widow normally enter the market as purchaser; on the contrary, she is to be far more often encountered relinquishing property or else undertaking temporary leasing arrangements for a set term of years. Indeed, the sense of a woman's custodial interest in land, a vehicle for transmission to sons and to husbands rather than as an autonomous beneficiary of liberal inheritance laws, remains very strong.⁸⁶ We may suspect, too, that the careful calculus enshrined in the contract of marriage redounded as much to the benefit of family members by blood or by marriage as to the woman herself, the agreement often ensuring that kinsmen or affines would not be encumbered by the need to sustain and provide for a bereaved or discarded wife.

Equally questionable are the advances ostensibly made by means of the enhanced economic opportunities available for women.

Many women, as we have seen, were active participants in the workforce of the period, but such gains as were made were limited both in kind and in the numbers of women whose lives were thereby affected. The overwhelming impression conveyed by our sources is that marriage or widowhood were the essential passports to work opportunities.⁸⁷ Indeed, if anything, the number of married women or widows engaged in productive employment may well be a gross underestimate, for women did not always take the names of their husbands in marriage. Many families, however, preferred to cherish their unmarried daughters at home, and rarely allowed them the freedom of servanthood or the public profile of the paid employee. Likewise, women's work tended to cluster at the menial end of the market, in tasks where the craft element was small and where, as was the case with brewing and baking, skills learned in the home could be put to productive commercial use. It is possible, too, that the transition from the consumption of ale to the consumption of beer, and the industry's transformation from a domestic and female-dominated mode of production to one which was capitalized and male-dominated, together with a growing identification of ale-wives with wantonness and loose living, not only undermined the opportunities available to women but discouraged many from pursuing the work.⁸⁸ The lack of specific occupational training must also be noted. The work experience of females often embraced a number of flexible, varied and diverse pursuits.⁸⁹ The celebrated statute of 1363, implemented in several Welsh jurisdictions, explicitly exempted women from its provisions, whilst enjoining craftsmen to 'hold every one to one mystery which he will choose'.⁹⁰ Tools and equipment of crafts were more often bequeathed to sons or male kinsmen, as was the case with a Presteigne parishioner who bequeathed to his son 'all my weaving loomys with all geers and other appurtenances'.⁹¹ True, the disjunction between women as eternal amateurs within a workforce where men were trained in a craft can be exaggerated. The sense of distinct occupational identity of the kind which is reflected in visual evidence such as the sepulchral slab of David Smyth of Brecon, proudly displaying a farrier's rasp and a horseshoe, is sometimes in evidence. But the male artisan, so we are told, was also versatile in his skills and rarely restricted himself exclusively to one calling.⁹² Nevertheless, the impression remains that for Welshwomen, set within the interstices of the world of

work, theirs was truly an 'economy of makeshifts', and their productive energies were channelled in diverse directions according to need and demand.

Above all, in their public function, women in Wales, if not entirely invisible, were severely limited in scope and Maitland's comment that 'in camp, at the council board, on the bench, in the jury box there is no place for her' is as relevant to the late medieval Welshwoman as it is to the Englishwoman of earlier ages whose rôle he describes.⁹³ By any criterion now available for analysis, the political status of women in late medieval Wales must be deemed negligible. Rarely, if ever, were women entrusted with official duties in their localities, nor did they normally serve on juries. While the individual female petitioner persistently pressing her claims, or even occasionally the female rebel adherent, may be encountered, just as the foci of female sociability may sometimes be glimpsed, the capacity of women for joint action or to formulate protest on matters of shared concern remained small.⁹⁴ Only in one sphere, albeit an important commitment, was a collective female presence accorded official acknowledgement. In both secular and ecclesiastical courts, when resort was made to the testimony of compurgators, a woman was expected to bring to the court a group of honest and trustworthy matrons to support her oath.⁹⁵ With this exception, however, the official personae of women, in so far as can now be determined, were small.

In one of his most sentient and delicate *cywyddau*, the poet Lewys Glyn Cothi addressed Edudful ferch Gadwgon, alone. The scene he depicts is a woman at prayer, offering oblations and lighting wax candles for the safety and weal of her sons. The rituals of domestic protection, here clearly in evidence, exude a sense of the power of women not only as the guardians of religious and moral concerns but as custodians of their families' material well-being.⁹⁶ Equally, as we have seen, his compositions convey the woman of open and generous hospitality, reaching beyond the concerns of her household and home, mediating and deepening those ties of kinship, friendship and dependence which formed the tissues of medieval society. If the poet's portrayals suggest, on the one hand, the enduring perceptions of womanhood in a society of deeply conservative instincts, they also betoken the forces making for change which this chapter has attempted to sketch. In short, the history of women reflects the creative tension between tradition

and change which formed the distinctive characteristic of late medieval society in Wales.

Notes

¹ D. Johnston (ed.), *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi* (Cardiff, 1995), 369–71. The *cywydd* is sensitively analysed by him in 'Lewys Glyn Cothi: bardd y gwragedd', *Taliesin*, 74 (1991), 68–77.

² Among more recent studies the following are important contributions: D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen (eds.), *The Welsh Law of Women* (Cardiff, 1980), esp. R. R. Davies, 'The status of women and the practice of marriage in late-medieval Wales', 93–115; C. Lloyd-Morgan, 'More written about than writing? Welshwomen and the written word', in H. Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), 149–66; S. Davies, 'Y ferch yng Nghymru yn yr Oesoedd Canol', *Cof Cenedl*, 9 (1994), 3–32; J. Cartwright, 'The desire to corrupt: convent and community in medieval Wales', in D. Watt (ed.), *Medieval Women in their Communities* (Cardiff, 1997), 20–48; H. Fulton, 'Medieval Welsh poems to nuns', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 21 (1991), 87–112; Jane Cartwright, *Y Forwyn Fair, Santesau a Lleianod: Agweddau ar Wryfodol a Diweirdeb yng Nghymru'r Oesoedd Canol* (Cardiff, 1929).

³ For example, there are nearly 4,500 references to women in the Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls for the period 1340–52 and over 3,500 for the period 1389–99. The references to the Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls in this chapter are to the file and record number in a database compiled at Aberystwyth and financed by the ESRC (award numbers R000232548 and R000234070) whose support is gratefully acknowledged. References to material in the Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls not calendared in the database are to the relevant roll and membrane number. All other references are to documents in the Public Record Office unless otherwise noted.

⁴ For recent surveys of the literature see O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, i, 1500–1800* (London, 1995), 1–24; A. Erickson, 'Introduction' to Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1992), pp. vii–lv. See also J. Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', *HJ* 36 (1993), 383–414. The contrast between 'home', suggesting a closed and private character, and 'abroad' may, of course, be anachronistic and I am grateful to the editors for pointing this out to me.

⁵ D. Johnston, *Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry* (Cardiff, 1991); C. Lloyd-Morgan, '“Gwerful, ferch ragorol fain”: golwg newydd ar Gwerful Mechain', *YB* 16 (1990), 84–96; M. Haycock, 'Merched drwg a merched da: Ieuan Dyfi v. Gwerful Mechain', *YB* 16 (1990), 97–110; Llinos Beverley Smith, 'Olrhain Anni Goch', *YB* 19 (1993), 107–26. See also Ch. 5 below.

⁶ For a useful review of the literature see J. S. Loengard, 'Legal history and the medieval Englishwoman: a fragmented view', *LawHR* 4 (1986), 161–78; and now 'Legal history and the medieval Englishwoman revisited: some new directions', in J. Rosenthal (ed.), *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* (Athens, GA, and London, 1990), 210–36; M. Sheehan, 'The influence of canon law on the property rights of married women in England', *Mediaeval Studies*, 25 (1963), 109–24; A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London, 1995).

⁷ J. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy* (Oxford, 1992), 6; M. F. Roberts, 'Women and work in sixteenth-century English towns', in Penelope J. Corfield and Derek Keene (eds.), *Work in Towns 850–1850* (Leicester, 1990), 88, 90.

⁸ K. Honeyman and J. Goodman, 'Women's work, gender conflict and labour markets in Europe, 1500–1900', *EcHR* 44 (1991), 608–28. See also K. D. M. Snell, 'Agricultural seasonal employment, the standard of living and women's work in the south and east, 1690–1860', *EcHR* 34 (1981), 407–38, esp. his comments at p. 436.

⁹ I am acutely conscious of the exiguousness of work on almost every aspect of women and gender in medieval Wales in contrast with what has been undertaken for England. This chapter should, therefore, be seen as an attempt to map out a preliminary agenda rather than as an analysis which is in any way definitive, and as a novice in the field of women's history, I am most grateful to the editors for their perceptive criticism of an earlier version of this chapter.

¹⁰ For emphasis of the importance of land tenure as a determinant of the status of women and the ways in which status based on land could, not infrequently, override status derived from the husband, Davies, 'Status of women', in Jenkins and Owen (eds.), *Welsh Law of Women*, 103–4. The issue is one which deserves more detailed consideration.

¹¹ In those lordships where *amobr* was levied, it was exacted, at different rates, from both bondwomen and freewomen, while Englishwomen were normally exempt from the payment. *Leyrwite* was paid only by bondwomen. Many of the issues which I can only touch upon in this paper are more thoroughly discussed in a volume on late medieval Welsh society which is in preparation.

¹² NLW, Badminton Manorial, 1645, m. 6 (court roll of the manor of Porthcaseg for 1342–3); Llan 3/765 (1358); Llan 4/2001 (1372); Llan 7 (1957); SC 2/219/12, m. 6; SC 2/220/3, m. 18. A freewoman married to a bondman did not normally lose her free status, although she might forfeit her land.

¹³ Compare, for instance, the practice in the Basque lands where the eldest child, regardless of sex, inherited in some areas: J. Poumarède, *Les Successions dans le Sud-ouest de la France au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1972), 293–6. For the Rumney custumal see A. C. Reeves, 'The Custumal of Rumney Manor', *BBCS* 27 (1977), 298–302 at 302.

¹⁴ PRO, SC 2/223/2, m. 6a, 6v; SC 2/219/2, m. 28; Llan 3/1870 (1362); Roll 9/1312 (1349); Roll 9/1544 (1349), SC 2/221/10, m. 37 (daughters allowed to hold their father's land *licet ipse filie erant que per legem Wallens' terras possidere et gaudere non possunt in hereditate*); BL Add. MS 10013, fo. 7 (Survey of Bromfield and Yale, 1391). For a widow of a Welsh tenant allowed to hold her husband's lands for life see SC 2/220/3, m. 19. Widows of bondmen were sometimes compelled to hold their late husbands' lands, for example Forties 2027 (1346); G. Jones, *The Extent of Chirkland, 1391–3* (Liverpool, 1933), 61. See also below, n. 22.

¹⁵ For grants of land *in plena virginitate* and *in pura viduitate*, see for example, NLW, Kinnel 3 and 4 (1348–50); Roll 10/470 (1350); NLW, Plymouth 25 (1479). The age of majority at which women were deemed capable of alienation was normally fourteen (PRO, Chester 30/11, m. 31v).

¹⁶ See for example NLW, Brogyntyn 4551 (1396) when a burgess of Harlech was enabled to enjoy his wife's lands after her death 'by the law of England': G/539 (1392); SC 2/219/10, m. 15v. For a claim that no tenure by courtesy existed in Flint see C1/934/27, 28, 29. For the practice on customary holdings see W. Rees, *South Wales and the March, 1284–1415* (Oxford, 1924), 156, and the examples cited.

¹⁷ For the emphasis in English common law on the separate property rights of husband and wife in relation to land see C. Donahue, 'What causes fundamental legal ideas? Marital property in England and France in the thirteenth century', *Michigan Law Review*, 78 (1979), 59–88.

¹⁸ For *cui in vita* see for example SC 2/216/13, m. 4; Roll 1/1395 (1341); 220/9 m. 27v; Chester 30/4, m. 18; 30/9, m. 39; 30/43, m. 3v.

¹⁹ Roll 1/1141 (1340), SC 2/222/4, m. 6; Roll 2/577 (1341); Roll 2/1205 (1341) where the property is said to be of the wife's inheritance. The separate examination of the wife was, of course, also done to enable the husband to convey his own land free of the wife's claim to dower: J. H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History*, 3rd edn (London, 1990), 553. For examples in Dyffryn Clwyd see for example Roll 4/181 (1344).

²⁰ For the rule concerning the wife's adultery as stated in Westminster II see the discussion in T. F. T. Plucknett, *Legislation of Edward I* (Oxford, 1949), 121, and S. S. Walker, 'Litigation as personal quest: suing for dower in the royal courts, circa 1272–1350', in eadem (ed.), *Wife and Widow in Medieval England* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1993), 81–108, esp. 88–9. For its implementation in the royal shires of north Wales in the early sixteenth century, NLW, Wales 20/2, m. 27. The rule is also set out in the Extent of Chirkland (*Extent of Chirkland*, 62) and is repeated in Welsh in the late fifteenth-century compilation of legal memoranda associated with John Edwards of Chirk (BL Add. MS 46846, fo. 78), which also specifies the forfeiture of any dowry (*ygenhysceth*) given by her family.

²¹ For the development of common law dower see J. S. Loengard, '“Of the gift of her husband”: English dower and its consequences in the year 1200', in J. S. Kirshner and S. F. Wemple (eds.), *Women of the Medieval World* (Oxford, 1985), 215–55; eadem, 'Rationabilis dos: Magna Carta and the widow's "fair share" in the earlier thirteenth century', in Walker (ed.), *Wife and Widow*, 59–80; J. Biancalama, 'Widows at common law: the development of common law dower', *Irish Jurist*, 23 (1988), 258–29; idem, 'The writs of dower and chapter 49 of Westminster I', *Cambridge Law Journal*, 49 (1990), 91–116; Baker, *Introduction to English Legal History*, 308–9.

²² For Boverton see B. Ll. James (ed.), *Rice Merrick: Morganae Archaographia* (South Wales Record Society, 1, 1983), 99. W. Rees, *South Wales and the March*, 155–6, gives details of the various manorial customs. See also F. Jones, 'Customs of the manor and lordship of Castlemartin, 1592', *BBCS* 34 (1987), 202. For widows relinquishing their lands on remarriage on the manor of Rumney see T. B. Pugh, *The Marcher Lordships of South Wales, 1415–1536* (Cardiff, 1963), 187. See also above, n. 14.

²³ B. Todd, 'Freebench and free enterprise: widows and their property in two Berkshire villages', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (ed.), *English Rural Society 1500–1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk* (Cambridge, 1990), 175–200. A study of the widow in medieval Wales is long overdue.

²⁴ For a valuable discussion of practice in England see R. M. Smith, 'Women's property rights under customary law: some developments in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries', *TRHS*, 5th ser. 36 (1986), 165–94, esp. 185–6; L. Bonfield, 'Contrasting sources: court rolls and settlements as evidence of hereditary transmission of land amongst small landowners in early modern England', *Univ. Illinois Law Review*, 3 (1984), 639–58. Examples in Wales are especially common where urban property was concerned (NLW, Kinmel, 8) but free and bond tenements might also be held in this way (Roll 1/424 (1341) (Dyffryn Clwyd); NLW,

Aston Hall 5804 (manor of Sandford). For an instance of the tenure of Welsh land jointly by husband and wife see Llan 7/2278 (1421).

²⁵ NLW, Brogyntyn, 3450; Aston Hall, 5837; Badminton Manorial Records, 1657, mm. 2v, 12 are examples. See also T. Stretton, 'Women, custom and equity in the court of requests', in J. Kermode and G. Walker (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), 170–91; J. H. Bettey, 'Manorial custom and widows' estate', *Archives*, 20 (1992), 208–16. For discussion of jointures in English regions see C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society 1401–1499* (Cambridge, 1992), 107–15, and S. M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Derbyshire Rec. Soc., 8; 1983), esp. 207. For the relative advantages and disadvantages of dower and jointure see R. E. Archer, 'Rich old ladies: the problem of late medieval dowagers', in A. Pollard (ed.), *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History* (Gloucester, 1984), esp. 18–21, and S. Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660–1833* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), esp. 27–37.

²⁶ BL Add. MS 10113, fo. 5v; SC 2/220/12, m. 10v; *Nineties*/626 (1393).

²⁷ I. Bowen, *Statutes of Wales* (London, 1908), 24–5; W. Rees, *Calendar of Ancient Petitions Relating to Wales* (Cardiff, 1975), 454; Chester 30/3, m. 1; 30/4, mm. 2v, 5.

²⁸ M. Rhys (ed.), *Ministers' Accounts for West Wales, 1277–1306* (London, 1936), 316.

²⁹ For Whittington, see the court rolls of the lordship (NLW, Aston Hall, 5826–5858), *passim*; Rees, *Calendar*, 73. For the grant to Oswestry, see NLW, 354C, fo. 1, and for the tenurial structure of part of the lordship at the end of the fourteenth century W. J. Slack, *The Lordship of Oswestry, 1393–1607* (Shrewsbury, 1951), 153–71.

³⁰ W. R. B. Robinson, 'Grants by Edward Sutton (d. 1532), Lord Dudley, relating to the lordship of Deuddwr', *MC* 84 (1996), 37–61, esp. 45–7, 51–2, 56. Some tenements were, however, granted to heirs male and female (*ibid.*, 50). For practice in the Welshry of the lordship of Gower in the early sixteenth century see G. Clark, *Cartae et Alia Munimenta quae ad Dominium de Glamorgancia pertinent* (Talygarn, 1910), v, 1868.

³¹ SC 2/223/7, m. 4. For an unsuccessful claim by a Dogfeiling (Dyffryn Clwyd) woman that a 'certain statute promulgated at Rhuddlan' had granted her the right to receive dower, see Roll 6/1256 (1346).

³² BL Add. MS 46846, fo. 78, which provides for the separate examination of a married woman when her land is alienated. See also above, n. 21.

³³ The developments are investigated in detail by J. Beverley Smith, 'Dower in thirteenth-century Wales: a grant of the commote of Anhunio, 1273', *BBCS*, 30 (1983), 348–55, and the sources cited.

³⁴ J. G. Jones (ed.), *History of the Gwydir Family and Memoirs* (Llandysul, 1990), 30–1; SC 2/219/9, m. 25; SC 2/232/2, m. 11v; BL Add. Ch. 9256; NLW, Francis Davies, 119; NLW, Elwes, 1688 (1445), where lands held by a son-in-law in *prid* from his wife's father are granted to the wife for life. An interesting example, albeit not strictly speaking a *prid* deed, is to be found in NLW, Powis Castle, 16257, a deed of 1314–15, where the bride's parents mortgage land to the groom and their daughter for a period of forty years with provision that if the sum is not repaid by them or their heirs it should remain to the younger couple in *libero maritagio*.

³⁵ NLW, Elwes, 6; Chester 30/11, m. 23; NLW, Brogyntyn, 4814; SC 2/219/7, m. 24; Llan 4/2473 (1375); Llan 7/815 (1414); NLW, Wynnstey (1952) Deposit, Box 89 (23).

³⁶ According to Welsh law, a daughter received half a brother's share of the father's moveable property: D. B. Walters, *The Comparative Legal Method* (Aberystwyth, 1982), 49. For a dowry valued at a third of the father's goods and chattels see Chester 30/11, m. 31v. For the relative value of land and chattels see the comments by Erickson, *Women and Property*, 18, 64–7.

³⁷ NLW, Sotheby, 144, 145; A. D. Carr, *Medieval Anglesey* (Llangefni, 1982), 160–1. Note the emphasis in the award on the 'unseemliness' (*unconveniences*) of the elopement. For the use to which a woman's portion might be put and the relationship of marriage portions to jointures see R. A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450–1700* (London, 1984), 74, and Carpenter, *Locality*, 214. Again, this is an area where the Welsh materials need to be carefully analysed.

³⁸ NLW, Wales 25/1, m. 3; Wales 20/1, m. 33; Clwyd Record Office, Wynnstey, DD/WY 6460. There are numerous references in the Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls to the dowries or portions of women: Roll 1/801 (1341), Roll 3/444 (1343), Nineties 27 (1396). For the *maritagium* of the daughter of a Clun bondman see SRO 552/1/1.

³⁹ See PCC 32 Dyneley (will of Thomas Wogler); NLW, Penpont Supplementary, 730.

⁴⁰ R. H. Helmholz, 'Married women's wills in later medieval England', in Walker (ed.), *Wife and Widow*, 165–82. For a valuable discussion and a list of Welsh wills see H. Chandler, 'The will in medieval Wales to 1540' (University of Wales, M.Phil. thesis, 1991).

⁴¹ D. B. Walters, *Comparative Legal Method*, 52–82; D. Jenkins, 'Property interests in the classical Welsh law of women', in Jenkins and Owen (eds.), *Welsh Law of Women*, 69–93; H. Pryce, *Native Law and the Church in Medieval Wales* (Oxford, 1993), 113–29.

⁴² F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *The History of English Law*, (Cambridge, 1968), ii, 427.

⁴³ Erickson, *Women and Property*, 24; *History of English Law* ii, 404–5. For the testamentary capacity of women in Wales, see Chandler, 'Will in medieval Wales', 42–67. For the epitaph at Beaumaris to Richard Bulkely and Elizabeth his wife see J. M. Lewis, *Welsh Monumental Brasses: A Guide* (Cardiff, 1974), 46–7.

⁴⁴ Roll 3/983 (1343); D/296 (1391), a good example of coverture. For a text of the will of William Edwards (NLW, Puleston, 961) see Chandler, 'Will in medieval Wales', 228.

⁴⁵ SC 2/216/4, m. 15; Roll 5/1126 (1345); Roll 9/1942 (1349) and 1982 (1349); SC 2/219/1, m. 21v.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the custom of *legitim* mainly in relation to the children's portion see R. H. Helmholz, 'Legitim in English legal history', in idem, *Canon Law and the Law of England* (London, 1987), 247–62; Erickson, *Women and Property*, 169–71. For division into thirds in Wales in earlier periods see Pryce, *Native Law*, 114, 115 n. 16 and 120.

⁴⁷ *History of English Law*, ii, 353.

⁴⁸ SC 2/216/13, m. 14; E. A. Lewis (ed.), *An Inventory of the Early Chancery Proceedings concerning Wales* (Cardiff, 1937), 80, 287; T. I. Jeffreys Jones, *Exchequer Proceedings Concerning Wales* (Cardiff, 1955), 145.

⁴⁹ NLW, 354C, fo. 59; NLW, Francis Davies Deeds 4 (1524); P. Riden (ed.), *Glamorgan Wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1392–1571: An Interim Calendar* (Cardiff, 1985), 4.

⁵⁰ H. D. Emanuel, 'Early St David's Records', NLWJ 8 (1954), 263.

⁵¹ H. Owen (ed.), *The Description of Penbrokeshire by George Owen of Henllys*

(London, 1892), i, 194; NLW, Wales 22/1, m. 2v. For the common-law writ to recover the widow's reasonable part see Baker, *Introduction to English Legal History*, 551–2. Intestacy also ensured to the widow a proportion of her husband's moveables.

⁵² J. Gillis, 'Conjugal settlements: resort to clandestine and common law marriage in England and Wales, 1650–1850', in J. Bossy (ed.), *Disputes and Settlements* (Cambridge, 1983), 278–9; Erickson, *Women and Property*, 146–7; B. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth Century England* (London, 1994), 211.

⁵³ For examples of the former see above, n. 38 and G. Jones and H. Owen (eds.), *Caernarvon Court Rolls, 1361–1402* (Caernarfon, 1951), 15–16; for examples of the latter, Chester 30/25, m. 6; Chester 30/40, m. 21. See also A. L. Erickson, 'Common law versus common practice: the use of marriage settlements in early modern England', *ECHR* 43 (1990), 21–39.

⁵⁴ Good illustrative examples may be found in Clwyd Record Office, Wynnstey DD/WY6398 (marriage settlement of John Eyton and Ermynald Kynaston, 1491–2), Wynnstey DD/WY6460 (marriage settlement of Edward Thelwall and Katherine, daughter of John ap David ab Ithel, 1491), NLW, Puleston, 555 (marriage settlement of William Edwards and Katherine Hokes, 1500), NLW, Bettisfield, 643 (marriage settlement of Thomas Hammer and Joan Brereton, 1489); NLW, Puleston, 996 (marriage settlement of Roger Salisbury and Elyn Hokes, 1481).

⁵⁵ Chester 30/24, m. 56v. See also Llan 1/2230 (1332), a contract which stipulates that a daughter's dowry of 7 marks should be repaid by the husband in the event of a divorce.

⁵⁶ Roll 3/444 (1343), where the wife, at fault, was to pay a sum of money agreed in the contract and half the urban property which her father had granted to the couple was awarded to the husband for life.

⁵⁷ NLW, Peniarth Deeds and Documents, 1580; E. J. L. Cole, 'Hereford probate records', *TRadnorHS* 3 (1961), 25. See also NLW, Longueville, Bundle 1167 (will of Thomas ap Hywel ap Twna of Corwen, 1540).

⁵⁸ The genre is now definitively discussed by B. O. Huws, *Y Canu Gofyn a Diolch c.1350–c.1630* (Cardiff, 1998).

⁵⁹ Figures based on an analysis of the data in Chester 30/9, mm. 16–18, and GC/4.

⁶⁰ See S. A. C. Penn, 'Female wage-earners in late fourteenth-century England', *AgHR* 35 (1987), 1–14. But see also the comments of Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life-Cycle*, 140. For female harvest workers in the early fourteenth century in Wales see, GC/1, 741, 742 (1313), indictments of women for leaving the lordship *contra autumnum*, 'in breach of the proclamation made by the court'. For an ordinance made in Dyffryn Clwyd prohibiting tenantry from leaving at harvest see GC 1/3618 (1335), for the lordship of Clun, SRO, 552/1/7 (1336–7) and for Whittington, NLW, Aston Hall, 5847, m. 1.

⁶¹ Note also the absence of prescriptive literature of the kind recently discussed for England by M. F. Roberts: 'To bridle falsehood of unconscionable workmen and for her own satisfaction': what the Jacobean housewife needed to know about men's work and why', *LHR* 63 (1998), 4–30 and J. Goldberg (ed.), *Women in England c.1275–1525: Documentary Sources* (Manchester, 1995), 8–9.

⁶² See SC 2/219/2, m. 6 (assize of bread and beer in Dyffryn Clwyd); *Caernarvon Court Rolls*, 165; R. H. Britnell, 'Forstall, forestalling and the statute of forestallers', *EHR* 102 (1987), 89–102. For the word *hwecstres* which enters the Welsh language during the fourteenth century, see GPC.

⁶³ For labour legislation, see above, n. 60 and below, n. 79. For citations of prostitutes in the consistory courts of the diocese of Hereford see among much evidence Herefordshire Record Office, O/8, 140; O/12, 85; O/32, 30. See also below, n. 80.

⁶⁴ For the term *hyswi*, see GPC. See also C. Middleton, 'The sexual division of labour in feudal England', *NLR* 13–14 (1979), 147–68. For criticism of the views advanced by B. Hanawalt, 'Seeking the flesh and blood of manorial families', *JMEH* 14 (1988), 33–45, and eadem, *The Ties that Bind: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1986), 141–56, see J. Goldberg, 'The public and the private: women in the pre-plague economy', in P. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (ed.), *Thirteenth Century England*, iii (Woodbridge, 1991), 75–91.

⁶⁵ The poems may be read in translation in Johnston, *Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry*, 82, 91–3. For discussion of the idea of gendered space see B. Hanawalt, 'At the margins of women's space in medieval Europe', in eadem, *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1998), 70–88, esp. 78.

⁶⁶ C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 156–60; Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200–1830* (London, 1983), 1–39.

⁶⁷ For Dyffryn Clwyd, see database *passim* and for the lordship of Chirk, NLW, Chirk Castle, D66 (1350–1) (payment of 6s. 8d. by the tenantry of the ringildry of Isclawdd to be quit of *golysanfreyd*), and Chirk Castle, D. 69 (1360–1). For references to mash-tubs and other brewing implements, see GC 1/1809 (1322).

⁶⁸ *Caernarvon Court Rolls*, 113.

⁶⁹ Clark, *Alehouse*, 31, notes the appearance of major brewers in Shrewsbury in the fifteenth century; NLW, Aston Hall, 5809; for indictments of sellers of Ludlow beer against the statutes of the borough of Clun, see SRO, 552/1/48 m. 3v and for selling Shrewsbury ale in Ruthin, SC 2/220/3, m. 21; *Gwaith Lewys Glyn Cothi*, 329, 332, 446.

⁷⁰ As far as the town of Ruthin is concerned, the change may be identified in the 1330s. Until then, there is an overwhelming preponderance of female brewers, while thereafter, men form a very substantial majority of those who make fine. All except one of the twenty-seven brewers of the borough of Clun in 1425 were women, SRO, 552/1/46.

⁷¹ GC 1/1741 (1321), 2820 (1330; GC 2/110, 137; Roll 2/1148 (1341); Roll 3/96 (1342); Roll 3/356 (1343); Roll 5/372 (1345); NLW, Badminton Manorial, 1657, m. 2.

⁷² R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1979), 105, notes female ale-tasters, but I know of no comparable evidence for Wales.

⁷³ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, 158.

⁷⁴ Database Roll C.

⁷⁵ For references to distaffs, see GC 1/2041 (1322), and for spindle-whorls, R. S. Kelly, 'The excavation of a medieval farmstead at Cefn Graeanog Clynog, Gwynedd', *BBCS* 29 (1982), 880; for listers, see Roll 9/1146, 1186 (1349).

⁷⁶ For the use of spinning wheels (*spynnyghwel*) G/1766 (1399). For the admission of women to sow flax on tenements of Tewkesbury abbey at Roath in 1449–50, see W. Rees (ed.), 'The possessions of the abbey of Tewkesbury in Glamorgan, 1449–50', *SWMRS* 2 (1950), 166.

⁷⁷ GC 1/2791–5 (1330). The list excludes the town of Ruthin, for which no statistics are available; Chester 30/9, m. 16, when several male weavers of the

county of Flint were amerced for taking excess salaries and likewise in Clun (SRO, 552/1/23, m. 1).

⁷⁸ For a general survey of the technology of weaving in Wales see J. Geraint Jenkins, *From Fleece to Fabric: The Technological History of the Welsh Woollen Industry* (Cardiff, 1981).

⁷⁹ Dyffryn Clwyd Database, *passim*. For Joan le Silksower, see Roll 8/673 (1348). Although references to contracts of service involving men and women are fairly common (SRO, 552/1/16, mm. 1v, 2; SC 2/219/2, m. 5v), it is difficult to tell from the vocabulary employed whether these refer to 'life-cycle' servanthood. For arguments that life-cycle service already existed in late medieval England, R. M. Smith, 'Geographical diversity in the resort to marriage in late-medieval Europe', in Goldberg (ed.), *Woman is a Worthy Wight*, 16–60, and for important contrasts in England, Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle*, esp. 158–202. My own impression is that the practice of allowing young girls to enter the households of others as servants was not a significant feature in late medieval Wales.

⁸⁰ When a woman acknowledged herself to be a common prostitute her kinsmen were released from the obligation of paying her *amobr*. See E. A. Lewis, 'The proceedings of the small hundred court of the commote of Arduwy in the county of Merioneth from 8 October, 1325 to 18 September, 1326', *BBCS* 4 (1928), 160, 162, and Davies, 'Status of women', in Jenkins and Owen (eds.), *Welsh Law of Women*, 112–13, and the sources cited. See also HRO, O/34, 320; O/36, 105, and above, n. 64.

⁸¹ J. G. Edwards (ed.), *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence Concerning Wales* (Cardiff, 1935), 251; R. F. Walker, 'The fourteenth-century surveys of Newcastle Emlyn and the building programme of 1347–8', *CA* 28 (1992), 43. Women also prepared raw materials for building work, such as drawing straw for roofing (NLW, Aston Hall, 5773).

⁸² For an estimate of the value of gleaning in the eighteenth century and its importance as a 'vital piece in the jigsaw of makeshifts', see King, 'Customary rights and women's earnings: the importance of gleaning to the rural labouring poor, 1750–1850', *EcHR* 44 (1991), 461–76. Gleaning becomes visible in the sources mainly when the rules against it were breached: GC 4/1905 (1375). Care of livestock seems to have been an important female activity, from the evidence of wills (for example, the bequest of a dairy with twenty kine to his wife by William John Voya in 1539, NLW, Francis Green, 10, 142–3) and manorial accounts (NLW, Aston Hall, 5812).

⁸³ Between 1364 and 1366 at least twenty-four women left the lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd to work elsewhere. Many returned and paid a fine. NLW, Badminton Manorial 1579 (a schedule attached to the bailiff's account for Wysham, Monmouth and Cefneithinog (1454–5)).

⁸⁴ For the importance of women as 'peace-weavers' between disputing kinsmen, see Llinos Beverley Smith, 'Disputes and settlements in late-medieval Wales: the role of arbitration', *EHR* (1991), 835–60. For wives as executors, see K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (London, 1982), 94. But see also the comments of Erickson, *Women and Property*, 158–9. The impression I have formed from references in the secular and ecclesiastical archives is that while wives figure as executrices, they are usually flanked by kinsmen. This is, of course, an area where detailed work needs to be done.

⁸⁵ I hope to return to the scold at a later date. On scolding and its significance see D. E. Underdown, 'The taming of the scold: the enforcement of patriarchal authority in early modern England', in A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (eds.), *Order*

and Disorder in Early Modern England (Cambridge, 1985), 116–37; A. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500–1800* (London, 1995), 273–4; M. Ingram, “‘Scolding women cucked or washed’: a crisis of gender relations in early modern England?”, in Kermode and Walker, *Women, Crime and the Courts*, 48–80; L. R. Poos, ‘Sex, lies and the church courts of pre-Reformation England’, *JH* 25 (1995), 585–607, and K. Jones and M. Zell, ‘Bad conversation? Gender and social control in a Kentish borough, c.1450–c.1570’, *CC* 13 (1998), 11–31. For the early sixteenth-century poetry, see D. H. Evans, ‘Thomas ab Ieuan a’i “Ysgowld o Wraig”’, *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, 19 (1993), 86–106. For presentments of scolds see Roll 1/30 (1341); Roll 6/35, 45, 2096 (1345); GC 5/1134 (1385); and for Clun, SRO, 552/1/21 (1386). For the legislation in the lordship of Raglan see NLW, Badminton Manorial Records, 14057. It should be noted that the *dispersonator* was also the subject of legislation.

⁸⁶ See above, n. 23.

⁸⁷ This is an impression I have formed from reading the period’s court rolls when married women or widows seem to preponderate among ‘working women’. Again, this needs to be put to the test.

⁸⁸ J. M. Bennett, ‘Misogyny, popular culture and women’s work’, *HWJ* 31 (1991), 168–88. See also Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, 243–4. The identification of female ale-house keepers with sexual licentiousness can be seen, for example, in indictments of such women for keeping bawdy houses, SC 2/223/4, mm. 13, 14; SC 2/224/23, m. 11. Possible changes in the brewing industry in Wales are suggested by the indictment of two Bangor brewers in 1503 for brewing and selling 10,000 gallons of beer in contravention of the statute forbidding the brewing of beer within 8 leagues of the English boroughs of Wales (Univ. Wales, Bangor, Porth yr Aur MS 52).

⁸⁹ Evidence of apprenticeship contracts for both young men and women in Wales is extremely exiguous. For evidence that a few young Welsh girls were apprenticed in Bristol in the early sixteenth century see D. Hollis (ed.), *Calendar of the Bristol Apprentice Book, Part I, 1532–1542* (Bristol Record Society, 14; 1949), 22, 40, 62. See also I. K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), 79, 95–9.

⁹⁰ *Statutes of the Realm* (London, 1810–28), i, 379. For its implementation in Welsh lordships see SC 2/219/1, m. 23; SC 2/223/1, mm. 3, 4v; BL Add. MS 10013, fos. 177, 178.

⁹¹ Cole, ‘Hereford probate records’, *TRadnorHS* 30 (1960), 51.

⁹² H. Swanson, *Medieval Artisans* (Oxford, 1989), 6; Cole, ‘Hereford probate records’, *TRadnorHS* 23 (1953), 45; G. E. F. Morgan, ‘The vanished tombs of Brecon Cathedral’, *AC* 80 (1925), 267.

⁹³ *History of English Law*, i, 485. For rare glimpses of women as *firmarii* or as officials, see Roll 3/1058 (1343).

⁹⁴ For the participation of women in the Glyndŵr rebellion, see SC 2/221/8, m. 25; SC 2/221/9, m. 13, although the identification of rebels through records of forfeiture of land may render the female adherent invisible in our sources. For evidence of the forms of female sociability, see GC 1/2075 (1322–3) (women keeping a night vigil in Rhiw church in Dyffryn Clwyd). The evidence of wills does not altogether suggest the patterns of friendship and social contacts among Welshwomen which have been charted elsewhere. See in general R. A. Houlbrooke, ‘Women’s social life and common action in England from the fifteenth century to the eve of the Civil War’, *CC* 1 (1986), 171–89, esp. 176.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 174–5; HRO, O/34, 146; O/38, 158. For purgation by six women in a case of *amobr* see SC 2/219/3, m. 16.

⁹⁶ Johnston, *GLGC*, 371–2. The identification of Edudful ferch Gadwgon is uncertain but is unlikely to be the same woman as the one described as the wife of Ieuan ap Llywelyn Fychan. *Ibid.* 603, for the problems of identification and for discussion of the *cywydd*, T. Llwyd, ‘Noddwyr y Beirdd yn Siroedd Brycheiniog a Maesyfed’ (University of Wales, MA thesis, 1987), 479–80. For the rituals described see M. Segalen, *Love and Power in the Peasant Family* (Oxford, 1983), 121.