

# The 1200 Mortimer charter to Abbey Cwmhir revisited

By Julian Ravest

## Introduction

By good fortune one of the early charters<sup>1</sup> of donations to Abbey Cwmhir, with original seal still attached, has survived and was identified in 1956. This charter is dated 6 March 1200 in our calendar, in the reign of King John, Fig 1.

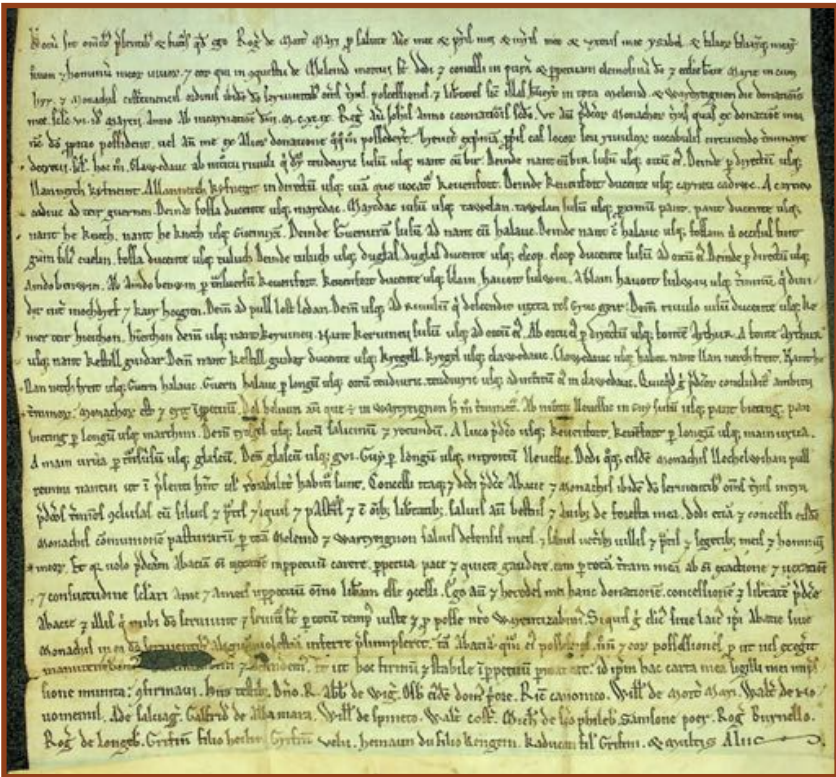


Fig 1: The Charter manuscript

It details the donation of land by the Marcher Lord, Roger Mortimer, to Abbey Cwmhir, and confirms earlier, un-named, donations by Welsh rulers. B.G.Charles<sup>2</sup> provided a transcript of the original Latin charter with a “paraphrase”, (his word), in English. He also gave a tentative identification of some of the places named in the charter. His article drew attention to the charter and its significance. It has formed the basis of all later work including this article.

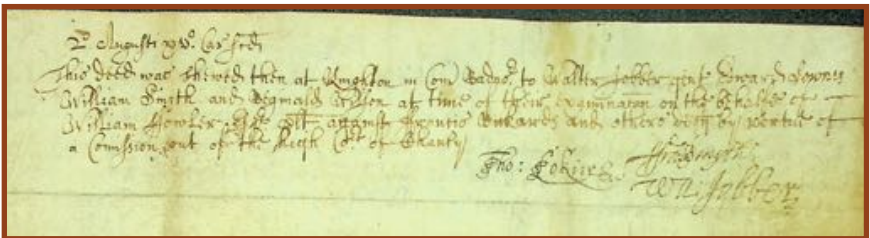
Others, notably David Williams<sup>3</sup> and Paul Remfry<sup>4</sup>, have contributed towards the definition of lands held by the Abbey. The purpose of this article is to revisit the original charter and to map, as far as possible, the extent of the lands donated and confirmed to the Abbey by Roger Mortimer.

Mortimer's donation to the already existing Abbey<sup>5</sup> was given in a time of considerable unrest in the area and open hostility between the Marcher Lord and the Welsh Rulers<sup>6</sup>. The Mortimers were not notably religious, and the donation can be seen as an assertion of domination over lands which he had only recently, in 1195, seized from the Welsh. In the introduction to the charter, he states that he has made the donation for the souls of his family and, notably, for those of his men who had died in that seizure of Maelienydd. By the charter he confirms all previous donations to the Abbey. However, he does not name the prior lands involved or give the names of the Welsh rulers who made the earlier donations. In effect he was erasing their contributions from history.

While no record of this has survived, it can be assumed that the Abbey's founder, Cadwallon ap Madog, donated land and money to his founding, or re-founding<sup>7</sup>, of the monastery in 1176. However, it was customary for the Abbey to obtain periodic confirmation charters from English Kings to have their rights to lands legally authorised. This was a very useful tactic when involved in any boundary dispute, especially when donations were from Welsh rulers or could otherwise be challenged.

## The Manuscript

Of the manuscript itself nothing was known of its detailed content or its history until its discovery in 1956 except for a brief annotation on its rear in seventeenth century hand, Fig 2, which mentions William Fowler. After this the charter was lost to sight. Previously the Mortimer donation was only known from brief mentions in the confirmation charters, (see later in this article).



*Fig 2: 1663 annotation on back of charter related to a court case.*

The date of this 'Fowler' annotation is 2 August 1663. The Fowler family were early owners of the Abbey lands following the dissolution<sup>8</sup>.

This annotation can be translated as:

*'2 Augusti XV Caroli secundi. This deed was shewed then at Knighton in comitatu Radnor to Walter Jobber gent Edward Lownes, William Smyth and Reginald Wilson at time of their Examination on the behalfe of William Fowler esquire plaintiff against Francis Rickards and others defendants by vertue of a Commission out of the High Court of Chancery. [Signed] Tho Lokier. ffra. Smyth, Wa Jobbers'*

Nothing more has yet come to light regarding this court case except to surmise that it was a property dispute in which William Fowler needed to establish ownership or rights related to land.

The charter is currently in the possession of University College London.

### Date of Charter

There is a date on the back of the Charter in an annotation. Fig 3. The transcription of the annotation in full is: '*Carta domini Rogeri/super Maylenid*' in a thirteenth century hand and, in a seventeenth century hand, '*Pro def*' above and '*2 Jo 1199*' below. The '*Pro def*' probably relates to its use in the Fowler case. However, the second part, the date, creates a problem since, in itself, it is impossible and an error. The confusion probably lies in the different dating system used during John's reign.

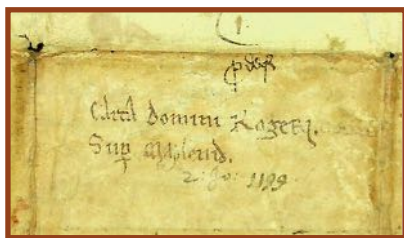


Fig 3: Annotation on back of charter

John was crowned on Ascension Day, 27 May 1199. His regnal years run from one Ascension Day to the next and are thus highly irregular. Uniquely, his regnal years are of different lengths as they are based on a movable feast which, in turn, depends on the date of Easter.

Consequently, the regnal year 1 John lasted from 27 May 1199 to 17 May 1200, while year 2 John lasted from 18 May 1200 to 2 May 1201. Hence, the date given on the back of the charter cannot be correct as there was no year '2 John 1199' since the regnal year, 2 John, did not overlap with the calendar year 1199.

The date within the charter is given as '*vi. idus Marcii..... MCXCIX regis autem Johannis anno coronationis secundo*'. That is the sixth day before the ides of March, (i.e. 6 March 1199). This date also appears incorrect as the Ides of

March in 1199 occurred before John became King, i.e. before the year 1 John. However, if the calendar year 1199 is based on older system which had the year end on 25 March, then it would have started at the end of March 1199, (our style) and ended on 25 March 1200, (our style). Consequently, the first Ides of March of Johns's reign would have occurred on 15 March 1200, (our style), but would have been considered as 1199 old style. This date would have been in 1 John, albeit close to the start of 2 John. The second Ides of March in John's reign would have been dated 15 March 1201, in the year 2 John. In the face of these contrary dates, we consider, on the balance of probability, that the charter was signed on 10 March 1200 (our style) and will continue to refer to it as the 1200 charter.

### The Mortimer Donation

The 1200 charter is, from the beginning, clear that, in addition to any donation from Mortimer, it confirms earlier Welsh grants with the same rights as held previously:

*'...Vel ante me ex aliorum donatione quoquomodo possederunt'*

*'...or they [the Abbey] possessed it in any way from the gift of others before me.'*

In the charter Mortimer says that he will describe the lands briefly referring to places and streams.

The charter then deals with five areas of land:

- The 'core' land containing the Abbey itself and extending in a contiguous area from it.
- A separate area of land known as Dolhelfa Grange, (called Dol Helwuein in the charter).
- Two other areas which are only named, Pullremmi and Nantui, which can be identified as Rhymney and Nantu
- A fifth area, Llechelwihan, also only named, but has not yet been identified.

The first two of these areas are defined as a perambulation of their boundaries which can, to some extent at least, be followed today.

In addition to the land, the charter defines the rights being given as woods, meadows, streams and pastures and all liberties except for the birds and beasts of the forests. In this later qualification he is reserving his hunting rights. With some qualification he also grants *'... communionem pasturarum per totam Melenid et Wartreignon...*, that is, common pasture throughout the cantrefs of Maeliennydd and Gwrtheyrnion, (these cantrefs are referred to later in this article). The significance of this aspect of the donation is difficult to gauge since it appears to go well beyond the boundaries of the land otherwise defined in the charter. It may reflect the abundance of open, unenclosed upland in these cantrefs and is a way

of allowing the Abbey to share rights of pasturage with different tenant farms and landholders without conflict.

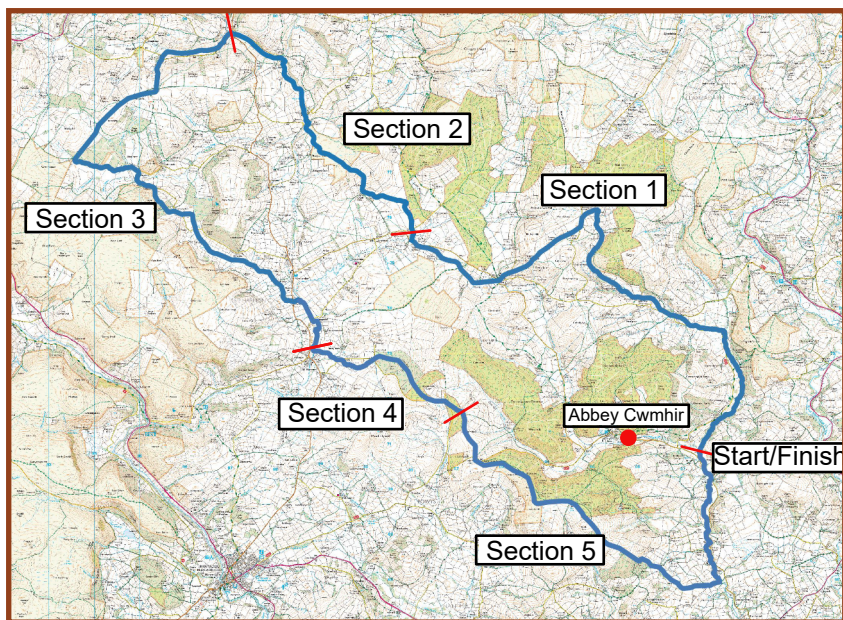
In the 1200 charter, Roger Mortimer is donating to the Abbey all the lands, possessions and liberties that they had previously, plus his own donations. These are given to the Abbey and to God in perpetuity. By giving the lands to the Abbey and to God, Mortimer is reducing the scope for the land reverting to the king.

### The Main Area Perambulation

In the following sections the modern names as they appear on modern OS maps is given. The table of place names as they appear in the charter appears at the end of this article. The place names may refer to farmsteads, rivers, streams, pre-existing tracks etc. The location of many of the names are now lost beyond recovery.

For clarity, the complete perambulation has been divided into five sections in this paper, Fig 4.

An anti-clockwise route has been assumed in the following account following the names and connecting instruction give in the charter. There appears to be one exception, that section defining the north-west area, where the order of names is clockwise. This is discussed further below.



*Fig 4: Main perambulation*

**Section One: Clywedog to Marteg.** This first section of the boundary can be reconstructed with confidence.

The perambulation starts at the confluence of the Clywedog and Bachell Brook approximately 2km east of the Abbey through which the Clywedog flows. This choice of starting point may be a consequence of the Abbey site having already been established at the time of the charter.

The boundary follows up the Bachell Brook to its confluence with the Ffrwd Wen which is followed to its source on Bwlch-y-sarnau Hill close to the route of a Roman road, Llwybr y Garth. This route is followed to Bwlch-y-sarnau from where it proceeds along a stream now known as Nant y Ffin to the Marteg. The stream name, which can be paraphrased as “boundary stream”, is appropriate in terms of the 1200 charter and may indicate a pre-existing boundary.

**Section Two: Marteg to Tylwch:** This section, with Section 3 presents a puzzle. If the order of names in the charter is followed, starting at Nant Tawelan, a clockwise boundary is described which lead back to near the point of entry of Nant y Ffin into the Marteg. It makes more sense to treat this as a clockwise direction of travel that the scribes presented in error, perhaps because it uses the order of names in a previously defined, Welsh, donation which is in part coincident with a cantref border. The key to decyphering this section is recognising this change of direction and equating ‘Tuluch’ in the charter with the existing village of Tylwch.

In broad terms the boundary in this area section is coincident with the commote of Rhaeadr, via Tylwch, as far as the small stream, Gwynfron, leading to Nant Tawelan and hence back to the Marteg.

The section starts at the northern side of the Marteg, following a small stream to its source. It then follows a still existing bank to the source of another small stream, also with lost name. This is followed to where it joins the river Dulas near the railway near Glanyafon Halt. The Dulas is followed north, past a waterfall, to Tylwch.

**Section Three: Tylwch to Marteg:** At Tylwch the boundary leaves the river Dulas and follow its tributary, Nant-cae-garw, to the west, before turning south near Dol-y-gors, an existing farm which may have early origins, to its source. From there it followed a path across the upland, Bryn Bras, to meet the river Dulas near its source.

From its source the boundary does down the Dulas as far as Gwenfach-fawr from where it crosses to the upper reaches of the Nant Tawelan, following this down to reach the Marteg near Pant-y-dwr.

**Section Four: Marteg to Maelienydd border:** This is the most difficult section to map conclusively from the charter as it abounds with lost names. However, the topology provides clues to the most convincing route.

Following from Section three, where the boundary reaches the Marteg, it is

reasonable to assume, pro tem, that it continues south along that river. There are two streams leaving the Marteg before it reaches St Harmon and heading east: Cwm Difwg and Cwm-bras.

Of these the Cwm Bras stream offers the most convincing route. It leaves the Marteg, skirting the pre-existing church of St Harmon to its source. This source is very close to the Maelienydd border. An existing track, the first part of which is now a narrow road, continues via a foot path to the border. The track itself actually crosses the border and drops down the Cwmhir brook over the land of the present Cwm Ffwrn farm. This track is likely part of the Monk's Trod, a route from Abbey Cwmhir to Strata Florida and probably of some antiquity.

**Section four: Maelienydd border to starting point:** Rather than following the track to the Abbey, the perambulation proceeds along the ridge along Cwm-hir bank and Camlo Hill. In so doing it is probably following a prehistoric ridge way as it is marked by three cairns and a standing stone before it drops down to an un-named brook which meets the Bachell Brooke at a farm called Cwmtelmau. The final leg of the route follows the Bachell Brooke to where it meets the Clywedog; the starting point of the perambulation.

### Dolhelfa Grange

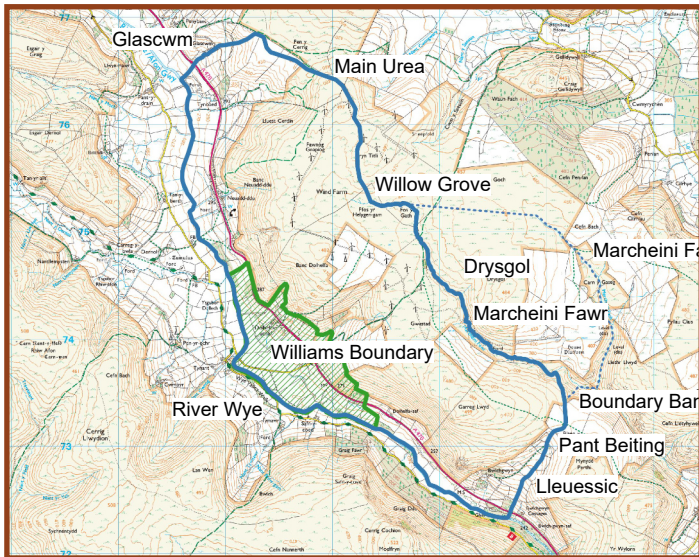


Fig 5: Dolhelfa boundary from Mortimer charter in blue, Williams boundary in green.

The starting point for study of the extent of Dolhelfa, is the work of David William, *Atlas of Cistercian Lands in Wales* (op cit).

The scale of the map of Dolhelfa appearing in the *Atlas* is, unfortunately, too small for anything other than a broad outline to be shown. It is, however, clear that only the enclosed fields alongside the Wye valley, are shown as belonging to Dolhelfa. The accompanying map, Fig 5, includes a re-drawing of Williams's map, which is shown in green. His principle of including fields and no upland has, as far as possible, been adhered to, using the OS 1<sup>st</sup> edition mapping as a guide. This has the effect of giving the delineation of the green line on the map the appearance of an unintended accuracy along the NE boundary.

The description in the charter for the boundary of Dolhelfa is far less ambiguous than that of the core lands. And can readily be identified with existing features with few minor uncertainties. The description is:

*Dol Heluein autem que est in Wartreignon huic modo terminator. Ab introitu Lleuessic in Guy susum Pant Bieting. Pan Bieting per longum usque Marchini deinde Trosgel usque lucum salicinum et rotundum. A luca predicto usque Keuenfort. Keuenfort per longum usque Main Urua. A main Urua per transversum usque Glascum. Deinde Glascum usque Gvi. Guy per longum usque introitum Lleuessic.*

The boundary description starts at the point where the Lleuessic stream from which it goes up to Pant Bieting, a lost name but most likely associated with an abandoned farmstead called Blaen-y-Bwlch on 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, and also known as Perthu, (Fig 6), to the River Marchini, now known as the Marcheini Fawr.



Fig 6: Deserted farmstead of Blaen-y-Bwlch identified as Pant Bieting

A boundary bank has been commented on by Percival<sup>9</sup> and is shown in Figs 7, and 8. The bank is clearly seen as a N-S line of the photogrammetry survey, Fig 9. The boundary thence follows the Marcheini onto Trosgel, (now the hill Drysgol), and onto a round willow grove. This grove may be recalled by the



current place name on the OS maps as Ffos yr Helygen-gam. Fig 8 shows the deep gullies of the *marcheini Fawr* and *Fach* at their junction. The boundary bank leading to *marcheini Fawr* is in the foreground.



*Fig 7: View towards the Lleuessic and Pant Bieting, boundary bank in foreground*

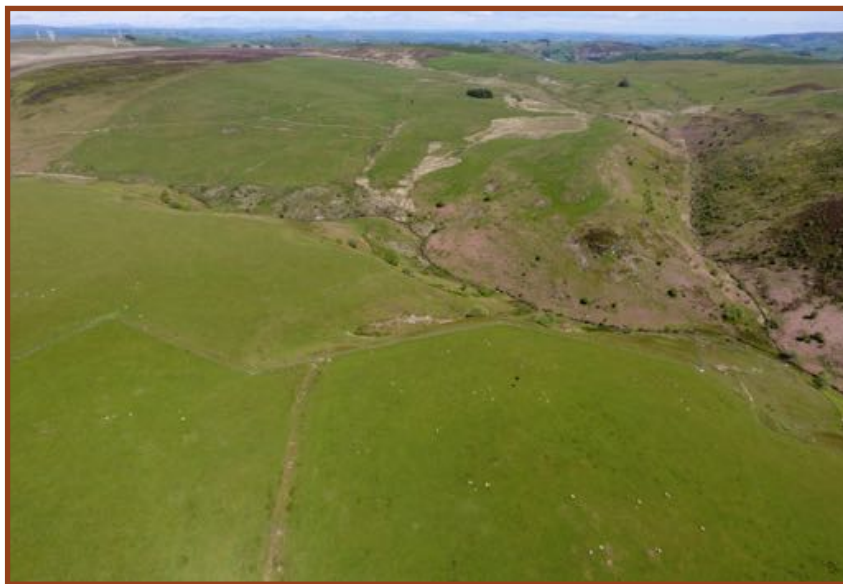
From the grove it proceeds along a ridgeway to Main Urua, identified by Charles, (op cit), as a stone. Notably there is a large, (c. 1x.5x.5m), quartz rock embedded in the ground near this point, Fig 10. It would have made a prominent and highly visible marker for the boundary and may have served as such in pre-historic times. From the stone, the boundary likely followed the ridge along a braided track what still exists today. The boundary finally drops down to the Wye at Glaswrm via a small stream. From there it simply follows the Wye back to the starting point.

A curiosity in the perambulation is the reference to “a round willow grove”, (*lucum salicinum et rotundum*). The willow association is preserved in current mapping as Ffos yr Helygen-gam which can be translated as “Willow ditch”. It is also the name, Fosheligan Gam, of a sheep walk referred to in the sale particulars of Neuadd Ddu in 1873, (Swindell, 2023). The question arises as to whether, at the time of the charter, there was actually an established willow grove that could act as a boundary marker, or if the reference, even then, was to an area associated with a more ancient and possibly sacred grove at the source of the *Marcheini Fawr*. Unfortunately, any answer is lost in the mists of time.

A possible variant to this reading of the charter is if the boundary follows the *Marcheini Fach* instead of the *Marcheini Fawr* as postulated above. If this alternative is followed the boundary would take a broad arc enclosing Drysgol

before rejoining our preferred option close to Ffos yr Helygen-gam. This alternative is shown as a dotted blue line on Fig 5.

This wider boundary following the Marcheini Fach encloses two interesting features: a beccaria (sheepcote) and what is likely to be an early, now deserted, farm, the site of which is now known as Dyrysgol. Beccaria are interesting in that they are associated with improvements in sheep management introduced by the Cistercians. The farm is well placed to be a centre for sheep farming on the open, upland, sheepwalk. Its large fields enclosures are well suited to sheep management but not to arable farming.



*Fig 8: Looking north towards confluence of Marcheini Fawr and Fach. Bank in foreground, Dyrysgol farmstead is in middle distance in small clump of trees*

There is an anomaly in this account: at the north end Glascwm lies outside the Gwrtheyrnion cantref boundary and strays into Arwystli, a commote in Powys Wenwynwyn cantref, Fig 16. This seems unlikely given the general respect the charter shows for the Welsh land units. It possibly comes about as a shift of the ‘Glascwm’ name to the farm a little to the south. In this case the intended boundary would have passed along the stream past the farm now known as Tyncoed. This stream is the cantref/commote boundary, Fig 16.

The later history of Dolhelfa can be found in Angela Swindell’s article in this volume<sup>10</sup>.

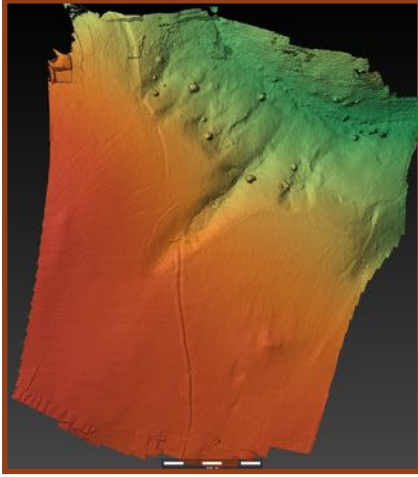


Fig 9: Photogrammetric view of bank from Lleuessic, in south, to Marcheini Fawr.



Fig 10: Bryn Titli quartz stone which may have been referenced in charter.

## Nantui

The Mortimer charter refers to three areas by name only:

*'Dedi quoquo eisdem monachis Llechelwihan Pull remmi Nantui ut presenti habent vel rationabiliter habituri sunt'*

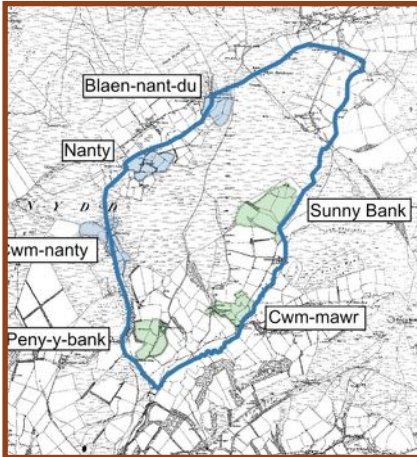
(Translation: I have given to the same monks Llechelwihan, Pullremmi, and Nantui whatever they have or will reasonably have).

No details of Nantui are given in the charter other than its name. The name, however, allows it to be identified as an area to the north-east of the main area described above. In this area are three early farmsteads lying alongside the stream Cwm-Nant-ddu. The modern names for these farms are Cwm-nanty, Nanty and Blaen-nant-du and are marked in blue on, Fig 11.

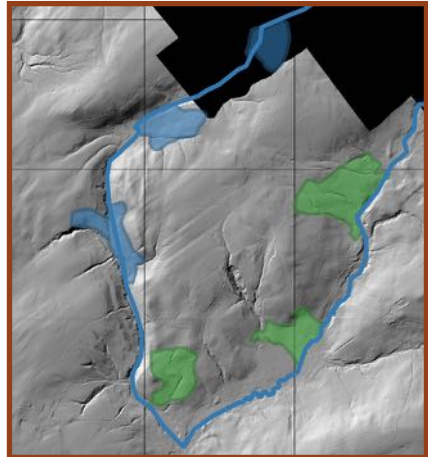
The farming landscape would have been different in the medieval period. Relatively small areas around each farmstead would have been enclosed in small, curvilinear fields. The small farms would have existed in an area of predominantly upland grazing. Stock, mainly sheep and cattle, would have been managed by shepherds who would kept flocks together within traditionally agreed areas, protecting them from predators both animal and human. It was only later with enclosures that farms accreted larger rectangular field on the previously open upland. Work is currently underway by the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust to identify and map these early farmsteads. Fig 11 shows what may be the approximate extent of the early farms with the later rectangular field excluded.

The upland area is bordered by two streams, the Cwm-Nant-ddu and the Gwenlas Brook. Alongside the latter are another three farmsteads marked green.

Each of these six farms have field systems comprising curvilinear bounded enclosures close the farm buildings, surrounded by rectilinear fields. The rectilinear field, in general, are the result of later enclosures and it is likely that in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries they would have been open upland offering grazing to farms each with a smaller area of enclosed land close to each farmstead. We have called such farms “early”. Some must have been in existence before 1200 but, apart from being named in charters, no other dating evidence exists. The northern extremity, beyond the sources of the streams, is likely to have been the watershed. The topography of the area is shown in Fig 12.



*Fig. 11: Nantui showing area defined by the two streams to the watershed with principal farmsteads*



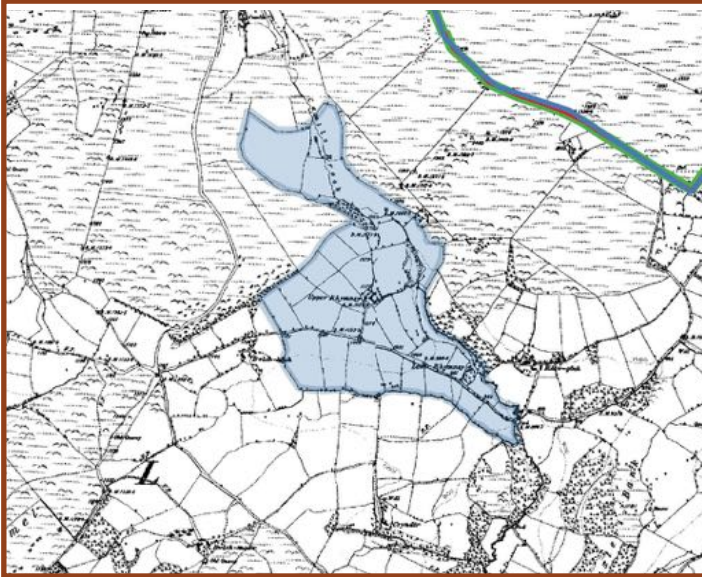
*Fig 12: Lidar photogrammetry of Nantui with principal farmsteads*

Interestingly, Nantui is identified in the confirmation charters as a donation by Marreduch ap Maylgon, (also named as Mereduc son of Mailgum, in Henry III, 1232 charter, and Meredith ap Maelgon in Edward II, 1318 charter). Pryce<sup>11</sup> notes that Maredudd gave only part, or half, of Nantui. This might reflect the difference in naming of the farmsteads on the two streams and may indicate that Mortimer actually gave only the farmsteads on one side of the hill.

## Rhymney

There is little to add to other commentators concerning Rhymney. There is a general consensus that this area relates to what is now two farms, Upper Rhymney and Lower Rhymney. Although detached from the boundary of the core land confirmed by Mortimer, it would have been adjacent to upland pasturage contiguous with those core lands. The farmsteads are simply in another valley, alongside the Camlo Brook, on the other side of the hill. This area is also in a different cantref, Gwrtheyrnion not Maelienydd. Together these reasons may

account for it being considered separate to, and detached from, the land within the perambulation. Approximate borders are shown in Fig 13.



*Fig 13: Rhydney, outlined in blue near Maelienydd border*

### **Confirmation charters**

The concept of land ownership in this period is not the same as today with our concepts of freeholders and lease holders. The details are complex and go well beyond the scope of this article. However, in very broad terms, all land was owned ultimately by the king. In modern terms he was the freeholder in chief. He could grant lands to various lords or favourites, and they would pay what was essentially a tax, in cash, kind or duties, to the crown. Equally, the land could be taken back by the king. For example, if a lord committed treason, or died intestate, or the heir was a minor, the land would revert to the king who could dispose of it at his pleasure. There was thus a cascade of tenure from the king to the tenant farmer. What was granted in this hierarchy were rights. The rights could be many and various. There might be rights of, as examples, pasturage, peat cutting, hunting, mining, coppicing, collection of fallen branches in a forest, foraging by pigs and so forth. These are frequently specified in the charters.

While the confirmation charters are not the main focus of this article, they do provide significant insight into the extent of the actual donation made by Mortimer, as opposed to his confirming prior gifts by Welsh rulers.

*Cumhiŕ.* } J. Dei gr̃a r̃c. Sciatis q̃ intuitu Di, 7 p̃ salute anie  
 nre, 7 aũccessoꝝ 7 successoꝝ nfoꝝ, c̃firmavim⁹ Do 7  
 ecclie B'e Maŕ de Cumhiŕ, 7 monachis Cýsŕcieiũ ordinis ibid̃  
 Do ſvientibꝫ, om̃s ſras q's hnt de dono Marreduch ſit Maýlgoũ,  
 ſcit, ſr̃a de Leghwýthoũ, Sarfbuũ, 7 Kenepawel, 7 Forghel  
 keyl, 7 Buthýgfre, 7 Dolvolblich, 7 Butharch, 7 Nanrim,  
 7 Dýnanner, 7 Rýulnýnaũ, 7 Cruthas, 7 Delýneyũ, 7 gran  
 giam q̃ vocatur Gwenweýn, Caýroghereũ, 7 Laythde, 7 diũ  
 Nanidu, 7 Guernegof, 7 Biggegwenith, 7 Dolganhenru, 7  
 pt̃e q' hnt de Keyllýbir, Gwenriw, 7 Peblewith, 7 cõmunã  
 pasturã p̃ totã Melenýd, 7 Kerý, 7 ſras de Maýsecrogur,  
 7 Kaýrwetiũ, 7 Breinecrois, venditas p̃ caſt̃ de Caminarum.  
 Confirmam⁹ & eis ſram de Dolelnem, 7 Pulleremmy, 7 totam  
 ſram de Nantu q' hnt de dono Roğ de Mortuomaŕ. Confir  
 mamus & ſram de Fortuũ q' hnt de dono Howeſ ſit Cathwatlaũ,  
 7 de dono Wiſſi ſit Alaũ, Heſkýborew̃ ex ut'q̃ pte rivuli de  
 B'toũ, 7 de dono Eýnan Clut, ſram de Karnaf cũ nemore q̃  
 vocatur Cohedrenis, 7 de dono Eýnan de Porſ ſram de  
 Kenbalva, 7 ſr̃a de Speýf, 7 de dono ejuſd̃ ſram de Wenũ' d̃  
 dono aũ Maýrreduch ſr̃a de Kýlwýlft, 7 Lechrich. Confir  
 mam⁹ & eiſd̃ de dono Lewliũ ſit Amaranth ſram de Kokýlbiſ,  
 7 Guernebowýs, 7 Kýlerumcy, ſram de Enigh. Q're  
 volum⁹ 7 firmiſ p̃cipim⁹ q̃ p̃d̃ci monachi de Cumhiŕ hant 7  
 teneant om̃s p̃d̃cas ſras inppetui, bñ 7 i pace, libe, quiete, 7  
 integre, plenaſ, cũ om̃ibꝫ p̃tiũ ſuis, 7 liſtatibꝫ, 7 libis c̃sue  
 tudinibꝫ ad h̃mõi ſras p̃tiũtibꝫ, ſic carte p̃d̃coꝝ donatoꝝ fonabiſ  
 teſtant'. [Teſt̃.] dñis P. Winſ, E. Herf, J. Bath 7 Glaſtoũ,  
 epiſ, W. Maris̄ coũ Penb̄, W. coũ Arundell, S. coũ Winſ,  
 Wiſſo Brewerſ, Huğ de Nevill, P. f Herb, Robto de Ros. Daſ  
 p̃ maũ mağri Riçi de Maris̄ canē nri, apud Wýgorũ, xxvij.  
 die Deç, añũ regni nri xvj.

Fig 13: Transcript of King John (1215) charter, as printed in *Rotuli Chartarum*, (Hardy)

In his introduction to his transcription of the *Rotuli Chartarum*<sup>12</sup>, Thomas Hardy describes the need for confirmation charters as stemming from ‘*the general feeling of the necessity of obtaining from successive sovereigns, confirmation of the grants of their successors. This was more especially necessary in times of contention and discord.*’ He points out that such charters also grew out of feudal law in which the King ‘*was considered supreme lord of the soil, and all persons enjoying its fruits or revenues obtained and held them either mediately or*

*immediately from him*'. In this context, King John's confirmation charter, Fig 13, is particularly significant as it was issued in 1215, only 15 years after the Mortimer charter and was the source, with some additions, of the later confirmation charters. The immediate reason for the charter was the death of Roger Mortimer in 1214 with his heir a minor, and King John taking the Abbey and its lands into his protection. The charter has been referred to as his Charter of Protection.

Below is a loose translation of the lands donated, omitting the standard introduction and ending. The spelling of the original place names has been kept. Paragraphs have been introduced for ease of reading.

*[preliminaries]...Confirmation of donations to the Church of the Blessed Marie of Cumhir, and the Monastery of the Cistercian order of the same [place] ..... all the lands which were given by Marreduch son of Maylgon, namely: land of Leghwython, Sarfbrun, and Kenepawel, and Forghekeyl, and Buthygyfre, and Dolvolblich, and Butharch, and Nanrim, and Dynanner, and Ryulnynan, and Cruthas, and Delyneyn, and the grange which is called Gwenweyn, Cayrogheren, and Laythde, and [part of ?] Nantdu, and Guernegof and Biggegwenith, and Dolganhenru, and the parts which were in Keyllybir, and Gwenriw, and Peblewith, and common pasture for the whole of Melenyd, and Kery, and the lands of Maysecrogur, and Kayrwetin, and Breinecrois, sold for the castle of Caminarum.*

*Confirm also to them the land of Dolelnem, and Pulleremmy, and all the land of Nantu that was in the gift of Roger Mortimer*

*Confirm also the land of Fortun which was given by Howel son of Cathwatlan, and the gift of Wittu son of Alan, Heskyborew excluding part of the river B'ton, and of the gift of Eynan Clut, lands of Karnaf with the wood which is called Cohedrenis, and the gift of Eynan de Port of the land of Kenbalva, and the land of Speyf, and the similar gift of the land of Wenn.*

*Gift of the same Mayrreduc the land of Kokylbir, and Lechricht.*

*Confirmation also of the gift of Lewlin son of Amaranth the land of Kokylbir, and of Guernebowys, and of Kylerumcy, the land of Enight.*

The confirmation charters are in a different style to Mortimer's. They do not carry the weight of domination propaganda of the 1200 charter and are, instead, a clear account of who gave what to the Abbey. They list Welsh donors and give specific place names or other details of what is given. The three confirmation charters, from 1215 to 1316, show a place-by-place conformity in place in the same order except for some donations added at the end of the 1318 charter. Each

was clearly a reiteration of the earlier and are for the most part listing farmsteads or groups of farmsteads.

What does change is the spelling of many of the names, either as a result of evolution of the language, or possibly as “errors” of transcription by English scribes either unfamiliar with Welsh or unable to distinguish the medieval script in which a succession of minims running together can be variously interpreted. For example, Kenepawel in 1215 becomes Keuenpawell in 1232 and Kevenpawl in 1318, (modern name is Cefn-pawl). Some of the names can be identified, as in this case, with varying degrees of certainty, with existing farms. Many are names lost over time that will never be recovered. The identity of the lands/farmsteads identified in the charter is the subject of on-going research by members of the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust research group.

Of the names that can be identified, that are a few name farms which clearly lie within the boundaries set in the Mortimer charter. Apart from the example above of Cefn-pawl, Buddegre (Buthygre), Divanna (Dynanner), and Forchy Tail (Forghekeyl – now abandoned) are in the confirmation charters as being given by Marreduch. There are doubtless others yet to be identified.

What is relevant in relation to the Mortimer charter is that these confirmations attribute only three places to Roger Mortimer: Dolelnem, Pulleremmy and Nantu, (i.e. Dolhelfa, Rhymney and Nantu). Of these, part of Nantu is listed as being given by Maredudd ap Maelgwn ap Cadwallon. By implication, other lands identified in the 1200 charter were given by Welsh Rulers and extend the lands held by the Abbey towards the north of the land defined by Mortimer.

### **Previous mapping of 1200 donation**

**Charles, 1990**, identification of place and river names is contained in his paper. No map is actually drawn, but his identification of some of the named places, (some which can now be seen as incorrect), formed a starting point for this article.

Notably, Charles chooses to read the charter as a clockwise perambulation starting a km or so south of the Clywedog-Bachell Brook junction. This leads to problems of continuity and some insecure identification between the charter and modern names.

In the author’s opinion, Charles makes a miss-identification in the north which takes the area too far in that direction outside Maeliennydd, and failing to identify ‘Tuluch’ in the charter with the village of Tylwch leads to miss reading the extent of the charter boundaries in the north-west. These, consequently, result in not appreciating the significance of the coincidence of the charter boundaries with those of the cantref.

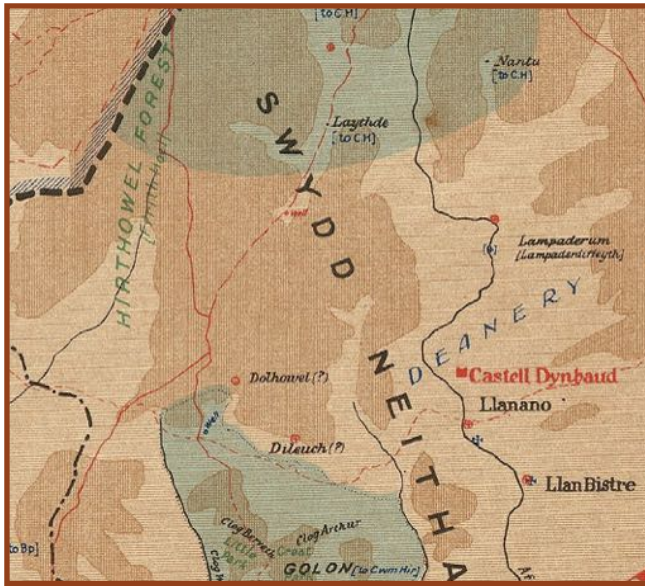
At the southern end of the boundary, Charles follows a parish boundary down



an un-named stream to the Bachell brook. This involves coming off the ridge, crossing the valley below the farmstead of Cwmbedw, climbing up over the hill Lan-wen before reaching the un-named stream. This does not follow the pattern of the charter in using the clear markers of streams, places and ridgeways.

How Williams mapped the Dolhelfa grange has already been commented on earlier in this article.

**William Rees, 1932**, mapped XIV century ecclesiastical land holding in Wales<sup>13</sup>. For Abbey Cwmhir the primary land holding comprises two, unconnected, areas, one to the south which he identifies with Golon, and a northerly are which includes land which can be identified with some of the lands which were given by Welsh donors. It is the southern area that concerns us here as it appears to relate to the Mortimer charter.



*Fig 14: Lands of Cwmhir from Rees's map*

His map, Fig 14, coincides with our view on the eastern and north-eastern parts of the charter but seriously miss the extent of the lands to the east as his reading has an eastern boundary which follows the Clywedog brook. The rationale for this is not evident. However, it must be noted that Rees's work predates the discovery of the Mortimer charter so was working without the background information and scholarship available today. For example, he does not include Dolhelfa or Rhymney but does include Nantui. The gap between the southern and the northern sections of the Abbey lands reflects a central area area

of upland with few farmsteads.

Golon, (sometimes spelt Gollon or Golen), is a name that appears in financial documents quoted by Dugdale in his *Monasticon Anglicanum*<sup>14</sup>. However, its extent is uncertain apart from it being clear that it is distinguished from the Abbey's home farm or desmesne as in the following extracts from Dugdale:

Transcript of return 26 Hen VIII First Fruits Office (1534)	£	s	d
[Abbey demesne]	1		
Golon	18	6	8
Abstract of Roll, 32 Hen VIII Augmentation Office (1540/1)	£	s	d
Comhere: home farm		10	
Golen: from diverse tenants	17	4	8
Golen: given as 28 bushels of oatmeal at 8d per bushel		18	8

Here the Latin in the Abstract of Rolls, (*firma terrarum dominicalium* – literally ‘farm of the land of God’) is taken to equate to Home Farm.

The term “Manor of Golon” appears in Patent Rolls recording the passing of the title to William Fowler following the Dissolution. Originally the Cistercian order was, by its rules, forbidden from owning manors as they are associated with temporal authority rather than ecclesiastical authority. This rule gradually became eroded as, by various means, Cistercian houses acquired manors. Neither does the name appear in any of the Welsh charters. It is, therefore, possible that Golon signifies an English creation of a manor after the Dissolution to confer status on the new secular owners. David Williams notes that some granges in Wales also became manors<sup>15</sup>.

Since the Dissolution, Golon appears to have been used as an imprecise term with various meanings and extent. Further research is required to confirm the accuracy of Rees's delineation of Golon, but it is plausible.

**Williams, 1990**, map in his ground breaking *Atlas of Cistercian Monasteries in Wales*, is not confined to the Mortimer charter donations and includes Welsh donations identified in the confirmation charters. In particular his boundary encompasses areas which are given to the Abbey by Welsh rulers after the date of the Mortimer charter

He does include Dolhelfa and Rhymney but not Nantu. However, he omits out extensive land to the north-west and to the south-east.

It is noteworthy that the Williams boundary follows parish boundaries except for the eastern boundary where it follows the Bachell Brook. The Williams mapping must be taken as lands that the Abbey acquired over a period in the early thirteenth century. Further research on the Welsh charters may suggest corrections to the area of these donations.



*Fig 15: Outline of core Cwmhir lands drawn from Williams map.*

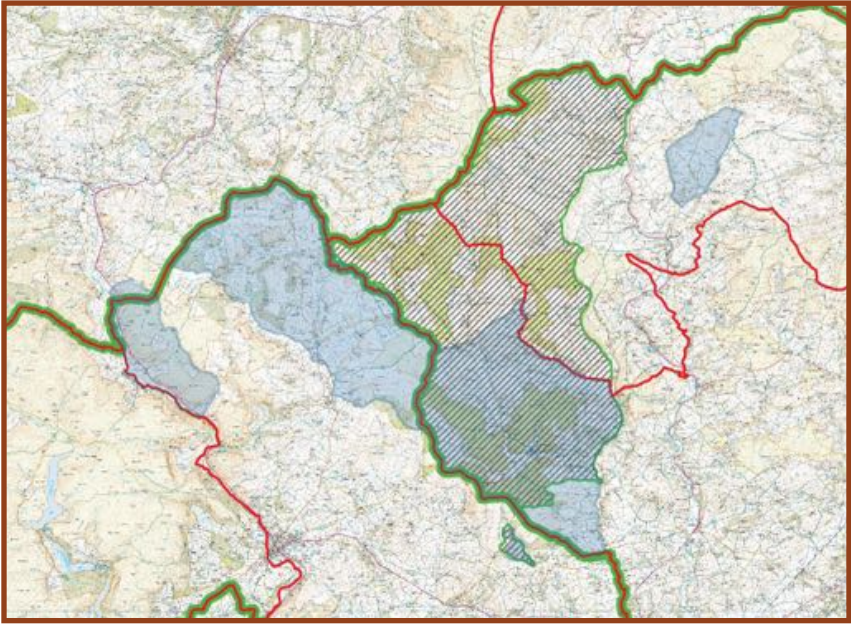
### **Cantrefws and Commotes**

The division of land in Wales into cantrefws, with commote sub-divisions, has roots in antiquity. Some were originally independent Kingdoms whose chiefs owed service to no higher authority. Cantrefws were the basis of Welsh law with each cantref holding its own court. Over time some of the commotes took over this local function.

The persistence of the Welsh administrative divisions of lands into Cantrefws and Commotes is illustrated that many of the boundaries continue today as county and parish boundaries, that is, boundaries of both civil and ecclesiastical scope. The borders traced in this article are, in places, based on insignificant upland streams whose claim to fame is that, in a time now forgotten, they were chosen as an immovable and precise marker of a well-defined boundary.

At the start of his charter, Mortimer states that he is donating land in the cantrefws of Maalienydd and Gwrtheyrnion. It is not surprising that his perambulation respects those borders. Indeed, the details in the charter may well draw on pre-existing accounts of the borders given in now lost Welsh documents.

The relationship between the boundary developed above for the area identified in the Mortimer charter perambulation, with the cantref boundaries is shown in Fig 16. In this map our reading of the Mortimer charter is shaded blue, Williams area is hatched green, cantref boundaries are wide green and commote boundaries are marked in red.



*Fig 16: Comparison of boundaries identified in this paper with that of Williams, with cantref and commote borders marked.*

## **Conclusion**

The foundational work on the Mortimer charter by Charles, 1970, published in the Transactions of the Radnorshire Society, and the map by David Williams, 1990, have provided the basis for understanding the land holdings and impact of Abbey Cwmhir in Mid-Wales. However, the shortcomings of these early works have become apparent as a result of ongoing research by the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust. This article is designed to revisit the earlier work and establish a new baseline using the earliest existing charter of donations to the Abbey, the Roger Mortimer Charter of 1200.

It is recognised that a degree of imprecision and uncertainty is a necessary factor in the interpretation of a medieval document in which so many of the place names are lost. Doubtless there will be other contributions to this study in future. The most that can be said is that it is the best that the author can do at this time.

This study draws attention to the extent of Welsh donation prior to the Mortimer charter, and consequently how limited were the ‘new’ donations by Roger Mortimer. This will be explored further in the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust research programme.

The main finding of this article is the part played by the Welsh cantref system in establishing the borders defined in the Mortimer donation. This was not apparent, and was not an assumption at the start of this work, but it now seems obvious that the Roger Mortimer charter, relating to the donation of land should relate to prior Welsh administrative divisions.

### Names appearing in the charter

Main perambulation	Main perambulation (cont.)
Clawedauc	Nant Keruineu
Teudeuric	Arthur
Nant Cum Bir	Nant kestill Guidar
Llannerch [Llannerth sp?] Kyneint	Kregell
Keuenfort	Clewedauc
Carneu Cadiwc	Nant Hellan Nerch Freit
Teir Guernen	Guern Halauc
Ditch	Teudiuric
Marcdac	Clawedauc
Tawelan	
Pant	<b>Dolhelfa</b>
Nant He Knech	Dol Heluein
Guenuran	Lleuessic
Nant Cum Halauc	Pant Bieting
Tuluch	Marchini
Duglas	Trosgel
Escop	Main Urua
Amdo Benwin	Glascum
Blain Hauoit Sulwiu	Guy (Gvi)
Mochdref	
Kair Hoegren	<b>Name only</b>
Pull Lost Ledan	Llechelwihan
Ros Gruc Geir	Pullremmi
Kemer Teir Hieithon	Nantui

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Maps were drawn by the author using QGIS, with acknowledgement to the Ordnance Survey for the base maps under Crown copyright and Landmark Information Group Licence, 2021. The author also provided aerial photographs and photogrammetry.

Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust provided the photograph of the Bryn Titli stone, Fig 10, © CPAT Photo Number: cs95-063-0031.

The cantref and commote boundaries are based on mapping by RCAHMW.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Now held in the Library of University College London
- <sup>2</sup> Charles, 1970, *An early charter of the Abbey of Cwmhir*, Transactions of the Radnorshire Society, vol 40, p68-74
- <sup>3</sup> Williams, David, 1990, *Atlas of Cistercian Lands in Wales*, The University of Wales Press
- <sup>4</sup> Remfry, Paul Martin, 2004, *A political History of Abbey Cwmhir 1176 to 1282*, Castle Studies Research and Publishing
- <sup>5</sup> Coward, Roger, *Abbeycwmhir*; Abbeycwmhir Community Council
- <sup>6</sup> Hume, Philip, 2020, *Welsh Marcher Lordships vol I Central and North*, Logaston Press,
- <sup>7</sup> There is record of the Abbey being originally founded in 1143 but there does not appear to be continuity between this and the refounding of the Abbey on its present site.
- <sup>8</sup> Lovell, Julian, 2019, The Transactions of the Radnorshire Society, *The Fowlers of Abbey Cwm Hir, vol 89, p141-151*
- <sup>9</sup> Percival, David, 1993, The Transactions of the Radnorshire Society, *The Boundary of the medieval grange of Dolhelfa*, p 42-44.
- <sup>10</sup> Swindell, Angela, 2023, *Dolhelfa: Continuity and change in an area occupied by a former grange of Abbey Cwmhir*, Transactions of the Radnorshire Society, vol 93
- <sup>11</sup> Pryce, Huw, 2005, The Acts of the Welsh Rulers, 1120-1283, The University of Wales Press, Charter no. 114
- <sup>12</sup> Hardy, Thomas Duffas, 1837, *Rotuli Chartarum*
- <sup>13</sup> Rees, William, 1932, *South Wales and the Border in the XIV Century, NE Sheet*
- <sup>14</sup> Dugdale, William, 1846, *Monasticon Anglicanum, p457*
- <sup>15</sup> Williams, David, 2002, *The Welsh Cistercians*, Gracewing