

THE MILITARY GARRISONS OF HENRY IV AND HENRY V AT STRATA FLORIDA, 1407 AND 1415–16

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an analysis of the royal garrisons deployed at Strata Florida Abbey in late 1407 and in 1415, a subject largely ignored by previous studies. The garrison of 1407 was a punitive force during the closing stages of Glyndŵr's rebellion; that of 1415 was to suppress possible dissent during the absence of Henry V in the Agincourt campaign. The choice of Strata Florida is discussed, along with the size, cost, disposition and purveyance of the garrisons, in relation to the political sympathies of the Cistercian Order in Wales, the military geography and the available resources to sustain an armed body. The impact of the garrison on the religious community and on the surrounding area is assessed.

INTRODUCTION

On three occasions during the first years of the fifteenth century, in 1401, 1407 and 1415, English royal troops were stationed at the remote Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida in Cardiganshire. The occupation of 1401 was very brief; that of 1407 slightly longer and punitive; that of 1415 longer still. It was, it seems, a place worthy of the attention of an English king and therefore must have had a deal of significance in the politics and economy of the day. In spite of this, previous studies of the war of that generation, the rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr, pay little heed to these occupations, with only the briefest mentions in some of the

standard texts.¹ This article seeks, therefore, to correct that omission by describing, as far as is possible, the circumstances of the two main occupations in 1407 and 1415 and assessing their impact on both the religious community and the people of the area.

THE REVOLT OF GLYNDŴR AND THE GARRISON OF 1407

Strata Florida, in the aftermath of Glyndŵr's descent on Cardiganshire in 1401, was not having a happy time: in fact, it had suffered badly as the struggle swayed this way and that across south-western Wales.² In 1402 the King's Council noted the damage caused to the abbey by both sides and in consequence decreed that:

Whereas the Abbey of Strata Florida by the frequent aggressions of Welsh rebels, and also by raids of the King's lieges for the castigation of the same rebels, is greatly impoverished and its lands devastated, so that the dispersion of the Abbot and monks is to be feared, the King has taken the Abbey and its appurtenances, with all annuities, pensions, leases etc., granted by its Abbots, into his hand, and has committed the custody of the Abbey and its lands, etc., to Thomas de Percy, Earl of Worcester, and John Belyng, Clerk, to dispose thereof to the Abbey's best advantage, and for its relief; all issues to be devoted to the support of the Abbot and monks, for the succour and relief of the said place; and until this is effected, all annuities, pensions, etc., are to cease; none of its corn, cattle, etc., to be taken by purveyors for the household of the King or of the Prince of Wales.³

This devastation of Strata Florida and its environs is usually laid firmly at the door of the English. However, although the abbey was used temporarily as a transitory military headquarters,⁴ the report pre-dates the arrival of a resident English garrison by five years and it is therefore

¹ J. E. Lloyd, *Owen Glendower: Owen Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford, 1931), pp. 43, 142; R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 105, 215.

² *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1401–1405*, p. 61.

³ S. W. Williams, *The Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida* (London, 1889), Appendix, p. lv, Westminster, 1 April 1402. See also William Rees, *Calendar of Ancient Petitions Relating to Wales* (Cardiff, 1975), pp. 363–4.

⁴ R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 443–4.

possible that the causes of the initial destruction were as the report indicates: first, Glyndŵr's own followers, who had killed and plundered across a wide swathe of territory, burning towns and villages, and in the countryside laid waste to rick, cot and tree; and secondly, those of the local Welsh nobility and gentry who had stayed loyal to the English Crown and had in their turn caused destruction as they moved against Glyndŵr. On the other hand, Adam of Usk refers to Henry IV's troops having occupied the abbey in strength in October 1401, filling the church as far as the high altar,⁵ and it is perfectly possible that they caused the damage. Whoever was responsible the result was that the abbey was clearly greatly impoverished and if decline was allowed to continue, its potential future usefulness as a base for the king's troops would be diminished; even worse, its treatment might provide yet another source of dissatisfaction to sustain the rebel cause.

Accordingly, as the rebellion was brought under control, the Council once more turned its attention to the abbey and determined in 1407 that it should be garrisoned for a short period, as a demonstration of royal power:

In monies by him received by the hands of John Straunge, his [i.e. King Henry IV's] Treasurer, for the war, of the aforesaid Treasurer at Gloucester, for the pay of 120 men-at-arms, each to take per day 12*d.* and 360 archers at 6*d.* per day each, for a quarter of a year, to stay in the Abbey of Strata Florida, and guard and defend it from the malice of the rebels, those who have submitted to the King, and to ride after and make war with the rebels, as well in South Wales as in North Wales, during the aforesaid time. By writ of the Privy Seal. Dated of this term. £666 13*s.* 4*d.*⁶ For which he will account.⁷

The garrison of 1407 was given a period of occupation of 'one quarter of the year', or ninety days, and the order is dated in early November. This would have been a difficult time of year to order a body of troops to move

⁵ C. Given-Wilson (ed. and trans.), *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk 1377–1421* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 144–5; discussion in Lloyd, *Owen Glendower*, p. 43.

⁶ Exactly 1,000 marks (two thirds of £1,000), perhaps indicating that the garrison was tailored to a set budget.

⁷ Williams, *Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida*, Appendix, p. lvi, Michaelmas, 16 November 1407.

for the state of the roads and the available fodder for animals, as will be discussed later, would have been a limiting factor. It is possible that the occupation was already under way, but this writ gives the distinct impression that the costs were being met in advance and the period of occupation looks, therefore, as if it ran from December to March – still 1407, given that the year turned on 25 March.

It seems clear that there was cause to believe that the monastic community's sympathies lay with the rebels, and this will be explored later in this article. Accordingly, the troops excluded the monks who had sided with Glyndŵr, replacing the abbot with Richard Ap Griffith,⁸ and the abbey was plundered by the king's troops as they departed as a punishment. *The Chronicle of Adam of Usk* reported that: 'the church and choir right up to the high altar was converted into a stable and completely stripped of its plate'.⁹ This was a deliberate act of desecration which, given the working of the medieval mind, would have been very difficult to induce even in mercenaries. Only a strongly held belief that the church concerned was engaged in more than earthly treason would have persuaded soldiers to treat the house of God in this way. As Eamon Duffy put it, 'medieval Catholicism exerted an enormously strong, diverse, and vigorous hold over the imagination and the loyalty of the people'.¹⁰ The high altar, where the Mass was celebrated and the Holy Sacrament reserved was a place of awe, a place where rich men would vie to be buried within sight of God's body: 'As kneeling congregations raised their eyes to see the Host held high above the priest's head at the sacring, they were transported to calvary itself'.¹¹ A monastery – and in particular a Cistercian monastery – emphasized even more this feeling of a place reserved, enclosed and set apart, thus making the desecration even more striking.

The garrison of 1407 therefore began as an exercise in force projection: that is, the capacity of the state to conduct expeditionary warfare, to intimidate other nations and implement policy by means of force, or the threat of force, in an area distant from its own territory. This ability has always been seen to be a crucial element of a state's power in

⁸ David M. Smith (ed.), *The Heads of Religious Houses in England and Wales, Vol. III, 1377–1540* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 334–6.

⁹ *Chronicon Adae de Usk*, pp. 144–5.

¹⁰ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (London, 1992), p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

international or in this case, intra-national, relations. The garrison's withdrawal concluded with a punitive statement. Moreover, there are some important clues in this decree that shed light on the activities and conduct of the later garrison in 1415.

THE WELSH WAY OF WARFARE

The garrison of 1407 would have known well that Wales was a difficult place for campaigning, for English armies had discovered this long before. During the thirteenth century Llywelyn the Great (d. 1240) and his grandson, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, caused a great deal of trouble to Edward I before his campaigns in 1276–77 and 1282–3 subdued the country. The central parts were mountainous and unsuitable for mounted or heavily armoured troops. This restricted the avenues of approach to the Vale of Glamorgan in the south, the Vale of Gwynedd in the north and a few routes through the mountains in between.¹²

The Welsh method of warfare in the late twelfth century – and things had not changed a great deal in the intervening years – had been described by Gerald of Wales in his *Descriptio Kambriae* (c.1194).¹³ The Welsh were respected for the skills of their bowmen, but they had also learned from their Anglo-Norman enemies: Gruffudd ap Cynan (d. 1137) and other Welsh princes and nobles learned the arts of knighthood and adapted them for fighting in Wales.¹⁴ During the revolt of Glyndŵr the Welsh adapted the new skills they had learnt to guerilla warfare, surprise ambush and raiding. Indeed Glyndŵr reputedly used the mountains to such good advantage that many of the exasperated English soldiery suspected him of being a magician able to control the natural elements. In addition to the two extremes of irregular warfare at one end of the spectrum and the imitation of the European code of chivalry at the other, there were also those of the middle-ranking Welsh gentry and their followers, and the captains of professional companies, who had served in

¹² John Edward Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (London, 1911), II, pp. 21–2, 36, 39, 40, 76–7.

¹³ 'Descriptio Kambriae', I.8, in James F. Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, VI (London, 1868), pp. 180–1; Gerald of Wales, *The Journey through Wales and the Description of Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London, 1978), pp. 233–5.

¹⁴ 'Descriptio Kambriae', II.7, in Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, VI, p. 218; *Journey*, trans. Thorpe, p. 267.

English armies abroad and brought back with them a great deal of experience in the military techniques of the day.¹⁵

How then could such an enemy be bested? Experience showed that first, much manpower and resources had to be invested in securing ports, harbours, roads and key points by building and manning fortifications – castles. From them, their garrisons could control access to those vital areas. These castles were also the supply bases for substantial expeditions – the second method of controlling the Welsh. In insurgent warfare, then as now, the key to success is to generate sufficient forces to dominate the country, separate the enemy from the population and thus his source of food and shelter, and take away his freedom to manœuvre. Thus he would be forced to spend more time on simply staying alive than in causing mischief. Therefore lack of food often forced the dispersal of large bodies of Welsh troops confined to mountain areas. The third method of control was by co-opting Welsh nobility and gentry into the English camp – divide and rule. The fourth method was economic: drawing the Welsh into the money economy and then controlling trade or exchange through the use of the only places where money could be got in exchange for goods, the urban markets held in the fortified boroughs attached to the great castles. All these factors can be seen to be in play with the garrisoning of Strata Florida.

HENRY V'S MILITARY EXPERIENCES IN WALES

Welsh wars had been a major financial drain on the exchequer of Henry IV, and from an early date they made an impact on his son. As early as 1403, as Glyndŵr's rebellion gained pace after its initial outbreak in 1400, Prince Henry, who had been placed in command of the effort to suppress it, was writing to his father to complain that he had been obliged to pawn his jewels to pay the troops – as he would do again when king before the campaign of 1415 – and how forage was so scarce in Wales that his men had to carry oats for their horses with them.¹⁶

Prince Henry's Welsh war dragged on for far longer than had been intended or anticipated as the Welsh outwitted the English time and

¹⁵ See also Sean Davies, *Welsh Military Institutions 633–1283* (Cardiff, 2004).

¹⁶ Harris Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England* (London, 1834–7), III, p. 125.

again using the tactics described by Gerald of Wales, augmented by more up-to-date experience. Henry himself was partly to blame for this in having mishandled the siege of Aberystwyth in 1407.¹⁷ In spite of being accompanied by large numbers of troops and seasoned commanders; in spite of the huge quantities of siege engines, cannon, powder and arrows brought by land, and by sea from Bristol to Haverfordwest;¹⁸ and in spite of having command of the sea and having interdicted the defenders' ability to re-supply, he agreed to abandon the siege and allow the Welsh to have free entry and exit for a month. In return, the Welsh agreed to meet on the field of battle and only if they failed to appear, or they lost the day, would Aberystwyth be surrendered. In the end, no battle ensued, Glyndŵr re-asserted control over the town and it was not finally re-captured by Henry until September 1408.¹⁹

Henry had good cause, therefore, to be wary of the Welsh – but only up to a point: the rebellion had effectively been ended in 1408 with the virtual disappearance of Glyndŵr.²⁰ Since then, on 23 March 1413, Henry V had empowered Thomas, earl of Arundel and Surrey – who as a substantial marcher lord would know the details of the country and the recent rebellion – to head a commission which would return former rebels to the king's peace and offer pardon;²¹ but which would also inquire into the causes of the insurrection and any treason or malpractice by the king's own officers that might have inspired it.²² Henry was not, it seems, a vindictive man – although as his treatment of the Lollards shows, he had no patience with religious error – and the keynote of Arundel's commission appears to have been reconciliation.²³

¹⁷ Davies, *Revolt*, p. 124; Anne Curry, *Agincourt: A New History* (Stroud, 2010), p. 33.

¹⁸ Desmond Seward, *Henry V as Warlord* (London, 1978), p. 23.

¹⁹ Davies, *Revolt*, p. 124.

²⁰ For an account of later sightings of Glyndŵr, see Terry Breverton, *Owain Glyndŵr: The Story of the Last Prince of Wales* (Stroud, 2009), pp. 166, 167, 173–4.

²¹ London, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), KB 9/204/3, m. 25.

²² *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1413–1416*, pp. 112, 114.

²³ For example, various rebel leaders who had sided with Glyndŵr were pardoned and given commands on the expedition to France: TNA C47/2/49; see also Edward Powell, *Kingship, Law and Society: Criminal Justice in the Reign of Henry V* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 232–40.

THE DECISION OF 1415

As Henry V prepared his descent on France to claim the crown in 1415, his Council made preparation not only for the expeditionary force but also for the security of the English rear areas, to 'safeguard the realm during the king's expedition abroad, presuming the ambassadors failed to arrange peace'.²⁴ This Council included some experienced soldiers: the duke of York; the earl of Dorset; Henry, Lord Scrope of Masham; and Sir Thomas Erpingham. These men met to decide on appropriate measures in February 1415; but they had already largely made up their mind in the autumn of 1414 that war was inevitable and that security measures would be required.²⁵ As well as arming the coasts, the Council gave thought to guarding against damaging raids from Scotland and Wales for at about the same time, parliament had expressed concern that Welsh rebels were raiding into the English Marches 'as if they were a land in war'.²⁶ In addition to making recommendations that all private castles and forts should be strongly garrisoned (at private expense, of course), the Council allotted only 100 men-at-arms and 200 archers for the security of the whole of Wales. Of these, sixty men-at-arms and 120 archers were to be stationed in north Wales – a number increased before the campaign began by an additional 120 men;²⁷ the remaining forty men-at-arms and eighty archers were to garrison the abbey of Strata Florida:

Item for the safe ward of the parts of Wales during the aforesaid expedition if it pleases the king. That 100 men at arms and 200 archers may be placed there, of which there shall be in North Wales 60 men at arms and 120 archers. And in South Wales 40 men at arms and 80 archers, the which 40 men at arms and 80 archers shall be at Strata Florida.²⁸

A garrison in Cardiganshire in 1415 would have echoes of that in 1407, and be a two-edged weapon: an element of reassurance to the loyal as well as a warning to those of Glyndŵr's supporters who might still be

²⁴ Ian Mortimer, *1415: Henry V's Year of Glory* (London, 2009), p. 79.

²⁵ Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances*, II, pp. 145–8.

²⁶ J. Strachey et al. (eds), *Rotuli Parliamentorum* (London, 1767–77), IV, p. 52.

²⁷ Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances*, II, pp. 172–80.

²⁸ Minutes of the Council held at the Friars Preachers in London, 2 February 1415, cited in Williams, *Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida*, Appendix, p. lvi.

inclined to action, even though Glyndŵr had not been seen for at least two years and was most probably dead. His supporters among the gentry still living near the abbey included, for example, the Ap Gwilyms of Llanbadarn Castle; the Gruffydds; and the Llwyds of Cellan and Rhydonnen.²⁹ Nor, if reconciliation rather than intimidation was the preferred royal policy, did it need to be too big. This reasoning can be discerned in the order for the garrison of 1407 even if the resulting occupation had been harsher than the tone of the order had implied. However, set against this, the mood of the moment was not punishment as in 1407, but reconciliation.³⁰

In the light of all these factors, there are two striking things about the provision of 1415: first, the small numbers of troops provided; and secondly, the location. Just how small a number of troops this was may be judged in comparison with the forces allotted to the then Prince Henry for his campaign in Wales after 1401, of 1,100 men-at-arms and 2,500 archers.³¹ This small number is partly explained in the proceedings of the Council: money. No more generous allocations of funding could be agreed until the treasury had made a full report on the state of the king's household finances, the income from the royal estates, his debts and his liability for annuities. Only after these matters were clear could full military preparations proceed.

WHY STRATA FLORIDA?

So, therefore, to the second question: why place the garrison in the abbey of Strata Florida? The answer lies in its location, its resources and its political affiliations. The abbey had been founded in 1164 by the Anglo-Norman lord Robert fitz Stephen from the mother house of Whitland, but soon thereafter the Lord Rhys seized Cardigan and assumed patronage of the monastery. He and his family were generous benefactors and a number of members of the dynasty were buried at the abbey. Under the patronage of Rhys and his dynasty it had become a major ideological centre and school of Welsh culture and language – the

²⁹ Ralph A. Griffiths, *Conquerors and Conquered in Medieval Wales* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 56–7.

³⁰ See, for example, the discussion in Breverton, *Owain Glyndŵr*, p. 173.

³¹ Rhidian Griffiths, 'Prince Henry, Wales and the royal exchequer, 1400–1413', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 32 (1985), 202–13.

two being inextricably intertwined.³² Some historians have seen it as part of the ‘counter-state’ to the kingdom of England on its border, part of a European-wide movement towards self-determination by small groups, determined to resist the drive towards ever bigger states.³³ Within its own ambit, it would encourage an indigenous view of land tenure, economy and law developed by a cohort of educated people. In medieval Europe, this cohort had to be founded on the Catholic Church.

By turning to the Cistercians Rhys was able to circumvent the Anglo-Norman diocesan system, with its requirement for obedience to Canterbury.³⁴ The Cistercians – here at Strata Florida subject to the authority of the abbot of Whitland, not the archbishop of Canterbury or his liege-man, the bishop of St Davids – developed local linkages throughout their monastic system in a manner that differed from the other orders: the Benedictines, Premonstratensions, Dominicans and Franciscans. Under the Cistercian rule, Strata Florida had flourished.³⁵ This is not to deny that the Cistercian order saw itself as part of the wider Catholic Church of the time: its place in the financial system of Europe, which will be discussed later, proves this; however, its houses were able to maintain a degree of independence that was attractive to Rhys and others.³⁶ All that said, Rhys, for reasons that are debatable, chose to be buried not at Strata Florida or Whitland, but at St Davids.³⁷

Around 1211, King John had been sufficiently alarmed at Strata Florida’s influence to order its closure, but the monastery had survived. It had been struck down during the Edwardian wars in 1284 when it had been burnt, following the absorption of all its holdings by the English

³² F. G. Cowley, *The Monastic Order in South Wales 1066–1349* (Cardiff, 1977), pp. 25–6; Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Manuscripts and the monasteries’, in Janet Burton and Karen Stöber (eds), *Monastic Wales: New Approaches* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 215–17.

³³ See, for example, David Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery: Britain 1066–1284* (London, 2003), pp. 213–16.

³⁴ Huw Pryce, ‘Patrons and patronage among the Cistercians in Wales’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 154 (2005), 81–95; David Stephenson, ‘The rulers of Gwynedd and Powys’, in Burton and Stöber (eds), *Monastic Wales*, pp. 89–102.

³⁵ David H. Williams, ‘The Cistercians in west Wales II. Ceredigion’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 159 (2010), 263.

³⁶ For more detail see the discussion in Jemma Bezzant, ‘The medieval grants to Strata Florida Abbey: mapping the agency of lordship’, in Burton and Stöber (eds), *Monastic Wales*, pp. 73–87; James Bond, ‘The location and siting of Cistercian houses in Wales and the West’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 154 (2005), 51–79.

³⁷ John Williams Ab Ithel (ed.), *Annales Cambriae* (London, 1860), p. 60.

crown – alluded to in the decree of 1402 already cited.³⁸ Even so it had re-surfaced, had survived the economic decline of the fourteenth century in the wake of the Black Death,³⁹ and had continued to function until the reprisals which followed the revolt of Glyndŵr threatened the entire system for which it stood, forcing the local gentry and nobility to take sides. To Henry IV, therefore, Strata Florida was a potential bastion of the enemy. As seen from the English court, the abbey was a nest of rebellion, the mother of treason and disloyalty, fostering every idea that stood for the downfall of the English hegemony. Even to Henry V, disposed to reconciliation as he seems to have been, Strata Florida is likely to have been highly suspect. What better reason, therefore, to garrison it and by doing so, put a stop to its seditious ways?

In addition to cultural and political factors, there were the matters of geography and economy. The abbey lands were located on the southern frontier of what had recently been – maybe still was – bandit country. It lay on the very westernmost edge of the Cambrian Mountains, at the head of the valley of the River Teifi which ran south and west into the Irish Sea at Cardigan, nearly sixty miles away. Between the abbey and the sea lay a strip more than ten miles wide on the north bank of the Teifi, some of it marsh, like the great bog of Tregaron, but much of it fine agricultural land suitable for mixed farming. To the east, the uplands provided valuable summer pastures for sheep, cattle and ponies as well as slate, building stone, silver, lead and copper: the Cistercians were well known as sponsors of major medieval industrial complexes working metal. Tracts of this upland had been ceded in previous centuries to the military orders to provide income for the upkeep of the Christian kingdoms of Outremer in the Holy Land – hence the place names that still endure: Ysbyty Ystwyth for the Hospitallers, Temple Bar for the Templars.⁴⁰ All this meant a money-based economy, and as elsewhere in medieval Europe, the Cistercians were the bankers who serviced this economy.⁴¹ There was no one else to do it: the nearest English markets

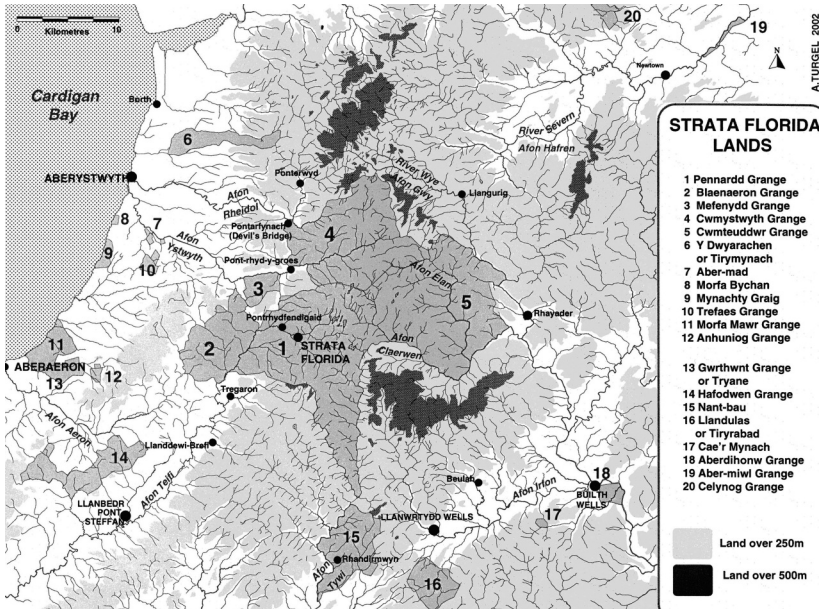
³⁸ Above, p. 646.

³⁹ For a short summary, see Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (London, 1979), pp. 119–120.

⁴⁰ David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales* (London, 1953), pp. 241 ff.; William Rees, *A History of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in Wales and on the Welsh Border, including an account of the Templars* (Cardiff, 1947), p. 28; Helen J. Nicholson, 'The knights Hospitaller', in Burton and Stöber (eds), *Monastic Wales*, pp. 147–61.

⁴¹ Janet E. Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000–1300*

Figure 1: The Abbey Lands of Strata Florida.
Map supplied by Professor David Austin, Strata Florida Project Director,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David.



were those of Carmarthen, Cardigan and Aberystwyth – and their interest lay in the trade with south-west England or Ireland.⁴²

More parochially, after the Black Death had receded, the old tithe system which had depended on physical surpluses of food and other produce made possible by a large labour force had been replaced by renders and returns: that is, money in lieu of commodities, again stressing the financial expertise of the Cistercian order. By 1400, Strata Florida was therefore both a cash nexus and a commodity nexus.

(Cambridge, 1994), pp. 55, 69; Peter King, 'Scottish abbeys and the Cistercian financial system in the fourteenth century', *The Innes Review*, 42, 1 (1999), 68–73; David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England*, Vol. I (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 75–6.

⁴² Cf. Ralph A. Griffiths, 'Medieval Severnside: the Welsh connection', in R. R. Davies et al. (eds), *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays Presented to Glanmor Williams* (Cardiff, 1984), pp. 77–8, 85–6.

Importantly, it retained its tithes in the significant commodities of sheep and oats, and it could and did serve as a store for agricultural surpluses, making it the centre of a web of commodity relationships. The exclusion of oats and sheep is significant: oats fed horses when no grass was available; sheep provided meat for the table, wool for the monks' clothing and skins for vellum.⁴³ For a monarch needing money for his wars and the means of upkeep for a garrison, Strata Florida would cause ears to prick: not only could the cost of the upkeep of his soldiers be imposed on the occupied area – war being made to pay for war – but the resources consumed would also be denied to a potential or actual enemy.

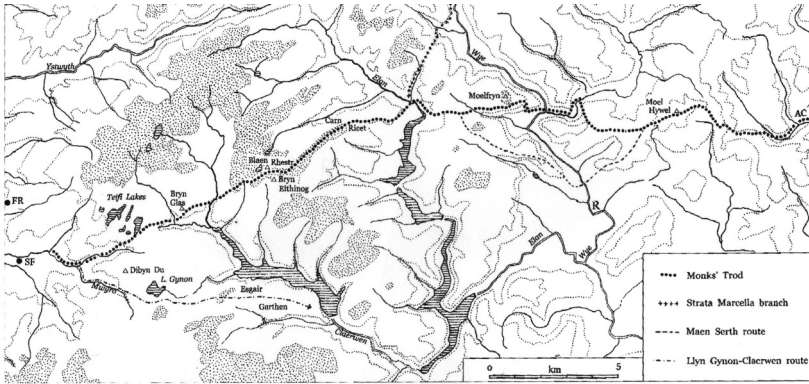
Next there were considerations of transport and communications. For any military commander it is relatively easy to decide where to place a force; it is quite another matter to get it there and having got it there, to keep it there. For this, one needs the means of supply – more of which later – and good routes. The road from Cardigan, although long, was an easy traverse up the Teifi Valley via Cenarth, the fortress at Newcastle Emlyn, the church and holy well at Lampeter, and Tregaron. The northward route from Carmarthen – partly following the old Roman road of Sarn Helen – ran through Llanpumsaint and joined the Teifi at Llanfihangel Ioreth. From the west, the Monks' Trod was an engineered road from the Wye Valley to the Teifi valley, mainly for mounted travel between Strata Florida, Cwmhir and Strata Marcella, as well as for the gathering of horses and ponies for export;⁴⁴ a fourth route from Brecon, through Sennybridge and Llandovery and on to Aberystwyth crossed the Monks' Trod at Strata Florida.

Strata Florida had seen the passage of large military bodies during the campaigns of 1277 and 1282. The initial stages of the campaign of 1277 saw Humphrey de Bohun, earl of Hereford, recapturing his lands in the lordship of Brecon, while Henry, earl of Lincoln, took Dolforwyn and Builth. In the Tywi valley, the Welsh lord Rhys ap Iorwerth submitted to Payn de Chaworth as he advanced and so his stronghold of Dryslwyn Castle was available to the king. Carreg Cennen, Llandovery and Dinefwr were captured in June, the latter becoming the administrative

⁴³ James Bond, *Monastic Landscapes* (Stroud, 2004), p. 38; see also Williams, 'Cistercians in West Wales II', 263–4.

⁴⁴ Andrew Fleming, 'The making of a medieval road: the monk's trod routeway, mid Wales', *Landscapes*, 10, 1 (2009), 77–100; see also Nigel W. Jones, Sian E. Rees and Robert J. Silvester, 'Conservation and investigation at Cwmhir Abbey, Powys', *Archaeologica Cambrensis*, 154 (2005), 133–51.

Figure 2: The Monks' Trod.
Map supplied by Professor David Austin, Strata Florida Project Director,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David.



centre.⁴⁵ The choice of this route used the good going along the river valley, secured the major fortresses, kept the army in fine agricultural land from which it could draw supplies and linked up the secure areas of Brecon and Builth with the important fortress and port of Carmarthen. This secure corridor in turn opened up the major routes north to Lampeter, Cardigan and Aberystwyth. Thus when the overall command in the south was assumed by the experienced soldier Edmund Crouchback, earl of Lancaster, the second surviving son of Henry III, he was soon able to move north to seize Aberystwyth, pushing Llywelyn's influence out of east, west and south Wales into Gwynedd. At least part of the army passed through the abbey lands, for the abbot Anian Sais sought redress for damages from the crown but in turn they were ordered to clear away woodland – probably as far as a bowshot either side – along the roads in order to make them safer for marching troops.⁴⁶ In 1282 a royal army was again sent through Ystrad Tywi, this time under the French nobleman William de Valence, marching right past the abbey from Llangadog to Lampeter and then through Tregaron, Lledrod and

⁴⁵ Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (2nd edn, New Haven, CT, 1997), pp. 150–1, 154, 155; Marc Morris, *A Great and Terrible King: Edward I and the Forging of Britain* (2nd edn, London, 2008), p. 180.

⁴⁶ Williams, *Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida*, Appendix, pp. xlvi–xliv.

Llanrhystud to Aberystwyth.⁴⁷ Strata Florida was therefore its own worst enemy: geographically close to a centre of support for Llywelyn, aligned with Welsh culture, wealthy, well known and easy to get to. For a king of England as military commander, it was all but irresistible.

THE GARRISON

Having determined *why* Strata Florida was the obvious candidate for a garrison, we must now consider what this garrison looked like. We know the numbers laid down by the king's Council, but is this the whole story? An armed company deployed in Wales for garrison duty at this time would generally be raised by indenture, or contract, between the monarch and a captain which would set out the exact terms of the agreement – a business arrangement, in effect – that detailed the numbers of men, lengths of service, rates of pay and other obligations and entitlements. The captain in turn would then enter into contracts with the men-at-arms, squires and archers. Once a retinue was raised and inspected at its place of assembly by royal officials, the captain would receive an advance of wages and from then on he was responsible for payment of the troops.⁴⁸

In general, an armed company of this period was made up of a ratio of one man-at-arms to one squire to three archers. Men-at-arms were described in the documents and orders of the time as *homines ad arma*, or *lanceae* (lances), a reminder that they could fight mounted with the couched lance, or on foot with sword, poll-axe, halberd, mace or axe. Men-at-arms were often, but not always, from gentle families; they could equally be yeomen who had turned professional. In either case they would be expected to find their own armour. The exact requirements for men-at-arms, dependant on social status, had been laid down under the Statute of Winchester in 1285: those with land of a yearly value of £15 or 40 marks were to possess a habergeon, an iron headpiece, sword and knife. They would usually be expected to bring a horse or pony to carry

⁴⁷ For a full description and discussion see J. Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd: Prince of Wales* (Cardiff, 1998), pp. 523–5.

⁴⁸ Anne Curry, 'English armies in the fifteenth century', in Anne Curry and Michael Hughes (eds), *Arms, Armies and Fortifications in the Hundred Years War* (Woodbridge, 1994), pp. 39–68; Malcolm Mercer, *The Medieval Gentry* (London, 2010), pp. 49–50.

them on long marches. Those with £10 to £15 the same, less a horse. Those with £5 to £10 a jack of plates or brigandine, iron head piece, sword and knife.⁴⁹ Each would also come with at least one *armiger*, or squire – hence their higher rate of pay. Forty men-at-arms would also therefore bring forty squires, each of whom, like their master, would be expected to be fully trained in the use of all weapons.

Eighty archers was twice the number of men-at-arms, since archers were cheaper than men-at-arms, could be found more easily, and were flexible. Archers, *sagittari* or *valetti* (varlets), were usually working men or perhaps yeomen, many again who had turned professional. They would be expected to bring some sort of body armour – such as a jack-of-plates or brigandine – and often an open helmet. They would also bring their own bow, arrow bags, and side-arm – sword, axe, club or dagger. They too represented a formidable force in battle. Each archer carried at least one bag of twenty-four arrows, with another on his horse – plus whatever else was being carried with the baggage. The first-line ammunition scale of eighty archers was therefore 3,840 arrows, which could be fired at a rate of six per man, that is, 480 per minute out to a range of 220 yards. They were, therefore, the precision guided weapon of the medieval period.⁵⁰

Even this relatively small number of men represented a considerable outlay of money: 12d per day for men-at-arms, 6d per day for archers, with an additional 100 marks, or £66 13s 6d, per quarter for every 30 men at arms.⁵¹ A knight could expect 2s per day and the captain of a company would expect to be paid for a quarter in advance. For an archer, this equated to almost three times the daily rate of pay of a labouring man – even without the possibility of plunder. For a man-at-arms, a year's pay, plus booty and ransom, could easily equate to the income of a small manor. The cost of the garrison of Strata Florida in wages alone was therefore 40s or £2 per day for the men at arms – £180 per quarter; and 40s or £2 per day for the archers – £180 per quarter. Add the bounty and the fee of any knight in command of the force and the total cost comes in at around £506 13s 6d – the equivalent of

⁴⁹ A. Forbes, *A History of the Army Ordnance Services, Vol. 1* (London, 1929), p. 4; M. R. Powicke, *Military Obligations in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1962).

⁵⁰ Jonathan Waller and John Waller, 'The personal carriage of arrows from Hastings to the Mary Rose', *Arms and Armour*, 7, 2 (2010), 155–7.

⁵¹ Curry, *Agincourt*, p. 61.

£358,000 at today's prices.⁵² This was at a time when the English economy was in an almost constant state of crisis. The overall accounts for 1415 reveal that for his campaign in France, Henry needed £500 per day for the wages of his army of 12,000 fighting men, without counting the cost of munitions, transport and food. This amounted to £45,000 for a campaign of ninety days at a time when the annual income of the treasury was £55,000 for the entire needs of the kingdom, for a year.⁵³

But as well as the fighting men, the garrison would have included at least twenty tradesmen, making their own living: a carpenter, wheelwright, saddler, bowyer, fletcher, farrier, blacksmith and armourer, plus the same number of assistants. Some use might be made of local tradesmen however in occupied territory, the quality of their work would always be suspect and anyway, why pay the locals when the object was to unload costs rather than give rewards? Then there would be grooms and carters – and women: wives and sweethearts, washerwomen and whores, to the scandal of the monks. This train could easily double the number of people, so that the total population was more likely to have been around 250 people and 200 horses and ponies.⁵⁴ This number of people represented, in effect, an itinerant village, moving at about twelve to fifteen miles a day, with all the issues of food and fodder, cooking, fresh water, sanitation, health-care, discipline and route organization that any village or small town of the day would have had.

How were the troops raised? In April 1415, the earl of Arundel was sent into Wales to carry out the necessary musters for the forthcoming campaign in France.⁵⁵ No archers were recruited in north Wales – hardly surprising given the fact that it had to be strongly garrisoned because of its still-suspect loyalty, even after the pardons issued by Arundel's earlier commission. However in south Wales, John Merbury, who was Chamberlain and Receiver of South Wales, and Commissioner of Array for Carmarthenshire, raised ten men-at-arms, thirteen mounted archers and 353 foot archers from the counties of Carmarthen and Cardigan;⁵⁶ and from the lordship of Brecon ten men-at-arms, thirteen mounted

⁵² Estimate based on a comparison of the retail rice index on www.measuring-worth.com (accessed 27 March 2015).

⁵³ Mortimer, *1415*, p. 219.

⁵⁴ Jonathon Riley, 'Logistics and supply in renaissance armies', *Arms and Armour*, 8, 2 (2011), 141.

⁵⁵ Curry, *Agincourt*, p. 59, citing TNA, E 403/621, m. 4

⁵⁶ A. D. Carr, 'Welshmen and the Hundred Years War', ante, 4, 1 (1968), 36.

archers and 146 foot archers. Among these was Sir Dafydd ap Llewelyn ap Hywel, better known as Dafydd Gam, who indented with three archers, one of whom was his son-in-law Roger Fychan of Brodorrdyn. Dafydd Gam, immortalized by Shakespeare, was a prominent opponent of Glyndŵr and was reputed to have made a failed assassination attempt on Glyndŵr at the parliament of Machynlleth, being allowed to escape only after swearing an oath to never bear arms against the prince again or oppose him in any other way. In 1412 Dafydd was captured by Glyndŵr's men and estimates of the amount paid as his ransom range from 200 to 700 marks, a large amount. That it was paid directly and speedily from the king's duchy of Lancaster estates in Wales indicates the esteem in which Dafydd was held by Henry. Dafydd was killed, along with Roger Fychan, at the battle of Agincourt, where the former was later reputed to have saved Henry's life and been knighted on the field.⁵⁷

Whether all these men volunteered or were compelled is not known and the muster rolls suggest that many of those selected sent substitutes, implying a degree of compulsion:⁵⁸ we know of one Welshman, Henry Gwyn of Carmarthenshire – possibly a supporter of Glyndŵr – who died fighting for the French at Agincourt and whose lands were seized in consequence.⁵⁹ It is highly unlikely therefore that these men would have been left to garrison an area in which a national rebellion was smouldering; on the other hand, removing large numbers of trained men from west Wales would deprive a nascent rebellion of much of its fighting potential.

If this is so, we must consider where the garrison came from. The largest town in medieval Wales was Carmarthen, less than three days' march from Strata Florida. This town, with its port, two monastic houses and castle, had been the terminus for a large and important trade with Bristol and other ports in north Devon and Somerset for three centuries; as well as to Gascony, Flanders, Portugal and Spain. From 1252, the agricultural surpluses of the Tywi valley – wool, fish, meat, cheese, eggs, bread, corn and ale – were brought to the town's markets and fairs for sale.⁶⁰ It was the port of disembarkation for soldiers, craftsmen,

⁵⁷ Davies, *Revolt*, pp. 225–7; T. F. Tout, 'Dafydd Gam (d. 1415)', rev. R. R. Davies, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); online edn, Jan. 2008 (accessed 19 June 2015).

⁵⁸ Curry, *Agincourt*, p. 66.

⁵⁹ Carr, 'Welshmen and the Hundred Years War', 36.

⁶⁰ Griffiths, *Conquerors and Conquered*, pp. 6–7, 181–2, 183.

merchants and supplies for the conquest of Wales. At the height of Glyndŵr's rebellion, soldiers and supplies were transported from Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Gloucestershire, and most especially from Bristol, Bridgewater, Dunster and Gloucester, to Carmarthen, to sustain the hard-pressed royal garrisons there and elsewhere. On two occasions, in 1403 and 1405, the castle had been besieged and captured by Glyndŵr's men and the town sacked and burned. Although by 1415 Carmarthen had a considerable garrison, including the bulk of those additional forces ordered by the king's Council for South Wales, the Constable, Sir John Skidmore (Scudamore), who had fought throughout the Glyndŵr rebellion, would have been hard pressed to spare men for a garrison at Strata Florida even though Glyndŵr's rebellion had died down.⁶¹

If not Carmarthen – and therefore indirectly the English counties of Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Somerset – where else? One possible source is Cheshire, for the archers of Cheshire were reckoned among the very best in the kingdom.⁶² Moreover Cheshire had provided large bodies of troops for earlier campaigns in Wales: in 1277, between one-third and half of the foot had been from Cheshire; further large contingents had been found in 1282, 1287 and 1295.⁶³ However, the counter argument is that Cheshire had been a seat of sympathy for Richard II and had sided with Henry Percy during his rebellion, which had been launched in concert with Glyndŵr; many of the gentry had died fighting for the losing side at Shrewsbury and in its aftermath: Sir Richard Vernon and Sir Richard Venables, for example, had both been publicly executed.⁶⁴ On the other hand, Henry IV had not taken vengeance on the many others among the Cheshire gentry who had fought for Percy, needing them and their highly capable archers for his own purposes, for Cheshire was especially noted for its cohesive tradition of military service.⁶⁵ In addition there was the considerable inducement

⁶¹ Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Principality of Wales in the Later Middle Ages: The Structure and Personnel of Government. I. South Wales, 1277–1536* (Cardiff, 1972), pp. 139–41.

⁶² Curry, *Agincourt*, pp. 66, 70–1; J. L. Gillespie, 'Richard II's Archers of the Crown', *Journal of British Studies*, 18, 2 (1979), 14–29; Philip Morgan, *War and Society in Medieval Cheshire, 1277–1403* (Manchester, 1987).

⁶³ J. E. Morris, *The Welsh Wars of Edward I* (London, 1901), pp. 115, 118, 127, 130, 154, 190; Morgan, *War and Society in Medieval Cheshire*, p. 32; TNA, E101/4/16, mm. 1–10.

⁶⁴ Morgan, *War and Society in Medieval Cheshire*, p. 218.

⁶⁵ Mercer, *Medieval Gentry*, p. 27; see also Morgan, *War and Society in Medieval Cheshire*, pp. 213–18.

of money, as already noted. There was, too, one further factor. The abbot of Vale Royal in Cheshire was also, after 1360, rector of the wealthy living of Llanbadarn Fawr outside Aberystwyth which housed the relics of St Padarn, a shrine second only in importance in south and west Wales to that of St David and therefore a source of income from pilgrimages. For this reason, the holding was much resented by the abbot of Strata Florida.⁶⁶ Why not therefore exploit the antagonism between two localities for a higher purpose?

In terms of numbers, Cheshire, it seems, had been contracted to raise a total of 700 men for the expedition to France,⁶⁷ however only 247 appeared on the payroll.⁶⁸ 700 less 247 leaves 453: a figure very close to the 420 men authorized for the garrisons in north and south Wales. This is not proof, of course, but it is at least a reasonable supposition. Unfortunately there is no record of any man of name leading the company at Strata Florida. Many of the gentry of Cheshire had perished at the battle of Shrewsbury, fighting for Percy; of those that remained loyal, all that can be traced, such as Sir Ralph de Bostock and Sir John Savage, appear to have been with Henry V in France.⁶⁹

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE GARRISON

In 1407, the period of occupation had been specified as ninety days, but the period of occupation is not specified in the order for 1415, so we cannot be certain as to how long this garrison stayed.⁷⁰ However some deductions are possible: the order was issued in February 1415 and the raising of troops took place in April. A company could have been mobilized in Cheshire and in position by the beginning of May. It would have remained there for as long as the king and the main army remained in France. News of the amazing victory of Agincourt reached London on Tuesday 29 October; the king himself sailed for Dover on 16 November, celebrated Mass at the shrine of Becket in Canterbury Cathedral the following day and was greeted at Blackheath on 23 November.⁷¹ The

⁶⁶ E. G. Bowen, *A History of Llanbadarn Fawr* (Llandysul, 1979), pp. 52–3.

⁶⁷ Nicolas (ed.), *Proceedings and Ordinances*, II, p. 385.

⁶⁸ Curry, *Agincourt*, p. 66, citing TNA, E 403/624, m. 3; E 403/629, m. 12.

⁶⁹ For Savage, see Mercer, *Medieval Gentry*, p. 57; for Bostock, see A. J. Bostock, *A Short History of the Bostock Family* (3rd edn, n.p., 2000), ch. II.

⁷⁰ Above, p. 652.

⁷¹ Mortimer, *1415*, pp. 460, 475, 476, 479.

mood in relation to Wales was relaxed and the short, ten-day parliament even issued a proclamation aimed at shoring up loyalty to the king: that in return for a payment of £1,000, the lands of Welsh tenants of the king would not escheat to the crown as decreed in 1400 after the beginning of Glyndŵr's revolt, but would pass directly to the heirs in accordance with Welsh law.⁷² At least another month would be required to frame and transmit orders for the withdrawal of the garrison by which time it was Christmas and winter weather. We may guess therefore that it would be late January at the very earliest before the departure of the troops – perhaps later if the roads were impassable.

So for at least nine months, troops were present at Strata Florida. Much time would have been spent in gathering and processing forage and food – more of which below – for standing crops are not the same thing as food, except for horses. Then there would have been the requirement to maintain local guards and security measures: as the decree of 1407 had put it, to 'guard and defend it from the malice of the rebels'.⁷³ Next came the requirement to maintain and improve weapons, horses and gear. Archaeology has revealed evidence of extensive metal-working inside the abbey confines, indicating that forges and smithies existed in which weapons and armour could be at least repaired and horses shod. Although none have been found, the standard issue military arrowhead could readily be made in even basic forges, even if there was no requirement by the garrison to manufacture additional arms or armour. Together with willow or elm shafts and goose feathers, the garrison had the capability to manufacture an almost inexhaustible supply of arrows.⁷⁴

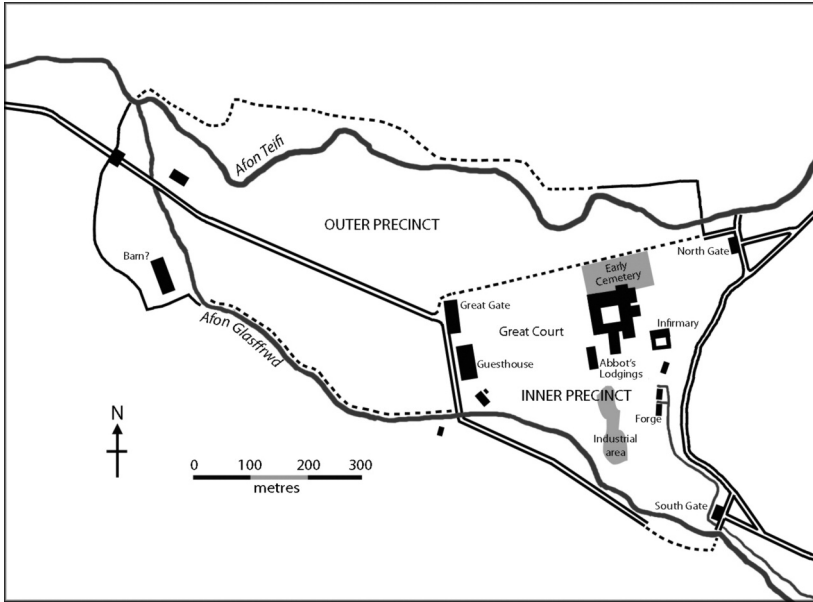
Given the thoroughness in recycling weapons then current in European warfare, it is not in the least surprising that no artefacts have been found, even if the iron could survive 600 years in the wet, acidic, soils around Strata Florida. Next came daily training in arms for men-at-arms, esquires and archers, to hone their skills. Most importantly there would be the need to make their presence known to the local gentry and people, especially those who might have rebel sympathies – again as the

⁷² *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1413–1416*, p. 13.

⁷³ Above, p. 647.

⁷⁴ Thom Richardson, 'Packing arms and armour for the King's voyages to parts of France, 1344–1360' (unpublished paper, Royal Armouries, 2010); J. E. Wiedemer, 'Arms and armour in England, 1360–1471: their cost and distribution' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1968), 198.

Figure 3: The Abbey Precincts.
Map supplied by Professor David Austin, Strata Florida Project Director,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David.



decree of 1407 had put it, 'to ride after and make war with the rebels'.⁷⁵ We can guess at expeditions of perhaps a dozen men-at-arms and twenty mounted archers moving quickly, appearing unexpectedly in some remote farmstead and staying for a day or two to make clear by their presence that they meant business in the event of trouble. The garrison was simply not big enough for anything else, given the need to secure their base; nor is there any evidence of a target large enough or important enough to justify a full-scale operation by the entire garrison.

⁷⁵ Above, p. 647.

HOW THE GARRISON WAS SUSTAINED

Medieval English kings had three main methods of feeding troops: general purveyance orders, directions to sheriffs of counties, and the use of merchants or contractors. The first two were essentially different forms of requisition. A fourth method was the requirement for captains of companies to arrive with their troops and animals victualled for at least the opening stages of their period of duty.⁷⁶ A soldier might therefore be expected to arrive with about two weeks' food for himself, beyond which he would buy food and fodder out of his pay. Thereafter, on campaign, the cost of feeding the troops would be exported as quickly as possible onto enemy territory by requisition.⁷⁷ Strata Florida would therefore be expected to cope with the demands of the itinerant village that descended on it, as well as its own population of monks and lay people.

Most authorities agree that the requirement for a medieval soldier on active service or a tradesman engaged in labour was around 3,250 calories per day per man, the bulk of which was made up by about 2½ lbs (1 kg) of bread, and about half as much for a woman.⁷⁸ Therefore the English force at Strata Florida would have consumed around 400lbs (180 kg) of bread per day. However, people did not eat bread alone, and apart from the many fast days (around seventy per year in the Church calendar),⁷⁹ and would require meat or poultry as well and drink in the form of ale, beer, mead, cider or wine. Even on fast days, there would be some form of protein, such as eggs, cheese, fish or eels. Thus in addition to 400lbs of bread per day, the abbey would have to find up to 240lbs (110 kg) of meat or other protein and 480 quarts (460 litres) of drink. Much of this might be preserved, since drying, smoking and salting were

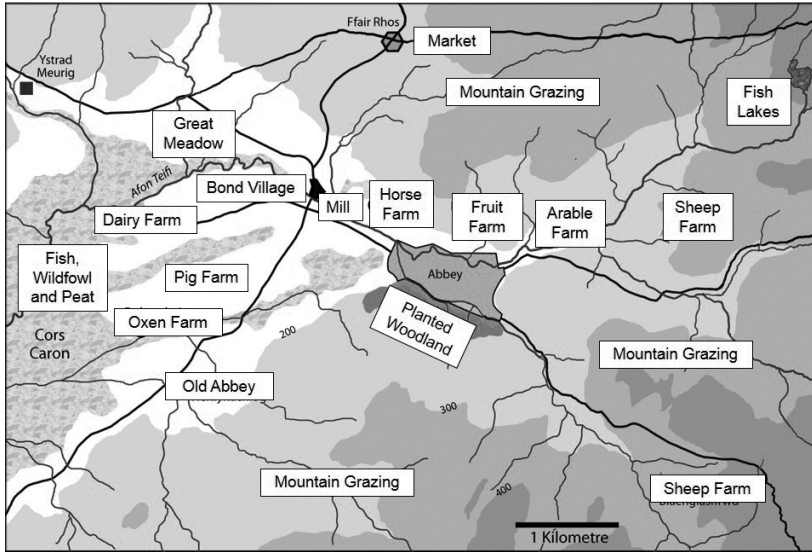
⁷⁶ Craig L. Lambert, *Shipping the Medieval Military* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 54, 58–9; H. J. Hewitt, *The Organisation of War under Edward III* (Manchester, 1996), ch. 3; Riley, 'Logistics and supply in renaissance armies', 141.

⁷⁷ Riley, 'Logistics and supply in renaissance armies', 141.

⁷⁸ See, for example, the calculations in Martin Van Crefeld, *Supplying War* (Cambridge, 1977), ch. 1; Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 11–12; Yuval Noah Harari, 'Strategy and supply in fourteenth-century western European invasion campaigns', *Journal of Military History*, 64, 2 (2000), 302–4; Lambert, *Shipping the Medieval Military*, pp. 58–9; Hewitt, *Organisation of War*, ch. 3.

⁷⁹ A. H. Pearson (ed.), *The Sarum Missal in English* (London, 1868), pp. xxvi–xxvii; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 41.

Figure 4: The Abbey Farms of Strata Florida.
Map supplied by Professor David Austin, Strata Florida Project Director,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David.



well-developed techniques – but there would be an additional daily requirement for foraging.

For the horses, fresh water was an absolute necessity, as was fodder – in many ways, the most important logistic consideration for any medieval force because of the quantities required. A horse could eat between 40 and 65 lbs (18 and 30 kg) of fresh forage depending on its level of activity, or about half as much corn in winter. If grazing was available then foraging was much reduced; one acre of good grazing might be expected to sustain fifty horses per day,⁸⁰ but the animals would have to be moved regularly to allow the grass to recover. It was this insatiable appetite for green forage that restricted the campaigning season to the growing season and that made good winter quarters essential. While an army kept moving, then provided the agriculture of an area had not been heavily despoiled, it could easily sustain itself. However, once any force

⁸⁰ Riley, 'Logistics and supply in renaissance armies', 144.

settled down in one place, it would rapidly eat up everything within reach unless the place was well provisioned from outside the local area.

At first glance, this seems a huge burden for Strata Florida – but was it? In fact, Strata Florida could well support its garrison and this must have been understood by the king's Council. At its peak, the abbey had routinely fed a population of 400 people.⁸¹ Its farms were organized on a highly sophisticated basis, which maximized the potential of different environments for the production of cereals (oats or perhaps barley); wool, hides and meat from large flocks of sheep and herds of beef cattle, especially on the tenant farms; dairy cattle; vegetables and fruit. Some areas were reserved for grazing and forage for horses, since the Cistercians were great horse-breeders. Within the proximity of the abbey were poultry: ducks and chickens for their eggs and flesh; geese for meat and the feathers that not only provided quill pens but also fletched arrows. There were also stew ponds for fish and eels, and wild game like rabbits and hares.⁸² The abbey was also staffed by educated men, who were used to dealing and trading in large quantities of goods and large amounts of money. These men needed only to be given the requirement and they would provide. In addition, there were considerable resources available from the local landowners – especially sheep and mountain cattle. Those amenable to reconciliation could be rewarded through purchase, while the disaffected could be punished by requisition. Feeding an armed company, even with its tail of auxiliaries, was therefore within the compass of the abbey at this period – although there would have been little in the way of surpluses or profits.

THE RESULTS OF OCCUPATION

There is no direct evidence of the results of the occupation. We know, as already described, the desecration that had occurred possibly in 1401 as well as in 1407,⁸³ and this must still have been in evidence in 1415. The presence of around 250 hostile English men and women for up to a year

⁸¹ Statistical information provided by Professor David Austin, Strata Florida Project.

⁸² Information provided by the Strata Florida Project. See also the report by David H. Williams, 'Abergavenny conference on the Cistercian landscape', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 154 (2005), 249–53.

⁸³ Above, pp. 646–8.

would have been unlikely to have permitted any improvements. In addition, the labour and cost to the abbey of maintaining and sustaining the garrison would greatly have diminished the available revenues for any rebuilding. There was much to do, for according to John Leland's description of Strata Florida in his *Itinerary* of 1538, following the destruction wrought by a later Henry, 'By is a large cloyster, the fraterie and infirmatori be now mere ruines. [. . .] The fundation of the body of the church was made to have bene 60. foote lenger then it is now.'⁸⁴

It is not surprising therefore that major rebuilding did not get under way until the arrival of Abbot Rhys ap Dafydd in 1436. This continued through his reign and into that of his successor, Morgan ap Rhys, from 1444 to 1486. According to the *Ode in Praise of Abbot Rhys ap Dafydd*:

he paid for the construction of the refectory. The recorder built the convent and supporting wall of Flur's house [i.e. Strata Florida]. He made glass windows, flowery ornament of a court ... a court to be made by weaving stone. Thick are the tracks leading from the tower to the cellar ...⁸⁵

Word of this restoration reached as far as the great abbey of Cîteaux: the descriptions were of fine carvings in the transepts, with oak trees between them and the east, 'a myriad of stone arches' (perhaps oak screens), the choir with new windows, 'cut ten complete windows, half the cost of this went in glass', and an oak roof covered with 'heavy lead'. There was also a great belfry, dressed with white lime.⁸⁶

Did the garrison of 1415 imitate its predecessors of 1407 by wrecking the abbey as it departed? We cannot be certain either way. It is possible, but given the king's leaning towards reconciliation with the Welsh, the lack of any additional written evidence and the want of archaeology it

⁸⁴ Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary in Wales of John Leland in or about the years 1536–1539* (London, 1906), p. 118.

⁸⁵ Dafydd Johnston (ed.), *Ode in Praise of Abbot Rhys ap Dafydd of Strata Florida/ Awdl Foliant i'r Abad Rhys ap Dafydd o Ystrad-fflur* (Aberystwyth, 2013), lines 15–18.

⁸⁶ Thomas Roberts (ed.), revd Ifor Williams, *The Poetical Works of Dafydd Nanmor* (Cardiff and London, 1923), pp. 73–5 ('I abad Ystrad Fflur'); translation from 'Account of Dafydd Nanmor', in unpublished memorandum prepared by Professor Anne Curry for Professor David Austin, Strata Florida Project, pp. 70–2.

seems unlikely. It is even possible that, after almost a year of residence, the troops felt kindly disposed towards the place. For the community, however, the departure must have been a moment of enormous relief and release from uncertainty about their future.