
CLARE

The important part played by this famous house in the affairs of South Wales calls for a précis of its history in so far as it is concerned with Wales. A kinsman of the Conqueror, Richard (died 1090?), was granted lands in Kent (Tonbridge) and the lordship of Clare in Suffolk. Of this Richard's five sons, the best known is GILBERT I (died 1115?), who was placed by Henry I in Ceredigion (see under [Cadwgan, died 1111](#)) and Dyfed by way of punishing [Owain ap Cadwgan](#), and who built the first castles at Cardigan and 'Llanbadarn' (i.e. Aberystwyth). Another of Richard's sons was WALTER (died 1138), often confused with a nephew of the same name, who (before 1119) was granted lands in Gwent Iscoed, with the castle of Chepstow; he was the founder of Tintern abbey, and on his death without issue these lands passed to his nephew (?) Gilbert, on whom [see under B below](#). The abovementioned Gilbert I had two sons, from whom descended two dynasties of Clares - A, the eastern, and B, the western.

A (the eastern dynasty): RICHARD I, perhaps the first of his line to bear 'de Clare' as a surname; he was killed in 1136 in Grwyney forest while journeying from Abergavenny to Cardigan. His eldest son GILBERT II, earl of Hertford, died without a son in 1152, and his lands passed to his brother ROGER (died 1173). Roger strove with little success to withstand the '[Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd](#)' (1132 - 1197) in Ceredigion. His marriage is of great importance. His daughter-in-law was Amicia, daughter and co-heiress of [William earl of Gloucester and lord of Glamorgan](#), and thus the house of Clare became involved in the history of south-east Wales. Richard's son, GILBERT III (died 1230), remembered as one of the barons of Magna Carta, was therefore earl of Gloucester and of Hertford, and lord of Tonbridge, Clare, Glamorgan, and Caerleon on Usk; his wife Isabel was daughter of [William Marshal](#) and thus a member of branch B (below) of the Clares. GILBERT III fought battles in Wales, and had to struggle with [Morgan Gam](#); he died 25 October 1230. His heir was RICHARD III (1222 - 1262), born 4 August 1222. His wide lands in England and Ireland (here, his mother had possessions), and his semi-independence as a great lord in the March, caused him to be spoken of as 'the foremost baron in England' at his coming-of-age in 1243. But he was prodigal and vacillating, veering alternately between the king and the Montfort party. In Wales, he took a step forward in the process of tightening the hold of the 'chief lord' of Glamorgan upon the Welsh mesne lords in the uplands and on the fringes of Glamorgan, who had hitherto enjoyed a sort of semi-independence because of the tolerance, voluntary or otherwise, of his predecessors; about 1246 he took into his own hands the mesne lordship of Miskin (Meisgyn) - see under [Morgan ap Caradog ap Iestyn](#) - and built a castle at Llantrisant to control the commote.

Even more important was his son GILBERT IV (1243 - 1295), 'the Red Earl' born 2 September 1243; his first wife was Alice de Valence, of the family which had succeeded the Marshal's in the earldom of Pembroke. The Red Earl's father and grandfather, absorbed in the baronial struggle with the Crown, had been somewhat negligent of a nearer menace to their fortunes in Wales - the rise of the principality of Gwynedd; they had regarded the two Llywelyn's (i.e. [Llywelyn the Great](#) and [Llywelyn the Last](#)) merely as convenient allies against the Crown. Gilbert IV in his turn sided with Montfort, but after Lewes (1264) they quarrelled, and Montfort encouraged [Llywelyn II](#) to ravage Gilbert's lands in Wales; Gilbert therefore fought for the king at Evesham (1265). He then however again changed sides, and indeed was the chief author of the compromise of 1267. In the same year was signed the treaty of Montgomery, which acknowledged [Llywelyn](#) as Prince of Wales and gave him (among other gains) the lordship of Brecknock. [Llywelyn](#)'s lands in Brecknock now marched with the Clare lands, and a further question arose - if [Llywelyn](#) was now (by the treaty) overlord of all the Welsh lords in Wales, was he overlord of the semi-independent Welsh lords of north Glamorgan? Prince and earl spent 1268-9 endeavouring to reach a settlement (the king clearly was unable and probably unwilling to settle the matter); in the meantime, it is clear from the documents that [Llywelyn](#) was already treating the Welshmen of Higher Miskin (above what is today Pontypridd) and Higher Senghennydd (above Gelli-gaer) as willing vassals. Gilbert's response to this was twofold. On the one hand, he imprisoned and exiled (1267) Gruffydd ap Rhys (great-grandson of [Ifor Bach](#)), the Welsh mesne lord of Senghennydd; and it is probable that it was at this time that he took into his own hands also the Welsh mesne lordship of Glynrhondda. In the second place, he began building the great castle at Caerphilly (1268). [Llywelyn](#) rushed down (October 1270) and razed the castle; Gilbert began rebuilding it in June 1271. It was agreed (November) that a royal garrison should occupy the castle pending negotiations, but Gilbert's men got inside it by stratagem - however, with the king's death this local quarrel was merged into the greater controversy between [Llywelyn](#) and the new king, Edward I.

Gilbert does not figure largely in the Welsh war of 1277, but more is heard of him in that of 1282-3. He was commander of the royal armies in west Wales, and led them into Carmarthenshire, but on 6 June 1282 was so signally defeated near Llandilo that he had to retreat, and to lose his command. Yet we find him in January 1283 with the royal force which took Dolwyddelan castle, Caernarfonshire. When the king made a royal progress through Wales (1284), we note the ceremonious formalities which stressed the privileged position of a 'lord marcher' - Edward entered Glamorgan only after Gilbert's formal consent, and Gilbert accompanied his in overlord from frontier to frontier. When [Rhys ap Maredudd](#) of Dryslwyn revolted in 1287, Gilbert was given large powers to put down the revolt, and indeed acted energetically - yet there were whispers that [Rhys](#) was to escape, with his connivance, to the Clare lands in Ireland.

Past events did not augur well for future good relations between the king and his over-powerful vassal. Ever since 1283,

Edward had been scheming to bind Gilbert more effectively to the royal cause: the earl was to divorce his wife and to marry the king's daughter Joan, so that his broad lands should descend to heirs more closely attached to the Crown. The pope took some time to facilitate this arrangement, and the marriage had to wait till 2 May 1290 - it was then further provided that should the marriage prove childless, the lands were to go to Joan's children by a second marriage. In the meantime, trouble had broken out between Gilbert and his neighbour Humphrey Bohun VII (c. 1250-98), lord of Brecknock (on the Bohuns, see *D.N.B.* and William Rees, 'The Mediaeval Lordship of Brecon' in *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1915-16), because Gilbert had built a castle on their common boundary - on Brecknock land, so Bohun maintained; the castle was Morlais near Merthyr Tydfil (confused by some with Morgraig castle, between Caerphilly and Cardiff). The king seized the opportunity of challenging the 'marcher right' to wage private war, and summoned the two lords to appear, first before a court of their peers in the March, and then (in view of the marchers' disinclination to prejudice the 'rights' of their order) before their overlord the king's own court. Both lords were condemned to imprisonment and to the forfeiture of their lands during their lives. True, they were released almost at once, and their lands were restored. But the Red Earl's prestige was gone. He died 7 December 1295.

As had been provided, the Clare lands were enjoyed by the princess Joan for the rest of her life; she died in March 1307. Her marriage with the Red Earl had brought her three daughters and a son, GILBERT V (1291 - 1314), born c. 10 May 1291. The little that we know of his dealings with his Welsh tenants reflects favourably upon him: he seems to have depended much, in Glamorgan, on [Llywelyn Bren](#) (Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, died 1317) of the old Welsh ruling family of Senghennydd. But he fell on Bannockburn field, 24 June 1314. An eventual partition of his lands (1317) gave Tonbridge, Gloucester, Newport, and Wentloog to his sister MARGARET, Clare and Usk to another, ELIZABETH (the foundress of Clare College, Cambridge), and the lordship of Glamorgan to the third, ELEANOR. She married HUGH DESPENSER, whose family retained the lordship till 1411; it passed afterwards to the NEVILLE family, earls of Warwick; on the death of the 'Kingmaker' (1471) it came into the hands of the house of York, was taken over by [Henry VII](#) after Bosworth, granted by him to his uncle [Jasper Tudor](#), and resumed by the king on Jasper's death in 1495. In 1536, it became the nucleus of the new shire of Glamorgan.

B (the western dynasty): the second son of the Gilbert I mentioned in the first paragraph of this article was GILBERT (died 1148). He inherited from his father the earldom of Pembroke and Kilgerran (the 'Cardiganshire' lands had been lost to the Welsh - see under [Cadwaladr, died 1172](#)), and further succeeded to the lordship of Chepstow on the death of his uncle (?) Walter, mentioned earlier. His son RICHARD (died 1176), 'Strongbow,' acquired great renown by his conquests in Ireland - he has left his name on the map of Ireland, in a river, a town, and a county. He had no sons, but his daughter ISABEL married [William Marshal](#), and the name 'Clare' disappeared from west Wales. The Clare lands there passed successively to the houses of [Marshal](#), Valence, [Braose](#), and Bigod.

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

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