Cynghellor and Chancellor

The reissue of Jones Pierce’s paper ‘The Age of the Princes’ in Medieval Welsh Society,¹ and a passing reference in Professor Bichly’s O’Donnell Lecture,² make it desirable to comment in English on the supposed references in the Welsh lawbooks to the office of chancellor. For though it is true that the Welsh princes of the thirteenth century had an officer who would in Latin be called cancellarius;¹ it is submitted that the name cynghellor (to use the modern orthography of the word which so frequently occurs in the lawbooks) never refers to such an officer. To that extent, Bichly’s reference to the Welsh lawbooks’ description of ‘a most elaborate court organization with a bevy of royal officials, including a chancellor’ is misleading.

Our study must begin with an examination of the Welsh word cynghellor. The various spellings which are found in the medieval manuscripts in Welsh must be normalized as cynghellor; only in the Black Book of Chirk (Peniath 29, MS. A of Ancient Laws) have I found an as in the first syllable;³ and the evidence of that notoriously heteroglyphic manuscript is no evidence, since it freely uses a for y.⁴ Geiradur Pryfysgol Cymru cites cynghellor from Lewis Glyn Cothi, but the citation is from the 1837–9 edition and is not supported by the early manuscripts, which all have the long y; an example from Tudur Aled likewise appears in print as ganghellor without early manuscript authority. The earliest authentic citations of -a- come from John Davies’s Dictionarium Duplex (1622), which refers the reader from Cynghellor to Ganghellor, which it renders Cancellarius; for Cancellarius the first meaning given is yglefynwyd, ygelwyt, followed by Cangheller, noted as a term of Welsh law. The earliest evidence, then, indicates that the lawbooks’ cynghellor is not derived from the Latin cancellarius, and it must surely be significant that it is so rarely represented by cancellarius in Latin texts. In the Book of Llandaff, where the Welsh version of Brant Tielo has ‘heb mair, heb cynghellor’, the Latin version has ‘sine consule, sine proconsule’,⁵ a rendering so surprising as to be strong evidence against a derivation from cancellarius. In the Latin texts of medieval Welsh law there seems to be only one example of cancellarius as the translation for cynghellor; elsewhere the word is left in its Welsh form. In the later Latin redactions, all the forms used represent cancellarius, but the oldest Latin redaction, Lat. A (from MS. Peniath 28, attributed to the end of the twelfth century), has forms which represent cymellor.⁶ Wade-Evans derived this from a Latin original

³ See Llyfrgell Gwynedd, ed. J. G. Edwards (Cardiff, 1940), for references to Master David, cancellarius of Dafydd ap Ilywelyn ab Iorwerth.
⁴ Bichly, Kingship, p. 28.
⁶ e.g. haeg (≡ CYNGHELLOR) 1.12, hae (≡ HWYL) 1.20, hamryd (≡ CYMELLOR) 24.18.
⁹ cymellor, ibid. 111.1, 114.30, 120.15, 135.28, 29, 146.51, 31; cymellor, ibid. 120.20, 23, 24, 26, 28, 32, 120.3, 128.3, 30, 147.8; cymellor, ibid. 120.34.
ferring to a transformed chancellorship, 'the most important and dignified office at court':

'the traditional list of twenty-four court officials, another officer, the chancellor, appears: he claims the first place in the hall, and sits next to the king at table.' This sentence is misleading: the cynghellor does not feature in the list of twenty-four court officials in any of the main lawbooks, and though he certainly appears at court, he can hardly be said to claim the first place in the hall. The lawbooks indeed allot him a defined place at table—next to the king according to Llyfr Iorwerth and Llyfr Cyfnewth, but one place according to Llyfr Blegywyrd—a but this does not imply any particular status, since Llyfr Blegywyrd gives the seat at the king's right hand to anyone the king chooses. The Llyfr Cyfnewth version, as found in some manuscripts, makes it quite clear that the cynghellor in question is the royal bailiff, by adding the condition 'if the king is holding court in his bailiwick [gwyllheryn o'r wyf eius].' Some support for the transformation of the cynghellor seems at first sight to be given by the passage quoted by Jones Pierce from a fourteenth-century manuscript, which 'adds that it is the chancellor's duty 'to stand and be in the place of the king, in his presence and in his absence, in every thing; and when he is invested with office, he receives from the king a gold ring, a harp and a cheetboard.' The passage is in fact found in MS. Peniarth 30, of the mid thirteenth century, and in late thirteenth-century manuscripts of Llyfr Cyfnewth, that it refers to the commune cynghellor seems to follow from its close association in Llyfr Cyfnewth with the provision for the cynghellor's seat in hall, and from the sentence which follows it in Peniarth 30. 'Four men have a claim which comes before them, maer and cynghellor and rhigill and inve [maer y byr ysgyryd]—since all four are local officials of the king under the traditional order.'

Two further small points need to be made. First must come a clarification of Jones Pierce's observation, 'A legal commentator can in fact refer quite casually to the fees charged by the chancery 'for letters patent dealing with real property and other important transactions'—since these words might be taken to imply that the commentator used a Welsh word for 'chancery,' whereas the sentence concerned should be translated 'He [the priest of the household] is entitled to four pence for every patent seal which the king gives for land or for other important business'. Secondly, Jones Pierce emphasizes that 'by the thirteenth century these traditional functionaries [maer and cynghellor] had certainly been replaced by the rhaglaw and the rhigill.' While this is well established by the record evidence, there is a morsel of such evidence which suggests that a combined office of maer cynghellor survived notionally into the fourteenth century: the Memoranda Rolls record that in 1326–7 L.I. was 'excused to the free tenants of the commune of Ardludy in Merioneth 'pro quodam officio quod vocatur Meyryd Kynkeleithor' as they allege that they had been deprived of it by the royal bailiffs,' that the two offices might be combined in

2 C. L.T.W.L. 288 n. 24 has a gloss of 'ed oft, preposition et copulatrix' to 'maer et chynghellyn'...
3 B. L. Williams and J. E. Powell, Llyfr Blegywyrd (Cardiff, 1949), p. 171.
4 The occurrence of 'cynghellyn' in a poem by Llywarch ap Llywelyn Fwydod y Moch (Llansgaffi Henrhydwaed), Ed. J. Morris-Jones and T. H. Parry-Williams (Cardiff, 1933), p. 254-3; Hen Geddfy Cefnaddau, ed. H. Lewis (Cardiff, 1931), IX, 30 raises another problem, to which J. Lloyd-Jones (Geografoedd Gymru Gymrag, 3, 1944) offers the tentative solution that the word here is a plural form of cymelgal. 5 M.W.S. 32. 6 Ibid. 7 Llyfr Colan, ed. D. Jenkins (Cardiff, 1963), §§159-64, 69-72. 8 Llyfr Colan §§649-52. 9 Ibid. 903. 10 W.M.L. 28-5, 7, Llyfr Blegywyrd 49-4. Llyfr Colan §618; Llyfr Iorwerth, ed. A. R. Williams (Cardiff, 1950), §916. It is not quite obvious in the Iorwerth and Colan texts whether it is the maer and cynghellor or the penclenwi who must come from the ranks of the local sechloch: the grammar of the sentence suggests the latter, and though it hardly seems to need saying that the chief of a wider kindred must be the head of his own narrower kindred, there is force in the argument of Llyfr Colan 157 that offices of state would be sought by younger men, who had not become entitled (by the death of their fathers) to patriarchal rights in land. On becoming so entitled, they might retire to exercise those rights, as the eldest sons of the landed gentry of today resign their commissions in the forces; but they might also prefer to remain in office as having greater economic security than that provided by a possibly very small share in land of perhaps inferior fertility—as younger sons may be obliged to do today. 11 M.W.S. 32. 12 Llyfr Iorwerth §524. 13 Llyfr Blegywyrd 52-5. 14 W.M.L. 29-9-7. 15 W.M.L. 29-9-7. 16 W.M.S. 32: the source is A.D. v. 1, derived from MS. D, which is dated c. 1346. 17 Damomman Colan, ed. D. Jenkins (Aberystwyth, 1975), §176. 18 W.M.L. 29-9-7. 19 Damomman Colan §173. 20 M.W.S. 33, citing Llyfr Iorwerth §79. 21 M.W.S. 32, cf. ibid. 32. 22 N. M. Fryde (ed.), List of Welsh Entries in the Memoranda Rolls (Cardiff, 1974), p. 69; Cl. W. Rees (ed.), Calendar of Ancient Petitions relating to Wales (Cardiff, 1975), p. 41.
the way thus suggested is implied by the statement in Llyfr Isorweth that the amob of a maer

ibly II. 1. The editor of Llyfr Isorweth suggests that the double title is 'a

It is suggested by the editor of Llyfr Isorweth that the double title is 'a
probable error for kegaliau', but if this were so we should expect to find the error cor-
rected in one or other of the manuscripts. The fact that the amob of a maer's daughter is
according to this text only ½l., whereas in other texts it is equal to that of the cychellor's
daughter, at 1l., supports the view that by the thirteenth century the two offices could
be conveniently combined. With increasing commutation of dues in kind, this seems
intrinsicly probable: in a similar way, the offices which replaced those of maer and cych-
leggorn the word cychellor is not derived from Latin cancellarius; (b) the office of the cychellor never
developed into that of a cancellarius; there were cancellarii and a chancery in thirteenth-
century Wales but we do not know their Welsh names.

Aberystwyth

Dafydd Jenkins

1 Llyfr Isorweth § 51/12.    2 Ibid. p. 126.

1 Such a correction was made in Llyfr Colan § 12—
but this may have been under the influence of Llyfr
Colan’s second (Latin) source; ibid. § 10 gives the

the traditional value of 1l for the amob of the maer’s
daughter.

R. A. Griffiths, The Principality of Wales in the
later Middle Ages, 1 (Cardiff, 1972), p. 65.

The Size of Farms in Late Eighteenth and Early
Nineteenth Century Cardiganshire

Despite the tendency throughout Britain during the second half of the eighteenth cen-
tury for the consolidation of farms into larger units, a wanderer in the countryside of west
Wales in the closing years of the century would have been particularly impressed by the
abundance of small farms often comprising several tiny fields of less than an acre in extent. 
Charles Hassall, surveying Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire for the Board of Agriculture
in 1794, reported that, although farms in the former county averaged 200 acres, the average
size of Carmarthenshire holdings did not exceed 50-60 acres. In the same year, the Board’s
surveyors of Cardiganshire emphasized the smallness of the farms in that county, units in
excess of 300 acres being unusual. The conclusion of these observers was reiterated twenty
years later by Walter Davies who pointed out that the general run of farms in south Wales
were between 30 and 100 acres in size. While there were undoubtedly a great number of very
small farms in Wales at this time, it is unlikely that many of these holdings were managed as
full-time units, providing the sole source of income for the farmer and his family. On the
Hengwrt estate in Merioneth, over 50 per cent of farms in the seventeen-nineties were
listed as being below 10 acres, while at the close of the nineteenth century it was reported
that in Cardiganshire, where farm size averaged 45 acres, over 20 per cent of units occupied
less than 5 acres. Although Arthur Young had argued that on the best soils 10 acres of

Carrots would maintain 8 horses, 60 sheep, and 12 oxen for the winter, such soils were rarely
encountered by the Cardiganshire farmer, who, even if he had the desire or the capital to
adopt intensive farming methods, was often inhibited from doing so by the ill-drained,
acidic, and often impoverished soils of his farm. In 1843 it was estimated in The Welshman
that the gross annual output of a relatively large farm of 500 per annum rental would
amount to approximately £ 180. Deduction of costs from this figure left a surplus available
to the farmer for the support of his family and the general maintenance of his farm of rather
less than £1 per week. Hence, little surplus income would be available for the generation
of capital, for adopting new farming methods, or perhaps for taking the tenancy of a larger farm.

1 See J. D. Chambers and G. E. Mings, The
2 Charles Hassall, A General View of the Agriculture
of Pembrokeshire (London, 1794), p. 10; Charles
Hassall, A General View of the Agriculture of Carn-
arthenshire (London, 1794), p. 11. In this week Hassall
comments upon the very small fields on many farms,
for which further evidence is provided by contempor-
ary estate surveys.
3 T. Lloyd and D. Turnor, A General View of the
4 W. Davies, A General View of the Agriculture of
South Wales (London, 1815), p. 162.
5 C. Thomas, 'Estate Surveys as Sources in His-
torical Geography', N.I.W. Journal, xiv (1966), 453;
Report of Royal Commission on Land in Wales and
Monmouthshire, 1867, p. 322.
6 The Welshman, 22 Dec. 1843. For a detailed
discussion of the state of Welsh agriculture at this
time, see my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cattle Produc-
tion and the Welsh Cattle Trade in the 19th Century,
University of Wales, 1974, and my volume The Welsh
Cattle Breeders (Cardiff, 1976).
7 Nevertheless, as Walter Davies observed, many
farmers, perhaps for reasons of prestige, undertook
tenancies of larger farms which were quite beyond
their financial resources (W. Davies, A General View