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## The execution of William de Braose in 1230 and how it illuminates the thirteenth century Welsh political dynamic

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**Dissertation for:**

**A329 : The Making of Welsh History**

**The execution of William de Braose in 1230 and how it  
illuminates the thirteenth century Welsh political dynamic.**

**By: Caroline Willoughby**

**May 2019**

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## Introduction

On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1230, William de Braose, an English Marcher lord, was hanged at Crogen in front of eight hundred Welsh onlookers. The execution, described by some as a purely private matter whilst acknowledged by others as politically significant<sup>1</sup>, can provide insights into the emergence of a growing bureaucracy within the Welsh polity. This dissertation seeks to explore why William was executed and what his execution can tell us about the developing Welsh political structure in the early thirteenth century.

The execution was the direct result of William's affair with Gwynedd's Queen Joan. Llewellyn's marriage to Joan, bringing him closer to the English Crown, had been fundamental to his success in achieving hegemony over other Welsh princes<sup>2</sup>. However, Llewellyn's increasing assimilation of Anglo-French influences at the expense of native customs caused consternation and he had to walk a difficult political tightrope between the English, the other Welsh leaders and his own leading men<sup>3</sup>. There was considerable bad blood between the Welsh and the English Marcher de Braose family<sup>4</sup>. Notwithstanding this, Llewellyn, as part of a treaty to release William from captivity in 1229, negotiated the marriage of his son Dafydd to William's daughter Isabella, bringing strategic lands into Llewellyn's control. It was against this backdrop of political manoeuvring and underlying resentment that the affair and execution took place and would test to the full Llewellyn's political skill<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Crump, J.J (2000). "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llewellyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave", in *Historical Research*, June 2000 Vol 73 pp197-212. Available at <https://doi-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1111/1468-2281.00103>. Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> February 2019. P201.

<sup>2</sup> Pryce, H. "Negotiating Anglo-Welsh Relations : Llewellyn the Great and Henry III". In *England and Europe in the Reign of Henry III (1216-1272)*. Eds. Rowlands, I.W. and Weiler, B.K.U. (London 2002). P15

<sup>3</sup> Pryce, H. "Welsh Rulers and European Change c 100-1282". In *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages : Essays in memory of Rees Davies*. Eds. Pryce, H., Watts, J. and Lovett Watts, J. (Oxford 2007). P50

<sup>4</sup> Anon., "Annales de Margan". In *Annales Monastici Vol II*. Ed Henry Richards Luard (Totonto 1864) p38. Available at <https://archive.org/details/annaesmonastici01luar>. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019

<sup>5</sup> Crump, J.J. "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llywelyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave".

Primary source material is limited and provided by two sets of sources; monastic annals and letters written by Llewellyn shortly after the execution<sup>6</sup>. Medieval history still relies on key chronicle texts<sup>7</sup> and most historiography relies on evidence from these letters and Welsh annals; *Brut y Tywysogion*, the *Annales of the Abbey of St Werburg* and *Caradoc of Llancarvan*<sup>8</sup>. Many of the historians are Welsh and, as Huw Pryce admits, approach the historiography from a Welsh perspective or, as Jenkins expresses it, have “bouts of partiality”<sup>9</sup>. This partiality is not restricted to Welsh historians; mention of the execution rarely features in English historiography. David Carpenter’s *The Struggle for Mastery* does cover the events but, as David Crouch states in his review of Carpenter’s book, “Even a writer of Carpenter’s skill cannot construct a wholly satisfactory British narrative” reflecting the tendency of historians to focus on English history<sup>10</sup>. It is easy to see, therefore, how the English annals have been overlooked in considering the affair and execution; as Welsh historians concentrate on Welsh sources and English historians adopt an Anglo-centric approach. Louise Wilkinson did address English chronicles suggesting they were “broadly similar” to the Welsh; a position this dissertation will challenge as it seeks to take a fresh look

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<sup>6</sup> “Letter from Llewellyn to Eva de Braose dated shortly after 2 May 1230”. Number 261 in *The Acts of Welsh Rulers : 1220-1283* Pryce, H (ed). (Cardiff 2010) pp428-429 and “Letter from Llewellyn to William Marshall, earl of Pembroke dated shortly after 2 May 1230”. Number 262 in *The Acts of the Welsh Rulers : 1220-1283*. Pryce, H (ed) (Cardiff 2010) pp429-431. For translations of the English monastic annals from Latin see Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> Johns, S.M . “Review of Wales and the Welsh in the Middle Ages : Essays presented to J Beverley Smith” In *Historical Review* Vol 128 Issue 535 (December 2013) p 1539-1541 Available at <https://doi-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1093/her/cef304>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019

<sup>8</sup> Anon. *Brut y Tywysogion : The Chronicles of the Princes of Wales*. Edited and translated by John Williams ab Ithel. (Cambridge 2013). Available at <https://doi-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1017/CB09781139163484>. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019. Caradoc of Llancarvan. *The history of Wales comprehending the lives and succession of the princes of Wales, from Cadwalader, the last King to Llewellyn the last prince of British blood with a short account of the affairs of Wales under the kings of England*. (London 1697). Early English Books Online. Available at :

[http://eebo.chadwyck.com/libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search/fulltext?ACTION=ByID&ID=D00000122781670000&source=varspell.ctg&WANN\\_n&FILE=/session/1525458998.12020](http://eebo.chadwyck.com/libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search/fulltext?ACTION=ByID&ID=D00000122781670000&source=varspell.ctg&WANN_n&FILE=/session/1525458998.12020). Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019. Although the St Werburg Chronicles were from Chester they were written by a Welshman and related significantly to Welsh affairs – see Christie, R. C (1887). Introduction to *Annales Cestrienses Chronicle of the Abbey of St Werburg at Chester*. British History Online. Available at: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/lancs-ches-record-soc/vol14/v-xxx1>. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> April 2019

<sup>9</sup> Pryce, H. “Negotiating Anglo-Welsh Relations: Llewellyn the Great and Henry III” , P15 and Jenkins, G.H, *A Concise History of Wales*. (Cambridge 2007). Pxi

<sup>10</sup> Crouch, D. “Review : The Struggle for Mastery, Britain 1066-1284 by David Carpenter (The Penguin History of Britain)”. In *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*. P569-571. (2004). Available at : <https://doi-org-libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1017/S0022046904390809>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

at the affair and execution incorporating English and Welsh material to provide a more nuanced approach to the reasons William was executed and explore how and if the different perspectives can be reconciled<sup>11</sup>.

The twenty-first century, in the wake of Welsh devolution in 1999, has seen an upturn in a Welsh national identity and with it interest in Welsh heroes such as Llewellyn the Great. Interest in the events of 1230 was ignited by J J Crump's article in 2000 on the repercussions of the execution and continued by Pryce's collection of primary sources in 2005<sup>12</sup>. These works linked to investigations undertaken by Crump's colleague at the University of Washington, Robin Stacey, on the Welsh law-books, in particular the Iorwerth version, thought to have been redacted in Gwynedd in 1230<sup>13</sup>.

There is no consensus amongst historians on why William was executed<sup>14</sup>. The proposition Llewellyn acted out of rage and personal vengeance receives support; although Crump disagrees, suggesting Llewellyn would not have made a decision that jeopardised his carefully-crafted, political strategy<sup>15</sup>. This dissertation will advocate it is unlikely Llewellyn acted out of rage, indeed may have known about the affair before Easter 1230, and that he

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<sup>11</sup> Wilkinson, L.J. "Joan, Wife of Llewellyn the Great" in *Thirteenth Century England* (2003) eds Prestwich, M., Britnell, R. And Frame, R. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81hqp.10>. Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019. Wilkinson describes all the accounts as "broadly similar" (p89) and goes on to describe the "neutral tone" employed by both Welsh and English chroniclers (p90) although she does later describe the Margan chronicle as "highly partisan" (p91).

<sup>12</sup>Crump, J.J. "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llywelyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave". Pryce, H. (2005). *Acts of the Welsh Rulers: 1220-1283*. (Cardiff 2010)

<sup>13</sup> Stacey, R.C "King, Queen and Edling in the Laws of Court" in *The Welsh King and his Court* (2000) eds Charles-Edwards, T.M., Owen, M.E. and Russell, P. Available at <https://www.questia.com/read/118983375/the-welsh-king-and-his-court>. Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Wilkinson and Stacey advocate the execution was due to Llewellyn's extreme anger. See Wilkinson, L.J. "Joan, Wife of Llewellyn the Great" in *Thirteenth Century England* " p89 and Stacey, R.C. "Divorce Medieval Style" in *Speculum* (2002) Vol77 no4 pp1107-1127. Available at <https://www-jstor-org-libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/3301214>. Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> January 2019 p1127. In Pryce, H. "Negotiating Anglo-Welsh Relations: Llewellyn the Great and Henry III" p13 he refers to the deep hostility between the Welsh and Marchers alongside the opportunity to break up the de Braose patrimony; a point agreed by Carpenter see Carpenter, D. "The Struggle for Mastery, Britain 1066-1284". (London, 2003). P325.

<sup>15</sup> Both Wilkinson and Hurlock support the anger motive – see Wilkinson, L.J. "Joan, Wife of Llewellyn the Great", p89-90 and Hurlock, K. "Counselling the Prince : Advice and Counsel in Thirteenth Century Welsh Society" in *History* (2009) Vol94 pp20-35. Available at <https://online.library-wiley-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1467-229x.2009.0040.x>. Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2019. p32. For Crump's counter argument refer to Crump, J.J "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llewellyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave" p 197

was involved in some way in the execution decision. David Walker's assertion that the death penalty was prescribed by Welsh law will be critiqued, as will the question of whether this was considered an act of adultery or treason, a premise supported by Pryce<sup>16</sup>. However, evaluating Welsh and English law will establish there was no judicial justification for the execution.

Having established what happened, as far as is possible, the lens of the execution will then be used to explore the developing political state structure in Wales in 1230. The execution could have had serious ramifications for other Welsh territories, yet no other Welsh leaders were consulted<sup>17</sup>. It could, therefore, be argued it represents the diminishing influence of those leaders. Crump claims convincingly, however, that the execution appeased the princes, vengeful at the brutality of de Braose's grandfather, and it will be asserted that maintaining the loyalty of those princes was more important to Llewellyn in 1230 than obsequiousness to the English Crown<sup>18</sup>. Executing William could be considered a shrewd political manoeuvre by tying those princes closer to Llewellyn and ensuring their loyalty. It highlights, though, that, by 1230, the shift from a confederation of Welsh princes to power residing at the Gwynedd court was almost complete.

. The importance of the Gwynedd counsel and how they acted in a judicial as well as executive function are issues epitomised by the execution. Llewellyn claimed the decision to execute William had been taken by the counsel outside his control<sup>19</sup>. Historians generally agree Llewellyn was dissembling<sup>20</sup>, although Crump maintains the council's decision

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<sup>16</sup>Walker, D. *Medieval Wales* (Cambridge, 2012). P96. Pryce, H. "Acts of the Welsh Rulers: 1220-1283" p430

<sup>17</sup> Hurlock, K. "Counselling the Prince : Advice and Counsel in Thirteenth Century Welsh Society" P33

<sup>18</sup> Crump, J.J. "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llewellyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave" P201

<sup>19</sup> See" Letter from Llewellyn to Eva de Braose dated shortly after 2 May 1230" and "Letter from Llewellyn to William Marshall, earl of Pembroke dated shortly after 2 May 1230

<sup>20</sup> For example see Hurlock. K. "Counselling the Prince: Advice and Counsel in Thirteenth Century Welsh Society" p31 and Turvey, R.K. *The Welsh Princes : The Native Rulers of Wales 1063-1283* (London 2002). P110

threatened the hegemony Llewellyn had created, suggesting he would not have acquiesced<sup>21</sup>. As stated, despite the emergence of a high court system involving the leading men, there is no evidence William's actions merited the death sentence under Welsh law and Turvey's suggestion that power ultimately rested with Llewellyn, carries weight<sup>22</sup>. Whilst it is not possible to know exactly what happened, it will be proposed that the counsel would not have made a decision without implied approval from their Prince.

The extent of Joan's influence within the Welsh state is disputed. Ellis claims she held no political power but Walker argues Joan was Llewellyn's close confidante who used her diplomatic skills to exert influence at the English court on his behalf<sup>23</sup>. The affair only appears to have had a short term effect on her marriage but how it influenced her standing with the rest of the Welsh political nation is not so clear cut. Analysis of the Iorwerth version of Cyfraith Hywel has led Stacey to conclude the marriage was considered intrinsically linked to Gwynedd's fortunes<sup>24</sup> whilst Pryce focuses on the recasting of the Queen's role, confining it, and her, to the domestic sphere<sup>25</sup>. The fact that, at the time, so little was written about Joan either by the Welsh or English could indicate the political sensitivity of Joan's position, as Llewellyn's Queen and Henry III's sister. It will be suggested her comparatively lenient treatment illuminates her political importance to Gwynedd's ascendancy and stability.

The affair and execution chapter will closely analyse the monastic annals and other primary sources considering them in conjunction with existing scholarship: from this a theory of the reasons for the execution will be advanced. Analysing and establishing what happened with

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<sup>21</sup> Crump, J.J. "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llewellyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave" P197

<sup>22</sup> For details of the high court see Stacey, R.C. *The Road to Judgement : From Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales*. (Philadelphia 1994) p140. For a discussion on the death sentence see Pryce, H. *The Acts of the Welsh Rulers: 1220-1283* p430 and for Llewellyn having the final say see Turvey, R.K. *The Welsh Princes : The Native Rulers of Wales 1063-1283* p110

<sup>23</sup> Ellis, T.P. "Welsh Tribal Law and Custom In The Middle Ages" (1926) P30. Online. Available at: <https://heinonline-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/HOL/P?h-hein.beal/weltricua0001&i=460>. Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2019. Walker, D. *Medieval Wales* P93

<sup>24</sup> Stacey, R. C. "Divorce Medieval Style" in *Speculum* (2002). Vol 77 No 4 pp 1107-1127 Available <https://www-jstor-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/3301214>. Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> January 2019 p1127

<sup>25</sup> Pryce, H. "Welsh Rulers and European Change c1100-1282" p47



the affair and execution can provide a unique snapshot of the Welsh political situation in 1230, the subject of the Welsh polity chapter. 1230 was a pivotal year when Llewellyn was considered at the height of his influence and power and yet the fragility of that power, which could have been lost by executing an influential Marcher lord, was dependent upon the support of those around him<sup>26</sup>. The execution brings the interplay between those different factions into sharp focus. By ensuring all available primary sources are considered in this dissertation, a deeper insight can be gained into the events of the affair and execution allowing a better informed perspective of the state of early thirteenth century politics to emerge.

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<sup>26</sup> Crump, J.J "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llewellyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave" P197

## Affair and Execution

To gain a better insight into why William was executed, it is possible to differentiate between the English and Welsh chronicles' characterisation of Llewellyn and William. Monastic annals were written to create an institutional memory, are usually anonymous, written in Latin and intended for the internal consumption of monasteries<sup>27</sup>. Gervase of Canterbury (1140-1210) described them as "direct and straightforward and eschewed stylistic ornamentation"<sup>28</sup>; this lack of ornamentation does not mean, however, that they do not contain bias. That bias, though, can be useful in providing an insight into contemporary thought. Reading the Welsh chronicles provides an image of an honourable Prince Llewellyn dealing with the adulterous William<sup>29</sup>. A different perspective is obtained from the English annals where the depiction is of the noble William being executed by the deceitful, treacherous Llewellyn<sup>30</sup>. The Welsh chronicles are more measured in their approach; J.Beverley Smith describes Brut y Twysiogon as "a factual record blended with a sympathetic account of the endeavours and tribulations of the princes"<sup>31</sup>. Louise Wilkinson describes the "neutral tone" of the chronicles as curious but also ascribes that neutrality of tone to both Welsh and English chroniclers; whereas it is asserted that the English chroniclers were quite forthright in their descriptions and condemnation of Llewellyn. For example, the Thomas Wykes chronicle describes Llewellyn killing William, "a noble man of great virtue and a vigorous young baron who had been

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<sup>27</sup> Lake, J. "Authorial Intention in Medieval Historiography" in *History Compass* (2014). Vol 12 Issue 4 Pp344-360. Available at <https://doi.org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1111/hic3.12147>. Accessed 26th March 2019

<sup>28</sup> Stubbs, W. Ed *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury Vol 1 p87-88* (1879). Available at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101067289676;view=1up;seq=152> Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

<sup>29</sup> For example the Chronicle of the Abbey of St Werburg describes "Llewellyn, prince of Wales" charging William with "adultery". Anon, *Annales Cestrienses Chronicle of the Abbey of St Werburg At Chester*

<sup>30</sup> For example the Thomas Wykes annals talk of William as "virtutis" of great virtue and "strennissima" vigorous whilst referring to Llewellyn's action as "by means of deceit". Wykes, T. *Chronicon Thomae Wykes, Annales de Oseneia Et*. In *Annales Monastici* ed Henry Richards Luard (Toronto 1864). Online archive.org. Available at <https://archive.org/stream/statuteswales01bowegoogpage/n35/mode/2up/search/Rhuddlan>. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Kock, J.T and Minard, H eds *The Celts : History Life and Culture* p135 (Oxford, 2012)

persecuted with so great a hatred” and the Waverlea chronicler describes Llewellyn’s “malicious” attack condemning William to the most “appalling” death<sup>32</sup>.

The characterisation of Llewellyn as deceitful by the English annalists is interesting given the known circumstances of his role as the cuckolded victim of the affair. It rests on the timing of events. William was Llewellyn’s prisoner for much of the two years before the execution and there is evidence that the affair with Joan started during his captivity. Caradoc tells us, for example, that William had an “honourable confinement in the Prince his Palace; but he had not continued there very long when he began to be suspected of being too familiar with the Princess”<sup>33</sup>. Caradoc does not tell us, however, who held these suspicions and it is unclear exactly when Llewellyn discovered the affair. There was a suggestion, made to Henry III by English barons in 1232 when creating the downfall of the King’s Justiciar Hubert de Burgh, that de Burgh had written to Llewellyn and it was as a result of these letters that William had been “treacherously hung like a robber”<sup>34</sup>. In view of the fact that de Burgh and Llewellyn were bitter enemies it seems unlikely that Llewellyn would have taken de Burgh’s allegations at face value and even Roger of Wendover states that these charges “may be true or maliciously false”<sup>35</sup>. The chroniclers of Margan go even further and suggest that the accusations of an affair were fabricated by Llewellyn in revenge for an ancient feud with William’s grandparents, William de Braose senior and Matilda, who had killed many noble Welshmen<sup>36</sup>. This idea was advanced by Kate Norgate in the *Dictionary of National Biography*

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<sup>32</sup> Wykes, T. *Chronicon Thomae Wykes, Annales de Oseneia* and Anon. *Annales de Waverleia*. In *Annales Monastici* ed Henry Richards Luard Vol2 p308 (Toronto 1864). Online archive.org. Available at <https://archive.org/details/annelesmonastici02luar/>. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019

<sup>33</sup> Caradoc of Llancarvan. *The history of Wales comprehending the lives and succession of the princes of Wales, from Cadwalader, the last King to Llewellyn the last prince of British blood with a short account of the affairs of Wales under the kings of England*

<sup>34</sup> Roger of Wendover *Flowers of History comprising the history of England from the descent of the Saxons to AD1235*. Published (Toronto 1849). Online archive.org. Available at <https://archive.org/details/rogerofwendover02roge/page/510>. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Roger of Wendover, *Flowers of History comprising the history of England from the descent of the Saxons to AD1235*.

<sup>36</sup>Anon. *Annales de Margan*. In *Annales Monastici* ed Henry Richards Luard Vol1 p38 (Toronto 1864). Online archive.org. Available at <https://archive.org/details/annelesmonastici01luar/>. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019

but has since been dismissed, by Carrot who revised the article, as unlikely<sup>37</sup>. The accusation is only found in the Margan chronicle; Margan Abbey being located in Marcher territory in Glamorgan, South Wales and patronised by the de Braose family suggesting that the account is highly partisan<sup>38</sup>.

Turning to other, potentially less biased, chronicles, some refer to William and Joan "being caught" suggesting that Llewellyn knew nothing about the affair until Easter 1230<sup>39</sup>. The idea that Llewellyn knew about the affair beforehand and had deliberately invited William for Easter in order to accuse and execute him, thereby acting deceitfully, comes from the English chroniclers. The annals of Worcester, for example, state "Llewellyn, having called William de Braose (to him) for Easter through a deception, suspecting him of committing adultery with his wife"<sup>40</sup>. Waverley chronicles go even further "Llewellyn....feigned affection, invited the noble baron William de Braose to treat with him at Easter, after an abundance of banqueting dishes and drinks, maliciously attacked him for the violation of his wife"<sup>41</sup>. The Worcester chronicles are thought to have derived much of their content from other monastic annals and hold many similarities to those written at Tewkesbury and Waverley, so the content may simply be a reproduction; however the Waverley annals are considered to have been written contemporaneously and to be one of the chief authorities for the early thirteenth century<sup>42</sup>. It should be noted that most of the chronicles would have been written with the benefit of knowledge of the subsequent war Llewellyn prosecuted against the English in 1231 and this too may have influenced their judgement of Llewellyn. Julie Kerr tells us hospitality emerges

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<sup>37</sup> Norgate, K, revised by Carrot, D. "Joan (Siwan) (d1237)" Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/14819>. Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Anon. *Annales de Margan*. Wilkinson, L.J. "Joan, Wife of Llewellyn the Great", p91.

<sup>39</sup> For example see Anon. *Brut y Tywysogion : The Chronicles of the Princes of Wales* and Roger of Wendover, *Flowers of History comprising the history of England from the descent of the Saxons to AD1235*.

<sup>40</sup> Anon. *Annales de Wigornia*. In "Annales Monastici" ed Henry Richards Luard Vol4 p421 (Toronto 1864). Online archive.org. Available at <https://archive.org/details/annelesmonastici04luar/>. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019

<sup>41</sup> Anon. *Annales de Waverleia*

<sup>42</sup> Luard, H.R "Preface to Annales Monastici" p xxxvi (Toronto 1865). Available at: <https://archive.org/details/annelesmonastici02luar/>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

as a "commonly accepted criterion of judgement in the chronicles"<sup>43</sup>. Protection of the guest was an integral part of the host's duties. Those who failed to protect them or, worse still attacked them, incurred great shame regardless of how that guest had behaved<sup>44</sup>. Pritchard partly ascribes the justification for the execution of William to his abuse of friendship and hospitality perceived by Llewellyn and his men<sup>45</sup>. Although it is impossible to determine precisely whether Llewellyn knew about the affair before inviting William for Easter, the annals allow us an insight into the perception of the English at the time and how, despite William's un-chivalrous actions, the English monks were able to portray Llewellyn as the deceitful party.

It was not, of course, just Llewellyn who was accused of being deceitful. Deceit, bringing with it dishonour onto Llewellyn, was the *raison d'être* given by Llewellyn for the sentence of death imposed by his counsel<sup>46</sup>. Adultery, on its own, did not carry the death penalty under Welsh law. The law provided for a husband to be able to beat his wife for being with another man<sup>47</sup> or she could be put away<sup>48</sup>. Welsh law was becoming increasingly subjected to Anglo-Norman influences and the case may have been considered with recourse to English law. William was after all an English lord and Joan of English descent, although usually under Welsh law any foreign wife assumed her husband's nationality<sup>49</sup>. As early as 1201, the English Crown had established their right to assume jurisdictional over-lordship<sup>50</sup>. This would have allowed Henry

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<sup>43</sup> Kerr, J." The Open Door : Hospitality and Honour in Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Century England". (2002) In *History* Vol 87, Issue 287 pp 322-335. Available at <https://doi.org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1111/1468-229X.00228>. Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019 p331

<sup>44</sup> Kerr, J (2007)." "Welcome the coming and speed the parting guest": hospitality in twelfth century England". In *Journal of Medieval History* p130-146 Available online <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmedhist.2007.04.002>. Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019

<sup>45</sup> Pritchard, T.J. Llewellyn. "The Heroines of Welsh History". P522. (1854 London). Online at [archive.org](http://archive.org). Available at <https://archive.org/detail/heroinesofwelshh00pric?q=Heroines+of+Welsh+history>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> March 2019

<sup>46</sup> See "Letter from Llewellyn to Eva de Braose dated shortly after 2 May 1230" and "Letter from Llewellyn to William Marshall, earl of Pembroke dated shortly after 2 May 1230".

<sup>47</sup> Anon. "The Venedotian Code Peniarth 32" Book 11 Chapter 1 p 193. Available at [cyfraith-hywel.cymru.ac.uk/en/mynegai.php?func=filter&ms=D](http://cyfraith-hywel.cymru.ac.uk/en/mynegai.php?func=filter&ms=D). Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> April 2019

<sup>48</sup> Ellis, T.P. *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1926) p419

<sup>49</sup> Ellis, *Welsh Tribal Law and Custom in the Middle Ages*, p425

<sup>50</sup> Davies, R R . *The Age of Conquest : Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford, 2000) p294

III to intervene in Welsh cases but, as shown in the evidence later collected by Edward I, often it was Llewellyn who consciously and deliberately assimilated English law into Wales<sup>51</sup>. Under English law, treason was not defined before the Treason Act of 1351 when there was a clear intention of the law to protect the royal bloodline and committing adultery with the Queen was specified as an act of treason. If she consented, she would also be guilty of treason<sup>52</sup>. However McBain informs us that adultery with the wife of the sovereign was not treason in England prior to 1351; under the laws of Henry I it was subject to a fine<sup>53</sup>. Interestingly, even the 1351 Act provided that it could not be treason if the Queen was too old to bear children; Joan was 43 at the time of the affair<sup>54</sup> and may or may not have still been in child-bearing years. Stephen White argues, however, that even before 1351, some literary texts identify sexual infidelity with the Queen as treachery<sup>55</sup>. Treason involved a breach of faith explicitly from those allied by homage or oath<sup>56</sup>: William would, of course, have been tied by fealty to Henry III, not Llewellyn, so arguably his actions couldn't be regarded as treason against the Welsh prince. Huw Pryce makes the point that Llewellyn's letters are notable in their assumption that he was entitled to jurisdiction over William<sup>57</sup>. Interestingly White also reflects that Kings chose "not to execute aristocratic rebels from the late eleventh century to the late thirteenth century because of a post-conquest reception of a culture of chivalry designed to limit brutality by treating prisoners of gentle birth in a humane

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<sup>51</sup>" Calendar of Various Chancery Rolls, Supplementary Close Rolls, Welsh Rolls, Scutage Rolls Preserved in the Public Records Office AD 1277-1326". Prepared under the Superintendant of the Deputy Keeper of the Records. Published by HMSO. (London, 1912). Printed in Hereford. Available at <https://archive.org/details/cu31924026113880/page/n4>. Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019. The rolls detail numerous first hand evidence accounts about Llewellyn ab Iorwerth's willingness to amend traditional law.

<sup>52</sup> McBain, G.S." High Treason – Violating the Sovereigns Wife" In *Legal Studies* June 2009 Vol 29(2) p264-270 p269 Available [https://heinonline-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/legstd29&id=280&men\\_tab=src\\_hresults](https://heinonline-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/legstd29&id=280&men_tab=src_hresults). Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019

<sup>53</sup> McBain, G.S "High Treason – Violating the Sovereigns Wife" p269

<sup>54</sup>Pritchard, T.J. Llewellyn. "The Heroines of Welsh History". p521

<sup>55</sup> White, S.D. "The Ambiguity of Treason in Anglo-Norman-French Law c1150-1250". In *Law and the Illicit in Medieval Europe* (ed) Karras, R. (2008). Online. Available at : [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fh9ps.11](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fh9ps.11). Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

<sup>56</sup> White, S.D. "The Ambiguity of Treason in Anglo-Norman-French Law c1150-1250" p93

<sup>57</sup> Pryce, H. *The Acts of the Welsh Rulers : 1220-1283*. (Cardiff 2010)

fashion"<sup>58</sup>. David Walker tells us that the death penalty was the prescribed punishment for William's offence but this could only be if William was considered guilty of treason and, as we have seen, there is little foundation for such a charge<sup>59</sup>. As Pryce says, the law texts were unlikely to have been consulted; Llewellyn and his council simply relying on their conviction that William had acted in a dishonourable way<sup>60</sup>. However, this lack of legal justification for such a brutal sentence imposed on an English subject makes it easy to see how Llewellyn, rather than William, could have been perceived again by the English, as deceitful and un-chivalrous.

Wilkinson also suggests that William's violent end was not the norm and puts forward this as a reason why the chronicles focus almost exclusively on the male protagonists rather than on Joan<sup>61</sup>. Joan is not mentioned in any of the English chronicles, other than as "Llewellyn's wife". It can be argued the chroniclers were being politically astute to avoid passing judgement on the King's sister, preferring instead to focus on her husband's brutality in executing William. The Welsh are only slightly more forthcoming in mentioning Joan; Brut y Twysiogion describes her status as daughter of King John and wife of the prince, Caradoc as the "sister of King Henrie" whilst the Chester annalist informs us of her fate "And the woman was imprisoned for a long time". Possibly a better appreciation of Welsh sentiment about Joan at this time, has been put forward by Robin Stacey who suggests that the Iorwerth redaction of Cyfraith Hywel, considered to have been undertaken in 1230, provides an insight into Welsh distrust of Joan, especially the doubt cast on her loyalty after her very public affair with a Marcher lord<sup>62</sup>. If the justification for hanging William was treason, it appears that the same charge was not brought against Joan who was released from captivity less than a year later. Wilkinson suggests that this might reflect that Llewellyn believed his wife to be the

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<sup>58</sup> White, S. D. "The Ambiguity of Treason in Anglo-Norman-French Law c 1150-1250". p90-93

<sup>59</sup> Walker, D. *Medieval Wales* (Cambridge, 2012). P96

<sup>60</sup> Pryce, H. *The Acts of the Welsh Rulers : 1220-1283* p430

<sup>61</sup> Wilkinson, L.J. "Joan, Wife of Llewellyn the Great" p 91

<sup>62</sup> Stacey, R. "King Queen and Edling" p 62

“reluctant recipient” of William’s attentions<sup>63</sup>. It is clear that Llewellyn, publically at least, held William primarily responsible for the affair. He is reported in the Waverley chronicle as attacking William for the “violation” of his wife and his letters to Eva de Braose and William Marshall firmly place the blame on William’s deceit and conspiracy<sup>64</sup>. It is necessary to take into account that Llewellyn’s motive in writing these letters was political, he was seeking to ensure the marriage between Daffyd and Isabella would proceed and needed to absolve himself completely of any blame. There is some disagreement on Llewellyn’s motivations; whether he acted pragmatically, recognising Joan’s important political role<sup>65</sup>; or out of a deep attachment for his wife<sup>66</sup>. The period of captivity could recognise the necessity for Llewellyn to ensure that Joan was not pregnant as a result of the affair before she was rehabilitated back into the Welsh court. Whatever the reasoning behind Joan’s lenient treatment, it is clear Llewellyn did allow her, within a relatively short period of time, to be restored to her full status within the Welsh court and this, combined with her absence from the source material can allude to the importance of her role within the court.

All the sources highlight that the affair and execution took place but after that discrepancies start to appear. By adopting different characterisations for the male protagonists and different timings of when Llewellyn discovered the affair, the sources have been able to provide differing perspectives of the events that, after 800 years, cannot be fully reconciled. What has been established is that there was no legal basis for the decision to execute William, leading to the conclusion that it was a political decision made by the executive. It has also been possible to learn more about what happened from what is not said, in particular Joan’s absence from the sources which, alongside her comparatively lenient treatment can illuminate her importance. There are significant difficulties in drawing objective conclusions due to the

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<sup>63</sup> Wilkinson, L.J. “Joan, Wife of Llewellyn the Great” p92

<sup>64</sup> Anon. *Annales de Waverleia* and “Letter from Llewellyn to Eva de Braose dated shortly after 2 May 1230” and “Letter from Llewellyn to William Marshall, earl of Pembroke dated shortly after 2 May 1230”.

<sup>65</sup> Crump, J.J. “Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llywelyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave”.p205

<sup>66</sup> Walker, D. *Medieval Wales* p96



partisan material but the sources are useful in telling us about contemporary perspectives and can illuminate the political situation in the early thirteenth century.

## Welsh Polity

Welsh politics was evolving as Gwynedd emerged in the ascendancy over its Welsh neighbours and imported Anglo-French court customs. The affair and execution can illuminate this by providing us with an opportunity to see how the different elements of the polity related to and interacted with each other over these events; allowing us an insight into early thirteenth century Welsh politics. Llewellyn's marriage to Joan, with her connections to the English Crown, had been a pivotal point in gaining Gwynedd's ascendancy<sup>67</sup>. Joan enjoyed influence over her father and brother that Llewellyn, at times of tension, sought to exploit<sup>68</sup>. Any outbreak of hostilities has been attributed to disputes with English lords rather than the King<sup>69</sup>. It is acknowledged that, by 1230, Llewellyn was at the very height of his power having, through his extensive political acumen, achieved hegemony over Pura Wallia and ensured as far as possible transfer of that power to his son by Joan, Dafydd<sup>70</sup>. The affair and subsequent execution could have had serious consequences for the future of Welsh politics and Llewellyn's hegemony. It could have destroyed Llewellyn's carefully-crafted marriage plan for Dafydd to Isabella de Braose; losing with it the strategic and long-coveted cantref of Builth<sup>71</sup>: it could have lost him his connection to the English Crown and it could have brought the forces of England and the Marcher lords down on Wales, ultimately losing him the support of his fellow Welsh rulers.

This dissertation has shown that the reaction of the English to events was not simply to turn the other way and ignore the execution of one of their own. The English monastic annals clearly reflect significant anti-Llewellyn feeling about the way William was treated. As has been seen, the event was perceived as being so contemptible that it was used by the English

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<sup>67</sup> Walker, D. *Medieval Wales* p93

<sup>68</sup> Norgate, K, revised by Carrot, D. "Joan (Siwan) (d1237)"

<sup>69</sup> Barrow, G.W.S. *The Completion of the Medieval Kingdoms 1066-1314*. p 218 (London, 1956)

<sup>70</sup> Pryce, H. "Negotiating Anglo-Welsh Relations: Llewellyn the Great and Henry III" p10

<sup>71</sup>For an explanation of Builth's strategic importance to Llewellyn in controlling access to the valleys into south west Wales see Carpenter, D. "The Struggle for Mastery, Britain 1066-1284" p325

barons in plotting the downfall of Hubert de Burgh. This indicates William's death and the facts surrounding the execution were considered by Henry III as an indignation; otherwise the barons would not have been confident it would contribute to de Burgh's fall. If we assume, as this dissertation has shown, that Llewellyn, above all a shrewd political operator, is unlikely to have acted purely out of personal vengeance, he would have been aware of the risks to his relationship with the English by the execution. Stacey claims no-one could have predicted the English reaction but describes Llewellyn's actions as bold at the very least<sup>72</sup>. From this, it can be inferred that in 1230, his relationship with England was, arguably, not Llewellyn's primary concern.

It seems that in 1230 Llewellyn was possibly more concerned about maintaining his hegemony over Wales. As Llewellyn's influence grew, that of the other Welsh princes and nobles had dwindled<sup>73</sup>. Llewellyn emerged initially as leader of a loose confederation of princes, formed to resist King John, as described in Llewellyn's letter to Philip Augustus, King of France dated 1212 in which he refers to "all the princes of Wales in unanimous confederation"<sup>74</sup>. There is evidence of the further growth of his influence over time from the *Cronica de Wallia* in 1228 "the magnates of Wales came together with Prince Llewellyn, whom they favoured unanimously"<sup>75</sup>. By 1230, Llewellyn had moved from being first among equals to being confident enough in his ascendancy to style himself as Prince of Aberffraw, Lord of Snowdon, a mythical political title of the ruler of Wales<sup>76</sup>. Alongside achieving ascendancy over the other Welsh princes, Llewellyn, with his marriage to Joan and marriage of all their children into Marcher families, moved markedly closer to Anglo-French society; weakening ties to those native princes and nobles<sup>77</sup>. This raises the question about what influence the

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<sup>72</sup> Stacey, R. C. "Divorce Medieval Style" p1125

<sup>73</sup> Hurlock, K. "Counselling the Prince: Advice and Counsel in Thirteenth Century Welsh Society" p21

<sup>74</sup> "Letter from Llewellyn to Philip Augustus, King of France". No 235 in *The Acts of Welsh Rulers : 1220-1283* Pryce, H (ed). (Cardiff 2010) pp392-393.

<sup>75</sup> Carpenter, D. "The Struggle for Mastery, Britain 1066-1284" p21

<sup>76</sup> Pryce, H. "Negotiating Anglo-Welsh Relations: Llewellyn the Great and Henry III" p10

<sup>77</sup> Pryce, H. "Welsh Rulers and European Change c1100-1282" p45

princes could exert in 1230 and whether they had any influence on the decision to execute. The possible hostility and fall-out from William's execution could have had ramifications within all of Wales but it seems doubtful they had any say in what is likely to have been considered an internal matter<sup>78</sup>.

Consideration of their feelings and expectations, however, may have been a deciding factor in William's ultimate fate. As already stated the Margan chronicles are highly biased, but they do inform us of the existence of significant hatred by the Welsh towards the de Braose family<sup>79</sup>. Llewellyn could have been trying to reassure other princes of his loyalty to them against their disquiet about his progression towards Anglo-Norman centres of influence, an argument supported by Crump<sup>80</sup>. Walker informs us that Llewellyn "won over leading Welshmen by fear or favour", fundamental exercises in Angevin kingship, and the execution could be an example of showing such favour<sup>81</sup>. The idea of the execution being used as a political tool to keep Welsh princes loyal, bears scrutiny when we consider the public nature, and even spectacle, of the execution; referred to by the Margan chroniclers who record those present exclaimed "now the blood of the Welsh is avenged"<sup>82</sup>. The execution is therefore a good example of how Llewellyn managed to maintain his ascendancy over other Welsh princes by political manipulation. Whilst he was clearly moving towards a more Anglo-Norman influence, Llewellyn still needed to maintain the "essential ideological prop of native tradition"<sup>83</sup> and the execution can be seen as an ideal way to appease native princes and retain their loyalty.

The decision to execute William also opens a window into the emergence at the Gwynedd court, under Anglo-French influence, of a council of advisors. Both Llewellyn and his leading

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<sup>78</sup> Hurlock, K. "Counselling the Prince: Advice and Counsel in Thirteenth Century Welsh Society" p33

<sup>79</sup> "Out of the old hatred of (de Braose's) ancestors" In Anon. *Annales de Margan*

<sup>80</sup> Crump, J.J. "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llewellyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave". P201

<sup>81</sup> Walker, D. *Medieval Wales* p99

<sup>82</sup> Anon. *Annales de Margan*

<sup>83</sup> Pryce, H. "Welsh Rulers and European Change c1100-1282" p 50

men would have been aware of the effects of the "legal renaissance in England"<sup>84</sup>: Magna Carta had only been fifteen years before the execution and had not gone unnoticed in Wales<sup>85</sup>. Involving his leading men and enhancing their importance, maintained their allegiance<sup>86</sup>. Alongside this executive function, the leading men also assumed a judicial role with the establishment of a high court over which the Prince and his chief justice presided<sup>87</sup>; it is feasible that William was sentenced by this court. However, this dissertation has already discussed whether this was an executive or judicial decision and as has established it is highly unlikely the execution was justified in terms of the law. It can be assumed, therefore, that the decision was an executive one. Crump has identified a submission made by Dr Anthony Carr that a charter places Llewellyn close to the execution site the day before, on 1<sup>st</sup> May, and that it was likely therefore that his counsel were meeting on that date. Crump claims that this suggests the decision to execute William was not taken until then and that Llewellyn was therefore in a position to prevent the hanging if he so wanted<sup>88</sup>. However, this suggested timing seems unlikely given that 800 people, including southern princes most affected by historic de Braose atrocities, managed to gather to watch the execution the following day. According to the abbot of Vaudy they gathered specifically to attend the execution<sup>89</sup>. More likely, therefore, would be the suggestion the decision had been taken to execute much earlier and the gathering, including Llewellyn and his counsel, was for the hanging itself. This does not mean, though, the decision to execute William was not taken earlier by the counsel.

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<sup>84</sup> Stacey, R.C. *The Road to Judgement : From Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales*. P143

<sup>85</sup> Stacey, R.C. *The Road to Judgement : From Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales*. P143

<sup>86</sup> Hurlock. K. "Counselling the Prince: Advice and Counsel in Thirteenth Century Welsh Society" p22

<sup>87</sup> Stacey, R.C. *The Road to Judgement : From Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales* p140

<sup>88</sup> Crump, J.J. "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llewellyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave". P200

<sup>89</sup> *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence Concerning Wales* (ed) J.G.Edwards (Cardiff, 1935). Quoted in Crump, J.J. "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llewellyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave".

The primary source evidence available, the letters to Eva de Braose and William Marshall, are unequivocal in placing the decision to execute at the door of the Gwynedd counsel <sup>90</sup>.

Llewellyn claims to Eva that "he could not have prevented the magnates of his land from making the judgment they made"<sup>91</sup>. In his letter to William Marshall he goes further claiming that "the magnates of Llewellyn's land would not bear not having passed the sentence"<sup>92</sup>.

However there is a large body of opinion that suggests that Llewellyn was dissembling<sup>93</sup>.

Crump quotes the Tewkesbury Annal suggesting this as evidence that contemporaries saw the execution as an act of private vengeance. It has already been established that the English chroniclers showed bias and Tewkesbury, close to the many of the ravages of the Welsh, had more reason than most to be partisan against them<sup>94</sup>. The evidence points against Llewellyn acting out of some kind of hot-headed rage; William was incarcerated for a month prior to his execution. The argument that the decision to execute William would have been disastrous for Llewellyn's carefully negotiated political plan, thereby suggesting that Llewellyn would not have made the decision<sup>95</sup> is countered by Turvey who suggests that, whilst the counsel had a significant impact, ultimately the power rested with the Prince. The counsel could advise Llewellyn but were not permitted to decide or dictate policy<sup>96</sup>. It is impossible to know what went on behind closed doors almost 800 years ago. It seems unlikely, however, that the counsel would have made a decision of such importance and which carried such political and wide-ranging ramifications without at least tacit approval from Llewellyn. Collective action, however, could lend more weight to the decision and allowed Llewellyn to distance himself

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<sup>90</sup> "Letter from Llewellyn to Eva de Braose dated shortly after 2 May 1230" and "Letter from Llewellyn to William Marshall, earl of Pembroke dated shortly after 2 May 1230"

<sup>91</sup> "Letter from Llewellyn to Eva de Braose dated shortly after 2 May 1230"

<sup>92</sup> "Letter from Llewellyn to William Marshall, earl of Pembroke dated shortly after 2 May 1230"

<sup>93</sup> For example see Wilkinson, L.J. "Joan, Wife of Llewellyn the Great" p92; Pryce. H. "Negotiating Anglo-Welsh Relations : Llewellyn the Great and Henry III" p13 and Hurlock. K. "Counselling the Prince: Advice and Counsel in Thirteenth Century Welsh Society" p32.

<sup>94</sup> Luard, H.R "Preface to *Annales Monasti* " p xvii (Toronto 1865). Available at: <https://archive.org/details/annelesmonastici02luar>. Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

<sup>95</sup> Crump, J.J. "Repercussions of the Execution of William de Braose : a letter from Llewellyn ab Iorwerth to Stephen de Seagrave". P201

<sup>96</sup> Turvey, R.K. *The Welsh Princes : The Native Rulers of Wales 1063-1283* P110

from that decision<sup>97</sup>. By allowing the counsel to decide, he achieves his aim of reinforcing their importance whilst revenging the southern princes, tying them closer to him: all the time distancing himself from the blame of the execution which allowed him to plead his case with the English. What the execution does show us is that, no matter what happened behind closed doors or where real power might lie, publicly the counsel had assumed a significant executive and judicial role in Gwynedd by 1230.

Joan's role within the Welsh polity, on the other hand, remains more elusive<sup>98</sup>. As has been pointed out earlier in this dissertation, the primary source evidence provides very little commentary about Joan's role in the affair and execution; the chroniclers barely mention her and Llewellyn does not refer to her at all in his letters. Tout comments that there was a lack of reaction by the English Crown to the affair and execution and this may have made censure of Joan politically difficult for the English chroniclers<sup>99</sup>. Her importance was recognised by the counsel; this can be seen in *Brut y Tywysogion* which tells us Joan was sent by Llewellyn to negotiate with John in 1211 "by the advice of his liege men"<sup>100</sup>. However, Pritchard suggests that she was regarded as an English spy and Stacey suggests the *Vendetion* version of *Cyfraith Hywel* contains well-documented resistance to foreign interference and was rewritten, in 1230, specifically to criticise Joan's role in Welsh affairs of state<sup>101</sup>. Joan, like other medieval queens, had to straddle two cultures and was considered an alien outsider who simultaneously had the greatest influence on the centre of power, Llewellyn<sup>102</sup>. This alienation and distrust could only have been magnified by Llewellyn's moves towards more Anglo-Norman influences and even more so after Joan's public affair with a Marcher Lord.

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<sup>97</sup> Hurlock, K. "Counselling the Prince: Advice and Counsel in Thirteenth Century Welsh Society" P32

<sup>98</sup> Wilkinson, L.J. "Joan, Wife of Llewellyn the Great" p83

<sup>99</sup> Tout, T.F. "The History of England from the Accession of Henry III to the Death of Edward III (1216-1377). P38. (London, 1905). Available online at <https://www.questia.com/library/102391130/the-history-of-england-from-the-accession-of-henry>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Anon. *Brut y Tywysogion : The Chronicles of the Princes of Wales* p269

<sup>101</sup> Pritchard, T.J. Llewellyn. "The Heroines of Welsh History". P516. Stacey, R.C. "Divorce Medieval Style" p1125

<sup>102</sup> Nelson, J. *Medieval Queens in the National Archives*. Podcast by The National Archives. Online Available at <https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/medieval-queens-in-the-national-archives>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

Stacey asserts that this mistrust is reflected in the amendments made to the Iorwerth redaction which refers directly to the concerns of the marital discord on Gwynedd's political instability<sup>103</sup>. It appears that the affair and execution caused considerable disquiet within the Welsh political nation but, despite their antipathy towards Joan and the opportunity to reduce her influence within the Court, they recognised her crucial role within the political sphere<sup>104</sup>. By 1232 she was back negotiating on their behalf with Henry III<sup>105</sup>. The affair and execution reveal the extent to which Joan was essential to the stability and influence of the Gwynedd court.

The affair and execution illuminate the complex balance of political influence within Wales in 1230. Llewellyn had been successful against the English in 1228, an unintended side-effect of which was William's captivity and the subsequent affair. This success on the battlefield, together with the recognition that English focus was, in 1230, centred on France not Wales, meant Llewellyn was more concerned with pleasing other Welsh princes than the English King. Their support would be needed when Llewellyn again prosecuted hostilities against the English in 1231. This relative importance of the Welsh princes against the English Crown is reflected in the decision to execute William. Meanwhile the events have also highlighted the importance gained, publicly at least, by the counsel within the Welsh polity; to such an extent that Llewellyn is able to claim that he was powerless to stop the execution. There were acknowledged tensions between the counsel and Joan reflected by the 1230 Iorwerth redaction. Despite their mistrust of her, particularly after the affair, and their wish to confine her to the domestic sphere, it is clear that the counsel also recognised that Llewellyn was responsible for his wife and that she was intrinsic to Gwynedd's fortunes.

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<sup>103</sup> For example Stacey suggests the grant in divorce to the husband of only one cat rendering him unable to keep his hens and eggs safe from outside intrusions alludes directly to the affair whilst changing the grant to the husband in a divorce from raised meat to "meat after it has been hung" using the word "crogi" associated with executions by hanging alludes directly to Williams execution. Stacey, R. C. "Divorce Medieval Style" P 1126-7

<sup>104</sup> Stacey, R. "King Queen and Edling" P55

<sup>105</sup> Wilkinson, L.J. "Joan, Wife of Llewellyn the Great" P92



## Conclusion

Incorporating all of the primary sources available has allowed a more nuanced picture of the events of 1230 to emerge. It has allowed an understanding of the English perception which has provided a different interpretation both of the execution and of Llewellyn and William. The dissertation has brought a fresh perspective to events by fully incorporating the English chronicles into the debate without dismissing them as being neutral. The significant bias present in the chronicles impedes the ability to draw any objective conclusions but, as has been shown, this bias can also provide illuminating insights into contemporary points of view.

It is still unclear when Llewellyn discovered the affair. Incorporating the English chronicles has made it more likely that Llewellyn knew about the affair before inviting William for Easter; making his actions more likely to be a carefully considered plan rather than act of personal vengeance. What is evident is that notions of honour and deceit feature highly when blame for the events is apportioned and clearly have significant resonance in the thirteenth century. The Welsh chronicles concentrate on the affair whilst the English focus on the execution allowing them to portray events in different ways. Examination of Welsh and English law has shown there was no legal justification for the death penalty, despite David Walker's statement to the contrary. Executing a fellow noble was also considered against established custom and, although political bias of the chronicles is evident, it has been shown how Llewellyn's actions made it easy for him to be portrayed by the English as the deceitful party. Meanwhile Joan's almost total absence from both Welsh and English sources means no definitive reason can be gleaned as to why she escaped from condemnation but can allude to the political sensitivity of the affair at both courts.

A definitive answer to the question of who authorised the execution has not been illuminated by the sources. The decision to execute was not taken by the other Welsh princes but is likely to have been influenced by consideration for their feelings and shows the taut political

tightrope that Llewellyn had to negotiate. The declining influence of the other princes in an executive function contrasts with the emergence of an Anglo-Norman style counsel at the Gwynedd court that, by 1230, had influential jurisdictional and executive powers. Llewellyn might have been more concerned in 1230 with reinforcing his hegemony over other Welsh principalities than with his links to the English Crown. There was no legal justification for the decision to execute so the decision was likely to have been an executive one made by the counsel; almost certainly with Llewellyn's implied approval, as suggested by Turvey<sup>106</sup>. Whilst Welsh law did not allow for any political role for the Queen, it is clear that Joan, with her links to the English Crown was essential in ensuring the ascendancy and hegemony of Gwynedd over Pura Wallia. Her lenient treatment by both her husband and the chronicles indicate her importance in fulfilling this diplomatic role in both English and Welsh politics. Joan would be released from captivity in 1231 and, by 1232, had resumed negotiating with Henry III on Llewellyn's behalf.

William's death broke up the de Braose patrimony in the Marches as his lands were divided between his four daughters, including Isabella, who would become Llewellyn's daughter-in-law. The failure of the English Crown to deal effectively with this political vacuum in the Marches was intensified by the deaths the following year of two other powerful Marcher lords, William Marshall II and Gilbert de Clare, providing a catalyst that gave Llewellyn his opportunity to attack Marcher lands in 1231<sup>107</sup>. A personal issue, William and Joan's affair, was therefore translated into the wider political context of Anglo-Welsh relations. Whether William's motives in having an affair with Joan were simply personal or vengeance against his captor, he could not have foreseen that it would end so ignominiously with his hanging in front of an 800-strong, baying crowd. These events provide us with a unique personal story from the early thirteenth century but also a comprehensive snapshot of Anglo-Welsh relations and the Welsh polity in 1230.

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<sup>106</sup> Turvey, R.K. *The Welsh Princes : The Native Rulers of Wales 1063-1283* P110

<sup>107</sup> Carpenter, D. "The Struggle for Mastery, Britain 1066-1284" p323

## Appendix

### Translation of English monastic annals from Latin into English.

From "Annales Monastici" Edited by Henry Richards Luard (Toronto, 1864). Translated by Jack Willoughby (2019)

#### **Annales de Margan / Margan Annals**

Eodem anno Lewelinus proditorie, ut dicebatur, nocte cepit Willelmum de Brewsa juniorem in domo sua, cum esset Paschalis festivitas, eo quod haberet eum suspectum de uxore sua secundum quosdam; re autem vera secundum alios, ex veteri odio progenitorum suorum, scilicet Willelmi de Brewsa senioris, et Matildis de Sancto Walerico uxoris suae, qui multos Walenses, tam nobiles et potentes, quam alios fecerant occidi. Cumque eundem Willelmum et milites qui cum eo venerant et familiam suam aliquanto tempore vinetos in carcere tenuisset, illum quidem fecit suspendi; garciones abire permisit, et quosdam alios redemptos pecunia liberos dimisit. Cujus suspendio divulgato, insultantes Walenses exclamaverunt, "Nunc vindicates" est sanguis Walensium quem Willelmus de Breusa et "sui effuderunt super terram".

In the same year, so it was said, Llewellyn treasonably captured William de Braose junior in his house at night, when it was Easter, for the reason that he held him in suspicion of pursuing his wife: on the contrary, the truth of the matter was something else as follows; out of the old hatred of his ancestors, namely William de Braose senior and his wife Matilda of Saint Valery, who killed many Welshmen, the nobles and mighty more than others. And when he held, bound in chains the aforementioned William and the soldiers who accompanied him and his family in prison for a certain time, he certainly hanged him; he permitted the men to depart, and when certain other freedmen had been retaken, he sent money. When the hanging had become common knowledge, the Welsh, revelling exclaimed "Now the blood of the Welsh, which William de Braose and his men had poured out over the land, is avenged"

#### **Chronicon Thomae Wykes or Annales de Oserieia / Chronicle of Thomas Wykes or Osney Annals**

Eodem anno fama circumquaque divulgabatur quod Leulyn dolo occiderat Willelmum de Brause, virum nobilem magnae virtutis et strenuissimae juventutis baronem, quem tanto odio persecutes est ut non solum illum extinguere, verum etiam terras suas castellan, et praedia destruendo et comburendo ad nihilum satageret redigere.

In the same year, the rumour was being spread all around amongst the people that Llewellyn had killed William de Braose by deception, a noble man of great virtue and a vigorous young baron, whom had been persecuted with so great a hatred in order that not only would he be destroyed but even in fact his lands, his castles and his estates and (Llewellyn) was busily engaged in reducing them to nothing.

### **Annales de Waverleia / Waverley Annals**

Leulinus praefectus Walliae, simulatae dilectionis gratia, Willelmum de Breuisa baronem nobilem ad Paschalia festa secum agenda invitans, eundem post epularum et poculorum abundantiam super perpetrato adulterio et violatione uxoris suae malitiose aggressus est, eumque aliquantibus diebus vinculis irretitum carcere retrudens, ad ultimum, ut dicitur, turpissima morte damnavit.

Llewellyn, commander of Wales, feigning affection, invited the noble baron William de Braose to treat with him at Easter; after an abundance of banqueting dishes and drink, maliciously attacked him for the violation of his wife and pushing him back, ensnared him with rope for some days, until at last, it is said, he condemned him to the most appalling foul death.

### **Annales de Theokesberia / Tewkesbury Annals**

Lewelinus princeps Norwalliae retinuit Willelmum de Breuse filium Reginaldi post Pascha; eo quod ipsum ita dicitur zelotiparet, occidit et suspendi fecit. Idem Lewelinus collegit magnum exercitum, auditor egis transit.

Llewellyn, prince of North Wales, detained William de Braose, the son of Reginald, since Easter; it is said that he jealously prepared and hanged and killed him. The same Llewellyn assembled a great army once he heard that the King had made the crossing to France.

### **Annales de Wigornia / Worcester Annals**

Lewelinus, vocato Willelmo de Breusa ad festum Paschale in dolo, suspicans eum adulteratum fuisse cum uxore sua, membris succisis fecit eum suspendi in patibulo, innocentem ut dicebatur et inculpabilem; et castrum suum munitissimum de Boeld solo tenus diruit.

Llewellyn, having called William de Braose to him for Easter through deception, suspecting him of committing adultery with his wife, constructed a fork-shaped yoke and suspended him from it once he had cut through his limbs; and just as he was declaring himself harmless and faultless, he destroyed his fortified castle of Builth by a single trap.

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