

# The Dissolution of the Monasteries

From 1536 to 1541 Henry VIII closed every monastery and nunnery in England and Wales. Henry did this by passing an Act of Parliament in 1534 making him the Supreme Head of the Church, and a further two acts in 1536 and 1539 sanctioning firstly the closure of the smaller monasteries, and then the larger ones.

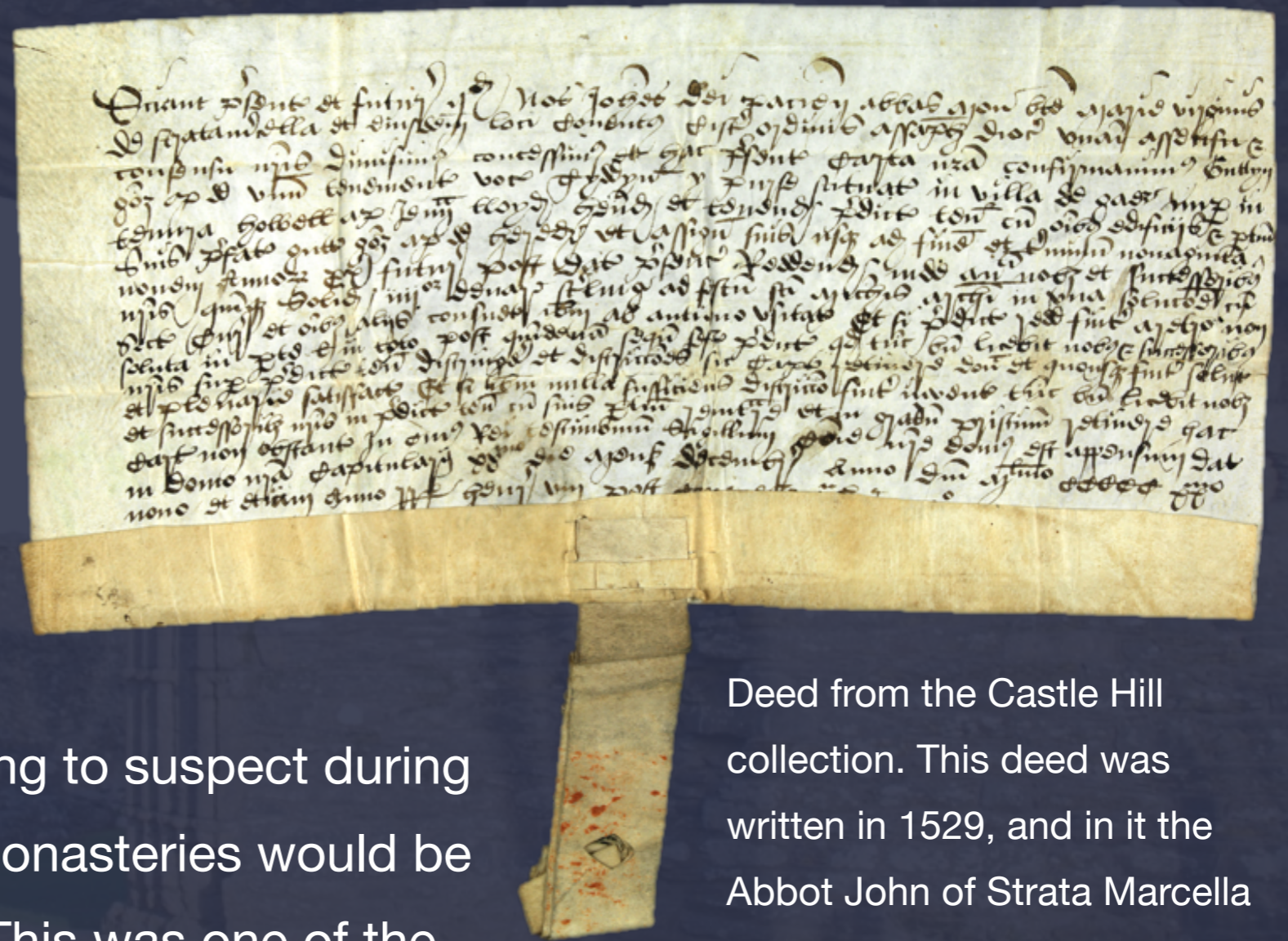




# The greedy King

Henry VIII was keen to see the king becoming the ruler of the church in England and Wales and believed that the monks and their monasteries would obstruct this move. He was also very eager to get his hands on the land and wealth of the monasteries.

It seems that monks were beginning to suspect during the 1520s and 1530s that some monasteries would be closed or taken over by the king. This was one of the reasons that they leased land, or even sold it in some cases.

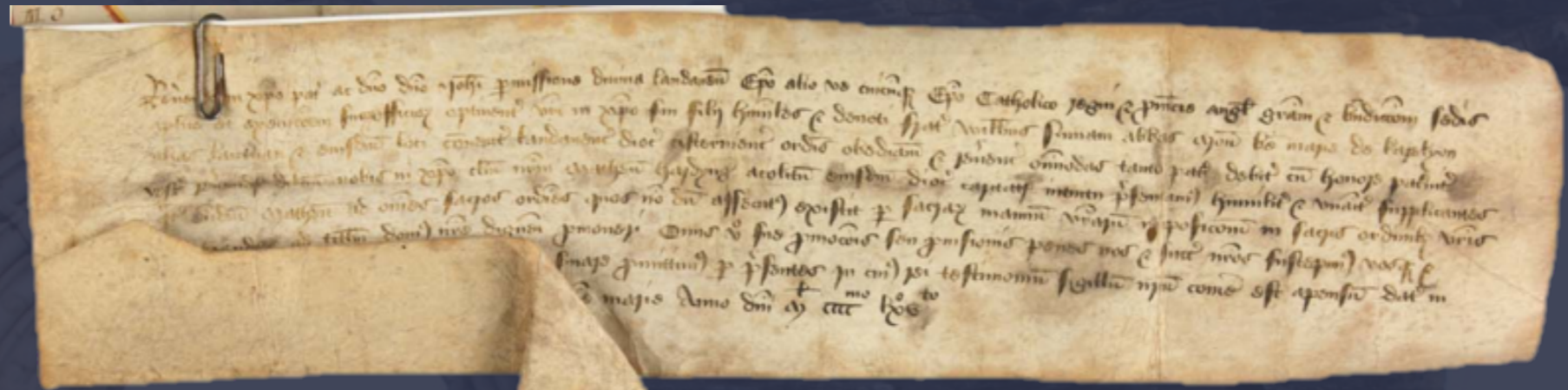


Deed from the Castle Hill collection. This deed was written in 1529, and in it the Abbot John of Strata Marcella near Welshpool grants land on lease to Gutun Goch ap Dafydd. The deed is written in Latin.



# The seal of the abbey

When signing important official deeds in the Middle Ages an abbot would attach a wax seal to proclaim the authenticity of the document. Without the seal the deed was considered worthless. Many of these seals have disappeared from documents, but some still exist on manuscripts at The National Library of Wales.



The Seal of Llantarnam Abbey. This seal dates from 1465.



# The King's opinion

One of the arguments used by Henry VIII for the dissolution of the monasteries was that monks no longer behaved as they were supposed to do. They were expected to lead simple, religious lives, offering alms to the poor and shelter to those in need. Henry believed that this was no longer true of many monks by the 16th century, and that they often led immoral and wealthy lives.

In fact Henry wanted to get his hands on the land and wealth of the monasteries, and was willing to use any excuse for doing so.

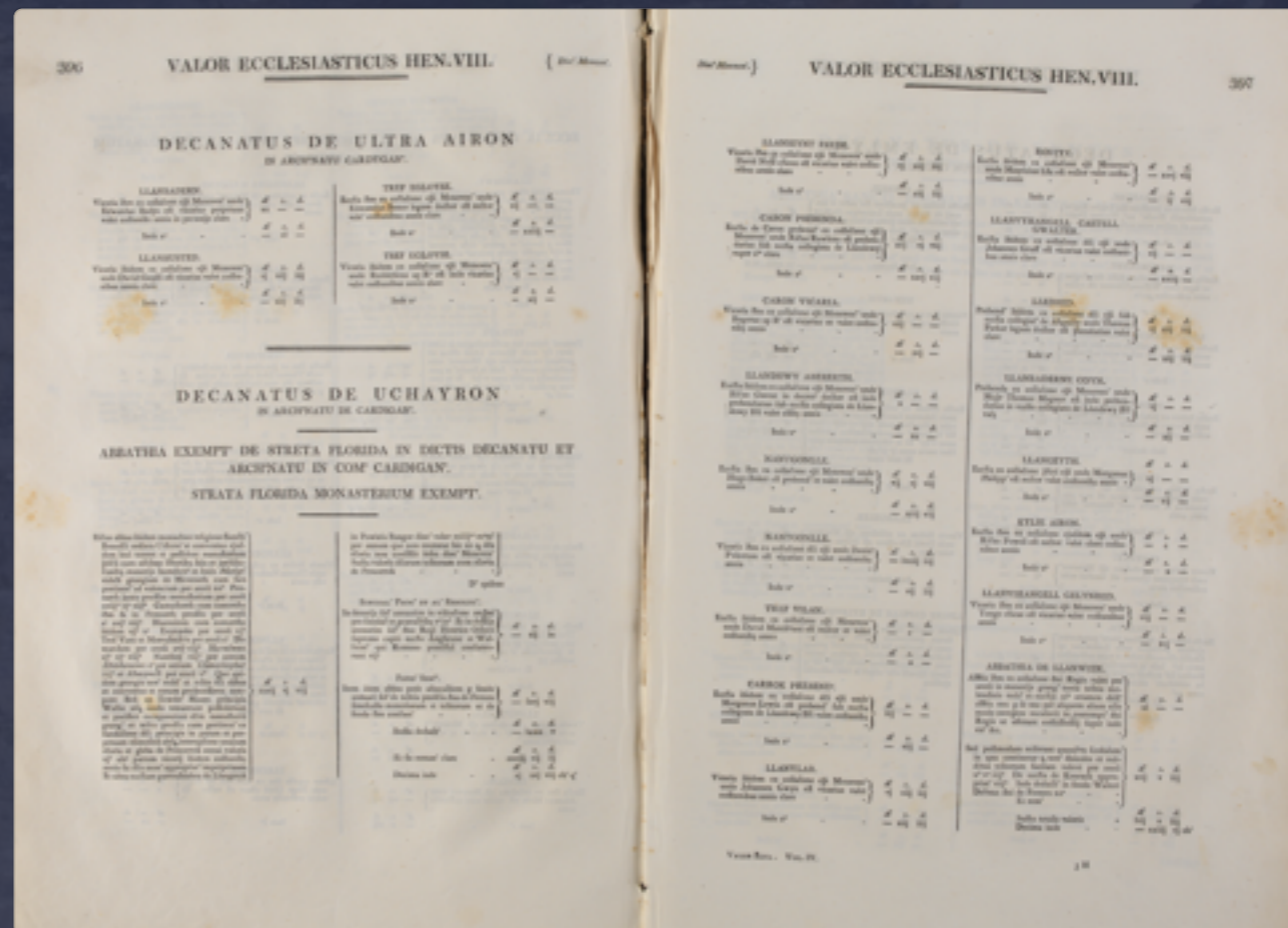




# Valor Ecclesiasticus

In January 1535 commissions were appointed in England and Wales to carry out a survey of property and land owned by the church and the monasteries. Abbots and church leaders were required to give evidence on oath about their incomes and the lands in their trust, and the commissioners were given the right to examine their records. The name given to this survey is the Valor Ecclesiasticus.

Valor Ecclesiasticus. The Valor was written in 1535-1536. This copy was published in 1821, and the page lists some of the land and wealth of Strata Florida Abbey. The text is written in Latin.



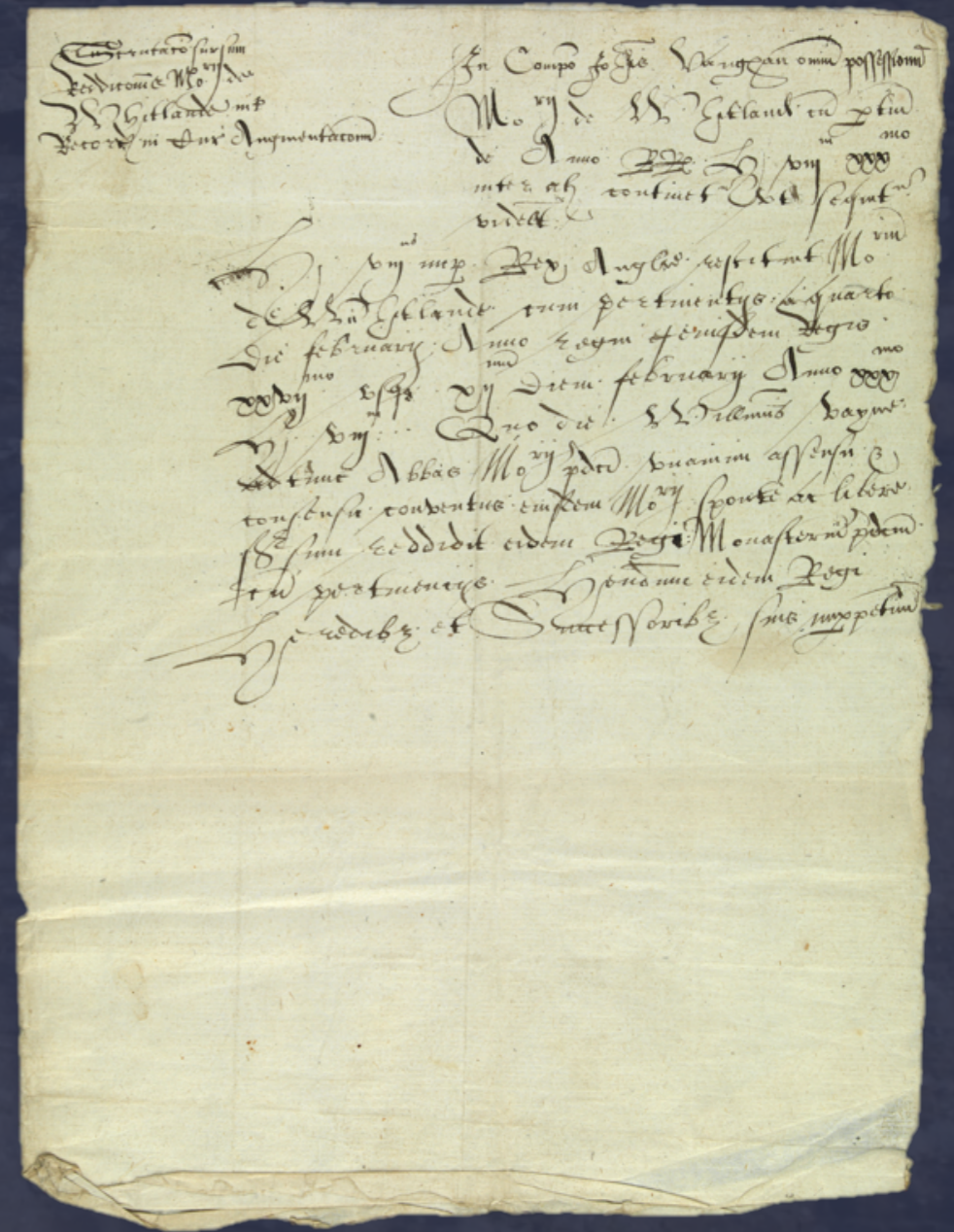
The Valor provided the king with an analysis of the wealth of the church and monasteries. It played a key part in the process that led to the dissolution of the monasteries, and is a very important document for historians of this period.



# Closing the monasteries

The dissolution of the monasteries in England and Wales began in 1536. Most were closed immediately, but Strata Florida, Neath and Whitland abbeys remained open by paying heavy fines to the king. In the end every monastery was closed and had to surrender its land to the crown.

At first Henry VIII intended to lease or rent the land that he gained from the dissolution of the monasteries in order to increase the income of the crown. However the king required money urgently to pay for wars, and decided to sell most of the land. It was usually the local gentry who bought the land from the king, and this meant that many rich families became even more powerful after acquiring land that used to be owned by the monasteries.



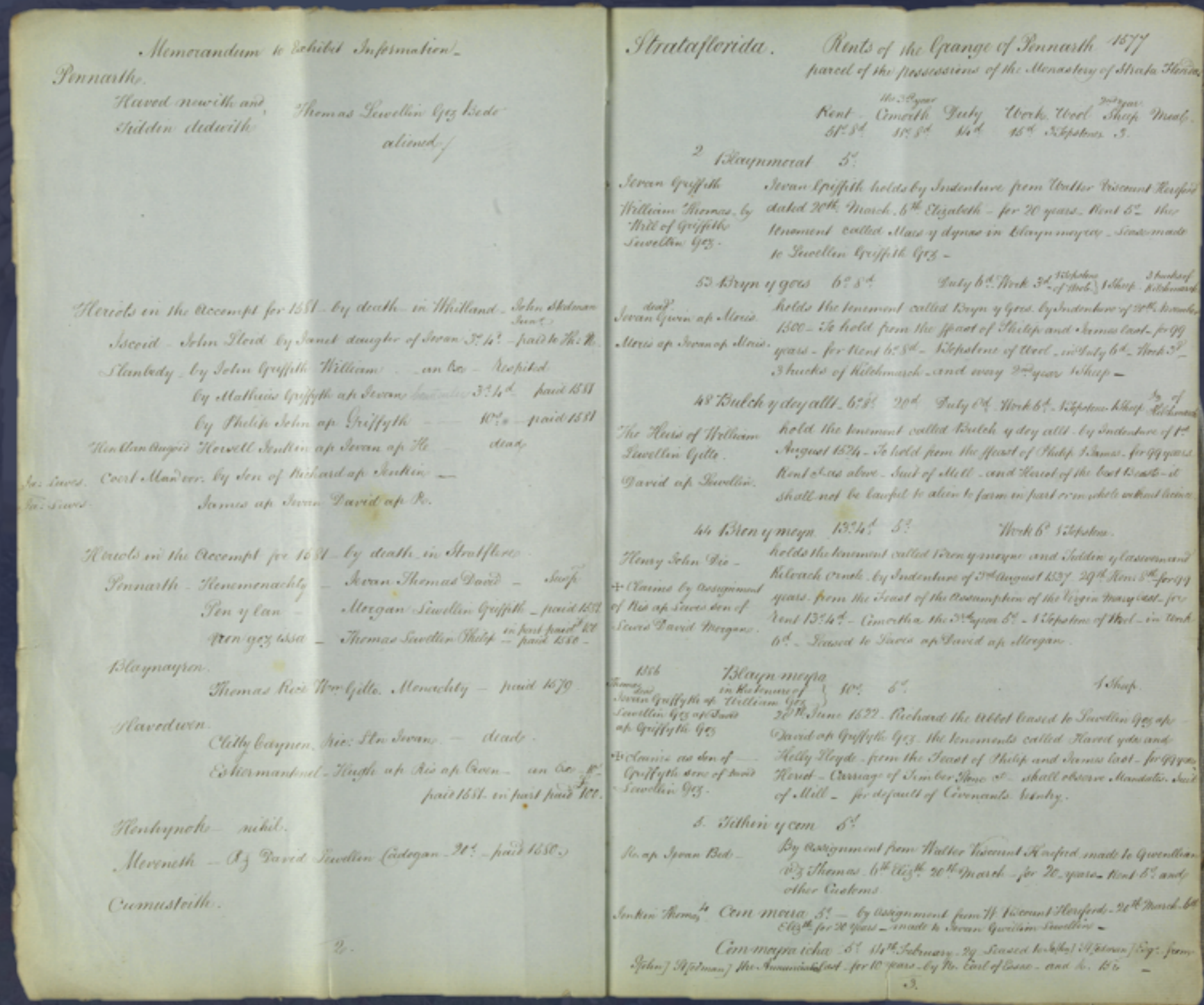
Letter from the Cilgwyn collection. Written by the Abbot of Whitland abbey surrendering abbey land to the crown. The letter is written in Latin.



# The King's land



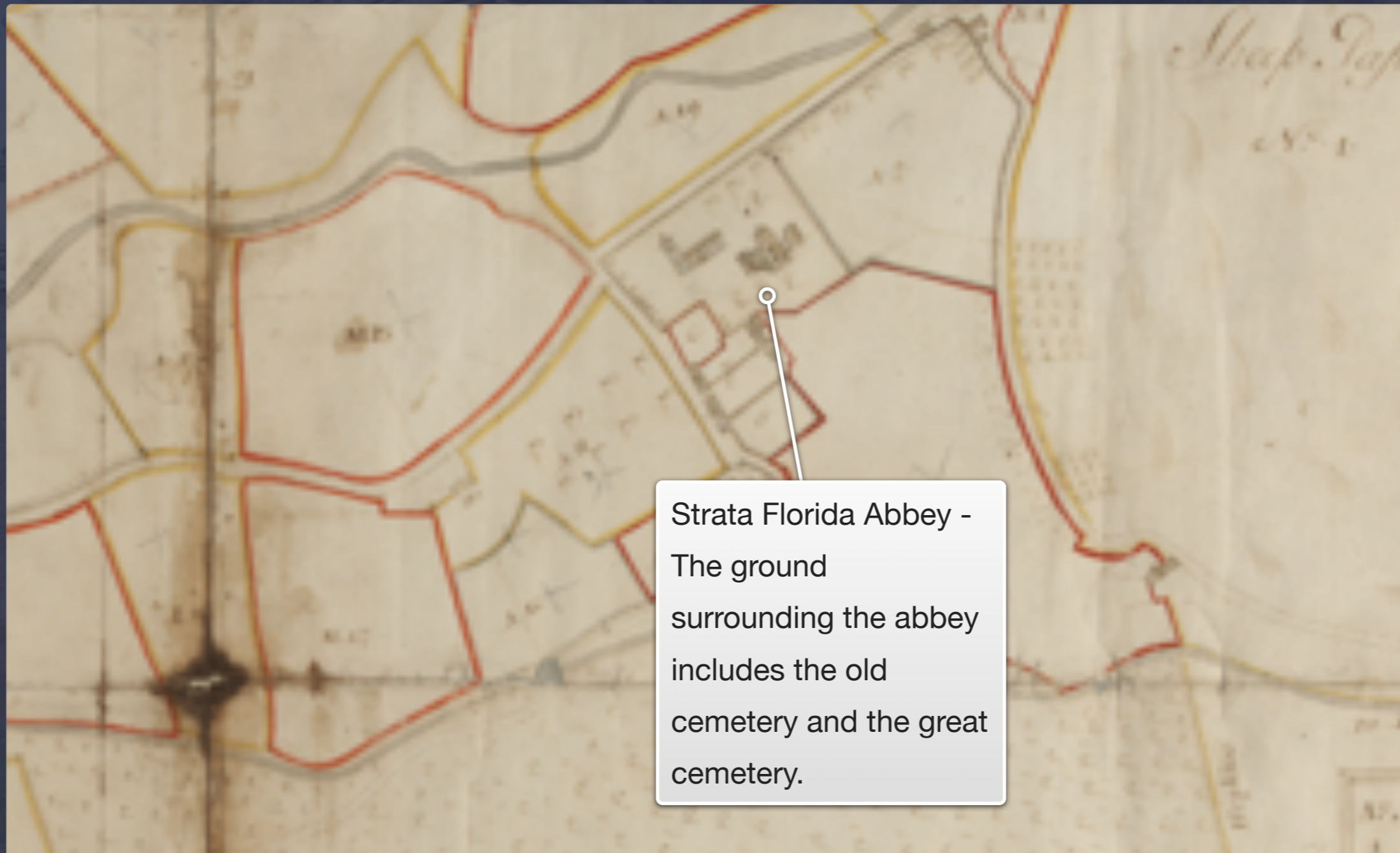
A copy of a manuscript from the Cwrtmawr Collection. The manuscript is written in English and contains information about who farmed the land formerly owned by Strata Florida in 1577. Click on the manuscript for more information.





# A map of Nantoes Estate

The Nanteos Estate Map shows land that was once part of Strata Florida Abbey. The ruins of the Abbey and the Church of Saint Mary can be seen on the map, as well as field names such as yr hen fynwent (the old cemetery), and y fynwent fawr (the great cemetery).



Strata Florida Abbey -  
The ground  
surrounding the abbey  
includes the old  
cemetery and the great  
cemetery.



# What happened to the monks?

Following the closure of the monasteries some monks went to work as priests, many received pensions from the king, while others went to work on the land. The manuscripts that were kept in the libraries at the monasteries were bought or discarded, and today many have been destroyed and lost. Many of those that have survived are now kept and treasured at The National Library of Wales.





# Timeline

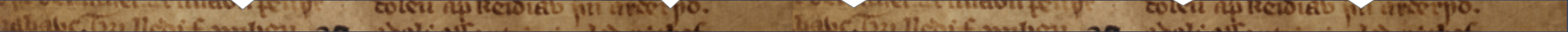
The Cistercian Order is established (1089)

Black Book of Carmarthen (circa 1250)

The Chronicle of Princes (circa 1330)

Strata Florida slate (circa 1470)

The dissolution of the monasteries begins (1536)



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## Events

- 1 1066 The Normans conquer England.
- 2 1095 The beginning of the Crusades; the Christians capture Jerusalem in 1099 as part of the First Crusade.
- 3 1176 The first Eisteddfod is held in Cardigan under the patronage of Lord Rhys.
- 4 1188 Gerallt Gymro (Gerald of Wales) tours Wales.
- 5 1212 King John of England accuses the monks at Strata Florida of supporting the Welsh Princes and threatens to destroy the abbey.
- 6 1240 The death of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth (Llywelyn the Great).
- 7 1349 The Black Death: The Bubonic Plague comes to Wales.
- 8 1380 The poet Dafydd ap Gwilym dies and is buried in Strata Florida.
- 9 1400 The revolt of Owain Glyndŵr begins.
- 10 1439 The first use of the printing press in Europe.
- 11 1543 The Second Act of Union of England and Wales.
- 12 1588 The publication of Bishop William Morgan's first complete Welsh translation of the Bible.