

INTRODUCTION

More than two centuries elapsed between the Norman conquest of England and the English conquest of Wales. One year after their victory at Hastings in 1066, William the Conqueror's knights and barons had launched their first raids across the Welsh border. Yet Wales was not brought under the direct control of the kings of England until 1282–3, when Edward I fought his second Welsh war, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last native prince of Wales, was killed, and Llywelyn's brother Dafydd was executed. In achieving dominion over Wales by military force, Edward I outdid his own campaigns of 1276–7 as well as all those of his Norman and Plantagenet predecessors. After William the Conqueror himself went on an expedition to St David's in 1081, Wales was attacked by William II in 1095 and 1097 and by Henry I in 1114 and 1121. Stephen was prevented by civil war from campaigning in Wales, but Henry II led armies there in 1157, 1158, 1163 and 1165. Richard I preferred the Holy Land and France as arenas for military exploits, but Wales was invaded by John in 1211 and 1212, and repeatedly, between the 1220s and the 1260s, by Henry III or his deputies. Yet none of these campaigns led to a Norman or English 'conquest' of Wales, even though some may well have aimed at doing so, notably the one which failed in 1165 and the one which was abandoned in 1212.

Nevertheless, the two centuries after 1066 were an age of dramatic change in the political geography of Wales and the borders. In that time, roughly half of Wales was conquered, albeit haltingly and in a piecemeal fashion, by Norman and English military adventurers. Many of the knights and barons who swept into Wales after 1066, especially those who built their castles along the northern and western coasts, soon saw their ambitions thwarted in the face of native opposition. But many others succeeded in securing footholds and lands for themselves and their descendants, often in places where Welsh resistance was temporarily weakened by the loss of a ruler or by rivalries between native dynasties.

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A good example is the Welsh kingdom of Morgannwg in south-eastern Wales. Norman raids began there under the leadership of Robert fitz Hamo, the lord of Creully in Normandy, probably after the killing in 1093 of Rhys ap Tewdwr, the king of south Wales. By means of the conquests Robert and his successors made in Morgannwg, they gradually established the lordship of Glamorgan. However, their position remained precarious throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Until the late 1260s, they failed to dislodge the Welsh rulers in the uplands to the north. Moreover, the Welsh threat to their acquisitions periodically grew acute, for instance when military leadership was provided by the rulers of Gwynedd, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (d. 1240) or his grandson, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (d. 1282). Despite this, the lordship of Glamorgan survived until 1282–3, its lowlands by then bristling with castles and settled extensively by English immigrants. Meanwhile, in the borderlands adjoining Herefordshire, families like the Mortimers and the Braoses fought for generations to gain control of the Welsh principalities of Maelienydd, Elfael, Builth and Brecon. The Clares occupied Ceredigion early during the reign of Henry I, only to lose it to the Welsh in 1136–8. But lowland Glamorgan, the Gower peninsula, Pembroke Castle and parts of south-western Wales remained in foreign hands from the late eleventh century onwards.

In the 1270s and 1280s, Edward I added liberally to these conquest lordships, rewarding the captains of his Welsh campaigns with Ceri, Cedewain, Chirk, Bromfield and Yale, Dyffryn Clwyd, Denbigh, Cantref Bychan and Iscennen. The former Welsh kingdom of Powys descended hereditarily to a scion of the Welsh dynasty of southern Powys who sided with Edward I in the war against Llywelyn ap Gruffudd; it thereby became a Welsh barony held of the English king.¹ By 1284, when Edward I established his Principality of Wales in what had been the previously unoccupied northern and western part of the country, the remainder of Wales had been parcelled out into around forty castle-centred lordships varying widely in size and age. The conquest lordships created in Wales between the late eleventh and the late thirteenth centuries constitute the area known to modern-day historians as the March of Wales. After 1283, they formed an extensive patchwork of territories that separated England from Wales and also extended along the southern Welsh coast from Glamorgan to Pembroke.²

¹ R. R. Davies, *Lordship and Society in the March of Wales, 1282–1400* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 26–31.

² For a recent introduction to the medieval March of Wales, see M. Lieberman, *The March of Wales, 1067–1300: A Borderland of Medieval Britain* (Cardiff, 2008). The most recent detailed analysis of a section of the March (that adjoining Herefordshire) is B. W. Holden, *Lords of the Central*

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Map 1. The Marcher lordships and the Principality of Wales in the fourteenth century

Wales was to stay divided until the end of the Middle Ages. While the Principality of Wales remained part of the private estates of the English crown, the Marcher lordships descended as hereditary domains of such families as Clare, Mortimer, Braose and Bohun, later also of Lancaster and

Marches: English Aristocracy and Frontier Society, 1087–1265 (Oxford, 2008). On Glamorgan, see J. B. Smith, 'The Kingdom of Morgannwg and the Norman Conquest of Glamorgan', T. B. Pugh (ed.), *Glamorgan County History*, vol. iii (Cardiff, 1971), pp. 1–43.

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Dispenser. These families claimed quasi-regal jurisdiction within their Marcher lordships, as their predecessors had begun to do by the end of the twelfth century.³ The administrative and jurisdictional fragmentation of Wales and the March persisted throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, despite the fact that it entailed serious inconveniences and risks for the English royal government. This became glaringly obvious when it hampered the military response to the revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr between 1400 and 1415.⁴ Nevertheless, it was only in the reign of Henry VIII that the English crown set about integrating the March into the administrative and governmental system of England. The two parliamentary acts of 1536 and 1542 created a single dominion of England and Wales. They also abolished the Marcher lordships, either subsuming them within one of seven new shires or incorporating them into an existing English shire.⁵

The Marcher lordships were all compact, by contrast with the estates of baronial landholders in England, many of which were scattered over several counties. The same compactness was characteristic of a number of castle-centred lordships which directly adjoined or even overlapped with Welsh territory: the Mortimer castlery of Wigmore, for instance, or the lordships of Oswestry, Caus, Montgomery and Clun on the Welsh frontier of Shropshire, the largest inland county of England. These lordships are sometimes considered to be part of the March of Wales, even though they originated as tenurial blocks established mostly or entirely on English territory, rather than as conquests in Wales. For one thing, they are coeval with the very first Norman conquests in Wales. They are already recorded in Domesday Book, the great record of landholding in England in 1086. However, their appurtenance to the English shires became ever more debatable during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and during the later Middle Ages they escaped the reach of the administrative, fiscal and judicial institutions of the English kingdom, albeit to varying degrees. Henry VIII's parliamentary acts of 1536 and 1542 treated many of them in the same way as the Marcher lordships established in Wales, providing for their integration into the new Welsh shires or the English border counties.

The March of Wales can therefore be fairly precisely characterized for the purposes of the political and administrative history of England and Wales during the Middle Ages. The March consisted of the foreign-held lordships in Wales and the compact honors directly adjoining Welsh

³ R. R. Davies, 'Kings, Lords and Liberties in the March of Wales, 1066–1272', *TRHS*, 5th ser., **29** (1979), pp. 41–61.

⁴ R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 256–7.

⁵ W. Rees, *The Act of Union of England and Wales* (Cardiff, 1948).

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territory. It therefore expanded and contracted significantly as conquests in Wales were made and lost, especially before 1167, when Ireland became a new destination for knights in search of lands to conquer. The extent of the March was also determined by the degree to which the frontier honors were withdrawn from the reach of the English state.⁶ After 1283, the March became more fixed in extent than ever before. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it drove a wedge between the Principality and the English counties, while also extending across southern Wales; but in 1536–42 it was erased from the map of the political geography of the British Isles.⁷

Thus, modern-day historians of the medieval period mean by the term ‘March of Wales’ the congeries of lordships carved out in Wales between 1067 and 1283; and they sometimes include the compact frontier lordships within this ‘March’ as well. This historiographical terminology is based on a medieval precedent: the phrase *Marchia Wallie*. An early version of that phrase is found in the folios of Domesday Book. The expression becomes more common in the second half of the twelfth century. Then, in 1215, the authors of Magna Carta juxtaposed a ‘March’ to England on the one hand and Wales on the other. Writers in England and the March referred to the borders of Wales by other Latin terms as well.⁸ But it does seem that in the voluminous records kept by the chancery and exchequer of the English crown the phrase *Marchia Wallie* acquired something of an official status. In view of this, and given that the modern historical category of the March of Wales refers to a relatively well-defined phenomenon, it might be expected that there was a contemporary concept of the March which corresponded to ours. However, the usage of the phrase *Marchia Wallie* between the late eleventh and the early fourteenth centuries suggests that the medieval concept of the Welsh March was a malleable one.

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It is possible to locate Domesday Book’s ‘March’ with some precision. The survey is arranged by counties, and the folios for Herefordshire state that both Osbern fitz Richard and Ralph de Mortimer held villis lying ‘in the March of Wales’.⁹ As Map 2 shows, the villis which were said to lie in

⁶ I will refer to the medieval English kingdom as a state, without using inverted commas. For a stimulating recent discussion of the concept and its uses for medieval historians cf. R. R. Davies, ‘The Medieval State: The Tyranny of a Concept?’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 16 (2003), pp. 280–99.

⁷ Davies, *Lordship and Society*, p. 16.

⁸ K. Mann, ‘The March of Wales: A Question of Terminology’, *WHR*, 18 (1996), pp. 1–13.

⁹ DB 183d (‘in marcha de Wales’), 186d (‘in Marcha de Walis’).

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this March were all located on the westernmost borders of Herefordshire, and formed a continuous territory through which ran Offa's Dyke. It seems natural, therefore, to wonder whether Domesday's 'Marcha' could be considered the precursor of the later March of Wales. However, unlike the later March, that of 1086 was not coterminous with lordships, or honors. Only part of the estates held respectively by Osbern fitz Richard and Ralph de Mortimer in 1086 were considered to lie in this March; their honors were not coextensive with the Domesday March, but overlapped with it. Ralph de Mortimer's main concentration of lands lay in the Teme valley, around his castle at Wigmore (he also held a number of estates north of the Teme, in Shropshire, outside the area shown on the map). Osbern's 'Marcher' estates formed a fairly compact group, but they were intermingled with Mortimer's – in this respect, the tenurial pattern in Domesday's March was similar to that generally found in the counties of England. Moreover, the focus of Osbern's honor probably lay further east, at Richard's Castle. Domesday's 'March' was really a geographical description referring to the valleys of the river Lugg and of the Hindwell Brook.

We can be confident that the phrase *Marchia Wallie* first became more common during the 1160s. This certainty is due primarily to the near-complete survival of the Pipe Rolls, the annual accounts of the royal exchequer of England, from the second year of Henry II's reign onwards. Since the Pipe Rolls record the accounts rendered annually by individual sheriffs, they reveal with some precision where the first twelfth-century March of Wales was thought to be located, which territories were subsequently included within the March, and when. The first 'March' of the Pipe Rolls was the Welsh border of Shropshire. In 1166, Geoffrey de Vere, the sheriff of Shropshire, accounted for £62 16d for 'the 100 serjeants of the castle of Shrawardine and of the March'.¹⁰ In 1168, Geoffrey de Vere received £100 'to guard the March of Wales'.¹¹ The following year, he accounted for the £29 4s he had spent on sustaining 'serjeants of the March'.¹² The sheriffs of Shropshire accounted for payments for the same purpose in 1171, 1172 and 1174.¹³ The Pipe Rolls show that the 'March'

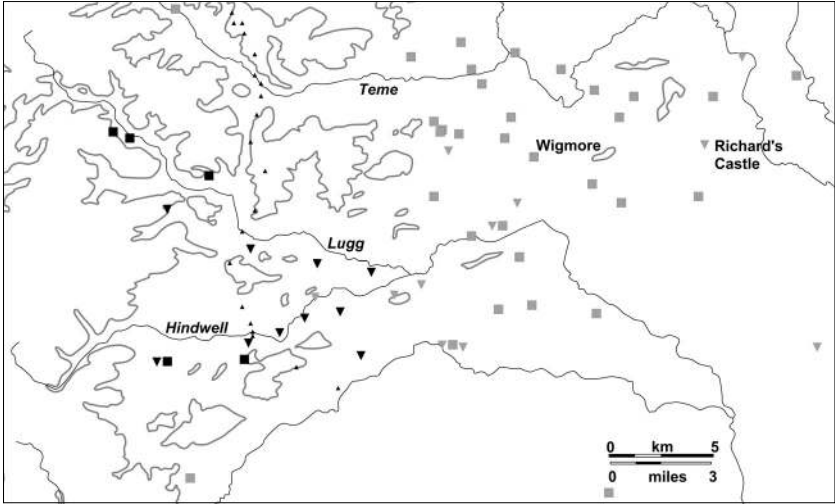
¹⁰ *Pipe Roll 12 Henry II, 1165–6* (P. R. S., 9), p. 59: 'in liberatione .c. Seruientium de Shrawurdin'. Et de Marcha a festo Sancti Michaelis usque ad uigiliam Pasce .lxii. libri. et .xvi. denarii'. The one Pipe Roll to survive from before Henry II's reign dates to 1129–30. It makes no mention of a 'March' even though it does contain accounts for the border county of Gloucestershire as well as for Carmarthen and Pembroke in south Wales: *Pipe Roll 31 Henry I*, ed. J. Hunter (1833, repr. in facs. London, 1929), pp. 76–80, 89–90, 136–7.

¹¹ *Pipe Roll 14 Henry II, 1167–8* (P. R. S., 12), p. 199: 'ad custodiendam March' Wallie'.

¹² *Pipe Roll 16 Henry II, 1169–70* (P. R. S., 15), p. 154.

¹³ *Pipe Roll 17 Henry II, 1170–71* (P. R. S., 16), pp. 32, 53, 96; *Pipe Roll 18 Henry II, 1171–2* (P. R. S., 18), p. 111; *Pipe Roll 20 Henry II, 1173–4* (P. R. S., 21), p. 108.

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- Mortimer estates said to 'lie in the March of Wales'
- ▼ Fitz Richard estates said to 'lie in the March of Wales'
- Other Mortimer estates
- ▼ Other fitz Richard estates
- ▲ Offa's Dyke

Map 2. Domesday Book's March of Wales

was clearly soon thought to encompass the southern Welsh borders as well. In 1167, the reference to 'the king's castles in the March' occurs in the Pipe Roll for Worcestershire, in 1173, 'serjeants of the March of Wales' are mentioned in Herefordshire, and in 1184, the Gloucestershire Roll shows Hywel, the lord of Caerleon, was remunerated 'for maintaining himself in the king's service in the marches of Wales'.¹⁴ However, the close link between the 'March' and the Shropshire–Powys borders is strikingly corroborated by a contemporary royal charter. It was before 1175, and probably after 1173, that Henry II confirmed Owain Fychan, a son of the king of Powys, Madog ap Maredudd (d. 1160), in the possession of Mechain and 'five villis of the March'. Four of these villis certainly

¹⁴ *Pipe Roll 13 Henry II, 1166–7* (P. R. S., 11), p. 64; *Pipe Roll 19 Henry II, 1172–3* (P. R. S., 19), p. 38; *Pipe Roll 30 Henry II, 1183–4* (P. R. S., 33), p. 59. The first references explicitly distinguishing between Wales and the March of Wales date to 1196: *Chancellor's Roll 8 Richard I, 1196* (P. R. S., NS 7, London, 1930), pp. 17, 19, 20; cf. Mann, 'Terminology', p. 6; Holden, *Lords*, pp. 43–5.

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lay in Oswestry lordship in north-western Shropshire; the fifth may have been Sycharth, just across Offa's Dyke from the others.¹⁵

In view of the geographical proximity of Domesday's 'March' to Shropshire, one wonders whether a regional tradition preserved the usage of the term. The shift from *marcha* to *marchia* may have been due to the fact that the former was derived from Old English *mearc/merc*, while the latter was a Latinization of Old French *marche*.¹⁶ Given the spread of the French language in England between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, this may plausibly explain why it was *Marchia Wallie* that became the dominant form, and remained so in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. If *marcha* and *marchia* were indeed derived from different languages, this raises the question of how far the two Latin terms might have had different meanings. Both Old English *mearc* and Old French *marche* could mean 'boundary'; but the meaning of 'border district' is documented for *marche* alone.¹⁷ The evidence of Offa's Dyke suggests that, in the eighth century, the Anglo-Saxons thought of their border with the Welsh as a line; so does the fact that, according to William of Malmesbury, Æthelstan, king of England, fixed the Wye as the boundary between the Welsh and the English.¹⁸ Yet perhaps it would be wise not to draw too strict a distinction between *mearc*, *marche* and their Latin derivatives. After all, it seems clear from Domesday Book's usage that *marcha* could also mean a border district.¹⁹

Possibly, a particular regional meaning of the term *Marchia* is suggested by the ecclesiastical re-organization of north-east Wales and the adjacent borders in the mid-twelfth century. In 1291, the diocese of

¹⁵ *The Welsh Assize Roll 1277–84*, ed. J. C. Davies (Cardiff, 1940), p. 237: 'Mechen cum pertinenciis et quinque villas de Marchia'. The four 'vills of the March' of this document which are certainly identifiable are Llyncllys, Llanyblodwel, Bryn and Trefonnen (see Map 3). Cf. R. Morgan, 'The Barony of Powys, 1275–1360', *WHR*, 10 (1980), p. 38, n. 2; D. Stephenson, 'The Supremacy in (Southern) Powys of Owain Fychan ap Madog: A Reconsideration', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 49 (2005), pp. 48–9 and n. 15. I must thank Dr Stephenson for kindly sending me an off-print of this article.

¹⁶ As is suggested by D. R. Howlett (ed.), *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources: Fascicule vi (M)* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 1717–18.

¹⁷ T. Northcote Toller (ed.), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth*, parts 1–4. A–Y (Oxford, 1898), pp. 673–4; T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Supplement, with rev. and enlarged Addenda by A. Campbell* (Oxford, 1921), p. 633; W. Rothwell, L. W. Stone and T. B. W. Reid (eds.), *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (London, 1992), p. 406.

¹⁸ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum*, ed. and transl. R. A. B. Mynors, compl. R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1998), 1, 216 (§134.6); cf. C. P. Lewis, 'English and Norman Government and Lordship in the Welsh Borders, 1039–1087' (University of Oxford DPhil thesis, 1985), pp. 348–9.

¹⁹ Above, pp. 5–6 and Map 2.

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St Asaph, alone among the four Welsh bishoprics, included a deanery of 'Marchia'.²⁰ The earliest evidence which establishes the boundaries of the diocese, the fiscal assessment of Welsh and English church lands known as the Norwich Valuation, dates to 1254.²¹ By then, the deanery of 'Marchia' encompassed Oswestry and Whittington lordships as well as territories to the west of Offa's Dyke, to wit, the Tanat valley and surrounding uplands. The latter district clearly related to the Welsh commote of Mochnant and indeed by 1291 a new, eponymous deanery had been created for it. A new deanery of Cynllaith was also established between 1254 and 1291. As a result, at the end of the thirteenth century, the deanery of 'Marchia' comprised just the lordships of Oswestry and Whittington. The best explanation for the inclusion of these lordships within a Welsh diocese is the political situation of the 1140s and 1150s. The diocese of St Asaph was established, or perhaps re-established, in north-east Wales in 1141.²² Oswestry Castle may have been in Welsh hands soon afterwards, and certainly was by 1149, or 1151 at the latest.²³ It is possible that the deanery of 'Marchia' was first created shortly after 1150,²⁴ and that it was already so named at the time.²⁵

It is also, of course, conceivable that the term *Marchia* did not have any local or regional meaning, or that the usage of the English royal chancery and exchequer developed independently of such a tradition. The timing of the phrase's first occurrence in the Pipe Rolls certainly points to a specific set of historical circumstances. Henry II led an unsuccessful campaign into Wales, by way of Oswestry, in 1165.²⁶ And it was in the same year that Geoffrey de Vere was installed as sheriff of Shropshire and

²⁰ D. R. Thomas, *The History of the Diocese of St Asaph*, 3 vols. (Oswestry, 1908), i, 41; *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae Auctoritate P. Nicholai IV. circa A. D. 1291*, ed. T. Astle, S. Ayscough, and J. Caley (London, 1802), pp. 272–94, esp. pp. 285–6. For the deanery of 'Marchia' in 1535 see *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, ed. J. Caley and J. Hunter, 6 vols. (London, 1810–34), iv, 344 and map; also the map in *VCH*, ii, 24; and W. Rees, *An Historical Atlas of Wales: From Early to Modern Times*, 3rd edn (London, 1967), Plate 33.

²¹ C. N. L. Brooke, *The Church and the Welsh Border in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. D. N. Dumville and C. N. L. Brooke (Woodbridge, 1986), p. 12, n. 40; cf. *The Valuation of Norwich*, ed. W. E. Lunt (Oxford, 1926), pp. 467–73, esp. pp. 471–2.

²² M. J. Pearson, 'The Creation and Development of the St Asaph Cathedral Chapter, 1141–1293', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 40 (2000), pp. 35–56.

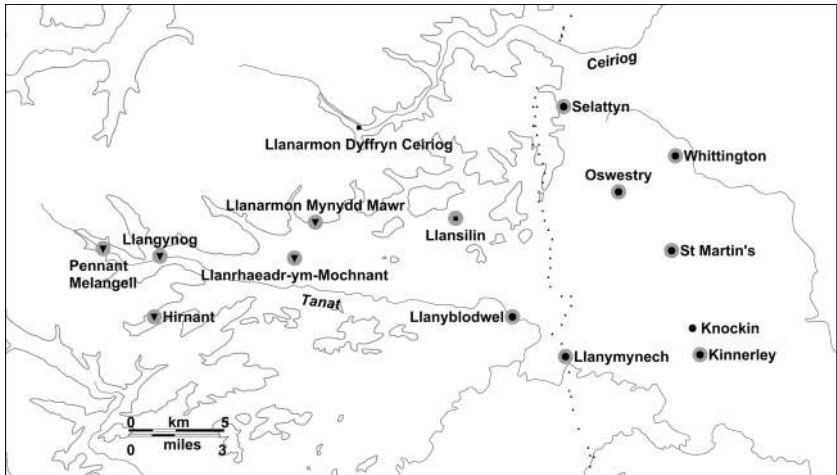
²³ *Brut*, p. 129; *Annales Cambriae*, p. 44. Below, pp. 45, 76–7, 119, 211.

²⁴ For this possible dating, see D. Stephenson, 'Madog ap Maredudd, Rex Powissensium', *WHR*, 24 (2008), pp. 14–15. Pearson, 'Creation and Development of St Asaph', pp. 47–8, suggests the period 1149–55 for the shaping of the deanery of 'Marchia'. See also J. R. Davies, 'Aspects of Church Reform in Wales, c. 1093–c. 1223', in *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 30 (2008), pp. 85–99. I should like to thank Dr Stephenson and Dr Davies for kindly sending me drafts of their articles.

²⁵ The deanery of 'Marchia' does not, however, appear to be mentioned in any of the edited twelfth-century Welsh or English episcopal acts or in any of the edited Welsh monastic charters.

²⁶ See index under Henry II (1165 campaign).

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- Deanery of 'Marchia' in 1254, possibly from c. 1150
- Deanery of 'Marchia' in 1291
- ▼ Deanery of Mochnant in 1291
- Deanery of Cynllaith in 1291
- Offa's Dyke

Map 3. The deanery of 'Marchia'

appears to have been placed in charge of a standing army of 'serjeants of the March'. As has been mentioned, after the debacle of 1165, no English king led a campaign into Wales for almost fifty years. It seems indeed as if the concept of a Welsh 'March' gained currency precisely at a time when it became more widely accepted that a military stalemate existed on the Anglo-Welsh border.²⁷

Given this timing, it may be that the twelfth-century *Marchia Wallie* came to be thought of as a military buffer zone, initially on the Shropshire borders, later all along the Anglo-Welsh frontier. The connotation of a disputed border territory was widespread at the time. None other than Gerald of Wales (c. 1146–1223), the author of invaluable ethnographic works on Wales and Ireland, described the frontierlands between English and Irish in Ireland as 'those lands that were furthest inland and closest to the enemy, the so-called marches, which in truth could well take the name

²⁷ See R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest. Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 2000; first published under this title Oxford, 1991; first published as *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063–1415*, Oxford, 1987), p. 272.