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On many occasions Local History cannot be meaningful in a purely 'local' context. An event or process identified in a particular place may be part of a much wider perspective that the local historian must be aware of in order to give his work its proper focus. The Battle of Grosmont was a turning-point in the Glyndwr Rebellion that had covered the length and breadth of Wales and the borders in the early years of the fifteenth century.

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THE BATTLE OF GROSOMT, 1405: A reinterpretation by Nick Thomas-Symonds

(researched by Gareth McCann)

Introduction

Owain Glyndwr was declared Prince of Wales on 16 September 1400 at his own manor. The apparent pretext was a disagreement with his neighbour, Lord Grey of Ruthin, over either a deliberately delayed summons for Glyndwr to accompany the king on his expedition to Scotland or a local boundary dispute. For Rees Davies, 'this was a premeditated act based on long-festering grievances and an attachment to the ideology of an independent Wales governed by its own native, legitimate ruler.'² Indeed, from this apparently minor event, Wales was to become a region in revolt. The Battle of Grosmont is one of the Anglo-Welsh battles of this time. It occurred almost exactly half-way through the 'revolt' period of 1400-1409, in March 1405.

The significance of the Battle of Grosmont can be located in the context of the Glyndwr revolt, or in terms of providing a brief historical window into the early character of Prince Henry of Monmouth, later Henry V (r. 1413-22), who provides the only true primary source for the battle itself. It is the view of both author and researcher that there is a sorry lack of study of local history within the national curriculum: this article takes a specific local event from a significant period in Welsh history and provides a new interpretation of it.

Grosmont

The name 'Grosmont' derives from the French word for 'big hill'. For Grosmont itself lies on a hill above the River Monnow. It was an important medieval Marches town. Barber observes that, in 1405, 'Grosmont was one of the largest and most prosperous towns in Gwent and in South Wales, only Carmarthen and Abergavenny were greater in size.' Barber further notes that Grosmont only ceased being a borough as late as 1860, when it lost the right to appoint a Mayor and an Ale Taster.⁴

Indeed, Grosmont's importance in the Middle Ages is well-captured by Hando, who even goes as far as to suggest that the red rose of the House of Lancaster may have originated there:

Grosmont's association with the red rose goes back to the days of Aethan who occupied 'Grismont', Skenfrith and White Castle before and at the time of the Norman conquest. Tenants of Aethan held their land on the payment yearly of one red rose and the Grosmont land was called 'Rosllwyn (rose bush). To Rosllwyn came Queen Eleanor, 'the rose of Provence', and she it was who adopted the red rose as the badge of her house. Her eldest son, Henry de Grosmont had on his seal a bunch of roses, and it was his daughter who married John of Gaunt, 'time-honoured Lancaster'. Does it then seem ridiculous to suggest that the red rose of Lancaster may have its origin in Grosmont?⁵

Whether the rose did originate there or not is beside the point: the fact is that Grosmont had a sufficient status at that time to be considered for such an accolade by Hando.

Grosmont also had an important fortification: its castle. This was one of the Three Castles guarding the Welsh Marches in the area, the others being Skenfrith Castle and White Castle. A useful, succinct account of the history of Grosmont Castle specifically is to be found in C.A.Raleigh Radford's HMSO pamphlet.⁶ He notes that Grosmont, along with the rest of what is now northern Gwent, was conquered by the Normans at the end of the eleventh century. A charter during the reign of Stephen (r. 1135-54) indicates that it was then a royal estate; under Henry II (r 1154-89) it was in the possession of the Crown, with the Sheriff of Herefordshire accountable for its administration. Radford cites twelfth century records of spending at the Three Castle: the Exchequer Accounts of 1182-3 note money spent on the castles of Skenfrith and Grosmont; further money was spent at Grosmont in 1185-6 and 1193-4. Therefore, in 1405, Grosmont Castle was a well-established strategic base with a three-hundred year history. It is unsurprising that it would feature at some stage during the Glyndwr revolt.

The Primary Source Available

For several hundred years, interpretations of the Battle of Grosmont were based, almost uncritically, around the letter sent by the young Prince Henry to his father, Henry IV (r 1399-1413). It was dated Wednesday 11 March, 1405, and was written in French, the major language of the royal court at the time. The following is a translation of the letter, which is well worth dwelling upon, as it is the primary source for the Battle of Grosmont.

Addressed to 'the King my most redoubted and most sovereign Lord and Father,' it reads:

My most redoubted and most sovereign Lord and Father in the most humble manner that in my heart I can devise I recommend to your royal Majesty, humbly requesting your gracious blessing. My most redoubted and most sovereign Lord and Father, I sincerely pray that

God will graciously show his miraculous aid toward you in all places; praised be he in all his works; for on Wednesday the eleventh of the present month of March your rebels of the parts of Glamorgan, Morgannok, Usk, Netherwent, and Overwent, assembled to the number of eight thousand men according to their own account. And they went on the same Wednesday, in the morning, and burnt a part of your town of Grosmont within your Lordship of Monmouth and Jennoia. Presently out were my well-beloved cousin the Lord Talbot and the small body of my household, and with them joined your faithful and valiant knights Sir William Newport and John Greindre, the which formed but a small power in the whole: but true it is indeed that Victory is not in the multitude of people, and this was well proved there, but in the power of God. And there, by the aid of the blessed Trinity, your people gained the field and vanquished all the said rebels, and slew of them by fair account in the field, by the time of their return from the pursuit, some say eight hundred others a thousand, being questioned upon pain of death: nevertheless whether it were one or the other I will not contend. And to inform you fully of all that has been done, I send you a person worthy of credit therein my faithful servant the bearer of this letter who was at the engagement and performed his duty well, as he has always done. And such amends has God ordained you for the burning of four houses in your aforesaid town: and of prisoners were none taken except one, a great chieftain among them, whom I would have sent to you but that he is not yet able to ride at ease. And concerning the governance which I propose to make after thus, may it please your Highness to give confident credence to the bearer of these in that he will lay before your Highness on my part. And I pray God to keep you always in joy and honour, and to grant me shortly to comfort you with other good news.

Written at Hereford the said Wednesday at night.

Your most humble and obedient son HENRY.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources rely on this letter extensively. This is unsurprising in one sense, given its lone status as a primary source. For the Battle of Grosmont is not specifically mentioned in any of the chronicles of the time. However, what is surprising is that historians took so long to cast a critical eye over it. One has to wait for the eighteenth century to find a secondary source mentioning the Battle of Grosmont. This is written by Thomas Pennant, and was originally published in 1778. Basing his interpretation almost entirely on the letter, Pennant writes:

On the 11th of March: a body of his partizans [Glyndwr's], to the amount of eight thousand, had assembled out of Glamorganshire, Uske, Netherwent, and Overwent. As usual, they began their march with desolating the country; and burnt part of the town of Grosmont, in the county of Monmouth. Henry prince of Wales was at that time at

Hereford, with the army entrusted to him by his father, ready to open the campaign. He there received an account of the defeat of these malcontents, by a handful of men commanded by Sir Gilbert Talbot, joined by Sir William Newport and Sir John Greindre. He transmitted the account to his father, in a letter written in an uncommon strain of piety and dutifulness. It seems that the Welsh forgot the ancient spirit of their country; and yielded an easy victory to the enemy. Eight hundred or a thousand were slain."

Thomas Thomas's account of 1822, *Memoirs of Owen Glyndwr*, is very similar, but with a greater emphasis on the destruction of *Grosmont* by Glyndwr's men. The account is very obviously based upon Prince Henry's letter, with the 8000 figure for the size of the Welsh force accepted without comment, and the 800-1000 figure for those killed. However, Thomas does ask the question as to why the Welsh were overwhelmed by a smaller English force: 'The Welsh in this battle, did not act up to the valour inherent in their nation. They were probably raw recruits, without either good officers or discipline, and particularly without Glyndwr's presence to animate them, which cause them to fall so easy a prey to the enemy, and suffer so greatly in the number slain.'⁹

William Owen's account of 1833, *Hanes Owain Glandwr*, is similarly dependent on the letter, relying, again, on the precise figure of 8000.¹⁰ At the turn of the twentieth century, the letter still held great sway. In 1902, Arthur Granville Bradley writes: 'Rhys [Gethin], passing through Glamorgan with eight thousand men and skirting Abergavenny, attacked the border town of *Grosmont*, in the valley of the *Monnow*, and burnt it to the ground. *Grosmont* had hitherto been a flourishing place but it never recovered from the blow then dealt it' Published in 1931, J.E.Lloyd's classic *Owen Glendower* is a little more circumspect in describing the Battle of *Grosmont*. Lloyd does not tie himself to the exact figure of eight thousand: 'Adherents of Owen assembled together from a wide area in *Gwent* and *Morgannwg* and in their thousands attacked the Lancaster vill of *Grosmont*. Without delay, assistance was sent from the prince's head-quarters at Hereford; Lord Talbot, William Newport, John Grendor, and others of the young Henry's household set upon the insurgent army and scattered it with great slaughter.'¹²

Using evidence from the Proceedings of the Privy Council (i.248), Lloyd continues: 'It was a victory of which the moral effect might be expected to be considerable, and the king upon hearing of it at Berkhamstead, directed that it should forthwith be made known, as most acceptable good news, to the mayor and citizens of London.- However, written in 1934, J.D.Griffith Davies's *Owen Glyn Dwr* accepts the letter at face value again. Davies's approach, and his reliance on Prince Henry's letter, is best summed up in the following sentence: 'The result of that attack [Rhys Gethin's on *Grosmont*] will be best appreciated from the despatch which Henry of Monmouth sent to his father a day later.- Moreover, post-war secondary sources have still, by and large, taken the letter at face value. *Glanmor*

Williams, in his *Owen Glendower*, obviously uses the letter, quoting in particular Prince Henry's figure for 800-1000 dead.¹⁵

D Helen Allday, it seems, is also very much persuaded by the letter. In her *Insurrection in Wales*, she writes: 'During March, 1405, a Welsh attack near the River Monnow was thwarted by Hereford men. A large rebel force of eight thousand led by Rhys Gethin had rampaged through Glamorgan, prudently avoiding the stronghold of Abergavenny, to descend ferociously upon the slumbering town of Grosmont- Geoffrey Hodges quotes Prince Henry's letter and notes: .this victory was won by mobile companies acting in concert, under orders from the prince's headquarters at Hereford.- He also mentions the significance of a victory at Grosmont: the birthplace of the first Duke of Lancaster, Henry of Grosmont, grandfather of Henry IV.¹⁸ Similarly, Chris Barber, in his *In Search of Owain Glyndwr*, argues: 'At the end of February [1405], Rhys Gethin raised a mighty army in Glamorgan and with eight thousand men he marched through Cardiff and Newport to attack the castles of Caerleon and Usk, which had been regained by the English."⁹

Barber argues that they arrived at Grosmont and, with Bradley, he notes that they 'plundered and burnt the town until it was a smouldering ruin. It was devastated to such an extent that it never recovered. Traces of the ruined streets can still be seen - According to Barber, Rhys Gethin took it for granted that Grosmont Castle would be occupied by a relatively small group. However, apparently, he was to be in for a rude awakening as, inside the castle, was Prince Henry of Monmouth with a well-drilled, if small, outfit: Prince Henry had been joined at Grosmont by soldiers from Hereford under the command of his cousin, Sir Gilbert Talbot, Sir William Newport and Sir John Greynder. They waited until Rhys Gethin's men were scattered over the surrounding area, ruthlessly pillaging and burning. Then, on 1 March, in a compact body, the English force rode out of the castle, brandishing swords. Falling upon the disorganised group of rebels, they took them completely by surprise and before long eight hundred corpses lay on the ground, whilst the remainder fled in confusion.'²

Barber observes that, in this battle, Owain's secretary, Owen ap Gruffydd ap Rhisiant, and brother-in-law, John Hanmer, were amongst those captured. Barber then quotes an excerpt from Prince Henry's letter, giving conclusive evidence, if any was needed, that his account is heavily influenced by it. He notes that Prince Henry's services in Wales were to earn him credit in the House of Commons: they asked the King to keep his eldest son in the area dealing with the problem. Even exclusively local accounts seem to take the letter as gospel. Sir Joseph Bradney, in his *History of Monmouthshire*, writes: 'On the 11th March 1405, an attack was made on Grosmont by 8000 of Owain Glyndwr's men, who burnt part of the town. Assistance was sent for from Hereford. Prince Henry was there immediately sent for Lord Talbot and with him Sir William Newport and Sir John Greyndour. The

English were victorious, and slew 800-1000 of the Welsh. Prince Henry said in a letter to his father.²²

Writing in *The Monmouthshire Review*, J.D.Griffith Davies's account is as you would expect, given his acceptance of the truth of Prince Henry's letter. He writes 'The redoubtable Rhys Gethin had raised a force of 8,000 men in Glamorgan. Whether he took the castles of Caerleon and Usk or merely left small forces to mask them it is impossible to say; but we know that he avoided the Beauchamp stronghold at Abergavenny and hurled himself at Grosmont, which at that time was one of the largest and most prosperous towns in South Wales. What happened there will be seen from a letter which the young Prince Henry sent to his father.'²

In his *A History of Gwent*, Raymond Howell notes that, in March 1405 'Owain's son Gruffudd collected a force with many men of Gwent and attacked Grosmont. Henry, however, sent a large army from Hereford which relieved the castle and scattered the attackers.'²⁴

However, amongst the secondary literature, Rees Davies's 1995 publication *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dwr* stands out in its approach to the Battle of Grosmont. Rees Davies is very doubtful of claims in Prince Henry's letter: 'the Prince of Wales, wanting to exaggerate the scale of his own victory at Grosmont in March 1405, boasted to his father that the force of Welsh rebels from south-east Wales which he confronted numbered 8,000 men, of whom up to 1,000 had been killed.'¹²¹

Also, interestingly, Rees Davies notes that the archers used at the garrison at Grosmont had to be exclusively English, born very much on the other side of the River Severn: part of the anti-Welsh feeling in the court of Henry IV.²⁶

However, whilst both Lloyd and Rees Davies had been suspicious of the content of Prince Henry's letter, it took until 2002 for a wholesale attack to appear in print. When it came, it was of great ferocity, almost compensating for the reverence in which the letter had been held over the previous centuries. This attack appears in G J Brough's *Glyn Dwr's War: The Campaigns of the Last Prince of Wales*. Brough does not doubt the validity of the date of the battle, March 11th, but he launches a solid attack on the credibility of much of the rest of the letter's content. That attack is well worth outlining in detail here.

Prince Hal claimed that the English were but a small force, and then went on to name those commanders who accompanied the prince as the Earl of Warwick, Lord Talbot, Sir John Greyndour and Sir William Newport. The prince and Warwick were well known for having huge, heavily armed retinues, the others were the English crown's commanders in the field in south Wales and led substantial forces.²⁷

Brough concludes firmly that the 'likelihood of such men, and the heir to the throne, going into battle with meagre forces can be dismissed as fanciful boasting by the teenage prince, in an attempt to exaggerate the scale and importance of the encounter, and thus the victory won.'¹²¹

Brough argues that the encounter was certainly a victory for the English, but that the prince's figure of 8,000 for the size of the Welsh force is 'ludicrous'.²⁹ He asks a series of telling questions: surely such an army would have been seen, why are there no mass graves, why did the English not take greater advantage in terms of prestige if this really was such a great victory? Why did such a large Welsh force fail to take Grosmont, why did it have no well-known or captured leaders? Why did they flee a small English force when Welsh forces had a track record of defeating English forces of greater size? And why do other sources not record so great an event?³⁰

Furthermore, according to Brough, the prince lists places of origin of the Welsh twice to further enhance the impression of a large force. He also uses the phrase 'by their own account' in order to avoid a charge of lying. For Brough, a 'force with no leaders probably indicates a small local initiative bent on raiding' that is all Grosmont really amounts to. Brough asks if this is the real date of the so-called skirmish on Campstone Hill, which was said to have taken place the previous August? He also points out the significance of Grosmont to Henry IV, the prince's father For it was here that the first Duke of Lancaster, grandfather of Henry IV, was born. Brough asks: 'What better place for a titular Prince of Wales to claim a victory to bolster morale or kickstart a campaign to recapture the lost country of Wales.[?]'³²

Thus, we have the assessments of the Battle of Grosmont. They do have some common ground. The usual starting-point is the notion that a large Welsh force led, very possibly, by Rhys Gethin, was gathered from areas in South Wales. That force marched, perhaps via Caerleon, Usk, and skirting Abergavenny, to Grosmont. At the time, Grosmont was a major settlement in Gwent. The force burned the town, arguably to such an extent that the area never really recovered. However, an English force, led by Lord Talbot, Sir William Newport and John Greindre, arrived at the scene and easily defeated the Welsh, inflicting relatively high casualties.

Questions to be Answered on the Battle of Grosmont

However, there remain a number of questions to answer. How large was the Welsh force? To what extent can we rely upon the figure placed upon its size by Prince Henry in his letter? To what extent was the English force smaller than its Welsh counterpart? How high exactly was the number of Welsh casualties? Were Talbot, Newport and Greindre really present? And was the real date of the battle 1 March, 1405? Such questions also

bring into question the veracity of Henry's letter itself, and how much credibility we can realistically place on its contents as a whole. Similarly, we can ask, was Rhys Gethin present? Was Henry himself present?

With regard to the first question, it is difficult to argue that the size of the Welsh force was actually 8000. Brough is right in this respect. To take an historical example, even in the Yorkist invasion of England in 1460, Warwick and March left only 2,000 men to siege the Tower of London." Anyone who has visited the Tower of London, or read about it, will realise its size and crucial significance for control of London in the early fifteenth century. Thus, if only 2,000 men were deemed to be required to siege this key fortification, it is doubtful that 8,000 people would either have been deemed to be required to take Grosmont or would have been defeated in trying to do so. In any case, as Brough argues, such a force would have been visible; Prince Henry's forces would surely have noted its vast size and balked at taking it on. If this figure is dubious, this seems to cast doubt on the casualty figures as well.

For they assume that around a tenth of the Welsh force was killed. If the overall size of the force is reduced, and it seems likely that it is well below 8,000, then we start talking about a much higher proportion that were slain. Thus, it seems that all that can be said with credibility is that Welsh casualties were high relative to the size of the force present.

Was the English force really smaller than the Welsh force? The problem with answering this question is the lack of solid proof. However, it is very possible that the Welsh force was much larger. For, although small Welsh parties could defeat larger English forces, this seems to have been a group that was set upon by the English. Rather than the Welsh and English taking arms at either end of a medieval battlefield, the Welsh were burning Grosmont when an English force arrived. Prince Henry writes that the Welsh 'went on the same Wednesday, in the morning, and burnt a part of your town of Grosmont.' He continues: 'Presently out were my wellbeloved cousin the Lord Talbot and the small body of my household, and with them joined your faithful and valiant knights Sir William Newport and John Greindre [emphasis added].'

As regards the size of the English force, Brough talks of large forces at the disposal of Talbot, Newport and Greindre, but their ultimate size depends on one's interpretation of what 'huge' and 'heavily armed' mean in terms of numbers. Of course Sir William Newport and John Greindre were both King's Knights. And Lord Gilbert Talbot of Goodrich, 'wellbeloved cousin' of Prince Henry, had become a Baron on 9 September 1403, in place of his father, Richard Talbot. Yet, in his notes to the Chronicle of Adam of Usk, C. Given-Wilson states that Greindre, as Captain of Usk, for example, had 20 lancers and 60

archers.³⁴ Prince Henry also mentions that 'the small body' of his household were also involved.

Now during this period there was no regular royal army as we understand the term today. Men were often raised by the method of commissions of array. A royal writ would be used to order the county sheriff to proclaim throughout the shire that all 'knights esquires, archers and other fencible men should equip themselves as befitted their rank and muster at an appointed place and time, ready to depart on the king's service wherever he should require them to go.'³⁵ This said, Prince Henry did have some regular soldiers at his disposal in March 1405. There survives for the period November 1404 to May 1405 accounts of Prince Henry's receiver-general John Wynter. This shows payments made to the prince for troops' wages. It also records the number of men. In the period from 1 March to 27 April 1405, 200 men-at-arms and 500 archers were on service in south Wales, costing £ 1,260* Given this figure of 700, and the size of force at the disposal of Greindre (80), we can guess that the English force was comfortably less than 1000. Even this figure allows for forces of 100 at the immediate disposal of Newport and Talbot, which is optimistic.

However the figure assumes that all the troops available to Prince Henry (and the other commanders) were in the Grosmont area, and not deployed elsewhere. Prince Henry almost certainly deployed men at different locations on the March.

During the winter of 1404-5 troops were stationed at strategic points such as Monmouth, Radnor and Hay-on-Wye.³⁷ Thus, we can make an educated guess that the size of the English force was only a few hundred. The Welsh force, could, therefore, in line with Brough's argument, have been a raiding party, but perhaps quite a large one. A Welsh group of over 500 would have been substantially larger than the English.

Yet the apparent flaw in the argument is this. Whilst the men Prince Henry had at his disposal on the March in March 1405 were paid soldiers, as Griffiths notes, this does not mean that other methods of raising men were not still used.

Consequently, the numbers that are available are inconclusive, for they do not include other soldiers who could be gathered when needed. However, what supports the argument is the word 'presently' in Prince Henry's letter: the English force was gathered in a matter of hours: there was not time to raise a large force. Those concerned had to rely on the forces at their disposal.

Thus, we can say that, whilst the English force probably was smaller than the Welsh group, the precise extent to which it was so still remains difficult to ascertain on the evidence.

What about Prince Henry's letter as a source of information? Is it simply the wild boasting of a teenager? It is difficult to see it quite in the way Brough portrays it.

Certainly, Prince Henry wants to talk up the victory. For Grosmont was definitely a significant place for Henry IV and the Lancastrians. Henry IV's grandfather was the first Duke of Lancaster. He was none other than Henry of Grosmont, probably born around 1310 in Grosmont Castle. His predecessors, whilst they were Earls of Lancaster, were not Dukes. Edmund Crouchback, last son of Henry III, brother of Edward I, was Earl of Lancaster; he had sons Thomas, Henry and John. Thomas was executed in 1322, having had a detrimental impact on the reign of Edward II.³⁹

Henry succeeded his brother as Earl of Lancaster, and had a son, Henry of Grosmont, who was created Duke of Lancaster in the mid-fourteenth century. However, Prince Henry is much more circumspect and wise in his use of language than Brough indicates. Of course, he does call the English force small. In the translation set out earlier he says that 'the which formed but a small power in the whole: but true it is indeed that Victory is not in the multitude of people, and this was well proved there, but in the power of God [emphasis added]'. However, the figure of 8,000 comes from the Welsh themselves: 'according to their own account.'

Brough thinks this is to pass on any charge of lying, yet it is a most incredible lie. And it is difficult to see how either Henry would peddle it, or expect his father to believe it.

Firstly, Prince Henry was very aware of the finance needed to fund a war. Griffiths argues that Prince Henry was 'at no time more acutely aware of the difficulties of war finance than during the summer and autumn of 1404.'⁴⁰ The central problem was ensuring that money was there when it was needed. Money could be collected by methods such as taxation, but this was slow and could lead to problems with morale. On the basis of substantial primary evidence, Griffiths concludes that, essentially, the Exchequer financed the campaign of Prince Henry in Wales. After the collapse of the Exchequer in 1403, Prince Henry had borrowed money and recovered alienated lands to raise money. He had also used his own earldom in Chester to raise revenue. However, the appointment of treasurers of war by the parliament which met in October 1404 meant that he could once more rely on the Exchequer.⁴¹ Claims that very small English forces could beat substantially larger Welsh forces would hardly be helpful in persuading the treasurers of war to hand out larger sums of money.

Prince Henry and his father were hardly unintelligent. According to Weir, Henry V 'possessed all the attributes required of a successful medieval ruler.'⁴² Weir observes: 'He had an extensive library and was literate in English, French, Latin and Welsh. He enjoyed books on history, theology and hunting, as well as the works of Chaucer, Hoccleve and Lydgate. English chroniclers are unanimous in their praise of Henry V, excelling themselves in superlatives. Henry had a good deal of common sense, being a perceptive man who was a wise judge of character Henry V was 'a brilliant general, a courageous leader.

Meanwhile, Henry IV 'could be stubborn and impulsive, and occasionally lacked foresight [but] was well-educated, and proficient in Latin, French and English.'⁴⁵

In other words, the argument about concerns of war finance aside, why would Prince Henry think that such a lie would persuade his father anyway? The answer may well be found in the precise language he uses. For the young Prince really seems to be saying that the English force defeated a much larger Welsh force claimed by the Welsh to number 8,000. In any case, if it was a boast, where does this highly arbitrary figure of 8,000 come from? It may well be that it does come from a Welshman, who thinks, naively, that the force was that big. Alternatively, it may come from Talbot, Newport or Greindre. Prince Henry's presence seems unlikely given the wording of the letter that 'Presently out' were Talbot, Newport and Greindre: in talking up the victory, he would surely have mentioned his personal presence to increase its prestige if he had been there. Yet, given the military experience of the three men, it, again, seems incredible that they would come up with such a figure.

The language of the letter, if anything, is cautious. Prince Henry is careful not to pin himself to a precise casualty figure, though, again, he states what has been said: 'some say eight hundred others a thousand, being questioned upon pain of death: nevertheless whether it were one or the other I will not contend.' Here, someone wildly boastful could have simply increased the figure. Half of the force could have been slain, Father. But could Prince Henry have made such a boast? For if he was not present, he is relying on Talbot, Newport and Greindre. There was the risk that they could, themselves, have 'caught him out' for excessive boasting.

The only aspect which appears to sit awkwardly with this thesis is that Prince Henry lists places of origin twice for the Welsh force. This cannot be put down to his lack of knowledge of the Welsh language. Yet, in a sense, this can be explained by Prince Henry's cautiousness: here, he was willing to exaggerate, since he was a little safer in the knowledge that his father lacked his level of literacy in Welsh.

Indeed, overall, the most likely scenario is that while the precise figures and information in the letter must be used critically by the historian, Prince Henry's letter should not be dismissed as simple, unintelligent, wild boastfulness.

When did the Battle of Grosmont take place?

There is also the argument about when exactly the Battle of Grosmont took place. It has been argued that it actually took place a number of months prior to the writing of Prince Henry's letter. Prominent among these arguments is that which appears in Ian Skidmore's *Owain Glyndwr: Prince of Wales*. According to Skidmore, the battle took place 'late in the summer' of 1404.⁴⁶ Rhys Gethin led an 'extended raid' of 8,000 men 'from Glamorgan, Usk

and Gwent. Their target was the prosperous town of Grosmont.⁴⁷ Skidmore argues that the raid was initially effective: the 'Welsh army' marched through Cardiff and Newport before attacking castles at Caerleon and Usk. The men then 'swept down on Grosmont and were burning and looting when they were attacked by a smaller force led by the Prince of Wales and his three closest friends, Talbot, Newport and Greindor.'⁴⁸

The Welsh were apparently stocking up with items from the town, and so were particularly vulnerable as they were pressed back by Prince Henry's force. The attempted retreat to Campstone Hill was ineffective as the Welsh were simply attacked, and the Welsh standard was captured, and its bearer, Ellis ap Richard ap Howell ap Morgan Llwyd, was killed. However, the Welsh retaliated, and their numerical advantage apparently pushed Prince Henry back to Monmouth. Over a thousand Welsh were dead, but the Welsh, 'pursued the enemy to Trelog Common between Tintern Abbey and the gates on Monmouth. In this final encounter the Welsh captured the English baggage train which the Prince's troops abandoned in their flight to safety. For all that, the battle had been enough to rejuvenate the dispirited Prince [according to Skidmore, he was very concerned about the threat to Hereford]. From Monmouth that night he wrote to his father.'⁴⁹

Then, Skidmore quotes the letter. He adds: 'Though the battle had proved to the prince's satisfaction that God was an Englishman it did little to reassure the commons. Early in 1405 the population of the Lordship of Brecon made their continued loyalty to the Crown conditional on the king showing himself able to contain the rebels.'⁵⁰

It is odd that Skidmore should quote the letter here. For, in relying on it for his account, he seemingly ignores its date. Why, if the letter was written on the night of the battle, is it dated 1 March, 1405? Why would Prince Henry feel the need to put a later date on the letter? The answer here is probably that he did not. The battle to which he is referring took place as he said it did, on that date.

The answer to the confusion probably lies with a point raised in J.D.Griffith Davies's *Owen Glyn Dwr*: there were separate battles at Campstone Hill in 1404, and Grosmont in 1405. Using indications from letters written from Prince Henry to his father, Griffith Davies argues that Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, took to the field against Glyndwr's men. He went to Gwent and, at Campstone Hill he inflicted a sharp defeat on Owen's force.- Yet, tellingly, Griffith Davies adds: The scanty information about this engagement prevents a proper appreciation of its importance; but it was undoubtedly a bitter blow to Owen's prestige; and a tale was told that during the fighting the English pressed so heavily upon the rebels that Owen's banner fell into their hands and he himself came near to death. It is a shame that there is not more evidence about such a potentially significant occurrence.

Significance of the Battle of Grosmont

If therefore, we are satisfied that the Battle of Grosmont did indeed occur on 11 March, 1405, we can ask directly what its significance was. Of course, asking this simply begs further questions: significance to whom and in what sense? Yet this problem can be circumvented. For what we are interested in here is significance to the historian. In other words, how, with the material available, can we judge the effects of the event in the context of the Glyndwr Revolt, and in the context of the life of the author of the primary source for the battle, Prince Henry of Monmouth?

The Battle of Usk

As regards answering the first question, it is necessary to set out the Gwent battle that came just after the Battle of Grosmont: the Battle of Usk, or Pwll Melyn ('Yellow Pool'). This battle comes quickly after the Battle of Grosmont; exactly how quickly is the subject of much debate. The major primary source for the battle, and the essential starting-point for discussion, is the chronicle of Adam of Usk:

"The son of Owen is captured. Deaths at Usk. Griffith, the eldest son of Owen, attacked Usk castle with a great host on the feast of St Gregory [12 March] an evil hour for him; however, the defences there had been considerably strengthened, and Lord Grey of Codnor, Sir John Greyndour, and many more of the king's soldiers were there, and they made a sortie in force from the castle and captured his men, driving them relentlessly through the river Usk, where many of them most notably the abbot of Llantamam were killed either at the point of a sword or by drowning in the river, through Monkwood, where Griffith himself was captured, and on to the mountains of Upper Went. Of those whom they took alive, three hundred were beheaded in front of the castle, near Ponfald, although some of the nobler ones, including Griffith, were sent as prisoners to the king. This Griffith remained in captivity for six years, eventually dying of the plague in the Tower of London; and from this time onwards, Owen's fortunes began to wane in that region."

The reliability of Adam's account is questionable in that he was actually in Rome at the time of the battle: proximity of the writer to the event is something sadly missing. Another source, however, is the manuscript of Gruffydd Hiraethog, written from 1556-1564, but based upon a Welsh chronicle written in 1422. Hiraethog writes that, in 1405, there was 'A slaughter of the Welsh on Pwll Melyn Mountain, near Usk where Gruffydd ab Owen was taken prisoner. It was now the tide began to turn against Owen and his men. At this time Glamorgan made its submission to the English, except a few who went to Gwynedd to their master Thomas Ellis estimated the number of Welsh either killed or taken prisoner at 1,500.¹⁵

These accounts do not answer the question as to whether the Battle of Usk occurred the day after the Battle of Grosmont, as Adam of Usk's account would have us believe, or later. For this is significant: was the battle simply the re-match from the previous day, with the remaining participants fighting it out to the end? Was the Battle of Usk simply an extension of the Battle of Grosmont? Is the use of two labels for the battles appropriate if the one was really just a continuation of the other? This last question, however, need not arise for it seems unlikely that the Battle of Usk occurred on 12 March. Indeed, historians have tended to argue that the Battle of Usk took place in May. For example, J.E.Lloyd writes, 'A still more resounding success [than the Battle of Grosmont] was won in this region [Gwent] early in May.'⁵⁶ Lloyd footnotes that he believes the precise date of the battle to be 5 May, using the Annals of Henry IV (399).⁵⁷ Similarly, Rees Davies states clearly that there were crucial victories for the English 'at Grosmont in March and near Usk in May.

Assessment of the Battle of Grosmont

Historians generally agree that Glyndwr's star was on the wane after the Battle of Usk. For example, Geoffrey Hodges argues: 'Worse was to follow [after the Battle of Grosmont] for Owain's cause.'⁵⁹ He accepts the date of 5 May 1405 for the battle from Walsingham, and notes that we 'rely largely on Adam of Usk for the details' If Adam was correctly informed, the battle ended in a cold-blooded massacre worse than any atrocity in the Rising we know of.⁶⁰ Local history books concur. In his *A History of Gwent*, Raymond Howell argues that Pwll Melyn, on the back of Grosmont, 'brought Glyndwr's fortunes to a low ebb.'⁶¹

Geoffrey Hodges writes that Grosmont was one of the 'blows from which they [Glyndwr's fortunes] never fully recovered.'⁶² Similarly, Glanmor Williams elucidates that 'Owen himself suffered two severe setbacks in south-east Wales. The first took place near Grosmont in March. The second was a heavier and more serious defeat in May at Pwll Melyn near Usk at the hands of a strong English force.'⁶³

J.E.Lloyd agrees: 'On March 11th the Welsh cause suffered a severe check in the valley of the Monnow.'⁶⁴ Lloyd, however, argues that the tide was only turning for Glyndwr locally in Glamorgan. For him, during 1405, 'Owen suffered heavy defeats and won startling successes, but neither proved conclusive, and the end of the year saw him in much the same state as the beginning.'⁶⁵

Rees Davies readily accepts it as a setback for Glyndwr, 'the heavy military defeats that Glyn Dwr's forces suffered at Grosmont and Pwll Melyn in March-May 1405 suggest that the rashness of local initiatives was endangering the revolt as a whole.'⁶⁶ Davies adds that

'Turning-points, however, are generally more striking in retrospect than they are at the time itself. As 1405 closed, Wales was still in turmoil. Devastation was clearly common.'⁶⁷

There are a number of possibilities here. Perhaps *Grosmont* itself is the first of two battles (the other being the Battle of *Usk*) which, in *Gruffydd Hiraethog's* phrase, began to turn the tide against *Glyndwr*. Or perhaps *Usk*, as in *Hiraethog's Annals* is the real tide-turner, and *Grosmont* is simply a cross-current somewhere.

Or perhaps neither is really, to change the metaphor, the turning point, or, indeed, the cause of a turning point. Indeed, the difficulty of locating such a turning point is that it invariably involves causal analysis. For one cannot simply select events and class them as main causes or points when the tide turned.

Of course, sometimes events stand out and beg to be classified as such: the Battle of *Stalingrad* in the *Second World War*, for example. Ultimately, however, the historian is not in the position of being able precisely to pin down when, or what caused, the English to turn the corner in the *Glyndwr Revolt*. For we cannot say that things would have been different without such and such an event, because we simply do not know what would have happened without the event. What has happened has happened; the counter-factual situation is at best an educated guess.

The *Glyndwr Revolt*

Yet one can clearly see the attraction of the view that *Grosmont* and *Usk* were, as *Hiraethog* stated, the turners of the tide. It is easy to build a picture of the years prior to 1405 as times of great success for *Glyndwr*, when the tide flowed in his direction.

Glyndwr's declaration as Prince of Wales on 16 September 1400 was followed by attacks on English towns in north-east Wales, and a rising in north-west Wales. A strong response from the English did not quell the revolt, and, on 1 April 1401, brothers *Rhys ap Tudor* and *Gwilym*, *Glyndwr's* relatives, captured *Conway Castle* and held it briefly before negotiating a surrender. In the summer of 1401, *Harlech Castle* was also besieged, and *Glyndwr* threatened *Caernarfon* and its castle. That same summer, *Glyndwr* also won the *Battle of Hyddgen*, the apparent significance of which was the confirmation of a step-change from sporadic attacks to a more widespread outbreak. *Glyndwr* commanded around 500 men to victory against an Anglo-Flemish force just in the *Pumlumon* foothills, just south of *Machynlleth*.⁶⁸

The revolt continued to grow. For *Hodges*, 1402-4 were the 'Years of Victory'. In the first month of 1402, *Glyndwr* raided the area around *Ruthin* and captured *Lord Grey of Ruthin*, with whom he had had his famous disagreement in 1400. On 22 June, he defeated the English, led by *Edmund Mortimer*, and captured him and some of his colleagues. He also began to raid areas hitherto untouched by his supporters. *Adam of Usk* claims he invaded

Gwent and Glamorgan. J.E.Lloyd agrees: 'Conscious of his new added strength, Glyn Dwr determined to make his presence felt in new quarters, and in August he appeared for the first time in Gwent and Glamorgan.'⁷⁰ On 30 November 1402, Glyndwr secured another propaganda coup when his daughter married the captured Edmund Mortimer. Even in the 1402-3 winter, rebels kept up the pressure in Flintshire and the marches of Shropshire. In May and June 1403, Harlech and Aberystwyth Castles were besieged, and, in July, castles in west Wales fell to Glyndwr as he marched an army down the Twyi Valley in the manner of Llywelyn two hundred years earlier.

Throughout 1403, the highlands of north-west Wales were Glyndwr's fiefdom. J.E. Lloyd notes that his 'hold upon the uplands of North and Central Wales. Was complete On 10 July, evidence also emerged that Glyndwr was affecting English high politics in a major way. Henry IV had appointed Henry 'Hotspur' Percy (1364-1403), son of the First Earl of Northumberland and his uncle, Thomas Percy, had been appointed as lieutenant in north and south Wales, respectively, in 1402. Now 'Hotspur' raised the standard in support of Glyndwr at Chester.

He and his uncle were to die well within a fortnight at, or around, the Battle of Shrewsbury with the King. However, Flintshire men loyal to Hotspur now transferred to Glyndwr. In August, English towns in the district were burnt, and castles, including that of Flint itself, were besieged. In the south, Monmouthshire men were now involved, and, in sieges at Kidwelly and Caernarfon, French troops were present.

Throughout 1404, the Welsh branched out, attacking the English on their own territory in the borders; indeed, it is a measure of their success that Shropshire and Powys enacted their own treaties with the Welsh. Aberystwyth and Harlech Castles fell to the Welsh. The bishops of St. Asaph and Bangor defected to Glyndwr who held his first Parliament, and, in the summer of 1404, signed a Treaty with France.

For Hodges, 1405 is the year of 'the French in Wales.'⁷² In the early months of 1405, the Welsh were still threatening the border counties of England. In February 1405, Glyndwr agreed the Tripartite Indenture, dividing England and Wales between the Earl of Northumberland, Edmund Mortimer, and himself. Historians have generally scoffed at this, for example, Skidmore contends: 'The Tripartite Indenture which Owain signed in February 1405 was at best a romantic dream.'⁷³ Perhaps so; but the fact that such an agreement was contemplated shows how high Glyndwr was riding at this time. The French arrived in Wales in August 1405, and moved across Wales, almost reaching Worcester. In the same month, Glyndwr held a second Parliament at Harlech Castle. Indeed, the Welsh, prior to the French arrival, were still besieging Rhuddlan Castle in July.

After 1405, and the Battles of Grosmont and Usk, Glyndwr's fortunes can be seen to be on the wane. He had not only suffered defeat on the battlefield. His brother was dead, and his son had been captured. Worse was to follow in 1406. As Rees Davies puts it: 'If there had been any doubt that the tide had turned against Owain Glyn Dwr as 1405 drew to a close, there could be no such doubts a year later.'⁷⁴ The revolt was shifting back to the north-west. The remaining French troops left Wales in the spring of 1406 and, worse still, in November 1407 France signed a truce with England. During 1406, the English also captured the heir to the Scottish throne and held him. In such circumstances Scotland was hardly likely to help Glyndwr for the English had the threat of what they could do to the prisoner. In addition, the rebellion of Archbishop Scrope in Yorkshire had been put down in 1405. Glyndwr was very much alone.

Glyndwr's forces were also suffering military defeats in 1406. On St George's Day, Glyndwr lost another son; also in June, a Welsh force including the Earl of Northumberland was badly beaten. Support for Glyndwr ebbed away, and in Flintshire the 'revolt' could be said to have formally ended in late March-early April when over 1,000 men from different parts of the country appeared before Gilbert Talbot' who now re-appears as justiciar at Flint. They were given fines. In addition, as J.E.Lloyd writes, Glyndwr 'was beginning to lose his hold upon the outlying parts of Wales. It was in 1406, according to the Welsh annals, that Gower, the region of the Towy, and most of Ceredigion submitted to the English.'⁷⁶

By December 1406, revenue collection had resumed in Anglesey, and, early in 1407, one John Mainwaring was appointed military commander on the island by the English; Anglesey was very much out of Glyndwr's hands. In 1408, Glyndwr lost the castles of Harlech and Aberystwyth. Without them, he was once again simply some kind of guerilla.⁷⁷ Whilst it took time to restore civilian administration these events were significant, as Rees Davies puts it: 'Rebel activity continued, as we shall see, spasmodically for years in different parts of Wales; but by early 1409 Owain Glyn Dwr, self-proclaimed prince of Wales, was no more than a desperate and hunted guerilla leader. Wales was no longer a society in revolt.'⁷⁸

The Turning Point of the Glyndwr Revolt?⁷⁹

Thus, in the early years, we see Glyndwr victories, and failed royal expeditions, then, with the Gwent battles of 1405, we start to see more mixed fortunes on the battlefield. Yet a number of 'turning points' present themselves. There is the change in the position with regard to external help. Not only did it take away possible assistance, it allowed the English to face the Welsh threat down directly. Indeed, the deteriorating position with regard to external help might well represent the real 'turning point' in terms of sounding the death-knell for Glyndwr's revolt.

Alternatively, the so-called 'turning point' may lie away from the battlefield in the English tactics. Griffiths argues that a policy of containment on the March just prior to 1405 was accompanied by attempts to control supply. This meant ensuring that English forces were kept well-supplied, whilst attempting to cut Welsh supply lines. There is the example of March 1402 when London and Chester armourers were ordered not to sell arms to the Welsh. Merchants at Shrewsbury were only allowed to supply the English, and there was always the deterrent of punishing anyone who helped the Welsh. Griffiths argues that the policy had some effect in contributing to the Welsh defeat in the rising, on the basis that the number of prohibitions issued in Chester declines after 1404.⁸⁰ The Welsh had few ships, and, in any case, the English ports were to refuse them dock. Thus, in the long term, the outcomes of individual battles were less important to which side triumphed. The side controlling supply would almost certainly win; it would just be a question of when.

Another potential turning point away from the battlefield was the supply of money to the English. Detailed consideration of the financial records available leads Griffiths to conclude that 'it would seem that a greater regularity of money supply in the years after 1405 contributed in some part to the final collapse of the Welsh rising. There were, of course, many other considerations.'⁸¹ Thus, one could argue that as soon as the English had a regular and consistent supply of money, the tide had turned.

Yet what these two examples serve to illustrate is that a search for a turning point is a fruitless one in this context. The idea of Glyndwr moving forwards up to 1405, then moving backwards thereafter is an attractive one. However, the situation is more complex than this. Events away from the theatres of conflict were affecting the revolt, and the revolt itself was a series of episodes, some of which were victories for Glyndwr, and some of which were not. Sometimes the tide flowed with Glyndwr, sometimes it did not. However, it did not flow completely one way up to 1405, and completely the other way thereafter. After all, even in Glyndwr's successful year of 1403, civilian government in Wales was not totally obliterated. For example, there were still courts in Dyffryn Clwyd.⁸² After 1405, Glyndwr still held Harlech and Aberystwyth Castles until 1408.

Conclusion

Where would that leave the Battle of Grosmont? Its true significance can now, perhaps, be understood. It is clearly not the cause of Glyndwr's decline. It is more an indication that the Welsh could not simply gather together forces and win. The English were regular soldiers who came upon the Welsh burning a town. In showing that the Welsh could be beaten heavily, it gave the English something to build on.

With the Battle of Usk, the English started building. And, together with that battle at Pwll Melyn, Grosmont damaged the popularity of Glyndwr in the Gwent and Glamorgan areas.

The Battle of Grosmont also provides a useful insight into the future Henry V's character. As we have seen, his letter is not so much wild boasting as the approach of a more shrewd man attempting to talk up a victory. Indeed, we can see the seeds of the wise, sensible nature of much of Henry V's reign. We can also see the seeds of what was to become his reputation as a 'just' king. This insight is provided by his treatment of the prisoner captured at Grosmont. He writes in his letter: 'and of prisoners were none taken except one, a great chieftain among them, whom I would have sent to you but that he is not yet able to ride at ease.'⁸³

If anything, the Battle of Grosmont has, for too long, simply been something worth a mention in books on Glyndwr. It is a battle which occurred at a unique location, a battle which forms part of the fabric of history of the Gwent area. Its significance both as an event in its own right and as an historical window into the character of one of England's great kings should not be dismissed lightly.

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- 54 This manuscript was written by Gruffydd Hiraethog, probably between 1556 and 1564.
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79 I would like to record my thanks to G J Brough for our discussions, particularly on this section, and more broadly on the Grosmont battle.

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82 Rees Davies, *Revolt of Owain Glyn Dwr*, pp. 114-5

83 Exactly who that prisoner was remains a mystery. There have often been assumptions that it was Rhys Gethin, but no primary source indicates that it was. With no such evidence available, it is a mystery that is unlikely even to be solved.