

THE CHARTER OF 1424

LLANTRISANT Borough's only known surviving Charter, Richard Beauchamp's Charter of 20 October 1424, is a large parchment document measuring 21¼ inches wide by 15½ inches high; its size reflects the importance of its content. Its Latin text is contained in thirty-eight lines of neatly written script. The ink has turned brown with age, and in places has faded so badly that it can be read today only with the aid of ultra-violet light. The parchment itself has darkened, and at some time in the past has become stained, particularly along its folds.

Almost three inches of the parchment at the lower edge of the document were turned up to form a hem, giving extra strength to support the weight of a seal. A narrow strip of parchment, 1½ inches wide, was then threaded through slits in the two layers of the hem as a seal tag. To this tag was applied the obverse and reverse impressions of the seal which gave force and authority to the deed, the green wax seal of Beauchamp's Chancery at Cardiff.

The Burgesses who lived within each of the borough towns founded by the Lords of the medieval Marcher Lordship of Glamorgan and Morgan enjoyed rights and liberties which gave them a privileged status and greater economic advantages than the non-burgess town-dwellers, or those who lived on manorial land outside the town, could enjoy. The right to elect their own corporation and administer their borough affairs brought into being a body of men with knowledge and experience of running a community, and merchants whose prosperity could advance within the favoured framework of borough trading. Grants of borough privilege were recorded in Charters, and series of medieval Charters, large imposing documents, have survived from Cardiff, Kenfig and Neath. Both Cowbridge and Llantrisant must also have possessed a series in the past, but one Charter only from each now survives.

The text of the Llantrisant Charter is long and involved, for it is a Charter of Inspection and Confirmation. It recites and confirms four earlier Charters which have not survived; their contents are known only from these recitals.

In his 1424 Charter, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick and Lord le Despenser, Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan, inspected and confirmed the Charter which had been given to the Burgesses three years earlier, on 24 August 1421, by another Richard Beauchamp, the Earl of Worcester, Lord le Despenser, Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan and Lord of Abergavenny, and his wife Isabel. The two Richard Beauchamps were related, and were the first and second husbands of Isabel le Despenser, daughter and heiress of Thomas le Despenser, the previous Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan.

Isabel's first husband had inspected and confirmed a Charter given on 18 February 1397 by her father, Thomas le Despenser, and Elizabeth his wife. Thomas, in turn, had inspected and confirmed a Charter given by his father, Edward le Despenser, on 2 July 1358, and this document had recited the Charter of 1346 of Hugh le Despenser, Edward's uncle.

Hugh le Despenser's Charter of 4 May 1346 had set out in detail the privileges which he confirmed to his Burgesses of Llantrisant:

Burgesses shall be free throughout the Lord's domain, in England and in Wales, and shall continue to enjoy the liberties they have been accustomed to have.

Burgesses shall be free to trade with their merchandise and goods, within the Lord's domain and elsewhere, free from tolls and various other named dues.

Burgesses may bequeath their burgages, both tenements and rents, to whomsoever they wish.

Burgesses shall not be constrained to pass beyond their ancient liberties and bounds, against their will.

Burgesses shall not be receivers of the Lord's monies, only those arising from the bailiwick of the Reeveship. None, but burgesses, shall keep a stall, shop or tavern.

Burgesses may form a guild amongst themselves, for their own profit.

Burgesses may not be distrained for another's debt, unless they had stood as surety.

The Lord's Bailiffs may not distrain or summons, this may be done only by the Constable of Llantrisant castle or by Bailiffs chosen by the Burgesses.

Merchants may not pass through boroughs, except by the king's highway, so that the Lord may not lose his tolls.

No burgess who can find bail may be imprisoned, except for the felony of stolen goods or an offence against the Lord.

In all inquests relating to property, the inquirers are to be inhabitants of the borough.

Burgesses may not be called upon to watch or guard any fugitives taking refuge in a church outside the town walls.

Burgesses, through the Lord's Constable, may make proclamations of the assize of bread and ale, and other ordinances. *[No Ordinance Roll has survived from Llantrisant, but the burgesses may well have had Ordinances for the regulation of trade, the good management of the town, and keeping the peace, similar to those on the Kenfig and Cowbridge Rolls].*

And lastly, the Constable may hold Hundred Courts, monthly, of all pleas and complaints, except the pleas of the Crown, and certain others.

In 1358, when Edward le Despenser recited and confirmed Hugh le Despenser's Charter of 1346, Edward added the following further privileges:

Burgesses may enjoy housebote and haybote (the right to wood for the repair of houses and fences) from dead wood in the forests of Miskin and Glyn Rhondda.

Burgesses may enjoy 'stonputhe', the right to grind corn in the Lord's mills in Miskin.

Burgesses may enjoy pannage for their hogs in the forests of Miskin and Glyn Rhondda, paying to the Lord one penny for an adult pig, a halfpenny for a half-year-old pig, and for piglets and little pigs of less age, nothing.

Burgesses may keep their livestock within the districts of Miskin and Glyn Rhondda without having to pay taxes.

And lastly, no outside Bailiff may be Coroner, only the Constable of the castle.

The provisions of the Charters of 1346 and 1358 were then ratified as each of the later Charters of 1397, 1421 and 1424 confirmed all grants of earlier date.

Hugh le Despenser, in 1346 (the very year of the battle of Crécy), referred to his Burgesses of Llantrisant as a body of people already in being. He confirmed privileges which they had been accustomed to enjoy. From this it is clear that the Charter of 1346 was not the first grant to the Borough, but no mention was made of earlier documents. A similar silence is found in Hugh le Despenser's Charter to Cardiff Borough; the privileges enjoyed by the Burgesses were there set out in detail, but no mention was made of earlier Charters, although several were in being, and indeed have survived to this day.

The 1346 Charter defined the extent of the Borough. It did this not by giving a detailed perambulation of the boundaries as they could be walked, but by referring to particular locations on the extremities, topographical features and neighbouring lands. The Borough is described as stretching from Llwyn Crwn 'Lloyncrun', in the east, to the king's highway from Llantrisant town to Glyn Rhondda, and the road from a field called 'Brinruth' to a ford called Rhydhelig, 'Ridyponthelik', in the west, from the lands of Madoc ap Cadogan Dorthu in the north, to the demesne lands of the manor of Clun in the south, from the same demesne lands of Clun in the east, to the land of Rees ap Oweyn in the west, and from a ditch called Clawdd Wilkin, 'Klavyth Gwykyn vachan', in the north, to a ford called Rhyd Collwyn, 'Ridgolyn', in the south; together with an acre of land beside the highway from 'Brinruth' to Cowbridge.

Each of the Charters had been given in the presence of substantial men of the day who were associated with the Lordship or with the locality. Their names appear as a list of witnesses on each occasion. Chief amongst these were two of the officials of the Lordship, the Sheriff, and the Constable of Cardiff castle. Then followed representatives of families who owned manors in the Lordship and who participated in events of import. They included Berkerolles of East Orchard, Fleming of St. George's and Flemingston, Mathew of Llandaff and Radyr, Norris of Penline, St. John of Fonmon, le Soor of Peterston and St. Fagans, Stradling of St. Donat's, and Turbevill of Coity. All these names are of Norman or continental origin, and represent families which had come into the Lordship.

The Welsh names recorded include Sir Thomas ap Aaron of Brigant, and Llewelyn Vachan who has been identified as the son of Llewelyn ap Cynfrig ap Howell ap Madoc ap Jestyn, of Miskin, and so a descendant of Jestyn ap Gwrgan, the last Welsh ruler of Glamorgan. Jevan ap David ap Llewelyn Vachan, a witness in 1421, is a later member of the same line. The number of witnesses with Welsh names, ten out of a total of thirty-eight, is significant, and shows how Welsh notables were re-asserting themselves and were gaining acceptance. The witnesses to the 1397 Charter are notable too for the inclusion of various churchmen associated with the cathedral church of Llandaff.

The granting of a Charter in the presence of witnesses was a means of making its provisions known, and of commanding respect for its terms. The Lord's commitment was signified by the sealing of the Charter with his Chancery seal.

THE SEAL

THE outer edge of the fine green wax seal of Richard Beauchamp's Cardiff Chancery has crumbled away, but enough remains to show clearly its handsome design. On its obverse is an armed knight on horseback. His shield bears the arms of Beauchamp and Newburgh. The caparisons of the horse have been emblazoned, but the wax is now so worn that only faint traces of Despenser quartering de Clare can be seen.

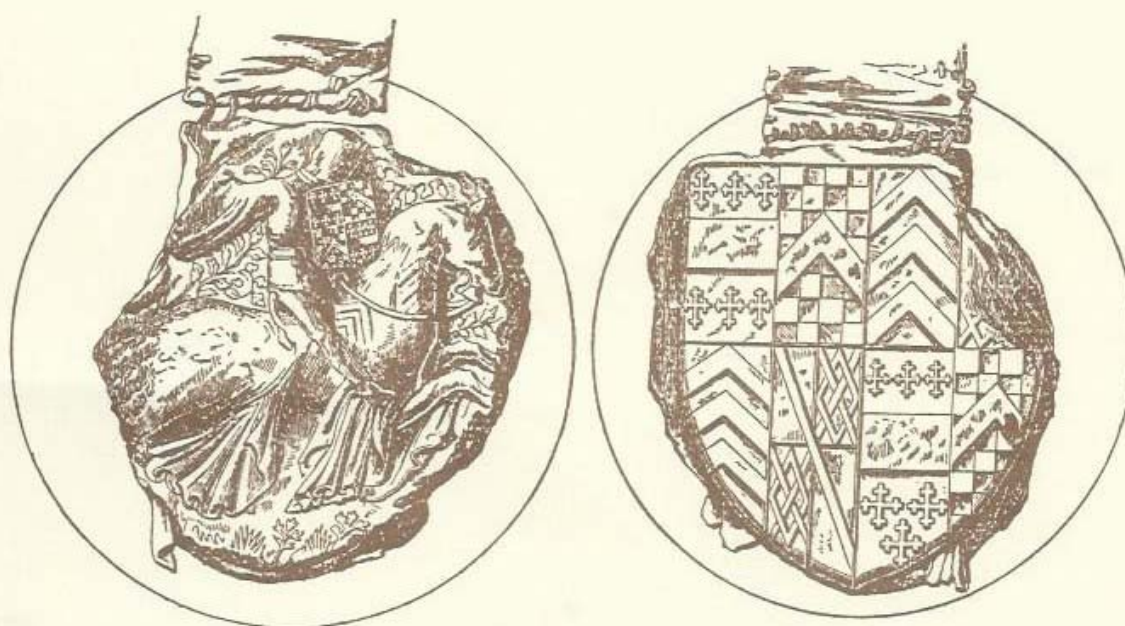
The reverse of the seal is filled by a broad shield displaying the coat of arms of Richard Beauchamp as Earl of Warwick and Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan. It is divided into four grand quarters: the 1st and 4th display Beauchamp impaling Newburgh, Earl of Warwick, while the 2nd and 3rd show de Clare impaling Despenser, an unusual reversal of the order, giving precedence to the older de Clare family, from whom the Despensers had inherited the Lordship.

Beauchamp: A fesse between six cross-crosslets.

Newburgh, Earl of Warwick: On a chequy ground, a chevron.

de Clare: Three chevronels.

Despenser: In the 2nd and 3rd quarters a fret, overall a bendlet.



by virtue of his bailiwick, shall make any summonses or attachments, or receive distress within the said boundaries, except only the Constable of our castle of Llantrisant and the Bailiffs of the same town who shall be chosen by the Burgesses themselves. And that merchants with their merchandise shall not pass through borough towns elsewhere than by the king's highways so that neither we nor our heirs shall at any time lose the toll or other custom due to us.

We have also granted that none of our said Burgesses ought to be taken or imprisoned for any matters concerning them while they can find bail or pledge, except only if they are taken in a case of felony with mainour (stolen goods) or for anything especially touching us or our household. And for everything done within the liberty of our said town which touches our said Burgesses, their tenements or chattels, for which an inquest ought to be held, that the inquest should be decided by inhabitants and not by others, and that our same Burgesses and their successors [*the next words are missing as there are now two holes in the parchment, but comparison with the Charters of Cowbridge and Cardiff would suggest a reading* 'shall not carry out any watch, or guard'] any fugitive in any church ['outside the walls of our said town. We have also granted'] to our Burgesses that they may, by ordinance of our said Constable, freely make ordinances and proclamations of the assize of bread and ale, and of other matters touching the said town whenever it shall be necessary, for the improvement of the town and the profit of the people, so that there shall be no proclamations of laws which have been made at any time within our county court of Glamorgan. We desire also that from henceforth our Constable of Llantrisant should hold all Hundred Courts of the town from month to month for all pleas and suits both hue and cry and bloodshed as well as trespass, debt, covenant, and as well as other diverse contracts, excepting pleas of the Crown, forestalling and homesoken and pleas of land.

We, the said Hugh and our heirs will guarantee all the said liberties to our said Burgesses against all men, and defend them for ever. In witness whereof we have caused to be affixed to this our present Charter, the seal of our Chancery of Cardiff. Witnesses: Sir Matthew le Soor, then our Sheriff of Glamorgan and Morgan, Thomas le Warde, Sir John le Norreis, Sir Thomas ap Aaron, knights, Payn de Turbervyll, Lewelin Vachan, Madoc ap David, and others. Given at Cardiff the fourth day of May in the twentieth year of the reign of Edward III [4 May 1346].

We [*Edward le Despenser*] have further granted to our same Burgesses of our special grace that they and their successors from henceforth shall have housebote and haybote, within reason, from the dead wood in our woods and forests of Miskin and Glyn Rhondda ('Glynrothnei'), without hindrance of our foresters; and that the same our Burgesses shall have the liberty called 'stonputhe' in all our mills of Miskin for grinding their corn, as other free tenants have, and were accustomed to have.

We have also granted to our said Burgesses that in all our woods of Miskin and Glyn Rhondda, and in our forests, they should have free pannage for their pigs when the time of pasturing shall occur, but excepting nevertheless [*a payment*] to us and our heirs, when in our forests, for each adult pig, of one penny, for each half-year-old pig, of a halfpenny, and for piglets and young pigs of less age, nothing. And that the said Burgesses and their successors may freely keep their livestock within the districts of Miskin and Glyn Rhondda, without paying tallage and rent of avowry to us and our heirs. And that no outside Baillif shall from henceforth perform the office of Coroner within the boundaries of the liberty of our said town, except whoever shall be Constable of Llantrisant for the time being.

And we, the said Edward le Despenser for us and our heirs do by these presents ratify and confirm for ever to our said Burgesses and their successors all the said liberties, both newly granted by us and previously given by Lord Hugh le Despenser, our uncle. In witness whereof we have caused to be affixed to this our present Charter the seal of our Chancery of Cardiff. Witnesses: Sir Gylbert de Ellesfeld, then our Sheriff of Glamorgan, Sir Richard de Turbervill, Sir John le Norreis, knights, William Flemyng, David Vachan ap David ap Madoc, Madoc Vachan ap Madoc ap Jorverth, and others. Given at Cardiff, the second day of July in the thirty-second year of the reign of Edward III [2 July 1358].

We the said Thomas le Despenser and our heirs do by these presents ratify and confirm all the said liberties to our said Burgesses and their successors for ever. In witness whereof we have caused to be affixed to this our present Charter the seal of our Chancery of Cardiff. Witnesses: Sir John de St. John, then our Sheriff of Glamorgan, Sir Laurence de Berkeroles, Sir William Stradlyng, knights, John Basset and Robert Walys, esquires, Sir Thomas Orewell, Archdeacon of Llandaff, Sir John Cris, Master Roger Crok, Master Henry War, clerks and canons of the Church of Llandaff, and many others. Given at Cardiff, the eighteenth day of February in the twentieth year of the reign of Richard II [18 February 1397].

by virtue of his bailiwick, shall make any summonses or attachments, or receive distress within the said boundaries, except only the Constable of our castle of Llantrisant and the Bailiffs of the same town who shall be chosen by the Burgesses themselves. And that merchants with their merchandise shall not pass through borough towns elsewhere than by the king's highways so that neither we nor our heirs shall at any time lose the toll or other custom due to us.

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And we, the said Edward le Despenser for us and our heirs do by these presents ratify and confirm for ever to our said Burgesses and their successors all the said liberties, both newly granted by us and previously given by Lord Hugh le Despenser, our uncle. In witness whereof we have caused to be affixed to this our present Charter the seal of our Chancery of Cardiff. Witnesses: Sir Gylbert de Ellesfeld, then our Sheriff of Glamorgan, Sir Richard de Turbervill, Sir John le Norreis, knights, William Flemyng, David Vachan ap David ap Madoc, Madoc Vachan ap Madoc ap Jorverth, and others. Given at Cardiff, the second day of July in the thirty-second year of the reign of Edward III [2 July 1358].

We the said Thomas le Despenser and our heirs do by these presents ratify and confirm all the said liberties to our said Burgesses and their successors for ever. In witness whereof we have caused to be affixed to this our present Charter the seal of our Chancery of Cardiff. Witnesses: Sir John de St. John, then our Sheriff of Glamorgan, Sir Laurence de Berkeroles, Sir William Stradlyng, knights, John Basset and Robert Walys, esquires, Sir Thomas Orewell, Archdeacon of Llandaff, Sir John Cris, Master Roger Crok, Master Henry War, clerks and canons of the Church of Llandaff, and many others. Given at Cardiff, the eighteenth day of February in the twentieth year of the reign of Richard II [18 February 1397].

We the said Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of Worcester, Lord le Despenser, Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan, and Lord of Abergavenny, do by these presents for us and our heirs ratify and confirm all the said liberties to our said Burgesses and their successors for ever. In witness whereof we have caused to be affixed to this our present Charter the seal of our Chancery of Cardiff. Witnesses: Sir John Stradlyng, then our Sheriff of Glamorgan, Sir John de St. John, Sir Edward Stradlyng, knights, Watkyn Morton, then Constable of Cardiff, Jevan ap David ap Lewelyn Vachan, Lewys Mathew, Howell ap Grono ap Ivor, Robert Mathew, Morgan ap Lewelyn ap Jevan, esquires, and others. Given at Cardiff, the twenty-fourth day of August in the ninth year of the reign of Henry V [24 August 1421].

And we, the said Richard, Earl of Warwick, Lord le Despenser and Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan, and Isabel our wife, for the salvation of our souls and the souls of all our ancestors and heirs, approving of all the charters, gifts, grants and confirmations above, do by these presents, for us and our heirs, grant, renew, accept, ratify and confirm them to our said Burgesses of our town of Llantrisant and their successors for ever. Willing and granting that these charters, gifts, grants and confirmations of all their liberties may be faithfully and inviolably observed for ever, without any interruption. In witness whereof we have caused to be affixed to this our present Charter the seal of our Chancery of Cardiff. Witnesses: [Oliver] de St. John, then Sheriff, Sir John de St. John, Sir John Stradlyng, knights, Henry Slacke, then Constable of Cardiff, Davyd Mathew, Lewelyn ap Jevan Mady, Morgan ap Lewelyn ap Jevan, esquires, and many others. Given at Cardiff, the twentieth day of October in the third year of the reign of Henry VI [20 October 1424].

GLOSSARY

<i>Assize of bread and ale</i>	— a regulation governing the weight and price of bread and ale.
<i>Bailiff</i>	— an official of a town or hundred.
<i>Burgage</i>	— a unit of freehold property within a borough.
<i>Burgess</i>	— an inhabitant of the borough enjoying its privileges.
<i>Carriage</i>	— a toll on carriage of goods through a territory.
<i>Commote</i>	— a subdivision of a Welsh lordship.
<i>Corf</i>	— a temporary dwelling or booth.
<i>Demesne</i>	— the land retained by a lord for his own use.
<i>Distrain</i>	— to seize goods.
<i>Domain</i>	— the area under control of a feudal lord.
<i>Foreign</i>	— coming from outside the liberty of the borough.
<i>Forestalling</i>	— buying goods before they are offered for sale at market.
<i>Haybote</i>	— wood for repairing fences.
<i>Homesoken</i>	— assaulting a person in his own home.
<i>Housebote</i>	— wood for repairing houses.
<i>Hundred</i>	— an administrative division of a lordship.
<i>Liberty</i>	— a privilege granted to a borough, <i>or</i> the area within which the privilege operated.
<i>Lot and scot</i>	— a tax paid by members of a corporation.
<i>Mainour</i>	— stolen goods.
<i>Murage</i>	— a tax levied for building or repairing town walls.
<i>Pannage</i>	— the right of pasturing pigs in woods.
<i>Pavage</i>	— a tax levied for paving roads.
<i>Pickage</i>	— a toll for breaking ground to set up stalls at a fair.
<i>Pontage</i>	— a toll for the use or maintenance of a bridge.
<i>Reeve</i>	— a borough official elected from among the burgesses; in some boroughs called portreeve or mayor.
<i>Rent of avowry</i>	— a payment by new settlers for the lord's protection.
<i>Stonputhe</i>	— a liberty attached to milling, [probably] the right to put in a stone and use the lord's mill.
<i>Tallage</i>	— a tax imposed by a lord on his dependants.

(The surviving ancient Borough Charters and other Borough records from Llantrisant, Cardiff, Cowbridge, Kenfig, and Neath are today in the strongrooms of the Glamorgan Record Office, where they have been placed for safe keeping. They may be consulted in the Record Office searchroom).