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The Medieval De Valle Brothers: Grants, Writs & Letters

The Earl of Pembroke, Richard “Strongbow” de Clare (also FitzGilbert) led the invasion of Ireland as part of the larger Norman Conquest. Three of Robert De Valle’s sons, Gilbert De Valle, Stephen De Valle, and Hay De Valle, crossed the Irish Sea with Baron Raymond “Le Gros” FitzGerald from Pembrokeshire, Wales, in advance of Strongbow’s army.

What follows is a fictional war report given to Richard “Strongbow” de Clare by the Baron Raymond FitzGerald, during which the three De Valle brothers fought by his side as knights. Some of the text included in the letter is from Raymond Le Gros’s speech regarding treatment of the prisoners of war taken during the battle at Baginbun Head (eloquent as his speech was, unfortunately they were all executed).

Based on their success in the Norman Conquest of Ireland, the three brothers were granted fiefs. According to the *Wall Family History in Ireland*, the three knights’ fees were feodaries granted to the De Valle brothers by the Marshall Earls of Pembroke. They consisted of lands in Ardristan in County Carlow, Inchiolaghan (southwest of Kilkenny), Tulachany (also southwest of Kilkenny), and Rathoe in northeast County Carlow. Included below is a mocked-up Land Grant given to the brothers with Sir Richard FitzGilbert, Earl of Pembroke as signatory.

During the middle ages, most of Europe was governed using the feudal system. Land was the key currency that was exchanged for loyalty and services. Deeply felt concepts of obligation and justice lay in the relationship between lord and vassal, as well as in an implicit belief in the presence of God in everyday life.

Vassals held land from their lords in return for certain obligations, including military service and taxes. King Henry II was at the top of the feudal pyramid. Below the king was a tenant-in-chief who was vassal to the king as either a Count or Earl, such as Richard “Strongbow” FitzGilbert, 2nd Earl of Pembroke, and the land given was called a “County.” The tenant-in-chief would then give land to a mesne tenant, lower on the rung, such as Baron Raymond FitzGerald. Below the mesne tenant, further mesne tenants could hold land from each other in series, such as the De Valle brothers from the Mowbray overlord at Carlow. It was not a clear-cut a system however, with a lot of chaotic crossover and exceptions to the rule. There were many different counties and duchies organized into different kingdoms where power was constantly shifting.

The contract between lord and vassal was a sacred one. A Charter of Homage and Fealty is pledged below between the De Valle brothers and the Baron Raymond FitzGerald on receiving their fiefdoms. In the Middle Ages this was the ceremony in which a feudal tenant or vassal pledged reverence and submission to his feudal lord, receiving in exchange the symbolic title to his new position.

War Report from Raymond “Le Gros” FitzGerald to Richard “Strongbow” FitzGilbert



The Battle of Agincourt, 15th-century miniature

I, Raymond Le Gros, son of William FitzGerald the Lord of Carew and by his great seal at the request of King Henry II and in his great name, convey to thee, Richard “Strongbow” FitzGilbert, a faithful report of the advancements made in our conquest of the Commonwealth of Ireland in the year one thousand one hundred and sixty-nine.

On the calends (first) of May, we landed at Baginbun Head on the Hook Peninsula, an army of thirty knights, made up of Gilbert De Valle, his brother Stephen De Valle, his brother Hay De Valle, William Ferrand, and other worthy men this report does not name, sixty men-at-arms, and archers numbering three hundred. Here, on the seacoast eight miles from Waterford and south of Wexford, we put up a rampart of sods and stakes to fortify our camp, an elevated position with a good view of the harbour.

The townsmen of Waterford and with them Mac Lacheline of Offaly quickly received intelligence of our arrival. They held a council and there resolved to march out in body against us. Mustering close to three thousand men, they crossed the river Suir which runs under the walls of the town on the east side and does divide Munster from Leinster. Being formed into three bodies, they boldly marched on our intrenchments, prepared to make their assault.

But it is scarcely possible that courage will not shew itself, or the ardour of valour be extinguished or daunted, and therefore, though inferior as we were in number, with surpassing

gallantry we sallied forth to meet our assailants and engage in the too unequal conflict. Though we appeared in perilous case, we advanced with our helmets laced and lances in hand, our horses covered with housing and well saddled, and the good archers marching out front to begin the action. A cry was raised, and so many of our enemy host issued forth that it seemed as if the whole world was there assembled to do battle.

The army of Waterford and Offaly made a goodly shew of resistance. Being so outnumbered our aim was to surprise the enemy, and to this end we foraged a large herd of cattle that was nearby and drove it headlong into the oncoming assault. Out of the havoc began the fray, exceeding fell and fierce, in which five hundred of our enemy died by the sword and lance and arrow. When the remaining ranks did cease to strike out of sheer weakness, we threw vast numbers of them from the edge of the cliffs.

Be it known to you that never was a town more proudly taken. When it came to the lowering of the lances, our enemy did turn their backs, and went away flying, abandoning the shore, and surrendering the land. After making capture of horses, palfreys, and other plunder, we did take seventy of the principal townsmen as prisoners of war.

For my part, I see no favour in shewing any favour to our enemies; but we must look on these citizens not as foes but as men who have suffered adverse fortune while defending their country. Their enterprise was honourable, and they should not be treated as thieves, insurgents, traitors, or freebooters. It is my belief that mercy ought to be shewn them for example's sake, rather than cruelty to torture them. This path of clemency will procure for us a noble distinction that as conquerors, we are also able to subdue our fury and wrath.

Thus fell the pride of Dundunolf, its power lost, and Mac Lacheline discomfited. It is a thing unheard of in these parts that so great a slaughter should be made by so small a band. We anticipate the overthrow of Waterford and Dublin with our hopes raised and encouraged and our enemies rightly struck with terror and despair.

We await the forthcoming arrivals of Hervey De Marisco and mine own uncle, Robert FitzStephen to reinforce our position until your arrival in the summer months, when you will lead campaigns against Waterford and Dublin. By which time, we will have fortified our ramparts of turf and bough into a more permanent defense.

Our Lord orders battles as it pleases Him and by His grace and by His will, all quarters of Leinster have been recovered for Diarmait Mac Murchada in mutual obligation with King Henry, and if you come in due time with a strong force, the other parts of the kingdom will be easily reunited with the fifth. You will add to the favour of your coming if it be speedy; indeed, it will turn out famous if it be not delayed.

Your loyal Second in Command under the King's Royal order to carry this project into execution,

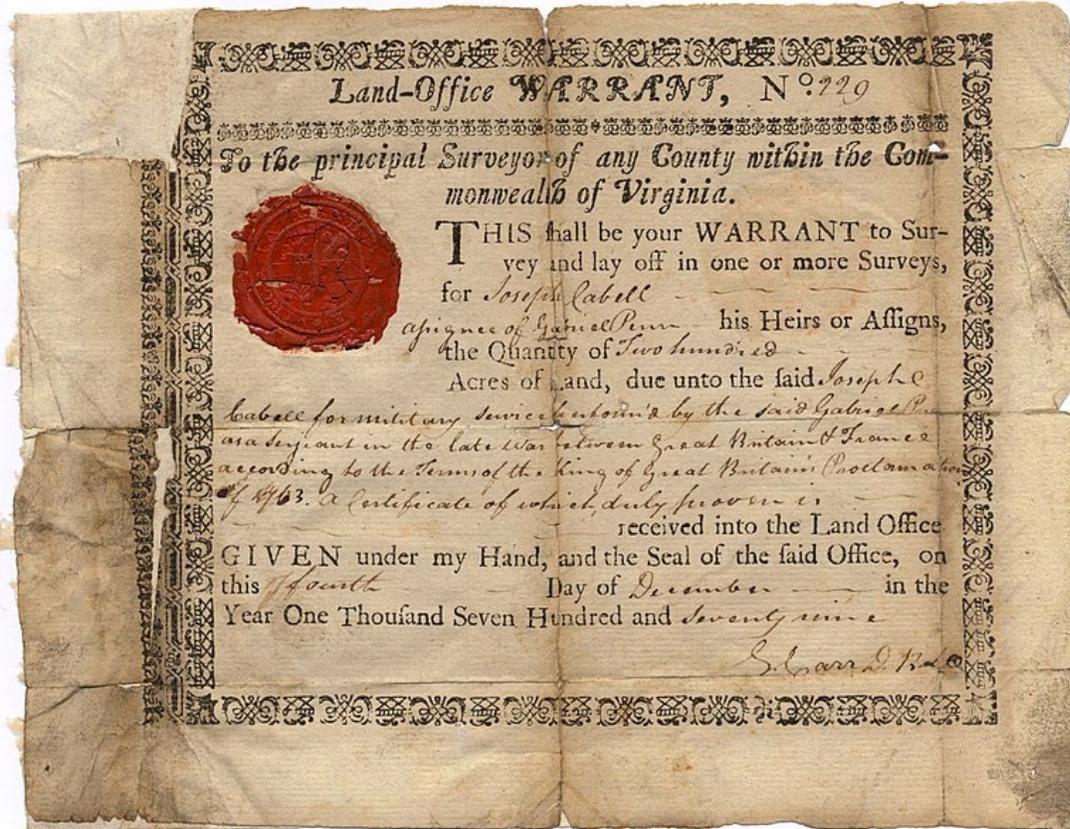
Raymond "Le Gros" FitzGerald

Land Grant



A GRANT OF LANDS FROM THE KING.

Medieval lord receiving a grant of land from the King



To the principal Surveys of Counties Carlow & Kilkenny of
Leinster within the Commonwealth of Ireland.

This shall be your Warrant to survey fiefs granted to Gilbert De Valle,
Stephen De Valle & Hay De Valle, & their Heirs or Assigns for their Good
Service, Loyaltie, and Zeale in the Norman Conquest of Ireland under the
Command of Baron Raymond FitzGerald from Pembrokeshire, Wales.
To Gilbert De Valle is granted Ardristan in County Carlow as full knight's fee,
in addition to Inchiolaghan as half a knight's fee. To Stephen De Valle is
granted a fief in Tulachany, southwest of Kilkenny. Hay De Valle is enfeoffed of
Rathoe in County Carlow, southeast of Tullow.

Received into the Land Office, Given under my Hand, and the Seal of the said
Office, on this fourth day of September in the year of our Lord One Thousand and
Seventy.

Richard Fitz Gilbert, 2nd earl of Pembroke, byname Richard De Clare



Harold swearing oath on holy relics to William, Duke of Normandy

Charter of Homage and Fealty

In the name of the Lord, I, Gilbert De Valle, in the presence of my brothers Stephen De Valle and Hay De Valle, and Earl Richard FitzGilbert, Baron Raymond FitzGerald, Robert FitzStephen, and of many other honorable men in service to our King Henry II, overlord of the conquered territory: since Baron FitzGerald has asked, in the presence of all those abovementioned, that we acknowledge to him the fealty and homage for the castles, manors, and places in County Carlow, Leinster, held for by him and his predecessors as a fief, and which we ought to hold as they held, we make the appropriate acknowledgment and homage as we ought to do.

Therefore, let all present come to know that I, Gilbert De Valle acknowledge verily to thee my Lord Raymond FitzGerald, by the grace of God, that myself and my brothers hold and ought to hold as fiefs in counties Carlow and Kilkenny the following: for myself, Ardristan for a full knight's fee, in addition to Inchiolaghan as half a knight's fee. To my brother Stephen De Valle, a fief in Tulachany, southwest of Kilkenny. Hay De Valle is enfeoffed of Rathtoe in County Carlow, southeast of Tullow.

For each and all of which we make homage and fealty with hands and with mouth to thee my said Lord FitzGerald and to thy successors, and we swear upon these four gospels of God that we will always be faithful vassals to thee and to thy successors in all things in which a vassal is required to be faithful to his Lord, and we will defend thee, My Lord, and all thy successors, and the said castles and manors and all men and their possessions against all malefactors and

invaders. We give to thee power over all the castles and manors above described, in peace and in war, whenever they shall be claimed by thee or by thy successors.

The aforesaid Lord FitzGerald, by the grace of God, receive the homage and fealty for all the fiefs of castles and manors and places which are described above; in the way and with the agreements and understandings written above; and likewise, we concede to thee and thy heirs and their successors, all the castles and manors and places aforesaid, as a fief, along with this present charter. And we promise to thee and thy heirs and successors, under the religion of our order, that we will be good and faithful concerning all those things described above.

Made in the year of the Incarnation of the Lord 1171, in the reign of Henry II. Seal of Baron Raymond FitzGerald who has accepted this acknowledgment in the presence of Richard FitzGilbert, 2nd earl of Pembroke, byname Richard Strongbow, also called Richard De Clare, as witness of the homage pledged to the said Earl FitzGilbert.

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