

# Isabel de Clare, 4th Countess of Pembroke

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**Isabel de Clare**, *suo jure* **Countess of Pembroke and Striguil** (1172–1220), was a Cambro-Norman-Irish noblewoman and one of the wealthiest heiresses in Wales and Ireland.<sup>[1]</sup> She was the wife of William Marshal, 1st Earl of Pembroke, who served four successive kings as Lord Marshal of England. Her marriage had been arranged by King Richard I.

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## Family inheritance



Daniel Maclise's painting of the marriage of Isabel's parents, Strongbow and Aoife of Leinster in August 1170, the day after the capture of Waterford.

Isabel was born in 1172 in Pembrokeshire, Wales, the eldest child of Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke (1130 – 20 April 1176), known to history as "Strongbow", and Aoife of Leinster, who was the daughter of Dermot MacMurrough, the deposed King of Leinster and Mor Uí Thuathail. The latter was a daughter of Muirchertach Ua Tuathail and Cacht Ní Morda. The marriage of Strongbow and Aoife took place in August 1170, the day after the capture of Waterford by the Cambro-Norman forces led by Strongbow.

Isabel's paternal grandparents were Gilbert de Clare, 1st Earl of Pembroke and Isabel de Beaumont. She had a younger brother Gilbert de Striguil who, being a minor, was not formally invested with either the earldom of Pembroke or of Striguil. It is unlikely that his father could have passed on the title to Pembroke as he himself did not possess it. When Gilbert died in 1185, Isabel became Countess of Pembroke in her own right (*suo jure*) until her death in 1220. In this way, she could be said to be the first successor to the earldom of Pembroke since her grandfather Gilbert, the first earl. By this reckoning, Isabel ought to be called the second countess, not the fourth countess of Pembroke. In any event, the title Earl was re-created for her husband. She also had an illegitimate half-sister Basile de Clare, who married three times. Basile's husbands were: Robert de Quincy; Raymond Fitzgerald, Constable of Leinster; Geoffrey FitzRobert, Baron of Kells.

### Isabel de Clare

*suo jure* **Countess of Pembroke and Striguil**

**Spouse(s)** William Marshal, 1st Earl of Pembroke

#### Issue

William Marshal, 2nd Earl of Pembroke

Richard Marshal, 3rd Earl of Pembroke

Maud Marshal

Gilbert Marshal, 4th Earl of Pembroke

Walter Marshal, 5th Earl of Pembroke

Anselm Marshal, 6th Earl of Pembroke

Isabel Marshal

Sibyl Marshal

Joan Marshal

Eva Marshal

**Noble family** De Clare

**Father** Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke

**Mother** Aoife of Leinster

**Born** 1172  
Pembrokeshire, Wales

**Died** 1220  
Pembrokeshire, Wales

Isabel was described as having been "the good, the fair, the wise, the courteous lady of high degree".<sup>[2]</sup> She allegedly spoke French, Irish and Latin.<sup>[3]</sup> After her brother Gilbert's death, Isabel became one of the wealthiest heiresses in the kingdom, owning besides the titles of Pembroke and Striguil, much land in Wales and Ireland.<sup>[4]</sup> She inherited the numerous castles on the inlet of Milford Haven, guarding the South Channel, including Pembroke Castle.<sup>[5]</sup> She was a legal ward of King Henry II, who carefully watched over her inheritance.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Marriage

The new King Richard I arranged her marriage in August 1189 to William Marshal, regarded by many as the greatest knight and soldier in the realm. Henry II had promised Marshal he would be given Isabel as his bride, and his son and successor Richard upheld the promise one month after his accession to the throne. At the time of her marriage, Isabel was residing in the Tower of London in the protective custody of the Justiciar of England, Ranulf de Glanville.<sup>[7]</sup> Following the wedding, which was celebrated in London "with due pomp and ceremony",<sup>[8]</sup> they spent their honeymoon at Stoke d'Abernon in Surrey which belonged to Enguerrand d'Abernon.<sup>[9]</sup>

Marriage to Isabel elevated William Marshal from the status as a landless knight into one of the richest men in the kingdom. He would serve as Lord Marshal of England, four kings in all: Henry II, Richard I, John, and Henry III. Although Marshal did not become the *jure uxoris* 1st Earl of Pembroke, Earl of Striguil until 1199, he nevertheless assumed overlordship of Leinster in Ireland, Pembroke Castle, Chepstow Castle, as well as Isabel's other castles in Wales such as the keep of Haverford, Tenby, Lewhaden, Narberth, Stackpole.<sup>[10]</sup>

Shortly after their marriage, Marshal and Isabel arrived in Ireland, at Old Ross, a settlement located in the territory which belonged to her grandfather, Dermot MacMurrough. A motte was hastily constructed, a medieval borough quickly grew around it, and afterwards the Marshals founded the port town by the river which subsequently became known as New Ross. The *Chronicles of Ross*, which are housed in the British Museum, described Isabel and Marshal's arrival in Ireland and records that *Isabella set about building a lovely city on the banks of the Barrow*.

In 1192, Isabel and her husband assumed the task of managing their vast lands; starting with the rebuilding of Kilkenny Castle and the town, both of which had been damaged by the O'Brien clan in 1173. Later they commissioned the construction of several abbeys in the vicinity.<sup>[11]</sup>

The marriage was happy, despite the vast difference in age between them. William Marshal and Isabel produced a total of five sons and five daughters.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Issue

- William Marshal, 2nd Earl of Pembroke (1190 – 6 April 1231). Chief Justiciar of Ireland. He married firstly, Alice de Bethune, and secondly, Eleanor Plantagenet, daughter of King John. He died childless.
- Richard Marshal, 3rd Earl of Pembroke (1191 – 1 April 1234 Kilkenny Castle, Ireland), married Gervase le Dinant. He died childless.
- Maud Marshal (1192 – 27 March 1248). She married firstly, Hugh Bigod, 3rd Earl of Norfolk, by whom she had issue; she married secondly, William de Warenne, 5th Earl of Surrey, by whom she had issue, including John de Warenne, 6th Earl of Surrey who married Alice le Brun de Lusignan; she married thirdly, Walter de Dunstanville. Five queen consorts of Henry VIII: Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr were her descendants.
- Gilbert Marshal, 4th Earl of Pembroke (1194 – 27 June 1241). He married firstly, Marjorie of Scotland, daughter of King William I of Scotland; and secondly, Maud de Lanvaley. He died childless.
- Walter Marshal, 5th Earl of Pembroke (1196 – 24 November 1245). He married Margaret de Quincy, Countess of Lincoln, widow of John de Lacy, 1st Earl of Lincoln, as her second husband. The marriage was

childless.

- Anselm Marshal, 6th Earl of Pembroke (1198 – 22 December 1245). He married Maud de Bohun. He died childless.
- Isabel Marshal (9 October 1200 – 17 January 1240). She married firstly, Gilbert de Clare, 5th Earl of Hertford; and secondly, Richard, 1st Earl of Cornwall. She had issue by both marriages. King Robert I of Scotland and Queen consorts Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr were descendants.
- Sibyl Marshal (1201 – before 1238), married William de Ferrers, 5th Earl of Derby, by whom she had issue. Queen consort Catherine Parr was a descendant.
- Joan Marshal (1202–1234), married Warin de Munchensi, Lord of Swanscombe, by whom she had issue. Both queen consorts Jane Seymour and Catherine Parr were descendants.
- Eva Marshal (1203–1246), married William de Braose (died 1230). Queen consorts Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Catherine Howard, and Catherine Parr were her descendants.

## Legacy

Isabel died in Pembrokeshire, Wales in 1220 at the age of forty-eight. Her husband had died the year before. She was buried at Tintern Abbey, Monmouthshire. However, a cenotaph was discovered inside St. Mary's Church, New Ross, Ireland, whose slab bears the partial inscription "ISABEL: LAEGN" and her engraved likeness.<sup>[13]</sup>

It was suggested in 1892 by Paul Meyer that Isabel might have encouraged the composition of the *Song of Dermot*, which narrates the exploits of her father and maternal grandfather. However, the *Song of Dermot* as now known was composed a few years after her death (though based on earlier writings).<sup>[14]</sup>

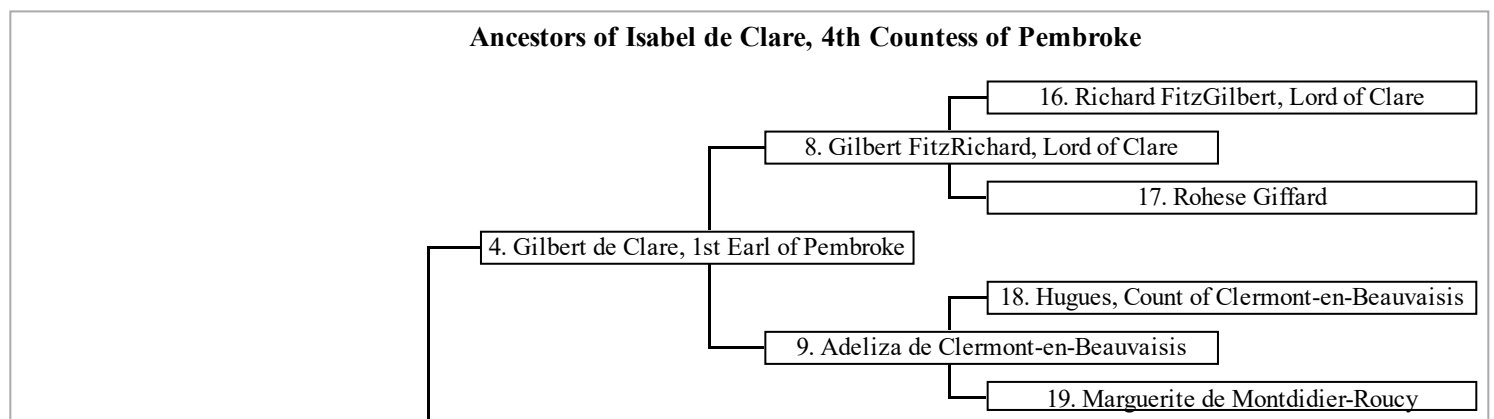
Although her daughters had many children, Isabel's five sons, curiously, died childless. This is supposedly attributed to a curse placed upon William Marshal by the Irish Bishop of Ferns, Ailbe Ua Maíl Mhuaidh.<sup>[15]</sup> The title of marshal subsequently passed to Hugh de Bigod, husband of Isabel's eldest daughter Maud, while the title of Earl of Pembroke went to William de Valence, 1st Earl of Pembroke, the husband of Joan de Munchensi, daughter of Joan Marshal. He was the first of the de Valence line of the earls of Pembroke.

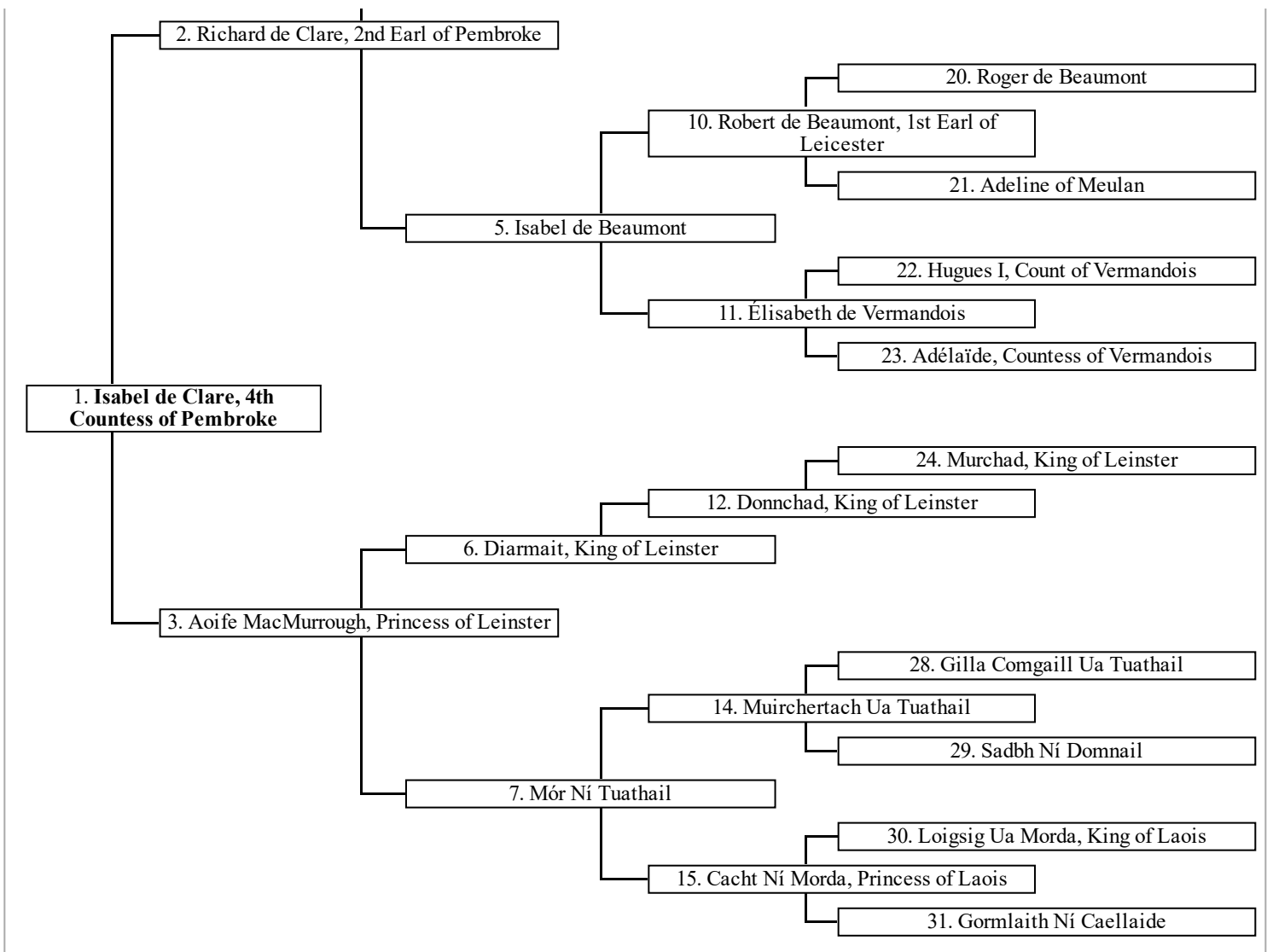
Within a few generations their descendants included much of the nobility of Europe, including all the monarchs of Scotland since Robert I (1274-1329) and all those of England, Great Britain and the United Kingdom since Henry IV (1367-1413); and, apart from Anne of Cleves, all the queen consorts of Henry VIII.



Tintern Abbey, the burial place of Isabel de Clare

## Ancestry





## References

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<b>Peerage of England</b>		
Preceded by <b>Gilbert de Clare, 3rd Earl of Pembroke</b>	<b>Countess of Pembroke</b> 1185-1220	Succeeded by <b>William Marshal, 2nd Earl of Pembroke</b>

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