ISSN 1753-2396 (Print)
ISSN 2753-328X (Online)

Journal of
Irish and Scottish Studies

Articles

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Volume 1, Issue 2
Pp: 1-27
2008
Published on: 1st Jan 2008

1495
ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

'Taphy-land historians' and the Union of England and Wales 1536–2007

Geraint H. Jenkins

> The night winds shake the tall trees above the hillside graves;
> Awake them not, O night winds, awake them not to-night;
> Let them not know our crazier, sorrier plight;
> O night winds, do not murmur to our fathers in their graves.[1]

These lines figure in *Gwalia Deserta* (1938), a powerful and unsettling depiction by the poet Idris Davies of industrial south Wales during the Depression. Although his immediate concern was the plight of striking miners, the unemployed and their families, Davies' poem also reveals a heightened sense of awareness of the psychological and cultural torments experienced by the Welsh over the centuries, notably the effects of the so-called 'language clause' in the Act of Union of 1536 and the subsequent consequences of what he called 'the bloody hand of progress'.[2] Even though the Acts of Union (1536–43) are often referred to in standard works as a critical watershed in the history of Wales, unlike the Scottish experience in 1707 their enactment caused no controversy at the time and the processes which fashioned a multinational British state were not seriously challenged except briefly during the Romantic period and, more bitterly, during the aftermath of the quartercentenary celebrations of 1936 when the controversial 'Fire in Llŷn'[3] provoked a new crisis of identity. Yet, the manner in which writers over the period as a whole chose to interpret the Union and its consequences and ramifications is important, not least, as this paper will show, because it sheds light on the preconceptions and values of the times in which such writers lived and because it also reminds us that the writing of history 'is rarely altogether innocent or detached'.[4]

By all accounts, the administrative and political assimilation of Wales into England, enacted piecemeal by parliament in 1536–43, was passed in stony

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[1] Dafydd Johnston (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies* (Cardiff, 1994), 19.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Dafydd Jenkins, *A Nation on Trial* (Caernarfon, 1998).

[4] F. J. Levy, 'Afterword' in 'The Uses of History in Early Modern England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68, nos. 1–2 (2005), 427.

silence. No protests were organised, no shots were fired in anger and Welsh poets, who could normally be relied upon to dramatise key events, were uncharacteristically lost for words. Even the perceptive soldier-cum-chronicler Elis Gruffydd, whose massive account of world history from the Garden of Eden to 1552, gave it no great status or significance: 'Subsequently he [Henry VIII] passed another bill to decree and divide the whole of Wales into counties.'[5] The muted response to union and the prospect of full-scale political integration contrasted sharply with the sense of apocalyptic pessimism expressed by Welsh poets at the time of the Edwardian conquest in 1282–3 when the ferocity of Edward I's shock-and-awe tactics brought the Welsh to their knees. 'Pa beth y'n gedir i ohiriaw?' (Why are we left to linger?) was the heart-rending cry of Gruffydd ab yr Ynad Coch in his elegy to the slain Welsh prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.[6] This poem, and others in similar vein, reflected the feelings of a people desperate to prevail but fearing the worst as their nation was cast to the ground and its authentic rulers disempowered. Yet, even when things were at their worst, the Welsh (together with the Irish and the Scots) responded to conquest and domination by making powerful and defiant assertions of their nationhood to which, in terms of history, territory, law and language, they had a perfectly legitimate claim. In the post-Conquest era, sores festered and there was a rumbling sense of anger within the vaticinatory poetry (*canu brud*) which kept alive a deep loathing of the English. Whenever they set aside their delight in sycophantic waffle, black humour and general tomfoolery, poets in late medieval Wales were not found wanting during periods of rebellion, economic slump and plague. Prophetic poetry assured the beleaguered Welsh that a *mab darogan* (son of destiny) would, at a propitious hour, return to free them from their captivity and wreak terrible vengeance on the English. This deliverer, usually referred to as Owain, turned out to be the decidedly uncharismatic Henry Tudor–a Moses who delivered the Welsh from bondage, according to the Pembrokeshire historian George Owen–who swept to victory at Bosworth in 1485 and set in motion a protracted process in which Britain became an aggregate of nations.[7]

[5] Peter R. Roberts, 'Tudor Legislation and the Political Status of "the British Tongue"' in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution* (Cardiff, 1997), 125.

[6] Rhian M. Andrews et al. (eds.), *Gwaith Bleddyn Fardd a Beirdd Eraill Ail Hanner y Drydedd Ganrif ar Ddeg* (Caerdydd, 1996), 424.

[7] George Owen, *The Description of Penbrokshire*, Henry Owen (ed.) (4 vols., London, 1892–1936), III, 7, 38–9, 55–7.

The perspective of hindsight should not therefore lead us to exaggerate the significance of the Union legislation at the time. Unlike the case of Scotland in 1706–7 there was no genuine debate about the merits and demerits of incorporation. Neither a marriage of equals nor a negotiated settlement, union was imposed upon Wales in order to safeguard the borders and the security of the realm against internal and external threats. Although the extraordinarily fictitious claim made in the preamble of the 1536 Act that Wales had always been 'incorporated annexed united and subject to and under the Imperial Crown of this Realm',[8] the deep and long-standing divisions between Principality and March meant that the overriding justification for union was the issue of political security. The Marcher lordships, a ramshackle cluster of violent and disorderly behaviour, were being wilfully manipulated by unscrupulous lords for their own private purposes. By the early 1530s, moreover, alarming international tensions were provoking fears of invasion and insurrection. The repercussions of the execution of the local favourite Rhys ap Gruffydd of Dinefwr in 1531 aggravated the sense of crisis as crippling divisions prevailed in the Marches. In exasperation a psychotic hardman, Rowland Lee, was dispatched in 1534 to serve as President of the Council in the Marches and to put a lid on this steaming cauldron of lawlessness. Lee believed that the Welsh were malcontents fit only for the gallows and although he enjoyed short-term success his intimidatory tactics made him many enemies.[9] Unsurprisingly, his profound lack of vision and compassion was supplanted by a much more expansive blueprint promoted by the chief minister of the crown, Thomas Cromwell. By this stage calls for decisive action had become increasingly strident at a time when Cromwell was acutely aware of processes of state formation on the continent and some of the glittering possibilities which unification and empire-building held in store. In his eyes Wales was crying out for an overhaul of its territories and fresh ideas for its long-term future, and events abroad provided some kind of intellectual and practical justification for making Wales part and parcel of England.

Most of Cromwell's reforming statutes in the 1530s were undertaken piecemeal and the Acts of Union enacted in 1536 and 1543 (the latter following Cromwell's execution) were no exception. The inclusion of makeshift and

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[8] Ivor Bowen (ed.), *The Statutes of Wales* (London, 1908), 75.

[9] W. R. B. Robinson, 'The Tudor Revolution in Welsh Government, 1536–1593: Its Effects on Gentry Participation', *English Historical Review*, 406 (1988), 1–20; Michael A. Jones, 'Cultural Boundaries within the Tudor State: Bishop Rowland Lee and the Welsh Settlement of 1536', *Welsh History Review*, 20 (2000), 227–53.

anomalous clauses, together with a desire to keep alternative options in mind, suggest a good deal of dithering. For very good reasons the cut-and-thrust of debate which occurred in 1707 was missing in 1536–43, but it is inconceivable that champions of good order and justice would have made the case for retaining the marcher lordships. Shoals of petitions had arrived at Westminster urging the king and his chief minister to impose a more effective and stable system of law and administration. Once Cromwell had convinced himself that it would be folly to allow the *morcellation* of the border counties and the destabilising jurisdiction of the Marcher lords to continue, a new map of Wales was produced. The Marcher lordships were abolished and internal unification was ensured by shiring the whole of Wales. Seven new counties – Denbighshire, Montgomeryshire, Breconshire, Radnorshire, Monmouthshire, Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire – were carved out of the defunct Marcher lordships and added to the other six shires – Anglesey, Caernarfonshire, Merioneth, Flintshire, Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire – which had existed since the Statute of Wales of 1284. Each shire was entitled to elect a county and a county borough member (with the exception of Merioneth), while Monmouthshire was given two county members. When, in 1543, the borough of Haverfordwest was awarded a seat, the total complement of MPs was raised to twenty-seven. Forty-shilling freeholders were entitled to vote at county elections, while free burgesses could vote in the boroughs.

Cyfraith Hywel – the hallowed and highly distinctive Welsh laws – were displaced by English common law, while the divisive Welsh custom known as *cyfran* (gavelkind) was supplanted by primogeniture, the more stable English system of inheritance. The Courts of the Great Sessions, which gave the Welsh a limited measure of constitutional autonomy, were set up to hear criminal, civil and equity cases. Four circuits were to be held in each corner of Wales and courts were charged to administer English law during six-day sessions held twice a year. The Council in the Marches in Wales, first established by Edward IV, was granted statutory authority and the Courts of Quarter Sessions, placed in the hands of the local gentry, were expected to shoulder the heavy burdens of local administration and governance. English became the language of High Prestige in Wales. No Welsh speaker could hold public office unless he was able to 'use and exercise the English Speech or Language'.[10] To add insult to injury, parts of Welsh-speaking Wales were arbitrarily lopped off and made part of England, while the position of Monmouthshire *vis à vis* Wales remained

[10] Bowen (ed.), *The Statutes of Wales*, 87.

exasperatingly anomalous. In order to bring this traditionally rebellious land into 'amicable concord and unity' and to teach the Welsh table manners, certain 'sinister usages and customs' were deemed unacceptable, including the Welsh language 'a speech nothing like, nor consonant to the natural mother tongue used within this realm'.[11] As England's oldest colony, Wales was the first nation to find its future political fortunes indissolubly joined with those of England.

Although, with the wisdom of hindsight, we can see that the Acts of Union marked a significant transition in the history of Wales, there is not a sliver of evidence to suggest that it was viewed at the time as a decisive, let alone traumatic, event. There were no heated debates over the issues involved and in these early days of the printing trade (Wales did not establish a press of its own until 1718) no pamphlet war. As far as is known, the only prominent figure to voice his disapproval was Rowland Lee, who made no secret of his dismay over plans to place local government in the hands of untrustworthy natives. In the event, his injudicious comments about setting thieves to catch thieves were ignored. If there were other dissenting voices, they were drowned out by a powerful pro-union lobby. Lewys Morgannwg, who acted as a royal bard in south Wales, described Henry VIII as a 'powerful Hercules'.[12] He knew full well that none of his patrons would risk infuriating such a volatile and merciless monarch or jeopardise their chances of acquiring a share of the benefits of public office, commerce and trade. Thomas Cromwell and his colleagues had no need to coerce or ride roughshod over the political élite in Wales. With so many advantages to be gained, the benefits of assimilation were too powerful to resist. The Welsh *uchelwyr* (gentlemen) were flattered by the prospect of becoming 'magistrates of their own nation' because it involved personal enrichment as well as the esteem which attended local power.[13] In similar vein, early Welsh humanists, sensing that a new window of opportunity had opened, expressed the hope that rich cultural and spiritual benefits would ensue.

By the Elizabethan period the chorus of lament heard in 1282–3 had been transformed into an effusive hymn of praise. The flow of comment on the Union was unerringly favourable. The most rhapsodic was George Owen, an unusually observant commentator from Henllys, Pembrokeshire. He not only tellingly described Wales as a 'cuntrey in England' but also referred to the 'joyefull metamorphosis' which had occurred since the coming

[11] Ibid., 75–6.

[12] Cynfael A. Lake (ed.), *Gwaith Lewys Morgannwg* (2 vols., Aberystwyth, 2004), II, 491–5.

[13] Owen, *Description of Penbrokshire*, III, 55.

of the Tudors.[14] Rowland Lee's warning of dire consequences had not been borne out. Several Elizabethan governors, administrators and chroniclers also lavished praise on the Union for bringing stability and civility to Wales, conveniently turning a determined blind eye to evidence of public disorder, riots and disturbances, and much else. Understandably, however, the major beneficiaries, having sampled tangible economic and political advantages, were happy to put a favourable spin on the results of incorporation. Outside gentry circles it is impossible to gauge the strength of anti-union feeling. Perhaps there was none. Vaticination had lost its edge and what fighting spirit the Welsh had possessed had been dissipated by the widely-disseminated view that the Tudor dynasty had conferred on the Welsh – their own people – a charter of liberties. More than 350 years would pass before demands for the repeal of the Union made themselves heard. As Philip Jenkins has pointed out, one of the most striking features of the early-modern period was that Wales 'achieved political integration with astonishingly little difficulty or unrest'.[15] At a time when the Irish became increasingly fractious, the Welsh prided themselves on being quiescent and benign.

The passivity of the Welsh is easy to explain. Was not Welsh blood coursing through the veins of the benevolent Tudors? What gentleman in his right mind would have pined for the late medieval period when Wales was a byword for division and bloodshed? Did not the Union satisfy those who yearned for the opportunity to get on in the world on an equal footing with their nearest neighbours? Just as compelling, at least to Renaissance scholars and promoters of the Reformation, was the benevolence of the Tudors in permitting Welsh to become the language of Protestantism from 1563 onwards. The coveted prize of a Bible in what (with an eye to the past) they deliberately referred to as 'the British tongue' enabled a Protestant culture to take shape which was as strongly attached to the vernacular as it was hostile to Catholicism. By injecting a note of 'nostalgic nationalism' into their writings, leading historians claimed that the so-called 'new' Protestant religion was in fact an integral part of the distinctive patrimony of the Welsh and that by re-availing themselves of their inheritance they were being true to the ideals of their ancestors.[16] Expressions of Welsh patriotism and pride became increasingly channelled through the

[14] Ibid., III, 7, 56.

[15] Philip Jenkins, 'The Anglican Church and the Unity of Britain: The Welsh Experience, 1560–1714' in Steven G. Ellis and Sarah Barber (eds.), *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British State 1485–1725* (Harlow, 1995), 138.

[16] Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge, 2004), 173–4.

Protestant establishment and helped to sustain, non-contentiously, a sense of nationhood.

In strictly political circles and most certainly in the drawing rooms of the landed élite there was a strong feeling that an old song had come to an end in 1536. The dictum 'England *and* Wales' supplanted the previous nomenclature 'Principality and March' and fixed itself in the public consciousness. Whilst the Welsh gentry might argue strongly that this ushered in new freedoms, the new dispensation confessed a subordinate status rather than true parity. Wales was subsumed into the dominant English narrative even as its people were politically and culturally lobotomised. In his enormously influential *Historie of Cambria* (1584), a work which covered the years from the death of Cadwaladr in 664 to that of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last prince of Wales, in 1282, David Powel counted his nation's blessings: 'Since the happy incorporation of the Welsh with the English the history of both nations as well as the people is united.'[17] The English and the Welsh had become one. The likes of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and Owain Glyndŵr were depicted as deluded rebels who had done their people a disservice by resisting centralising and homogenising forces. Since there were no Welsh universities to train young scholars in the craft of writing history or major cultural centres where intellectual stimulation was available, the Welsh were clearly in grave danger of losing their historical identity forever.

Even though the successors of the Tudors were Scottish and, subsequently, German, the Welsh saw no reason not to glory in wedlock. James I, who was greeted by Welsh writers as 'the high and most mighty monarch', claimed descent from Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and Henry VII, and was not loath to refer to the legendary history of Brutus in order to enhance his image as the first British monarch and the most likely restorer of a unified kingdom of Britain.[18] Thrilled by this notion, Sir William Maurice of Clenennau in Caernarfonshire, a maverick MP given to sudden enthusiasms, caused considerable mirth in parliament by tabling a bill in 1604–5 which would have allowed the newly-enthroned monarch to style himself 'Emperor of Great Brittaine'.[19] James I's status as an Anglo-Scottish king meant that Wales was a low priority in his ambitions, a perspective which he confirmed

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[17] William Wynne, *The History of Wales* (London, 1697), sig. A3[r].

[18] Roger. A. Mason, 'Scotching the Brut: Politics, History and National Myth in Sixteenth-Century Britain' in R. A. Mason (ed.) *Scotland and England 1286–1815* (Edinburgh, 1987), 60–84.

[19] Lloyd Bowen, *The Politics of the Principality: Wales c. 1603–1642* (Cardiff, 2007), 70–1.

in pointing to the precedent set in 1536 while addressing parliament in 1607: 'Do you not gain by the Union of Wales? And is not Scotland greater than Wales?'[20] Echoing such thoughts, the historian John Doddridge, author of a well-regarded history of the principality of Wales, maintained that since the annexation of 1536 had led to such 'great peace, tranquility, ciuility, and infinite good' it could easily serve as a precedent for more ambitious plans, including union with Scotland.[21] Even though, largely for reasons of security, a critically important reversal of government policy had allowed the Welsh to worship in the vernacular, Wales played a subordinate role within the embryonic, integrated 'British' state and as the years rolled by every effort was made to eliminate, smooth over or blur unwelcome signs of diversity or otherness. In the meantime, the Welsh were positively encouraged to flaunt the success of the Union at every opportunity. In 1630 Sir William Vaughan of Llangyndeyrn, Carmarthenshire, a man who ironically made his name by seeking to establish Welsh settlements abroad, called on his countrymen to bury old antagonisms: 'Rejoice that the memorial of Offa's Ditch has been extinguished with love and charity. . . .God gave us grace to dwell together without enmity, without detraction.'[22]

Champions of the Union believed profoundly that its fortunes were inextricably bound up with the monarch and the Protestant faith. Although there were genuine fears that James I and especially his ill-fated successor Charles I were disposed to lighten the burdens of the penal laws on Catholics and perhaps even to convert to Rome, there was no great desire among the nobility and the gentry in Wales to abandon the Lord's Anointed in his hour of need from 1642 onwards. The deeply rooted belief that Catholicism was a perversion of Christianity and the threat posed by Irish Papists and foreign conspirators meant that the Welsh robustly rejected bearers of the Old Faith as well as regicides and turners-of-the-world-upside-down. Since their view of the past was contaminated by a profound loathing for Catholicism, they adopted a resolutely Protestant stance. In supporting the Royalist cause on the eve of the civil wars, petitioners dwelt on the benefits of union and warned of

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[20] Peter R. Roberts, 'The English Crown, the Principality of Wales and the Council in the Marches, 1534–1641' in Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill (eds.), *The British Problem, c.1534–1707: State Formation in the Atlantic Archipelago* (Basingstoke, 1996), 139.

[21] John Doddridge, *The History of the Ancient and Modern Estate of the Principality of Wales, Dutchy of Cornewall, and Earldome of Chester* (London, 1630), 40.

[22] William Vaughan, *The Arraignment of Slander, Perjury, Blasphemy and other Malicious Sinnes, showing Sundry Examples of God's Judgements against the Offenders* (London, 1630), 322.

the price to be paid should insurgents succeed in subverting the constitution. In the post-Restoration period, too, the anti-Popery drum was beaten with great vigour. Writers like Charles Edwards and Jeremy Owen, both dissenters, maintained that the Acts of Union had set the Welsh 'at liberty from a very tedious and ingrateful captivity' by ushering in the divine blessing of the Protestant religion and the printing press, and by ensuring that persecutors who had once 'driven on furiously the chariots of death and destruction' were now plying the Welsh with saving literature and charity schools.[23] Just as the Lord had watched over Israel in the days of Ahasverus and Esther, so had he planned the marriage between England and Wales. 'Ravening wolves' had become 'caring shepherds'.[24]

By the Hanoverian age, therefore, it was part of the conventional wisdom that the Union had been a brilliant success. George Owen's roseate view still prospered. Even those who styled themselves Cambro-Britons in order to distance themselves from the Britons, who were deemed to be the descendants of usurping Saxons, and from the equally unpalatable term 'Welsh' which bore all the hallmarks of linguistic imperialism, had been fully supportive of assimilative trends since 1536.[25] In the Stuart age John Owen, the famous Latin epigrammatist from Plas Du, Caernarfonshire, became the poet laureate of the imperial British identity. This 'Cambro-Britannus' claimed to speak for his countrymen:

> Though the language of Britons is not one,
> their heart is one,
> now that the union of three kingdoms
> has come about.[26]

Such sentiments pre-dated the Act of Union of 1 May 1707 which brought into being the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Unlike Wales, Scotland's shotgun wedding was characterised by public riots and trenchant anti-union literature, none of which seems to have bothered the Welsh unduly. On the occasion of the bicentenary of the Union in 1736, Lewis Morris, a remarkably versatile litterateur and patriot in Georgian Wales and a man whose correspondence is

[23] Jeremy Owen, *The Goodness and Severity of God* (London, 1717), 16.

[24] Charles Edwards, *Y Ffydd Ddi-ffvant* (Oxford, 1677), 209–10.

[25] J. Gwynfor Jones, 'The Welsh Gentry and the Image of the "Cambro-Briton", c. 1603–25', *Welsh History Review*, 20 (2001), 623–4.

[26] Ibid., 651. See also J. Henry Jones, 'John Owen, Cambro–Britannus', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1940–1), 130–43.

packed with character assassinations of the English, celebrated, perhaps with a touch of derision, the bringing together of two peoples in 1536: 'What people of Britain have adhered more loyally to the crown of England than the Welsh ever since their happy union with the valorous English?'[27] Similarly, the diaries of the tireless Welsh evangelist Howell Harris were punctuated with a desire to express 'great freedom to cry for Great Brittain'.[28] Such middling sorts were keenly aware of the blessings of living in a land which set great store by loyalty, civility and tolerance.

Even so, by the eighteenth century some of the more unwholesome chickens produced by the Union were coming home to roost. In spite of the rhetoric employed in the aftermath of 1536–43, it had become increasingly clear that the English were determined not to accept the Welsh as equals. When the United Kingdom came to pass in 1707 it became even more evident that the Welsh were the poor relations. According to Daniel Defoe, who was an eye witness to the run-up to the Anglo-Scottish Union, one of the arguments deployed by anti-unionists, who believed that the treaty flew in the face of history and brought dishonour upon the Scots, was that incorporation would serve as 'an eternal badge of their subjection':

> This was a general cry, and began to be very popular: The people cried out, they were Scotsmen, and they would be Scotsmen still; they contemned the name of Britons, fit for the Welchmen [sic.], who were made the scoff of the English, after they had reduced them.[29]

From the Elizabethan period onwards English satirists, ballad-mongers and pamphleteers had depicted the Welsh in the most unflattering terms, making contested assumptions about their primitiveness, ignorance and fecklessness, as well as their apparent willingness to remain a conquered people. Somehow the Welsh were not believed to be fully-fledged human beings. Their vernacular was thought to be an emblem of their subjugation and its survival on the lips of up to half a million people was a problem for those who believed that order, stability and civility could only be attained if the Standard English held sway.

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[27] Hugh Owen (ed.), *The Life and Works of Lewis Morris (Llewelyn Ddu o Fôn) 1701–1765* (Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club; Angelsey, 1951), 340.

[28] Geraint Tudur, '"Thou Bold Champion, Where are Thou?" Howell Harris and the Issue of Welsh Identity' in Robert Pope (ed.), *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c. 1700–2000* (Cardiff, 2001), 52.

[29] Daniel Defoe, *The History of the Union between England and Scotland* (London, 1786), 226.

Different sections within Welsh society coped in different ways with the cultural and psychological challenges posed by these developments. In order to further their own careers and please English sensibilities the leading gentry families abandoned Welsh patronymics, took up the English mode of land tenure and supposedly superior standards of civility, stood no nonsense from the much-derided 'mountain Welsh', employed non-Welsh-speaking agents and stewards, and carved out a reputation, as one aggrieved tenant farmer put it, for 'insatiable avarice'.[30] Slowly but surely from 1660 onwards land gravitated into the hands of substantial and mostly absentee landowners, new 'Leviathans' who viewed the otherness of the Welsh and the cultural aspirations of patriotic middling sorts with contempt. For them, 'civilising' meant 'Anglicising', and it was inconceivable to such 'true Englishmen' that any inhabitant of Wales would be content to remain a monoglot Welsh-speaker. The *deraciné* Welshman was also joined by the pseudo-Welsh gentleman, an effete figure who deemed his native tongue (which he usually spoke more fluently than English) an embarrassing handicap and who affected English airs whenever he espied the belfries of the border counties. This tragic-comic figure, known by Welsh satirists as Dic Siôn Dafydd, became the archetypal stage Welshman who bore the brunt of ridicule for confusing the tenses of English verbs and using 'she' or 'her' as catch-all pronouns.[31] The glorification of the English language – a Scottish enterprise, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, referred to it in 1768–71 as 'the language of a great and powerful nation'[32] – by swaggering Little Englanders irked patriotic Welshmen and sometimes provoked rather ugly ethnic tensions.

There were therefore widespread fears by the Hanoverian age that the measure of linguistic and historical identity which the Welsh had managed to retain from 1563 onwards was in serious jeopardy. The growth of merchant capitalism, burgeoning Atlantic trade, Protestant imperialism and

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[30] National Library of Wales, NLW, MS 13221E, f. 343. For the background, see Geraint H. Jenkins, '"A Rank Republican [and] a Leveller": William Jones, Llangadfan', *Welsh History Review*, 17 (1995), 365–86.

[31] J. O. Bartley, *Teague, Shenkin and Sawney* (Cork, 1954); Mark Stoyle, 'Caricaturing Cymru: Images of the Welsh in the London Press 1642–46' in Diana Dunn (ed.), *War and Society in Medieval and Early Modern Britain* (Liverpool, 2000), 162–79; Prys Morgan, 'Wild Wales: Civilising the Welsh from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries' in Peter Burke, Brian Harrison and Paul Slack (eds), *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas* (Oxford, 2000), 265–83; Megan S. Lloyd, *'Speak it in Welsh': Wales and the Welsh Language in Shakespeare* (Lanham, MD, 2007).

[32] Quoted in Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), 306.

glorious victories on land and sea against the 'Popish' foe meant that there were powerful reasons for thinking in terms of 'Great Britain'. After 1707 the Union Flag (on which Wales, still reckoned to be a principality, was not represented) was redesigned in order to promote a much wider identification with Great Britain. 'Rule Britannia', composed by the Lowland Scot James Thomson in 1740, celebrated the emerging sense of Britishness, and five years later the strongly loyalist and Protestant anthem 'God Save the King' (also possibly written by a Scot) offered an immediate riposte to the Jacobite rebellion.[33] Processes of incorporation and amalgamation meant that residual legal and political emblems of Welsh distinctiveness were removed. In 1689 the Council in the Marches of Wales, which had been granted in 1536–43 a significant role as an executive arm of the privy council and which possessed wide criminal and civil jurisdictions, was abolished. In 1746 the 'inconvenience' of having to mention Wales in every piece of legislation was removed: according to 20 George 2, c. 42, s. 3, 'in all cases where the kingdom of England, or that part of Great Britain called England, hath been or shall be mentioned in any Act of Parliament. . . shall from henceforth be deemed and taken to comprehend and include the dominion of Wales'.[34] No objections were voiced publicly. Less easy to accept, however, was the way in which the established church, so often represented as a unifying and healing force, was Anglicising itself. As non-Welsh bishops took root in Welsh dioceses and proclaimed 'the *genius* of the [English] tongue',[35] an advocate in the Court of Arches was emboldened to argue that since Wales was 'a conquered country' it was perfectly in order for representatives of the Anglican church to promote the English language.[36] Relying, as was his wont, on the wisdom of his forefathers, Edmund Burke maintained that since the fortunes of Wales had been irrevocably joined with those of England in 1536–43 the last survivor of the Welsh judicature, the Court of the Great Sessions, should be abolished. Writing under the shadow of discourses about confederation and federation in the 1770s, Burke invoked the Welsh experience, or at least his misleading rhetorical interpretation of it, since its incorporation by Henry VIII: 'as by a charm, the tumults subsided; obedience was restored; peace,

[33] Nick Groom, *The Union Jack: The Story of the British Flag* (London, 2006), 178–9.

[34] Bowen (ed.), *The Statutes of Wales*, 206.

[35] Robert Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (London, 1762), iii. Lowth was bishop of St David's for five months only in 1766.

[36] Lambeth Palace, Records of the Court of Arches, no. 10002, G 139/95; Geraint H. Jenkins, '"Horrid Unintelligible Jargon": The Case of Dr Thomas Bowles', *Welsh History Review*, 15 (1991), 494–523.

order, and civilisation, followed in the train of liberty–When the day-star of the English constitution had arisen in their hearts, all was harmony within and without'.[37] In the event, the Court of the Great Sessions was reprieved until 1830, but political and legal incorporation had already acquired such unstoppable momentum that there was a very real danger that a five-foot, non-historic nation like Wales would fall off the map. As the historian William Warrington noted with approval, the 'wild spirit of independence' had been tamed.[38]

Yet there were alternative ways of thinking about and writing of the Welsh past. Much to the disapproval of dyed-in-the wool conservatives, the application of the scientific practice of observation and experimentation on the one hand and the spontaneous creativity associated with Romanticism on the other offered different interpretations which appealed to the literate middling sorts. With exquisite timing, the great Celtic polymath Edward Lhuyd published *Archaeologia Britannica* in 1707, a substantial work which, among other things, provided a demonstration of the common Celtic origin of Breton, Cornish and Welsh, the result of a first-hand study of the Celtic languages and an incident-packed four-year journey through the Celtic countries. Probably more by chance than design, the publication coincided with the newly enacted 'British' polity of 1707. Simon James believes that Lhuyd had 'a political agenda clearly in mind' in projecting the notion of a Celtic family.[39] Although the evidence for such an assertion is circumstantial, and possibly totally erroneous, there is no doubt that by making a public, inspiring affirmation of Celticity or Celticness Lhuyd showed that multiple identities existed within the Union and that being subsumed by Anglo-centrism or Englishness was not inevitable. Lhuyd's premature death in 1709, however, was a severe blow to 'Celtic' studies. His disciples at Oxford took to the bottle instead of their books and the field was left to a variety of blinkered enthusiasts, local antiquarians and all kinds of 'Druids-as-wished for'.[40] As the eighteenth century unfolded historical sensibilities became more easily excited as the zeal of remembrancers

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[37] Edmund Burke, *The Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq; on Moving his Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies, March 22, 1775* (London, 1775), 38.

[38] William Warrington, *The History of Wales* (London, 1786), 556.

[39] Simon James, *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* (London, 1999), 49. Nancy Edwards has reminded us that the *Glossography*, the first and only published volume of Lhuyd's proposed *Archaeologia Britannica*, had already been sent to the press in 1704. Nancy Edwards, 'Edward Lhuyd and the Origins of Early Medieval Celtic Archaeology', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 87 (2007), 167, 192.

[40] Stuart Piggott, *The Druids* (London, 1968), 164.

outstripped their critical powers. Thanks to the patriotic sentiments of the likes of Paul Pezron, Theophilus Evans and Henry Rowlands, Welsh historiography continued to be bedevilled by the mythology surrounding the progeny of Noah. To linguistic patriots, nothing brought greater satisfaction than to be able to declare that the Welsh people had preserved the language of the descendants of Gomer, son of Japhet.[41]

From the 1770s the first stirrings of Romanticism brought new perspectives as a rising generation of writers sought to discover lost worlds through the assiduous study of history, poetry and language. The Bard as a custodian of the past took pride of place, Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* set pulses racing, and the new interest in landscape, nature and all kinds of intriguing artefacts stimulated a desire to conserve the old and to mourn irretrievable losses. Bogus history and mythmaking became a cottage industry among artisans and craftsmen who took it upon themselves to assume cultural responsibilities formerly entrusted to the gentry. Chief among them was Edward Williams alias Iolo Morganwg, a remarkably many-sided Glamorgan stonemason who may reasonably be called the first of Wales' cultural nationalists. Styling himself a 'Rattleskull Genius',[42] Iolo was scathing about the 'Taphy-land historians' of the past: 'I cannot help using the language of sarcasm, when I am obliged to mention the *stuff* that has been written on Welsh history.'[43] Like many self-taught craftsmen, he had a low opinion of the traditional universities which, in his view, did not produce graduands of cultivated sensibility and patriotic values. Spewing out piffling pedants and drunken curates, Oxford and Cambridge bestowed on unsuspecting parishes 'a loathsome swarm of the vilest bloodsucking insects that ever dishonoured the Creation'.[44] Only a fool, he argued, would thus believe that their scribblings offered an authentic view of the past. He loathed the fact that wealth and privilege counted for more than brains and opportunity, and by soaking himself in the principles of the twin revolutions of America and France and responding creatively to the pleasures of the imagination he brought new energy into Welsh historical writing.

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[41] See Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1999), 54–5, 61, 66–8; Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Historical Writing in the Eighteenth Century' in Branwen Jarvis (ed.), *A Guide to Welsh Literature c. 1700–1800* (Cardiff, 2000), 23–44.

[42] Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff, 2005).

[43] Elijah Waring, *Recollections and Anecdotes of Edward Williams, The Bard of Glamorgan* (London, 1850), 170.

[44] NLW, MS 13112B, f. 367.

Those who are familiar with Iolo's remarkable archive in the National Library of Wales will know that he unashamedly created the past in his own image. Insofar as he manufactured material and manipulated sources with impunity, he was not by any means unique within a European context. But by Welsh standards he was *sui generis*, and most of his colleagues were unaware that he was passing off bogus material as authentic chronicles, blurring the lines between the factual and the fictional, and filling in empty spaces and interstices with additional data based on an imaginative reconstruction of sources. At every turn, he defied convention. He invented the Gorsedd of the Bards of the Isle of Britain, minted new Welsh words, composed a Welsh version of the Marseillaise, revelled in his reputation as the 'Bard of Liberty' and became Wales' leading campaigner against the slave trade. Around the time when the Act of Union of 1800 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Iolo identified the Union of 1536–43 as a significant cultural watershed in the history of Wales. Determined not to allow received wisdom about the assimilation of Wales into England to pass unchallenged, he was the first historian to declare that union had precipitated a cultural malaise which had worsened with the passage of time. In the first volumes of *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (1801–7), a three-volume juggernaut designed to 'reanimate the genius of our country'[45] and bring into the public domain the literary and historical treasures of the past, Iolo produced 'one of the earliest examples of modern Welsh nationalist writing'.[46] Bemoaning the decline of *amor patriae* among the natural leaders of Welsh society and the lack of institutional support for the native tongue, he seized on 1536 as a major turning point in how the Welsh language was perceived:

> About the time when Wales was incorporated with England, government seems to have entertained an idea that it was not safe or politic to suffer the Welsh language to live; the use of it was discouraged, and all that could decently, and with saving-appearances, be done, was attempted, to suppress and annihilate it.[47]

For Iolo, defending the vernacular culture and promoting democratic/patriotic consciousness were interlinked, and even though fanning the nationalist

[45] Owen Jones, Iolo Morganwg and William Owen Pughe (eds.), *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (3 vols., London, 1801–7), I, xv.

[46] Prys Morgan, *Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff, 1975), 17–18.

[47] Jones et al (eds.), *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, I, ix–x.

flame during wartime was a risky business he was not an easy man to silence. For the first time, a Welsh historian had publicly declared that 1536 had relegated the native tongue to an inferior position in its own land. Had he fulfilled his promise of publishing a 'superb' six-volume history of Wales it is certain that his vision of the past would have differed sharply from that purveyed by the 'Taphy-land historians' who preceded him and whom he despised.[48]

Despite Iolo's hopes that the Welsh would think again about their cultural legacy and whether the Union had been a necessary and beneficial event, these were dashed in the post-1815 period by progressivism and evangelical Protestantism. During the course of the nineteenth century Wales experienced a major economic transformation the like of which had never been seen before. As an international producer of iron, steel, coal, copper and slate, it became one of the major workshops of the world. Its population quadrupled within little more than a century and, although the bulk of the population was working class, the cultural agenda, which itself provoked unresolved tensions, was set by pious, middle-class Nonconformists and Liberals. The desire for self-improvement encouraged these to march under the banner of 'Progress'. This was especially the case following the publication of the notorious Blue Books of 1847 – popularly known as the 'Treachery of the Blue Books' – a government-sponsored report on education which outrageously depicted the Welsh as degraded liars and cheats with the morals of alley-cats. This public indictment created a profound sense of insecurity and self-loathing. Traduced Nonconformists feared that 'we shall have many eyes upon us [and] that we shall be scanned narrowly', and the anxieties engendered by this shame culture were further deepened by the notion that the febrile Celts were racially and culturally inferior to the Anglo-Saxons.[49] The Welsh-speaking petite bourgeoisie were persuaded by this fiction and came to believe that their native tongue could not possibly compete successfully with 'imperial' languages in the Darwinian age and that the best course of action was to admit defeat.

1847 was thus a critical psychological turning point: the Welsh lost their nerve and a proper appreciation of their past. As a 'reduced people', they were now expected to count their blessings, hold their tongues and, as Henry Hussey Vivian, first Baron Swansea, advised them at the National Eisteddfod of Wales at Swansea in 1863, to see themselves as a 'whole united compact

[48] Geraint H. Jenkins, Ffion Mair Jones and David Ceri Jones (eds.), *The Correspondence of Iolo Morganwg* (3 vols., Cardiff, 2007), II, 143–8.

[49] Hywel Teifi Edwards, *The Eisteddfod* (Cardiff, 1990), 26–7.

people'.[50] Such sentiments heavily coloured historical writing up to the Great War and it even provoked bouts of amnesia regarding the immediate past. When Jane Williams wrote a chapter on the Tudor dynasty and legacy in her single-volume history of Wales, she airbrushed out of the narrative any reference to rebellions, riots, anti-establishment views and popular radicalism: 'Wales has gradually become a land of peace, to which bloodshed, with heinous crime in every form, is now almost unknown.'[51] A more fatuous verdict on Victorian Wales could scarcely be imagined, but it helped to solidify the belief that union had brought untold blessings.

Yet it would be a mistake to believe that other strategies did not occur to the Welsh. The burgeoning numbers of Welsh speakers, the development of a thriving Welsh-language periodical and newspaper press, the eisteddfod movement, the remarkable spread of Nonconformity, and a striking renaissance in historical and literary writing all contributed to the development of a new form of cultural and political nationalism. The hunger for popular, melodramatic history, peopled by medieval heroes, was reflected in Welsh-language magazines and journals. Patriotic discourse was peppered with newly coined words like *cenedlgarwch* (patriotism), *cenedlaetholdeb* (nationalism) and *ymreolaeth* (self-rule),[52] notably in the pungent radicalism purveyed by R. J. Derfel, Michael D. Jones and Evan Pan Jones. Crusaders associated with the *Cymru Fydd* (Young Wales) movement of 1886–96 mobilised separatist tendencies and planted the idea that Wales might not remain united and annexed to England forever. During the ferment of the home-rule movement in the late nineteenth century the federal University of Wales was constituted in 1893, soon to be followed in 1907 by the National Library of Wales and the National Museum of Wales. These institutions helped to foster a renewed sense of national identity without for a moment challenging the security of the British state. There were also fervent hopes that at long last Wales would nurture its own erudite but readable historians who would not lose sight of the social and intellectual dimensions of the past. A new era of scholarship seemed to beckon.

Yet the history of Wales did not immediately become an officially recognised subject within academe. Much to the disapproval of the *gwerin* who had invested time, energy and precious pennies in establishing the 'People's

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[50] Hywel Teifi Edwards, *Gŵyl Gwalia: Yr Eisteddfod Genedlaethol yn Oes Aur Victoria 1858–1868* (Llandysul, 1980), 348.

[51] Jane Williams, *A History of Wales* (London, 1869), 495.

[52] *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru/A Dictionary of the Welsh Language* (4 vols., Caerdydd, 1950–2002).

University',[53] there was a marked reluctance on the part of its constituent colleges to establish chairs of Welsh history or make appointments designed to improve the quality of historical writing. It was left to O. M. Edwards, tutor in history at Oxford, to quench the thirst for history by producing an array of magazines, anthologies and, in particular, his heavily-read volume *Wales* (1901), works which warmly reflected his affection for his native land. Edwards made not even the shallowest claims to objectivity in assessing the Tudors: 'To them the customs of Wales were sinister usages, its language a curse, and its national life a dead volcano of treason.'[54] Like many *fin-de-siècle* writers in Wales, he was a prisoner of his age insofar as he championed imperialism and also the distinctive national identity of his homeland. By waving the Union Jack and the Red Dragon, he endeared himself to Welsh Liberals in particular and also to those who believed that stimulating a sense of the past, however subjective the interpretation might be, was an integral part of nation-building.

The development and prestige of Welsh history as a subject and profession owed most to John Edward Lloyd, who became professor of history at Bangor in 1899. Lloyd is the founding father of Welsh history as a serious professional business. This immensely learned, fastidious, and rather aloof figure took on the role of guardian of academic standards in the field. By precept and example, he emphasised the need for intensive archival research, critical assessment of evidence, copious footnotes and discerning judgements. His lucid and masterly two-volume *History of Wales* (1911), which took the story of the nation up to 1282, was his most enduring achievement and placed him above all his colleagues as the 'lantern-bearer of the lost centuries'.[55] For the most part, Lloyd was coolness and detachment personified, and in his eyes the Acts of Union were to be viewed only from the standpoint of their creators in 1536–43.[56] Yet, as Huw Pryce has shown, even this giant carried cultural baggage: 'he believed that the debunking of legends and traditions and the construction of a new narrative of the Welsh past based on "the most authentic sources" would serve to strengthen a sense of nationality by placing it on firmer foundations than before'.[57] The spirit of *Cymru Fydd*, as well as a

[53] Geraint H. Jenkins, *'The Finest Old University in the World': The University of Wales 1893–1993* (University of Wales, 1994), 1–2.

[54] O. M. Edwards, *Wales* (London, 1901), 335.

[55] R. Geraint Gruffydd (ed.), *Cerddi Saunders Lewis* (Caerdydd, 1992), 31.

[56] J. E. Lloyd, *Golwg ar Hanes Cymru* (2nd edition., Aberystwyth, 1948), 48–9.

[57] Huw Pryce, 'Modern Nationality and the Medieval Past: The Wales of John Edward Lloyd' in R. R. Davies and Geraint H. Jenkins (eds.), *From Medieval to Modern Wales:*

whiggish presumption, continued to permeate his work even as he preached the merits of exhaustive and exact scholarship.

In many ways R. T. Jenkins, his colleague at Bangor and professor of Welsh history from 1930, was an even more zealous advocate of using primary sources, testing them rigorously and writing up conclusions in a disciplined, objective manner. A cultivated conversationalist and a scintillating writer in Welsh, Jenkins was the best-read historian of his day and also the most popular among the general reading public. Heavily influenced by the scientific methods of research advocated by Leopold von Ranke, he cared deeply about the past and warned others of the perils of violating it. No great admirer of Liberal sentiments or the polemics of nationalists, he vigorously defended the 'independence of the past' and always believed that a dispassionate objectivity was the mark of a good historian. His pioneering article *Yr Apêl at Hanes* (The Appeal to History) was his definitive statement on the aims and objectives of a self-respecting Welsh historian.[58] For him, the architects of 1536–43 were not driven by malice or evil and were, for all their faults, entitled to be judged according to the standards of their own times. In one of his sparkling (and characteristically digressive) reviews, he reiterated his commitment to objectivity:

> In considering our country's past in its entirety, whether the historian himself is an 'ardent' Nationalist or an 'avowed' Communist, a 'faithful' Churchman or a 'professed' Independent, his first duty as a *historian* is to treat his sources without prejudice, to seek to the best of his ability to discover the *objective* truth.[59]

By repudiating teleology and celebrating objectivity, Jenkins set new standards for historical writing in Wales and since his attractive prose was so widely read he must have influenced historical perspectives. No one who admired his dispassionate stance would have guessed that he was a keen supporter of the Labour movement. As a demonstration of the historian's craft, in terms of approach, style and content his work has hardly been bettered and his seriousness of purpose remains his legacy.

Historical Essays in Honour of Kenneth O. Morgan and Ralph A. Griffiths (Cardiff, 2004), 22. See also Neil Evans, '"When Men and Mountains Meet": Historians' Explanations of the History of Wales, 1890–1970', *Welsh History Review*, 22 (2004), 230.

[58] R. T. Jenkins, *Yr Apêl at Hanes* (Wrecsam, 1930).

[59] R. T. Jenkins, *Cwpanaid o De a Diferion Eraill* (Dinbych, 1997), 115.

Jenkins's preoccupation with historical truth and objectivity was put to the test in 1936, the 400th anniversary of the 1536 Act. As it happened, the circumstances of the time were unusually propitious for a reappraisal of the Union. The days of economic boom were over. Indeed, inter-war Wales was a period of unimaginable misery. Structural unemployment, depressed incomes and high levels of migration characterised the years of Depression and overwhelmed rural and industrial communities alike. With the Welsh economy on its knees, the British Empire a shadow of its former self, and the native tongue in dire straits, it was hard to reiterate the old argument that union was a guarantor of security, prosperity and stability. These economic and cultural concerns, together with the fillip provided by the emergence of nation-states in the post-1918 period, let to the emergence of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru, the first political nationalist party in Wales, in 1925. Since the Labour party, notwithstanding its many promises, was loath to promote a devolutionary programme, it was left to the far less numerous nationalists to make the running. Although Plaid purported to represent people from different shades of the political spectrum, it was largely composed of affluent, university-based home rulers. In cultural circles its president, Saunders Lewis, certainly provided stature and credibility but, with his bow tie, reedy voice and fondness for good wine, he was hardly a populist. More concerned about the fate of the Welsh language than the plight of working-class families, some of his maladroit responses to social distress and ill-timed comments about the need to de-industrialise communities and return to pre-union days were greeted with consternation and anger. By flirting with right-wing movements, notably L'Action Française, a royalist brotherhood led by Charles Maurras, a poet, scholar, anti-Semite and political theorist, the party was rendered unelectable.[60] Poorly organised, it struggled at the polls against the overwhelming popularity of Labour and it was an easy target for anti-fascist caricaturists.

For all his shortcomings, Saunders Lewis had an impeccable sense of timing. In September 1936 he and two colleagues set fire to an RAF bombing school in the Llŷn Peninsula. Howls of protests against the building of such a training school for bomber pilots at Abbotsbury in Dorset, Holy Island in Northumbria and Friskney in East Anglia had been heeded (for conservation and environmental reasons) by the government, but the objections voiced by champions of Welsh culture were dismissed out of hand. In his address to the

[60] Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Back to the Land: Historiography, Rurality and the Nation in Interwar Wales', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 19 (1994), 70; Stéphane Giocanti, *Maurras: Le chaos et l'ordre* (Paris, 2006).

jury, Saunders Lewis invoked what he rather nebulously referred to as 'the universal moral law' as a justification for the arson and referred movingly to 'the irreparable loss of a language, of purity of idiom, of a home of literature, of a tradition of rural Welsh civilisation stretching back fourteen hundred years'.[61] The blaze of publicity which accompanied these startling events encompassed the Acts of Union. At a time when Oxford and Cambridge were producing young historians and rebels who were converts to Marxism – among them Christopher Hill and E. P. Thompson[62] – the Welsh-speaking intelligentsia veered towards nationalism and reconsidered ways of writing the history of the nation. Present-centred history was never more in evidence. Nationalist writers like Ambrose Bebb, a professional historian at Bangor, regarded the Union with undisguised hostility and scorn. In a preface to five addresses delivered at the Summer School of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru in August 1936, Bebb referred to the 1536 Act as a statute which inflicted 'the most fatal blow ever to the entire Welsh culture'.[63] No stranger to rhetorical boloney, Saunders Lewis was even more explicit: when the first Act of Union was enacted, he spluttered, Wales was 'taken out at dawn and shot'.[64] He urged the Welsh people to affirm their nationality by denying the validity of a union which had been 'the primary cause of the misery of Wales and of the servitude of the Welsh people ever since'.[65] A flurry of books, articles and papers reflected feelings of loss and exclusion, victimhood and oppression. Union was an imposition, a shackle and emblem of inferior status. Harsh words were spoken and written, usually at the expense of historical awareness and understanding, and the most that can be said is that such sentiments added emotional intensity to the historical narrative.

Historians of a more traditional bent approached the issue with greater circumspection (some might say timidity). In their eyes, unity and harmony had been, and still were, desirable. Centralism, tried and tested over the centuries, worked. Dissociating themselves from the nationalists and privately deploring

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[61] Saunders Lewis and Lewis Valentine, *Paham y Llosgasom yr Ysgol Fomio* (Caernarfon, [1936]), *passim*; Dafydd Jenkins, *Tân yn Llŷn* (Aberystwyth, 1937), 138.

[62] Noel Annan, *Our Age: Portrait of a Generation* (London, 1990), 182.

[63] W. Ambrose Bebb (ed.), *Y Ddeddf Uno, 1536 (Y Cefndir a'r Canlyniadau)* (Caernarfon, 1937), ix–x.

[64] Saunders Lewis, 'The Case for Welsh Nationalism', *The Welsh Nationalist*, 5 (1936), 6; T. Robin Chapman, 'Theism's Last Hurrah: Saunders Lewis's Caernarfon Court Speech of 1936' in idem (ed.), *The Idiom of Dissent: Protest and Propaganda in Wales* (Llandysul, 2006), 24–42.

[65] Saunders Lewis, '1536–1936: The Act of Union a Terrible and Malignant Reality', *The Welsh Nationalist*, 3 (1934), 3.

their efforts to subvert received wisdom, they were more interested in the way in which union had brought about administrative efficiency and national unity than in its cultural consequences. In a short pamphlet written for the Historical Association, J. Frederick Rees, a historian and principal of the University College of South Wales and Cardiff from 1929 to 1949, derided the 'small groups of enthusiasts' who had questioned the benefits of union and waspishly invited them to consider the available options at the time: 'To attempt to state in terms of sixteenth-century conditions what was the alternative which was rejected would certainly test the ingenuity of the modern nationalist.'[66] William Rees, the first holder of a Chair in Welsh history in the University of Wales, was less dogmatic and opinionated in his address to the Cymmrodorion Society in 1936. Focusing on what he rather clumsily termed 'the conditions precedent to the measure', Rees conceded that the Union had been an annexation rather than a bipartisan treaty agreed upon by negotiating parties.[67] In a private letter to J. E. Lloyd, written at a time when the shadow of Fascism weighed heavily upon him, he maintained that the Union settlement stemmed from colonial-style attitudes: 'I can well believe that a session of parliament at the time was something akin to a Fascist Grand Council and that there was little scope for discussion of the draft submitted.'[68] By contrast, in a lecture delivered to members of the Middle Temple, Sir Thomas Artemus Jones, judge, historian and journalist, claimed that the Union had been decisively shaped by the notion of 'responsible self-government', a principle widely recognised as 'one of the foundations of British rule throughout the world'.[69] Others threw in their tuppence's worth as the Acts of Union divided opinion as never before.

It is important to bear in mind that the academic study of Welsh history was still in its infancy at this stage and the great upsurge of interest in the

[66] J. F. Rees, *Tudor Policy in Wales* (Cardiff, 1935), 17. This essay was reprinted in idem, *Studies in Welsh History* (Cardiff, [1947]), 26–47.

[67] William Rees, 'The Union of England and Wales', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1937), 27.

[68] William Rees to J. E. Lloyd, 23 August 1938, Bangor University Archives, The Papers of Sir John Edward Lloyd 248. I am grateful to Professor Ralph A. Griffiths for drawing my attention to this letter.

[69] Thomas Artemus Jones, *The Union of England and Wales* (London, 1937), 9. It is worth noting that Jones was nevertheless a strong believer in the right of Welsh speakers to use Welsh in the Courts. He defied the 'language clause' in the 1536 Act by hearing cases in Welsh and supporting the Welsh Language Petition which paved the way for the Welsh Courts Act of 1942. Gwilym Prys Davies, 'The Legal Status of the Welsh Language in the Twentieth Century' in Geraint H. Jenkins and Mari A. Williams (eds.), *'Let's Do Our Best for the Ancient Tongue': The Welsh Language in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2000), 207, 223, 224–5, 227.

subject, both scholarly and lay, was delayed until the second half of the twentieth century.[70] The revival of a sense of Welshness, triggered in part by Saunders Lewis' portentous lecture 'Tynged yr Iaith' ('The Fate of the Language') in 1962, coincided with a striking renaissance in Welsh historical writing.[71] Heavily influenced by the approach of 'the Annales school', it concentrated on social history, more especially on history 'from below' in the modern period. But since one of the principal instigators of this revival of interest was Glanmor Williams, professor of history at Swansea from 1957 to 1982, the Tudor period, which he taught successfully as a special subject, was not neglected. In a wider sense, by this time the 1530s had become 'classic Elton territory' and the part played by Thomas Cromwell in the Henrician Revolution in government was deeply entrenched in textbooks.[72] Many historians, young and old, were in awe of Elton, none more so than W. Ogwen Williams who, in *Tudor Gwynedd* (1958), made no secret of his admiration for the 'political genius of the great Tudor sovereigns and ministers'.[73] In 1966 Peter R. Roberts, one of Elton's pupils at Cambridge, completed a highly regarded doctoral thesis on 'The "Acts of Union" and the Tudor Settlement of Wales', a study which led to several illuminating chapters and articles on the issues raised by Thomas Cromwell's strategy and also enriched what became known as the 'new British history'.[74] Thanks to Elton's three major books on Cromwell and these Welsh studies, the enforcement of the Union was now unquestionably viewed as part of the Cromwellian Revolution.[75]

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[70] Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Clio and Wales: Welsh Remembrancers and Historical Writing, 1751–2001', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, new series, 8 (2002), 119–36.

[71] Saunders Lewis, '*Tynged yr Iaith*' ('The Fate of the Language'). See http://www.bbc.co.uk/cymru/cymruaryrawyr/database/tynged.shtml [accessed 7 July 2008].

[72] C. S. L. Davies, 'The Cromwellian Decade: Authority and Consent', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 7 (1997), 177.

[73] W. Ogwen Williams, *Tudor Gwynedd: The Tudor Age in the Principality of North Wales* (Caernarvonshire Historical Society, 1958), 61; J. Gwynn Williams, 'William Ogwen Williams (1924–1969)', *Welsh History Review*, 4 (1969), 397–9.

[74] See, for instance, Peter R. Roberts, 'The Union with England and the Identity of "Anglican" Wales', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (1972), 49–70; idem, 'The "Henry VII Clause": Delegated Legislation and the Tudor Principality of Wales' in Thomas G. Watkin (ed.), *Legal Record and Historical Reality* (London, 1989), 37–49; idem, 'The English Crown, the Principality of Wales and the Council in the Marches, 1534–1641' in Bradshaw and Morrill (eds.), *The British Problem, c.1534–1707*, 118–47; idem, 'Tudor Legislation and the Political Status of "the British Tongue"' in Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, 123–52.

[75] Geoffrey R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (Cambridge, 1953); idem, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Cromwell* (Cambridge, 1972);

In 1975 John Pocock published his famous 'plea for a new subject'[76] in which he invited historians to broaden their perspectives by adopting an archipelagic approach to the study of British history. The immediate response was muted and several years passed before Welsh historians took up the gauntlet. When it came it was as much a response to the unlovely effects of Thatcherist neoliberalism as it was to the upsurge of nationalist movements in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, not to mention the issues raised by multiracialism and multiculturalism and the place of the United Kingdom within the European Union.[77] While purporting to recognise the 'otherness' of Wales and the validity of its history, however, 'British history' tended to emphasise convergence rather than divergence and often displayed a strong Anglocentric bias. Its proponents were notoriously deaf to the voices of the 'Other' who spoke and wrote in languages other than English, and references to Wales as 'a Principality' or to 'British nationhood' deservedly invited derision. Not all historians were guilty on these counts – the works of Rees Davies, Peter R. Roberts and Keith Robbins warrant serious attention because they recognised the importance of multiple cultural perspectives – but the suspicion remained that 'British history' was simply a synonym for a greater England. Issues regarding Welsh identity assumed greater prominence during the Thatcher era and the titles of some of the most influential historical works – *When was Wales?*, *Wales! Wales?* and *The National Question Again* – reflected the vulnerable mood of the times in the aftermath of the referendum on devolution in 1979.[78]

How Welsh historians reacted to these shattering experiences may be illustrated by the responses of two Dowlais-born historians, both of whom were called Williams and both of whom had grown in stature over the years if not in physical size.[79] No Welsh historian, not even J. E. Lloyd, exercised greater influence on Welsh historical studies than Glanmor Williams. Apart from his own seminal volumes on the sixteenth century, he served his subject

idem, *Reform and Renewal: Thomas Cromwell and the Common Weal* (Cambridge, 1973).

[76] J. G. A. Pocock, 'British History: A Plea for a New Subject', *Journal of Modern History*, 47 (1975), 601–21.

[77] For a valuable introduction, see the essays in Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (eds.), *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (London, 1995) and in Glen Burgess (ed.), *The New British History: Founding a Modern State 1603–1715* (London, 1999).

[78] Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (London, 1985); Dai Smith, *Wales! Wales?* (London, 1984); John Osmond (ed.), *The National Question Again* (Llandysul, 1985).

[79] Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Dau Fachan Bêch o Ddowlish: Glanmor Williams a Gwyn Alfred Williams' in Hywel Teifi Edwards (ed.), *Merthyr a Thaf* (Llandysul, 2001), 192–226.

by being the founding editor of the *Welsh History Review*, the general editor of the *Oxford History of Wales*, one of the general editors of the monograph series *Studies in Welsh History* and general editor of the *Glamorgan County History*, an enormous portfolio which no other historian could match. For the most part Williams embraced the social democracy of the working-class man and the sense of Britishness which the Labour movement, with its focus on centralisation and integration, fostered. But he also believed that a Welsh identity, based on language and history, could be accommodated within the Union and that assimilation was preferable to fragmentation. This often meant that, in his writings and public stance, he often found himself caught betwixt and between conflicting loyalties. He never managed to resolve the tensions implicit in being, as he put it, a 'two-sided Welshman'.[80] Although he feared that nationalist historians like Gwynfor Evans deliberately allowed politics rather than the past to kindle the fires of their emotions,[81] he steered clear of disagreement and controversy, and by the end of his career he had come to the conclusion that too much had been attributed to the Union legislation and that it needed to be viewed 'as only one strand in a broader and more complex historical tapestry'.[82]

The second Williams – Gwyn Alfred Williams – was just as diminutive but decidedly more combustible. As professor of history at Cardiff from 1974 and, more significantly, as a beguiling television personality, this irreverent, mischievous and hugely gifted admirer of Gramsci became the most vocal representative of the left in Wales. The old guard of unionists reeled as he flaunted his partisanship in the most vigorous way in works such as *When was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (1985). In his hands, history became a powerful usable tool, a politically-charged instrument markedly different from the complacent 'Lib-Labism' or 'whiggishness' of many of his predecessors.[83] Williams believed that if Welsh history was to live, it needed to be communicated to a much broader audience, a task which someone of his riveting intelligence was uniquely equipped to undertake. By depicting the history of the Welsh as

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[80] Glanmor Williams, 'Eira Ddoe: Cofio Dowlais', *Taliesin*, 69 (1990), 18–19.

[81] Glanmor Williams, 'The Act of Incorporation and the Welsh Language', *Planet*, 72 (1988–9), 48–53.

[82] Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Act of Union* (Bangor, 1992), 47. For his interpretation of Union historiography see 'Haneswyr a'r Deddfau Uno' in idem (ed.), *Cymru a'r Gorffennol: Côr o Leisiau* (Llandysul, 2000), 55–71.

[83] Geraint H. Jenkins, *The People's Historian: Professor Gwyn A. Williams (1925–1995)* (Aberystwyth, 1996); Dai Smith, 'Gwyn A. Williams (1925–1995)', *Welsh History Review*, 18 (1996), 318–26.

story of successive, often cataclysmic, crises, splits and ruptures, he challenged received wisdom. For him, union was just one of many such crises which the Welsh had survived, but to champions of the post-Tudor polity and the new 'British history', as well as to anti-devolutionists, his words came as a shock. In retrospect, his vision of the past appears misguided and even absurd, but in the context of the times it resonated loudly.

In the mid-1980s Gwyn A. Williams concluded apocalyptically that the Welsh were 'now nothing but a naked people under an acid rain'.[84] But within a decade the rigours of Conservative rule had produced an ironic and unexpected legacy. The ways in which large numbers of Welsh people viewed the Union changed. In September 1997 the Welsh, riding on the coat-tails of the Scots, voted by a tiny majority in favour of a devolved Assembly Government for Wales. Even more significant for the historian's standpoint was the growing readiness of professional remembrancers to express their nationalist leaning in their writings. Previously it had always been presumed that historians with nationalist sympathies were bound to exaggerate, distort or impoverish understanding of the past.[85] But by the 1990s, to a greater or lesser degree, historians like Rees Davies, J. Beverley Smith, John Davies and the present writer were perfectly prepared to express nationalist sentiments in their interpretations without compromising the rules of the game. Fears of failing to pass muster in the eyes of others disappeared and some uncomfortable truths were expressed as writers addressed both the intended and unintended consequences of union. For instance, in a major multi-volume social history of the Welsh language it was emphatically declared that the 'language clause' of 1536 had denied equality to the Welsh language, a statement conspicuous by its absence in previous accounts.[86] In the first edition of his magisterial history of Wales, John Davies declared that it had been written 'in the faith and confidence that the nation in its fullness is yet to be', an accurate prediction which he felt entitled to crow about when a revised edition emerged in 2007.[87]

What does the future hold? The setting up of a National Assembly for Wales in May 1999 unquestionably marked a new departure. Current trends strongly

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[84] Williams, *When was Wales?*, 305.

[85] Robin Okey, 'Plausible Perspectives: The New Welsh Historiography', *Planet*, 73 (1989), 31–8. Okey rightly wondered why nationalist interpretations were reckoned to be 'uniquely subject to anachronism and propagandist present-mindedness'.

[86] See the volumes published under the series title 'A Social History of the Welsh Language' by the University of Wales Press between 1997 and 2000, especially Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, chapter 2.

[87] John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1994), 686.

suggest that the Welsh possess a growing desire to take further responsibility for their own destiny. According to the 'One Wales' coalition agreement made in 2007 between the Wales Labour Party and Plaid Cymru a referendum will be held by 2011, subject to the recommendations of an all-Wales Convention designed to assess the extent of support for primary legislative powers on the Scottish model. Wales has become a more lively political entity, more plural, more multifaceted and, as a result, more likely to adopt imaginative approaches to its past. Since we no longer, for instance, trust in age-old markers of identity based on blood, ancestry and heritage, other forms of historical enquiry and lines of argument are bound to emerge. Of one thing we can be certain: as they engage in a dialogue between the past and the present, historians will continue to reshape and revise their interpretations of the Acts of Union and their consequences and will do so in the light of the tastes, interests and aspirations of the society in which they live. As J. Frederick Rees laconically observed: 'Events press forward . . . to what end we cannot tell.'[88]

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[88] J. F. Rees, *Of Welsh Nationality and Historians* (London, [1951]), 24.