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Wales in Britain

Helen Fulton

When did Britain begin? The historians and geographers of the ancient world, such as Posidonius and Strabo, first conveyed the concept of Britain ('Prydain' in the Brittonic language of its pre-Roman inhabitants) through the imperial discourses of travel, topography, and conquest.[1] These were outsider views of Britain which constructed it as a group of fragmented polities within an island geography and recorded its ultimate conquest by Rome in the first century AD. When the voices of the insiders, the British people themselves, began to be heard, around the sixth century AD, they spoke not only in Latin but in Welsh, the immediate descendant of the earlier Brittonic language. From their earliest writing until the eighteenth century, the Welsh believed themselves to be the descendants of the British people who were the rightful owners of the island of Britain. For clues to the origins of the idea of Britain, there is no better place to start than Wales.

The issue of Welsh nationhood has been much debated – when did the Welsh begin to think of themselves as a nation? Historians of medieval England writing in the twentieth century, steeped in ideologies of imperialism and the nation state, were typically inclined to deny that the Welsh experienced any sense of national identity until the thirteenth century; before then, due to its lack of a centralised kingship, it was 'not so much a nation as an association'.[2] Though the governance of medieval Wales was certainly diffuse and competitive in comparison with the more centralised governance of the kingdom of England, there is plenty of evidence that, from our earliest written records, the Welsh regarded

[1] David Rankin, 'The Celts Through Classical Eyes', in Miranda J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 21–33.
[2] W. L. Warren, *Henry II* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), p. 156. See also R. R. Davies, 'Law and National Identity in Thirteenth-Century Wales', in R. R. Davies et al. (eds), *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays presented to Glanmor Williams* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1984), pp. 51–69.

themselves as a *cenedl*, a nation of people united by a shared history, territory, culture, and language. The modern nation-state model has erased the medieval political reality of 'de facto mini-sovereignties in a vast system of often loose overlapping jurisdictions'.[3] For the Welsh, their lack of a centralised system of governance was no bar to a sense of national identity. What counted was their language, British, and their *patria*, their homeland, which was what might be called British Britain, the island ruled by the British ancestors of the Welsh.

The formation of Wales as a specific region within the island of Britain was imposed from the outside, by the incoming Angles and Saxons who began arriving in colonising numbers from the early fifth century AD. The period between the fifth and ninth centuries saw the gradual migration of many British-speaking peoples away from the areas of Anglo-Saxon settlements in the east and south of the island towards the north, west, and south-west, where linguistic and cultural Britishness could be largely maintained.[4] Wales and Cornwall owe their territorial names to the Anglo-Saxon word *wealh*, 'foreigner'. The British name for themselves was derived from **com-broges*, people from the same region, the name which survives in the modern place-names Cymru and Cumbria. British and English were two separate ethnicities, often opposed in murderous power struggles. In the early eighth century, Bede's well-known formulation of the five languages and four nations of Britain, namely English, British, Scots, and Picts, with Latin used by them all, suggests a correspondence between language and nation which remains fundamental to the place of Wales (and Scotland) within Britain today.[5]

[3] Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 33.
[4] See Richard Coates, 'Invisible Britons: The View from Linguistics', in Nick Higham (ed.), *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), pp. 172–91.
[5] Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), I.1.

By the tenth century, when the Mercian king Athelstan claimed authority in 927 over the other kingdoms and regions as *rex totius Britanniae*, ‘the king of the whole of Britain’, the concept of a single English kingdom encompassing the whole island had begun to take root.[6] In Wales, where regional divisions of land under dynastic princes encouraged power-grabs from ambitious rulers, deep-seated rivalries prevented any lasting political unity. Despite the political instability, the Welsh saw themselves not only as a nation of people, but as the true descendants of a larger British nation stolen from them by the Saxons. At exactly the time when Athelstan was setting himself up as king of the English, a portentous Welsh poem railing against Saxon oppression and predicting the overthrow of the English by a pro-British alliance was in circulation. *Armes Prydein*, ‘The Prophecy of Britain’, authorised by the prophet Myrddin (Merlin), deplored the Saxon taxes that were demanded from Welsh princes and declared that the Welsh and their allies would drive out the English and take back the land that was rightfully theirs: ‘sooner will [the Saxons] retreat into exile than the Welsh will become homeless’.[7] The message of the prophecy is clear: the Welsh are the rightful inhabitants of British Britain; the English are the invaders.

Origin legends surviving from the early ninth century in the *Historia Brittonum* attributed to Nennius positioned the Welsh as the direct ancestors of Brutus, himself descended from the Trojan Aeneas, the founder of Rome.[8] The heritage of the British people, the originary inahabitants of the island of Britain, thus derived from Troy, on the shores of the eastern empire, and Rome, the jewel of the west, a powerful dual legacy that legitimised British sovereignty. This was the myth of origins that was to be so brilliantly embroidered by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, ‘History of the Kings of Britain’,

[6] R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 36–37.
[7] Ifor Williams (ed.) and Rachel Bromwich (trans.), *Armes Prydein* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972), ll. 42–44, my translation.
[8] John Morris (ed. and trans.), *Nennius, British History and the Welsh Annals* (London: Phillimore, 1980), pp. 10–12.

which first appeared in about 1136. According to Geoffrey's account, the line of power from Troy to Rome to Britain led straight to the Normans, whose conquest of the English was justified by their barbarian origins, while the Norman oppression of the Welsh was justified by their decline into degeneracy after their glorious past.

This was not, of course, how the Welsh saw the trajectory of their history. For the Welsh, 'Ynys Prydain' was not simply the Roman province of Britannia but the whole island of Britain which they had once, in their literary imagination, ruled from Scotland to Cornwall. Welsh tradition claimed 'a Crown and three Coronets' for the island of Britain, a single kingdom stretching from the lands of the Picts, north of the Firth of Forth and the Clyde, to Cornwall in the south. The Crown belonged to London, with the 'coronets' at Penrhyn Rhionydd in the north, Aberffraw in Anglesey, and Cornwall: 'And no one has a right to this Island except only the nation of the Cymry (*y cenedl Gymry*), the remnant of the Britons, who came here in former days from Troy.'[9]

Following the Norman conquest of England and Wales in 1066, a new dynamic entered the politics of the island of Britain. While the English had been content to engage in border warfare in the Marches, the Normans were focused from the beginning on a wholesale project of colonisation of the entire island.[10] In the first third of the twelfth century, Henry I made himself over-king of England, Wales and Scotland, while Henry II added Ireland to the kingdom. The concept of Britain was appropriated by the Norman and then English kings to signify a single kingdom of which they were the indisputable rulers. Though they called themselves kings of England, what they meant was that the kingdom of England was now

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[9] The text is *Enweu Ynys Brydein*, 'Names of the Island of Britain', in Rachel Bromwich (ed. and trans.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein, The Welsh Triads*, 4th edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), pp. 246–55 (on p. 246, trans. p. 247). The text can be dated to the first half of the twelfth century but is likely to contain much earlier material (Bromwich, pp. c–civ). The location of Penrhyn Rhionydd is unknown but is likely to have been in Scotland (Bromwich, p. 4), probably in an area once inhabited by the Britons of the 'old North'. *Cenedl* is the Welsh word (with a Celtic root) signifying 'nation, tribe, clan, kindred'.

[10] For an account of the Norman settlements in Wales, see R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 27–41.

coterminous with the island of Britain, a pervasive concept that has been called 'Britain-as-Greater-England'.[11] Already by the twelfth century, historians were in the habit of referring to the island of Britain as England, as if 'Britain' were an archaic term for what was now England.[12] By implying that the kingdom of England was identical with the whole of Britain, the Norman kings disinherited the Welsh and redefined 'Britain' as an antiquarian concept.

In the first century and a half of Norman settlements in England and Wales, some of the greatest prose texts of the Welsh canon took shape, namely the eleven prose tales known collectively as *The Mabinogion*.[13] Intriguingly, none of these tales refers explicitly to the presence of the Normans in Wales, though 'the English' make token and unwelcome appearances, but some of the tales consciously invoke an ideal of nationhood embedded in the pre-Saxon sovereign British kingdom. In the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, *Branwen verch Lŷr*, 'Branwen daughter of Llŷr', the main protagonist, Branwen, is the sister of Bendigeidfran, described as '[b]renhin coronawc ar yr ynys hon, ac ardyrchawc o goron Lundein' ('crowned king over this island and invested with the crown of London').[14] Most striking of all is the tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*, 'Culhwch and Olwen', in which the hero, a nephew of Arthur, achieves impossible tasks in order to marry the giant's daughter, Olwen. Replete with folk motifs, onomastic lore, and traces of older stories, the tale has the distinction of being an entirely original Welsh Arthurian text which almost certainly pre-

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[11] Ailsa Henderson and Richard Wyn Jones, *Englishness: The Political Force Transforming Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 30.

[12] Henry of Huntingdon, for example, wrote in c. 1129 that Britain was 'formerly called Albion, later Britain, and now England'. Diana Greenway (ed. and trans.), *Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon: Historia Anglorum, 'The History of the English People'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 12–13. See also Alan MacColl, 'The Meaning of "Britain" in Medieval and Early Modern England', *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), 248–69.

[13] The eleven tales are of various unknown authorship and of different dates, composed or compiled somewhere between about 1100 and 1250. The standard translation is by Sioned Davies, *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[14] Derick S. Thomson (ed.), *Branwen Uerch Lyr* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), ll. 1–2; Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 22.

dates Geoffrey's *Historia*.[15] Arthur is king of the Island of Britain and has at his command not only a personal retinue of skilled champions and an army of British warriors but also a massive alliance of kings and nobles throughout the known world. In the tales of the *Mabinogion*, Welsh writers have taken back control of the historical narrative and definitively reclaimed Britain as the kingdom of the British people.

By the middle of the thirteenth century, the English kings were tiring of Welsh recalcitrance. Norman Marcher lords occupied large swathes of the lands that bordered with England and the south and south-west coastal regions of Wales, but the central, north-west, and northern areas, *pura Wallia*, remained under the jurisdiction of the Welsh princes. Edward I came to the throne in 1272 determined to assert the authority of the English crown over both Wales and Scotland. Unlike Scotland, Wales had never had a single kingship, only a series of rulers who had tried at various times to extend their authority over the whole of the country. In the thirteenth century, it was the dynasty of Gwynedd which aspired to claim the rulership of Wales. Early in the century, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, or Llywelyn Fawr ('the great'), succeeded in diverting the feudal obligations of many of the Welsh princes from the king to himself, further cementing his authority by marrying Joan, the illegitimate daughter of King John, in 1205. By 1218, after a series of bold military campaigns, he had achieved the acknowledged lordship of the whole of native Wales, a position he held until his death in 1240.

It was Llywelyn's grandson, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last independent prince of Wales, who flew closest to the sun. Rebuilding, often by force, feudal alliances with all the native rulers of Wales, Llywelyn began to call himself 'prince of Wales', a title that was recognised by Henry III in the Treaty of Montgomery signed at Rhyd Chwima in 1267. This

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[15] See Diana Luft, 'Commemorating the Past after 1066: Tales from the *Mabinogion*', in Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton (eds), *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 73–92.

was the high point of Llywelyn's career: he had achieved what no other Welsh ruler had ever achieved and which successive English kings had resisted, namely the overlordship of native Wales whereby Llywelyn would pay homage to the king on behalf of all the other Welsh lords. With the Welsh dynastic lands placed on a new footing as a single territory, Rhyd Chwima signified 'a meeting ground between two nations and two political entities'.[16] But Llywelyn's achievement lasted barely fifteen years. Engaged in an almost constant power struggle with Edward I, who was determined to be the over-king of both Wales and Scotland, Llywelyn was inevitably the loser. In 1282, Edward declared war on the rebellious Welsh and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was killed by Edward's army near Builth Wells. By 1284, the native dynasties of Wales had been disbanded and disinherited, and what had been *pura Wallia* was absorbed into the administrative structures of the kingdom of England.[17] Wales was henceforth divided into crown lordships in the west and north – an area known as the Principality from 1301 – and the Marcher lordships along the eastern border and southern coastline.

The shock of 1284 led to an identity crisis for Wales. Any hope of maintaining a territorial independence within the kingdom of England had to be discarded. The sense of grief and loss were immediately expressed by the court poets who lamented the downfall of their princely patrons and, indeed, the consequent loss of their own livelihoods. Gruffudd ab Yr Ynad Coch mourned Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, calling him 'gwersyll Cadwaladr' ('Cadwaladr's stronghold'):

Oer calon dan fron o fraw—allwynin
Am frenin, dderwin ddôr, Aberffraw…

[16] J. Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd: Prince of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 185.
[17] For an account of the settlement of 1284, see Davies, *Age of Conquest*, pp. 355–70.

Ys mau lid wrth Sais am fy nhreisiaw,

Ys mau rhag angau angen gwynaw.[18]

(Heart cold in the breast with dread, grief-stricken,

For a king, oak door, of Aberffraw…

Mine, rage at the Saxon for crushing me,

Mine the need, before death, to lament.)[19]

The imagery is redolent of a lost British kingdom – the court at Aberffraw, the perfidious Saxon, the British king Cadwaladr who ruled Gwynedd in the seventh century and became Geoffrey of Monmouth's last king of Britain before the coming of the Saxons. Such imagery is typical of the *gogynfeirdd*, the highly privileged court poets who sang at the courts of the princes until the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, their poetry, often describing contemporary battles against the English, invokes Britain as the rightful kingdom of the Welsh, the Saxons as the enemy, and British heroes such as Cynan, Cadwaladr, Cadwallawn, and Rhodri as the ancestors and avatars of their noble patrons. Before 1282, such allusions had cultural capital and some level of legitimacy in reminding contemporary Welsh princes of a heritage that underpinned their independence. After 1282, though poets slowly found new patrons among a reconfigured Welsh nobility, the references to Britain as the old kingdom of the Welsh, while still salient, became fewer and more nostalgic.

In the new social and political order, the main preoccupations of the Welsh were the survival of their cultural practices and their ambivalent relationship with the English crown. On the one hand, a newly empowered Welsh gentry, descended from the old princely

[18] Thomas Parry (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), ll. 1–2 and 17–18.
[19] Joseph P. Clancy (trans.), *Medieval Welsh Poems* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), pp. 171–4.

dynasties, served the crown, mostly uncontroversially, as administrators and military leaders, with many Welsh of all social classes fighting with the king's armies during the Hundred Years War (1337–1453). Some of the Welsh court poets went so far as to praise the English king and his Marcher lords, such as Iolo Goch's poems in the late fourteenth century to Edward III and Roger Mortimer, the Earl of March.[20] On the other hand, relations between the Welsh and local English settlers on the Marches and in the growing towns were often fraught, while the Welsh clergy bitterly resented the exploitation of Welsh ecclesiastical lands and revenues by English bishops. In 1400, a powder-keg of pent-up hostility was set alight by Owain Glyndŵr, a Welsh baron in north-east Wales who had fought for Edward III in Scotland in the 1380s. Incensed by various perceived slights, including provocation from his English Marcher neighbour, Lord Grey of Ruthin, Owain took advantage of the instability caused by the deposition of Richard II in 1399 and the seizure of the throne by Henry IV to raise a rebellion against the king which, over the course of seven years, engulfed most of Wales as well as some key members of the English aristocracy.[21]

Owain's rebellion was a war of independence, an attempt to free the nation of Wales from the 'tyranny and bondage' of the English.[22] Having declared himself Prince of Wales on 16 September 1400, he proceeded to seek alliances with the king of Scotland, the lords of Ireland, and Charles VI of France, appealing to the latter's hostility to Henry IV. To the king of Scotland, Robert III, Owain called on their shared descent from Brutus, the traditional eponymous founder of the Island of Britain, 'your most noble ancestor and mine...the first crowned king who dwelt in this realm of England, which of old times was called Great

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[20] Dafydd Johnston (ed. and trans.), *Iolo Goch: Poems* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1993), no. 1 and no. 20.
[21] The definitive history of the Glyndŵr rebellion is by R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[22] Dylan Rees and J. Gwynfor Jones (eds and trans), *Thomas Matthews's Welsh Records in Paris: A Study in Selected Welsh Medieval Records* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 111.

Britain'.[23] With these words, Owain articulated the still commonly-held view in Wales that the 'realm of England' – that is, the kingdom – had deliberately replaced and effaced what was once 'Great Britain', the rightful home of both the Welsh and the Scots.

Owain's mobilisation of British history was a means of justifying his attempt to recover Wales as an independent nation within a federated Britain. By 1405 he had won over two powerful English supporters, the Earl of Northumberland (Henry Percy, whose son Hotspur had died fighting for the rebel cause in 1403) and Sir Edmund Mortimer, uncle of the young Earl of March (later Edward IV). With these lords, Owain drew up the 'Tripartite Indenture', a programme for the division of Britain into three parts, carefully mapped out using rivers and existing counties as borders.[24] Owain and his heirs were to be the lords of Wales, contained within the topographical borders separating it from England, which included all the Marcher lordships as far west as Worcester and as far north as the Mersey (thus extending well into what is now England).[25] The Earl of Northumberland was to be lord of all the northern English counties, from Norfolk to Northumberland and as far west as Derby and Stafford. Edmund Mortimer would have the remainder of England. In the context of twenty-first-century discussions of possibilities such as a four-nation federation and a division of England into regional governments, Owain's ambitious vision for a return to 'Great Britain' was startlingly prescient, though, given the mighty constitutional and military strength of the English monarchy, doomed to failure. His rebellion had all but petered out by 1407 and Owain himself was dead by 1415.

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[23] Rees and Jones, *Welsh Records in Paris*, p. 103 (text) and p. 111 (translation). The letter is dated 29 November 1401 and seeks urgent military support to continue the fight against the English. For this and other documents concerning Owain Glyndŵr, including poetry, see Michael Livingston and John K. Bollard (eds), *Owain Glyndŵr: A Casebook* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

[24] For the text of the Tripartite Indenture, drawn up in Latin as 'Tenores Foederis Tripartiti', see Rees and Jones, *Welsh Records in Paris*, p. 108 (text) and p. 116 (translation).

[25] As Huw Pryce has said, referring to Wales in the twelfth century, 'The eastern border of Wales fluctuated according to changing political circumstances…indeed, Welsh and English notions of the border may have differed.' Pryce, 'British or Welsh? National Identity in Twelfth-Century Wales', *English Historical Review*, 116 (2001), 775–801 (on pp. 776–7).

Only decades after the Glyndŵr rebellion, Wales was once again riven by factionalism during the Wars of the Roses. With some exceptions, west Wales and areas beyond the March supported the Lancastrians, led by Jasper Tudor on behalf of his nephew, Henry Tudor, while most of the March, dominated by English magnates, supported the house of York. From the earliest days of the conflict and the birth of Edmund Tudor's son, Henry, in Pembroke Castle in 1457, the poets were intrigued by Henry's potential as a *mab darogan*, a 'son of prophecy' who would be the one to free Wales at last from centuries of Saxon oppression.[26] Jasper Tudor was hailed as a saviour of the Welsh who was 'raising a dragon for us, of the fortunate blood of Brutus', that is, his nephew Henry Tudor, while Hors and Hengist, the evil Saxons, were 'aliens to the Greek history [of Brutus] and the Round Table [of Arthur]'.[27]

With the death of Edward IV in 1483 and the usurpation of the throne by Richard III, Welsh support for Henry Tudor became unanimous. Prophecies of British heroes coming to rout the English circulated around the country, and Henry's return from exile in France and his subsequent victory at Bosworth in 1485 were seen as the triumphant fulfilment of the prophecies. 'You have won – you found a fine spirit of battle – the Island of Britain,' said Dafydd Llwyd in a praise-poem to Henry VII shortly after his accession, and it did seem to the Welsh that they had won back the sovereignty of the island through the kingship of Henry Tudor.[28] To what extent Henry VII identified as Welsh is debatable; despite being born at Pembroke Castle and spending his boyhood with the Herbert family of Raglan, he is likely to have felt more French than Welsh. Nevertheless, he was well aware of the debt he owed to those Welsh families who supported his march across Wales from his landing-place at

[26] On the Tudor family and its close links with the Welsh princes, see Ralph A. Griffiths and Roger S. Thomas, *The Making of the Tudor Dynasty* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1985), pp. 5–14.
[27] From a poem by Dafydd Llwyd (fl. c. 1420–1490), in W. Leslie Richards (ed.), *Gwaith Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1964), no. 33, my translation.
[28] 'Enillaist, neur gefaist gain / O naws brwydr ynys Brydain.' Richards (ed.), *Gwaith Dafydd Llwyd*, no. 22, lines 29–30, my translation.

Pembroke to the final battleground at Bosworth. And in naming his first son Arthur, he gestured towards the concept of British Britain that the Welsh held so close to their hearts.

It was in the next generation, during the reign of Henry VIII, that the Welsh concept of Britain was definitively remodelled to suit the English political agenda. With its thick swathe of Marcher lordships, virtually independent from the king, separating the crown from its lordships in the Principality further west, Wales was already an administrative headache for the crown and was widely regarded as lawless and socially unstable. The first Act of Union of 1536 annexed Wales to the kingdom of England to form a single administrative polity; the second, of 1543, attended to remaining details relating specifically to legal and judicial arrangements, in particular the suppression of Welsh law and the imposition of a single legal system across the whole of Wales and England.[29] The annexation of Wales marked the most significant move by the Tudor administration towards the formation of a nation-state in the modern sense of the term.

The largest sector disenfranchised by the Act of 1536 were the Marcher lords, whose previously independent fiefdoms were reconfigured into a new set of English counties spread along what now became a political border separating Wales and England. The map of England and Wales was thus comprehensively redrawn into a distinctively Tudor geography which represented a single centrally-managed state. Conventionally called ‘England’, which meant England-and-Wales, Tudor writers and chroniclers sometimes used the term ‘Britain’ for the kingdom, in an antiquarian sense, as a means of legitimising Henry’s power over both nations. Just as Geoffrey of Monmouth had invoked Britishness to provide the Norman invaders with an authorising history, so Tudor writers positioned Henry VIII as the rightful

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[29] William Rees, ‘The Union of England and Wales’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1937), 27–100. On the consequences of the Act of Union of 1536, see Katharine K. Olson, ‘The Acts of Union: Culture and Religion in Wales, c. 1540–1700’, in Evans and Fulton (eds), *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, pp. 157–75, especially pp. 159–160. For the wording of the Acts themselves (27 Henry 8, c. 26 and 34-35 Henry 8, c. 26) see Ivor Bowen (ed.), *The Statutes of Wales* (London: T. Unwin Fisher, 1908), pp. 75–93 and pp. 101–33.

king of the island of Britain. The Welsh, who had considered themselves 'British' in ethnic opposition to the English, now found themselves sharing a new state-defined identity of Britishness with the English themselves, and on English terms.

The ideological work of subsuming Wales into the kingdom of England was done most ably by Tudor historiographers and chorographers such as John Leland in his *Itinerary* of 1536–39, Raphael Holinshed in his *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (first published in 1577 and revised in 1587), William Harrison, whose *Historicall Description of the Islande of Britayne* was incorporated into Holinshed's *Chronicles*, and William Camden's *Britannia*, first published in Latin in 1586. Camden's concept of 'Britannia' is both antiquarian ('ancient Britain') and geographical, describing the island of Britain and its neighbour, Ireland, in an ambitious expansion of the Tudor kingdom. Harrison's *Description of Britain*, on the other hand, covers only the realm of England and Wales, though his use of 'Britain' implies the same dual meaning, antiquarian and geographical, as that of Camden.

The Tudor annexation of Wales was an explicitly imperialist move: Wales was now 'subject to and under the imperial crown of this realm'. But imperialism itself implies a hierarchy of nations or states, and although Wales remained subordinate to England as a colonised nation it did at least recover occupation and control of its own territory. As the kingdom of England continued its imperialist trajectory towards the high point of the British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, extending far beyond its own boundaries, Wales could define itself as a nation within its own borders while England remained ideologically blind as to where its territory ended and others began. Paradoxically, then, the Act of Union returned Wales to its territorial integrity and reignited the Welsh nationalist belief in its British past.

In the wake of the English union with Scotland in 1707, the rediscovery of 'ancient Britain' by eighteenth-century English Romantics was a means of celebrating the new polity

of 'Great Britain'. But this was an English-speaking polity, and one that went out of its way to marginalise and exclude the Welsh language, regarded by Welsh writers as the very essence of the Britishness to which they laid claim. The constitutional invention of 'Great Britain' led Welsh antiquarians such as Edward Williams ('Iolo Morganwg') and Lewis Morris to investigate and transcribe surviving manuscripts of medieval Welsh literature and to present them for the first time in printed form, often with accompanying English translations.[30] This recovery of early Welsh literature, much of it made accessible to non-Welsh speakers, was a deliberate attempt to reclaim the culture and language of Wales as the direct legacies of the 'ancient Britons'. As Edward Williams said in a letter of 1792, 'by Britons, we the Welsh always mean ourselves'.[31]

In parallel with the antiquarian recovery of medieval literature as a key part of national identity, Welsh writers and poets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attempted to forge new understandings of the state of their nation. The dominant influence was religious, in particular the Nonconformism of the numerous chapels throughout Wales and their Welsh-speaking, often monolingual, congregations. This 'Nonconformist nation' was both captured and critiqued by writers such as Daniel Owen (1836–1895), writing in Welsh, and Caradoc Evans (1878–1945), a Welsh speaker who wrote in English.[32] In popular novels such as *Rhys Lewis* (1885) and *Enoc Huws* (1891), Owen addressed the chapel faithful and presented them with a world that they knew all too well, a world full of 'characters whose loveable idiosyncracies of conduct and speech turned them into instant heroes of the folk culture of the day', and yet a world that was also narrow and limited in its outlook, suspicious of change,

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[30] See for example Evan Evans, *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* (London, 1764), digitised by the National Library of Wales [https://www.library.wales/digital-exhibitions-space/digital-exhibitions/europeana-rise-of-literacy/poetry-volumes/some-specimens-of-the-poetry-of-the-antient-welsh-bards#?c=&m=&s=&cv=4&xywh=-296%2C-1%2C4301%2C4669].

[31] Bethan M. Jenkins, *Between Wales and England: Anglophone Welsh Writing of the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), p. 130.

[32] M. Wynn Thomas refers to the 'Nonconformist nation' as 'a distinctively Welsh cultural phenomenon'. 'From Nonconformist Nation to Proletarian Nation: Writing Wales, 1885–1930', in Evans and Fulton (eds), *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, pp. 405–27 (on p. 407).

and hypocritical in its pious morality.[33] At the same time, a new strand of Welsh writing began to appear, represented by novelists, particularly women, who were part of a large-scale immigration of English people into industrial south Wales who then identified themselves as Welsh. One such writer was Anne Beale (1816–1900), born in Somerset but who moved to Wales in 1840 as a governess and remained there for most of her life, working as a full-time writer. Her novels, many of them set in Wales, were enormously popular and represented to some extent the attitudes of the incoming English towards the 'indigenous' population, attitudes that could be admiring but also imperialist.[34] Already by the late nineteenth century, the emerging tradition of English-language writing in Wales encompassed writers addressing a bilingual audience, such as Caradoc Evans, and writers who, like Anne Beale, addressed mainly a monolingual English audience whose idea of Wales as a nation placed it unequivocally and unproblematically within the British empire.

The Welsh sense of nationhood continued to depend on the Welsh language as its most defining feature, though the fabric of Welsh was already wearing thin by the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century.[35] The road to devolution in Wales, finally achieved in 1999, was paved in part by the efforts of the Welsh language movement throughout the twentieth century to protect and promote Welsh as the national language of Wales. Yet Welsh speakers alone were not able to propel Wales to devolution, as the failure of the 1979 referendum showed, 'a profoundly traumatizing experience for both traditional parties of

[33] Thomas, 'From Nonconformist Nation to Proletarian Nation', p. 407.

[34] Katie Gramich, 'Travel, Translation, and Temperance: The Origins of the Welsh Novel', in Evans and Fulton (eds), *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, pp. 335–52 (on pp. 338–9).

[35] The 1901 census showed that only 50% of the population could speak Welsh, while 30% were monolingual Welsh speakers, a decline that continued throughout the twentieth century. Janet Laugharne, 'Language Use and Language Attitudes in Wales', in *Multilingualism in European Bilingual Contexts: Language Use and Attitudes*, ed. by David Lasagabaster and Angel Huguet (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006), pp. 208–33 (on p. 208). The 2001 census suggested that around 20% of the population of Wales could speak Welsh, a slight increase on previous figures. See John Aitchison and Harold Carter (eds), *Spreading the Word: The Welsh Language 2001* (Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2004), p. 51.

Wales', namely Labour and Plaid Cymru.[36] It was not until the social and economic changes wrought by the Thatcher government of the 1980s and the landslide Labour victory of 1997 that the economic as well as nationalist benefits of devolution appealed to a sufficient, if slim, majority of Welsh people in the referendum of 1999.

In the decades leading up to devolution, the emergence of Welsh Writing in English (a term coined by Professor M. Wynn Thomas at Swansea University in the mid-1980s, to replace the unsatisfactory hybrid term 'Anglo-Welsh Literature') as a powerful literary and publishing force in Wales accelerated the acceptance of bilingualism as the dominant linguistic mode in Wales. The link between the Welsh language and national identity could no longer be sustained in a country where the majority of inhabitants were monoglot English speakers, albeit enriched by daily encounters with the Welsh language around them. The struggle for 'Welshness' – whether a non-Welsh speaker could claim to be 'Welsh', and if so, how would one define that Welshness? – is exemplified by 'the two Thomases', the poet R. S. Thomas (1913–2000), a Welsh speaker who wrote poetry only in English, and his more famous contemporary, Dylan Thomas (1914–1953) who had little or no Welsh. While the poetry of R. S. (his usual soubriquet) hails a bilingual audience from within Wales, the poetry of Dylan Thomas delivers an idea of Welshness to English audiences, whether in Wales or in England. In Dylan Thomas's life, the loss of the language represents a cultural loss which left him stranded between his bilingual Welsh-speaking relatives in west Wales and the monolingual English culture in which he grew up in Swansea, a step-sibling to the wider English national culture which imperiously claimed him as one of their own. While Dylan Thomas was unable to critique Welsh-language culture from the inside, R. S. was all too familiar with its strengths and weaknesses. He deplored the Welsh tendency to look to their

[36] Seán Aeron Martin and Mari Elin Wiliam, 'Debating Nationhood, c. 1945–2000', in Evans and Fulton (eds), *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, pp. 491–506 (on p. 496).

past to shape their national identity: 'Come to Wales / To be buried', wrote R. S. in 'Welcome to Wales', while in another poem, 'Reservoirs', he wrote more savagely about the exploitation of Wales by the English and the complicity of the Welsh in the death of the language, 'elbowing our language / Into the grave that we have dug for it'.[37]

Writers and critics of the mid-twentieth century grappled with the 'two cultures' of Wales and their competing visions of a national identity. Saunders Lewis (1893–1985), a Welsh-speaking writer, academic, and playwright, 'arguably the most impressive intellectual figure in twentieth-century Welsh culture', modelled an explicitly nationalist bilingualism that viewed the inexorable anglicisation of Wales with both dismay and disdain.[38] Like R. S. he was inclined to blame the Welsh for their own marginalisation and he saw the growth of Welsh writing in English as a symptom of moral and national decline. Welsh writers wrote in Welsh; those who, like Dylan Thomas, had no Welsh and wrote in English, 'belong[ed] to the English'.[39] Not surprisingly, Lewis was an avowed Welsh nationalist, a founder of Plaid Cymru, the Welsh national party whose objective was, and still is, self-government for Wales.

From the 'English' perspective, Raymond Williams (1921–1988), an anglophone Welsh writer and cultural critic, engaged with the tensions of culture and identity among different groups in Wales whom he saw as divided not simply by language but by history and topography, between the industrialised urban centres of Wales and the agricultural farmlands of the west ('Welsh heartland') and the east ('British Wales').[40] Williams, a product of the old Marcher lands in the east of Wales, highly anglicised and looking towards England, was an acute observer of cultural identities, both Welsh and English, which he saw as co-existing

[37] R. S. Thomas, 'Welcome to Wales' (line 1) and 'Reservoirs' (lines 21–22), both in *Not That He Brought Flowers* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969).
[38] M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures: The Two Literatures of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p. 48.
[39] Saunders Lewis, *Is There an Anglo-Welsh Literature?* (Cardiff: Guild of Graduates of the University of Wales, 1939), p. 5.
[40] These terms are used by Martin and Wiliam, 'Debating Nationhood', p. 491.

(along with Scottish culture) within a larger British state. He acknowledged his English orientation, which 'cut one off thoroughly from Welshness', and yet the legacy of Welsh Nonconformism did not make 'Welshness' particularly attractive: 'The result was a rejection of my Welshness which I did not work through until well into my thirties.'[41] Yet he was also doubtful about whether Wales was in fact a nation, perhaps influenced by the hegemonic coalescence of 'nation' and 'nation-state' and by the anti-nationalist sentiments of the political left in the 1970s. In a 1979 interview, asked about national identity, he said, 'Wales had never been a nation: it had always had a cultural rather than a national existence. It was precisely incorporated into "Britain" before it developed a really separate national identity.'[42] Uncomfortable with the ambiguities of the term 'nation' and its appropriation by the elites of capitalism, Williams concerns himself more with 'the cultural struggle for actual social identities'.[43]

In post-devolution Wales, the swell of immigrants into the country, not just from England but from all parts of the world, has made the struggle between 'two cultures' redundant and produced a more positive and inclusive sense of what it means to be Welsh, one that would have appealed immediately to someone like Raymond Williams. Welsh writers of the twenty-first century sometimes write about Wales, but, whether they write in Welsh or in English, they are just as likely to set their novels in Africa or America or England. Of the current writers and poets of Wales, some, such as Christopher Meredith and Rachel Trezise, were born in Wales and have spent most of their lives there; others, such as Owen Sheers (born in Fiji, brought up in Abergavenny, university educated in England), Gwyneth Lewis (born and brought up in Cardiff, worked in London and New York), and Jerry Hunter (brought up in Ohio, moved to Bangor) bring a range of experiences and identities

[41] Daniel G. Williams (ed.), *Raymond Williams: Who Speaks for Wales? Nation, Culture, Identity*, Centenary Edition (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021), p. 107.
[42] Williams (ed.), *Who Speaks for Wales?*, p. 107.
[43] Ibid., p. 339.

from outside Wales to their writing. A number of Welsh-language writers, such as Lewis, Hunter, Owen Martell, Llwyd Owen, and Caryl Lewis, move between Welsh and English as a means of experimenting with language as well as reaching different audiences. Black and Asian Welsh voices are articulated in literary works such as Leonora Brito's *Dat's Love* (1995), Afshan Malik's *Safar* (1998), Charlotte Williams's *Sugar and Slate* (2002), and Eric Ngalle Charles's *Asylum* (2016).[44]

Like many forms of cultural identity, Welshness is now embodied in the self, based on residence, or upbringing, or birth, or language, or simply a sense of recognition.[45] Its national identity, once limited to the two cultures of Welsh and English, has changed into something more diverse and inclusive: not just bilingual but multilingual, not hyphenated to England but culturally independent, not divided by traditional regionalisms but mobile and outward-looking. In this relatively stable society, despite the social and economic problems of post-industrialism, there appears to be less appetite for constitutional independence than there was in the mid-twentieth century. YesCymru, an online group campaigning for an independent Wales, currently has 31,000 signatures from people committed to voting for independence should the question ever be put to the vote, a very small proportion of the roughly 2.5 million people on the electoral roll in Wales. Of the main parties in Wales, Plaid Cymru is committed to holding a referendum on Welsh independence, while Welsh Labour/Llafur Cymru, the governing party, seeks a stronger form of federalism within the United Kingdom, pledging to seek further devolutionary powers from Westminster and work across the four nations to press for federal reforms. With devolution having brought perceived benefits to Wales, reasons for

[44] Studies of immigrants and minorities in Wales stretch back over more than forty years. Key works include Charlotte Williams, 'A Question of Literary Activism: Writing Black Wales', *Planet*, 232 (2018), 36–44; Neil Evans and Huw Pryce (eds), *Writing a Small Nation's Past: Wales in Comparative Perspective, 1850–1950* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Neil Evans, Paul O'Leary and Charlotte Williams (eds), *A Tolerant Nation? Revisiting Ethnic Diversity in a Devolved Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015).

[45] The criteria for eligibility to become a Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales are 'persons resident in Wales, persons of Welsh birth who are resident elsewhere, and others with a particular connection with Wales' (https://www.learnedsociety.wales/fellowship/becoming-a-fellow/criteria/) [accessed 15 August 2021].

resistance to full-blown constitutional independence are largely pragmatic, based on a relative satisfaction with the status quo and the economic strength of the union: it is highly unlikely that Wales would have sufficient industrial or trade infrastructure to support an independent economy (and similar fears have been voiced with regard to Scottish independence). A more qualitative and cultural reason is likely to be the number of people resident in Wales who regard themselves not as Welsh but as English, and who therefore have little investment in Welsh independence.[46]

The fact of devolution and its consequences has enabled Wales to define itself as a nation within a larger federated state. The rhetoric of the 'four nations' of the United Kingdom has normalised the concept of sub-state nations, that is, nations that are not themselves states. Yet still the old elision between 'Britain' and 'England' continues, at least on the English side of the border. Surveys show that the English concept of 'Englishness' tallies closely with Welsh (and Scottish) concepts of 'Britishness', suggesting that many English appropriate to themselves aspects of identity that belong to the larger British collective.[47] In other words, Britishness is normalised as a proxy for Englishness, denying other versions of Britishness held by the Welsh, Scots and Northern Irish and requiring them to interact 'not as a four-way partnership but as a series of bilateral relationships with England'.[48] Though Welsh cultural memories of 'British Britain' disappeared long ago, the struggle for national identity and equality in the island of Britain continues.

[46] The importance of the 'English' element in Welsh politics has been confirmed by Danny Dorling's detailed studies of voting patterns in the 2016 EU Referendum, which indicate that English migrants to Wales were more likely to have voted 'Leave' than other sectors of the Welsh population, particularly Welsh speakers (https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/sep/22/english-people-wales-brexit-research) [accessed 15 August 2021].
[47] Henderson and Wyn Jones, *Englishness*, pp. 135–6.
[48] Ibid., p. 136.