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# The role and importance of the Welsh language in Wales's cultural independence within the United Kingdom

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The role and importance  
of the Welsh language in Wales's  
cultural independence within  
the United Kingdom

**Sylvain SCAGLIA**

Under the direction of Professor Gilles Leydier

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# INTRODUCTION

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The French have always tended to speak of “England” when they meant the United Kingdom or Great Britain, and to speak of “the English” when they were referring to the British people, whether they were really English, Irish, Welsh or Scottish. This behaviour might be representative of what the situation is and has always been like in Great Britain within the United Kingdom.

It cannot be denied that of all the members of the current United Kingdom, it has always been England which has dominated the others nations. With the creation of the Kingdom of England by the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century – which emerged from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that had existed for centuries –, we can say that England was ahead of the game as compared to the other regions of the British Isles. These other regions were indeed still constituted of small lordships, small domains where local princes ruled and fought each other to obtain more land.

England was united as a kingdom, and as such, it felt the need to establish its supremacy and power over the British Isles, spreading its influence and expanding its territory. This led to many wars and conflicts throughout the history of Britain, but in some cases there was no need to resort to military conflicts.

In 1535, Wales was annexed by the Kingdom of England and became a full part of it, with the same laws and rules. For if there have been many military conflicts between England and Scotland which England wanted to subject, the incorporation of Wales within the Kingdom of England was merely decided by the English government under Henry VIII’s reign, himself of Welsh origin. Wales had no power to oppose this decision, and at the time of the Laws in Wales Acts, it was already under the domination of the Prince of Wales and the Earl of March. There was no unity in Wales as far as the concept of nation is concerned: “a large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular state or territory”.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, at the time there were very few links that bound the people living in Wales together. Compared to England, Wales had no real independent political structure, no united military forces, and no standard, widely-spread culture. As a consequence, annexing Wales in order to turn it into nothing more than a region of the Kingdom of England was not difficult for Henry VIII. He then planned on erasing the Welsh identity, culture and language by imposing English laws, rules, customs and of course language in Wales. All the elements that could have led to the end of an ancient Celtic culture were gathered together.

And yet, on 2 March 2012 the online version of the Catholic Herald contained an article entitled *the remarkable resilience of Welsh culture*. In this article, FR Alexander Lucie-Smith gave us an account of the celebration of Saint David and spoke of his feeling towards the liveliness of the Welsh culture:

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, *Nation* (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/nation>).

There is something very resilient about Welsh culture. The Welsh have held onto their language, and indeed the number of Welsh speakers is growing; this is no doubt helped by government subsidy for various Welsh-language projects, but it would not have happened without Welsh people actually wanting to preserve their language and culture. This strong attachment to national consciousness, and close affinity to the land, is something that I admire.<sup>2</sup>

How come there is still today such a strong attachment to the Welsh culture, that same culture Henry VIII wished to replace half a millennium ago? How come nearly five centuries of English domination have not erased the Welsh identity and all the elements that are part of it? Many are the nations which have kept elements from their past culture, but very few are those whose unique culture have survived and live on with such influence as the Welsh culture has.

Moreover, we need to take into account the Devolution process in Britain that accelerated more than ten years ago with the creation of the Welsh Assembly and of the Scottish Parliament. These nations have expressed their will to gain more autonomy, more independence from the British power centralized in London. It is a path towards more autonomy chose by nations that want to break free from a history of English domination.

So the Welsh culture has managed to survive, and today Wales is heading towards a status with more autonomy. As a consequence, we may ask ourselves some questions:

- What is the Welsh culture like? What are the major elements that it includes, and to what extent is it different from the English one?
- Where does that unique culture originate from?
- What link has existed between the Welsh culture and the Welsh people? What about today?
- What role does the Welsh language has played and still plays in the Welsh culture? Can it be considered as the flagship of the Welsh culture?

To try and answer all these questions, we will ask ourselves one central question:

*To what extent does the Welsh language account for the cultural independence of Wales, and to what extent does this cultural independence fuel the nation's desire to gain more autonomy at all levels?*

Several works and essays deal with the originality of the Welsh culture and with its existence alongside the English cultural influence. The process of Devolution in Wales has also been studied in several

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<sup>2</sup> FR Alexander Lucie-Smith, *The remarkable resilience of Welsh culture* (2 March 2012 ; <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2012/03/02/the-remarkable-resilience-of-welsh-culture/>).

research articles. When reading about these two subjects, I wondered about the link between them. Is the desire for more autonomy a consequence of the Welsh culture's influence? Or is it because Wales has always longed for autonomy and independence that its people managed to keep their culture alive throughout centuries? These are the main reasons which led me to the writing of this essay.

But even before that, my interest for Wales was originally born from the fact that one could hear and find much information about Ireland, Scotland, and of course England, but not so much about Wales. To many people in France, for instance, "le pays de Galles" is known only through rugby, and to most of them, Wales is "une région de l'Angleterre".<sup>3</sup>

When I decided to apply for a job as a foreign language assistant, I chose Wales as the place I would like to work, and I eventually got a job in a Welsh-medium school in Cardiff.

There I could witness an amazing enthusiasm and love for the nation. Many people were quite aware of the fact that they needed to protect their culture and language if they did not want them to disappear.

It was the Welsh speakers who were aware of the importance of their national culture the most. In the school where I worked, the use of English was not encouraged at all within the buildings.

As a consequence, my interest for the reasons which had led this people to protect its language and culture kept on growing. I eventually came to wonder what link existed between Wales's culture and language and its political situation within Britain, that is to say the Devolution process it has undertaken and the distrustful attitude Wales sometimes had towards the British government.

We will thus take a look at several elements that are part of the Welsh culture and identity. Through its history and its fights to protect its ancient Celtic culture, we may be able to grasp some of the elements which have shaped Wales's unique identity.

It then appeared necessary to me to focus on the Welsh language. From what I could witness when in Wales, the Welsh culture can hardly be dissociated from the Welsh language; it accounts for a large part of Wales's unique culture. So, without going into an in-depth linguistic analysis of the language, I believe it will be useful to show to what extent the Welsh language is different from English because of its Celtic roots.

The origins of the Welsh language, which we will be able to link to the nation's history, will also give us a good understanding of the specificities of this language which is one of the last Celtic language which is not extinct and for which so many people still fight.

All these elements will eventually enable us to link the Welsh language to its people. Indeed, we will try to show who the Welsh speakers are, for if the Welsh language has the same official status as English in Wales, it is spoken by far less people today. Nevertheless, the Welsh language has many defenders like political parties, associations and institutions which do their best to, for example, make sure Welsh is still taught in as many schools as possible in order to keep it alive.

Who are those who still speak Welsh? Is it only the children of Welsh speakers who will learn that language? Are there social differences between Welsh and non-Welsh speakers? Can we speak of geographical frontiers

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<sup>3</sup> I sent emails to 23 of my contacts asking them « *Qu'est-ce que le pays de Galles pour vous ?* ». Out of the 20 replies I got, 16 mentioned Wales as a nation playing rugby ; 11 think Wales is a region of England and 9 that it is « a country next to England ».



separating Welsh-speaking regions from regions where only a small part of the population knows that language? We will try to answer these questions in order to better understand the profiles of the Welsh speakers.

This will eventually lead us to the role played by the language concerning Wales's relationships with the other members of the United Kingdom. Today, The Welsh Assembly is the symbol of a nation longing for more autonomy. Nationalist parties like *Plaid Cymru* have influence, and their main concerns are preserving the nation's territory, culture, traditions and language. This, according to the steps already taken towards more autonomy, cannot be achieved if Wales remains under the British government's authority.

We will thus try to show that the Welsh's attachment to their culture and language have always played a major role and have always influenced the political choices of the nation. Additionally, we will see in more details how the Welsh culture and language are considered within the rest of the United Kingdom.

Throughout this essay, we will try to show that Wales's culture and language are the main elements that make it a nation. Even though it is part of the United Kingdom, the nation never lost its identity, and it is this identity more than administrative or economic reasons which put Wales on the path towards Devolution.

# WALES: NOT AN INDEPENDENT STATE, BUT AN INDEPENDENT NATION

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# *I – The fight for Welsh freedom: the birth and evolution of Wales*

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## From Celtic tribes to *Cymru*

Country located in the middle of the British Isles, Wales has benefited from its mountainous landscape which has protected it from invaders and thus contributed to the protection of the Welsh culture and traditions. Indeed, Wales has remained partially protected from the Roman and Saxon invaders thanks to its geographical location.

For centuries, the British Isles were inhabited by Celtic peoples; and not only Great Britain, but almost the whole of Western Europe. From roughly the third century BC, the Celtic civilisation which had been reigning over Europe began to lose territories because of all the invaders attacking it.

The Celtic inhabitants of Great Britain were known as the Britons. The first successful invasion of the British Isles was led by the Roman Empire at the beginning of our era, in 43 AD. Britain had the great advantage of being an island, making it more difficult for invaders to conquer it. The first Roman raid into the British land was made of an army of about 40,000 men. They managed to occupy the South Eastern British kingdom, and in this area, just like in any other country conquered by the Romans, “the Celtic languages and culture were Romanised out of existence.”<sup>4</sup>

To fight the Roman invaders, a famous Briton warlord named Caradog became the leader of the Celtic peoples in Britain. He used guerrilla techniques to fight the Romans, established his base in South Western Wales, and trained the Silurian people who lived there.

Caradog can be considered to some extent as the first Welsh king, since he has co-ordinated the military actions led by British Celtic peoples. He was eventually made prisoner by the Romans, but it did not put an end to the Welsh resistance against the Roman invaders.

A couple of years later, the new Roman emperor Nero had to leave much more troops stationed in Britain than in any other conquered country in order to maintain Roman positions.

Then for nearly three centuries, the situation remained more or less unchanged. During this period, the soldiers of the Roman army, who had come from Germanic countries, spread their culture in the conquered south-eastern Britain. A Germanic-Roman culture emerged and replaced little by little the Celtic and druidic cultures which had prevailed in those lands for centuries.

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<sup>4</sup> Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.9

At that time, Wales was divided into four kingdoms. Those kingdoms were not actually located in Wales as we know it today, but in northern England and southern Scotland. They were Welsh-speaking kingdoms totally independent, with their own music, literature and poetry.

The bards used to sing about the heroic defence of their lands against the Roman and German invaders.

Eventually, the Welsh kingdoms entered war with the Germanic kingdom of Northumberland. Three of those Welsh kingdoms were finally defeated and conquered sooner or later, and the last one became part of Scotland through marriage.

The actual birth of Wales, which was not called *Cymru* yet, took place in AD 383, when the Roman emperor Magnus Maximus withdrew from Britain. Before leaving the British Isles, Maximus decided to grant responsibility for the defence and government of Wales to the Welsh ruling families. Each of these families ruled over a canton-sized state; with this decision, Magnus Maximus gave Wales a well-defined geographical shape and a relatively stable administrative system. As a consequence, it would be easier for Wales to protect its culture, its language and its heritage from the Germanic influence of the neighbouring kingdoms.

### The emergence of a nation

In the following years, a large number of Irish immigrants went to Wales. They were so numerous that the Welsh felt something had to be done. The Welsh leader at the time was Cunedda, and he led a campaign to expel the Irish from the north of Wales, where most of them were settled. This action should not be regarded as an act of hatred or of racism, but rather as a way for the Welsh to protect their homeland and to make sure that their country will remain a Welsh-speaking one with a genuine Welsh culture.

Indeed, Wales's inheritance had been so threatened and had been so close to disappearing that the Welsh people couldn't take the risk of letting its culture, its identity and its language be annihilated and replaced.

By the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, another cultural phenomenon took place in the British Isles. The Celtic Church which was the only faith the Celtic peoples had ever had was being threatened by the Christian religion. The Pope sent a mission of 40 clerics to evangelise the British Isles, and a delegation led by Saint Augustine met the Welsh delegation. The Welsh were asked to help evangelising the English and to abandon their own beliefs so as to embrace the Christian faith.

Bede, a Northumbrian scholar, wrote that the Welsh delegation asked a hermit whether they should adopt the Christian religion or not. The hermit told them to see whether the Christian delegation would stand up to greet them if they were late at the meeting. Saint Augustine's delegation did not stand up when the Welsh delegation arrived, so they refused to embrace the Christian faith, but it did not prevent the Christians from evangelising the English.

After that period, a relative stability within Wales enabled the country to develop both socially and culturally. Even though Wales was not a united nation yet, it was an independent kingdom apart from the Teutonic peoples settled in the east of the country. Not only Wales was a distinctive kingdom, but it also had

its own culture, traditions and its own way of life. It was at that time that the country became known as *Cymru*, a word derived from *Cymro*, which meant “compatriot” in Old Welsh language.

As for the word “Welsh”, it originated from the Germanic word *Walha*<sup>5</sup>, which means “foreigner”. The Germanic peoples must have used that term as the Welsh mountains isolated the Welsh people from them and prevented them from invading Wales.

A very rich Welsh literature began to appear at that time too. It was told and written in Old Welsh and consisted mainly of poetry, the great Welsh tradition. The poets wrote about their ancestors who had fought bravely against the invaders; Welsh literature became even more important, in quantity as well as in quality, as we will see later on.

It is thanks to its rich culture and to its geographical isolation that Wales managed to remain protected and independent. Its mountainous relief protected it from a Germanic invasion and from military raids. Culturally speaking, it is because the Welsh culture was rich that it succeeded in protecting itself from the Germanic cultural and linguistic influence.

Then Wales remained relatively peaceful and stable for another couple of centuries, until the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, Viking invaders led a series of attacks on the coasts of many European countries, including Britain and Wales. Those raids did not go very far into the Welsh land, the only archaeological evidences of the Vikings presence having been found in coastal areas.<sup>6</sup> It is known very little about those Viking settlements but according to evidences found, Vikings may not actually have been as cruel and brutal as it is often thought or believed.

Then, in 1039, a man became king of two Welsh states, Gwynedd and Powys. His name was Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, and he managed to usurp the throne of Powys and to also take the throne of Gwynedd, whose leader had been betrayed by his own men. He then began to fight the armies of the neighbouring Welsh kingdoms, winning almost all the battles he led.

In 1055, Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, who had rid himself of those who reclaimed their thrones, killed Gruffydd ap Rhydderch of Gwent, one of his rivals who fervently defended his kingdom. He then allied with Aelfgar, another military leader, and together they defeated Hereford, located in present Eastern Wales.

Gruffydd ap Llywelyn also took possession of Morgannwg and Gwent. He claimed sovereignty over the whole of the Welsh territory, and the English did acknowledge his authority.

## The Norman invasion and its consequences

The next major event in Wales’s history was the Norman invasion. In 1066, the Norman duke who was to become famous as William the Conqueror invaded Britain and defeated the Saxons at the battle of Hastings.

In Wales, the kingdom of Gwynedd was divided into two parts by 1175, each half ruled by Gruffydd ap Llywelyn's descendants. But the one who was the legitimate claimant to the throne of Gwynedd was the

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<sup>5</sup> John Davies, *A history of Wales* (Penguin Adult; January 2007) p.69

<sup>6</sup> National Museum Wales (2 April 2007; [http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/rhagor/article/?article\\_id=26](http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/rhagor/article/?article_id=26)).

nephew of the two rulers: Llewelyn. Moreover, Llewelyn was the grandson of the Prince of Powys, and the church supported his claim. In 1194, as he was 21 years old and with the help of two of his cousins, he defeated one of his uncles and took control of his territory. His other uncle died the following year, and Llewelyn's cousins took possession of that part of the kingdom.

From that period onwards, Llewelyn consolidated his power and defended his territory against the neighbouring threats. In 1200, after his cousins' death, Llewelyn became Prince of whole Gwynedd, and by 1202, he began to lead his first attacks against his neighbours. He then married King John's illegitimate daughter, improving his relationship with the King.

Llewelyn went on acquiring more and more territories thanks to his diplomatic skills and alliances. By the end of his reign, he was called “Llewelyn the Great” and was the ruler of whole Wales.

Meanwhile, the Anglo-Norman influence had established itself in the south-eastern parts of Wales. Even though the Prince of Wales was the vassal of the king, the Anglo-Norman influence did not take over the Welsh culture.

Indeed, with this invasion, two new languages were brought to Wales: French and English. French was spoken by the Norman leaders, and English was the language of the Saxons. According to some Welsh chronicles of the time, the Welsh felt that they were fighting the French more than the English.<sup>7</sup>

But French was spoken only by the Norman leaders; their followers, the Saxons, spoke English. As a consequence, the English language spread amongst the Welsh people, but even some French words were absorbed by the Welsh language.

By the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Henry I, who was king at the time, allowed settlers to settle in the western part of Wales. This led to the extinction of the Welsh language in this area, but it still prevailed in the north of the country, where the English influence was weaker.

But on the other hand, such invasions made the Welsh people rally to their national culture and identity, strongly defending their ancestral customs, traditions and values.

In 1284, King Edward I completed the conquest of Wales. So as to ensure his control over the country, he had several castles built throughout Wales. Edward I's son, Edward II, became Prince of Wales in 1301. Then in 1399, Henry IV seized the throne, which was seen as the right moment to rebel by the famous Owain Glyndwr.

Owain Glyndwr, was born about the year 1354. He claimed descent from Llewelyn the Great and the ruling Princes of Wales, and he united the Welsh peoples. Many followed him in his rebellion against the English, even the Welsh youth saw in him the long-awaited leader who could free Wales.

The rebellion only ended with Glyndwr's natural death in 1416, as Henry V, Henry IV's son, was leading a military campaign in Wales in order to crush it.

In the following years, peace and stability were back in Wales. But a formal union was not signed before 1536, in an act passed by the Parliament of England annexing Wales to the kingdom of England.

Although the Welsh identity and nationalism have never disappeared and have always been deeply rooted, it took the Welsh people half a millennium to “rebel” again against the English supremacy.

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<sup>7</sup> BBC Wales History (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/normans/>).

## The awakening of nationalism

It was in 1925 that the Welsh nationalist political party *Plaid Cymru* was founded. In the beginning, the aim of the party was to make Wales a Welsh speaking country only; Welsh nationalism was first of all a cultural nationalism. What mattered the most was the fact that the Welsh people did refuse the English domination: Beyond political and economic matters, what was at stake was the survival and the supremacy of the Welsh culture and language within the Welsh nation.

Throughout the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Plaid Cymru* got more and more votes at both the European Parliament elections and the UK general elections. Charlotte Aull Davies, author of the book *Welsh Nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the ethnic option and the modern state*, believes that Wales's distinctive history, culture and language have played a major role in the expansion of Welsh nationalist parties. According to her, beyond political, economic and administrative issues, it is the culture and language of a country which makes a people proud of its identity, and which makes it feel different and culturally independent from other nations/cultures<sup>8</sup>.

In 1979, a referendum was held in Wales asking the people whether they wanted a more autonomous Wales with its own assembly. The Welsh voted “no” in majority, showing that they might not have been ready at the time to make this step towards devolution.

Another referendum asking the same question was held again in 1997, and this time Wales said “yes”. But it was not a frank “yes”, as 50.3% of the voters only did vote in favour of the proposition. Nonetheless, the Government of Wales 1998 Act was passed, and the Welsh Assembly created the following year.

Consisting of 60 elected members, the Welsh Assembly is located in the Senedd, in Cardiff. In theory, the assembly powers are not limited only to legislative or to executive powers. What the Assembly can actually do depends on the field of activity; those fields, defined in the Government of Wales 2006 Act, include education and training, economic development, health services, local government...

But the Assembly also has the competence to make assembly measures concerning culture, history buildings, sport, tourism, and the Welsh language.

The assembly members in 2007 were constituted of:

26 representatives for the Labour Party, which is about 43% of all the seats

15 representatives for *Plaid Cymru*, which is about 25% of all the seats

12 representatives for the Conservative party

6 representatives for the Liberal Democrats

1 independent member

Such a distribution may mean that those who voted “yes” at the referendum for the creation of the Assembly were not all motivated by separatist thoughts, but that they merely wanted more autonomy for their nation,

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<sup>8</sup> Charlotte Aull Davies, *Welsh Nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century : the ethnic option and the modern state* (April 1989; Praeger Publishers).

and above all, they aimed at being recognised as an independent people with its own culture, customs and traditions.

## Twentieth century challenges

Economically, Wales had to go through a period of decline by the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the decline of the automobile and petro chemistry industries, Wales industry suffered from regression, and the closure of the last coal mines in 1984 did not help. Indeed, the development of the coal industry which began with the Industrial Revolution had contributed a lot to Wales's economic development. The mining valleys were declared "Distressed areas"<sup>9</sup>, but they were eventually saved thanks to two major reforms:

In 1976, the *Welsh Development Agency* was created in order to improve Wales's economy and industrial dynamism. It also aimed at making Wales an attractive country for foreign investors. It was rather successful, and several foreign companies decided to set up in Wales, especially famous Japanese firms like Toyota, Sony or Hitachi. More than 50 Japanese companies have made Wales their European manufacturing base<sup>10</sup>, and today, it is estimated that more than 30% of Welsh employees are working for foreign companies. The Welsh Development Agency doesn't exist any longer; its functions were absorbed into the Welsh Assembly Government's Department of Economy and Transport.

Another reform to help Welsh economy was the *Programme for the Valleys*, set up in 1993. This programme aimed particularly at helping the mining valleys which were suffering from an economic decline because of the closure of the coal mines. In those areas too, foreign companies established and helped them re-industrialize.

The building of bridges and motorways also helped Wales to open up to the rest of the United Kingdom. Cardiff, Wales's capital city, is well-connected to London and Birmingham; it is thus easier for Wales to benefit from the positive economic influence and appeal of those cities.

But few of the industries and companies in Wales are actually Welsh. Welsh companies only represent 17% of the country's GDP, while the average in Great Britain is 26%.

Having a poor quality soil, Wales is not well-suited for crop-growing. Livestock farming has always been the privileged type of agriculture practised by Welsh farmers. With the Industrial Revolution, the mining industry developed alongside livestock farming, but all the mines were closed by the 1970's and 1980's, replaced by an industry brought by foreign investors.

But there is another major field contributing to Wales's economic development and prosperity. Indeed, tourism in Wales began two hundred years ago; over these two centuries, the number of people touring Wales has kept increasing, especially with the increase of paid time-off for industrial workers. In the most rural parts of Wales, tourism represents a large part of those regions' economy and prosperity.

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Bonnet-Piron, *La civilisation britannique* (1 Juillet 2007; Nathan scolaire).

<sup>10</sup> Japanese firms and factories in Wales (<http://aitech.ac.jp/~yoshiga/WALES/JAPANESEFIRMS2.html>).



Nonetheless, there is a big difference between the wages of a Welsh employee and those of a man working in London. It is estimated that on average, the wages in Wales are twice as low as the wages in London. Wages in Wales are the lowest in the United Kingdom after North Ireland.

Wales also has to deal with unemployment. Even though it has decreased by 50% over the last decade thanks to re-industrialization, it is still higher than the average in Great Britain. In 2006 for instance, the unemployment rate in Wales was of 5.7%, and although it is higher than the United Kingdom average, it is lower than several European countries'.

## *II – A unique Welsh culture*

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### Culture, a definition

Wales has always had a culture of its own, which has evolved over time with the invasions and immigration. But what is a culture in the first place? As we are trying to tackle the question of Wales's cultural independence, it could be useful to define more precisely what this term refers to.

The more widespread interpretation one can have of the term “culture” is the one which was born with the beginning of colonization of foreign territories by the old European powers. This concept implies that there is a sort of hierarchy, with cultures superior to others. The European settlers considered their own cultures as the best, prevailing over those of the countries they discovered. That is why each colonizing country imposed its own culture to the inhabitants of the lands they colonized. Being convinced of one culture's superiority is a purely subjective judgement and does not allow a good understanding of another culture but one's own. This is of course not the definition I give to the term “culture” mentioned in the title of this essay.

One of the definitions of *Culture* is “a type of civilisation; the attitudes and values which inform a society”.<sup>11</sup> The concept of “culture” includes the region where a people live and the society they evolve in. Indeed, Wales is located in the middle of Great Britain, but the Welsh people have its own traditions, language, way of life, which are not the same as the English's, the Scots' or the Irish's. A country's culture develops first of all in a geographical region, where the inhabitants share a way of life, and live within the

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<sup>11</sup> “Culture” in *The Chambers Dictionary* (Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd 2003).

same community. This community, evolving towards a more complex society, will absorb its members' social specificities, and all of those specificities will be considered as that society's culture.

The evolution process of a society is made of changes that occur over time, throughout generations. The original peoples which were to become the Welsh people have actually evolved culturally, and will undoubtedly keep evolving as it is a characteristic which is part of the concept of “culture” itself. Social sciences, as they are created by men, keep changing since the men who keep them alive are changing too.

So a culture, including all of the social characteristics of a people, evolves over time, influenced by all the technical and social innovations its people are capable of. But there is another major factor greatly influencing a people's culture, which is foreign influences. Few are the nations which have not undergone any invasion since the creation of the first civilizations and nations, millenniums ago.

As we have seen, Wales did undergo several invasions, military invasions of course but also cultural invasions. If they have never erased the original Welsh culture, they all have undoubtedly modified it, adding new elements to it, and possibly removing some original ones.

It is with this conception of the term “culture” in mind that I am trying to achieve this essay. Remaining objective and being a mere observant of the history of a culture and understanding it are the two major difficulties when studying a foreign country. Of course, this doesn't prevent us from analysing the data gathered, and understanding it through our very own individual perception. It is the basic work which consists in gathering information and trying to tackle the subject's issues correctly and efficiently which must be done dutifully and objectively.

### Some Welsh national symbols

The Welsh culture is different from the other British countries' on several aspects including its language, which is the main subject of this essay, its customs, holidays, literature and music. Wales also has, like many other countries, its own national symbols which represent it as a nation. That is to say, it does not matter that Wales is not an independent state but a part of the United Kingdom. It still is a nation since a nation is “a body of people marked off by common descent, language, culture, or historical tradition, whether or not bound by the defined territorial limits of a state”<sup>12</sup>. It is this definition of the term “nation” which justifies the very existence of the subject of this essay.

The first symbol representing a nation, the first one we associate to a people's identity, is the flag. The Welsh flag has two equal horizontal stripes, white above green, and a large red dragon. It is believed that this flag originates from a Roman standard which showed a dragon. Even though the emblem of the Roman Empire was an eagle, the Welsh might have got more used to the dragon standard brandished by the Roman legions posted along the Welsh border<sup>13</sup>.

By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the Romans withdrew from Britain, the neighbouring Germanic peoples began to threaten the unified Welsh nation. At that time, several aspects of the Welsh culture including the

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<sup>12</sup> “Nation” in *The Chambers Dictionary* (Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd 2003).

<sup>13</sup> The Welsh Flag (<http://www.data-wales.co.uk>).

Welsh way of life had been “romanised”. It was the first major foreign influence the Welsh culture underwent, and with the duration of the Roman occupation, the Welsh had got accustomed to those changes, and they did not want to lose their “Romano-Welsh” culture, which had become their identity. As a result, they adopted and integrated the Roman dragon into their national flag.

Other symbols representing the Welsh culture and identity are the leek and the daffodil. The leek is known to have been displayed as a Welsh emblem in 1536, and, according to Shakespeare's *Henry V*, this symbol originated from an ancient tradition. As for the daffodil, it is said to have been adopted later. Indeed, wearing a daffodil as a buttonhole on Saint David's day – Wales's patron saint – might have been considered more attractive than a leek.

But there is another theory explaining the use of those two symbols. Indeed, the Welsh words for leek (*cennin*) and for daffodil (*cennin Pedr*, “Peter's Leeks”) are very close to each other. It is thus believed by some that there originally was only one single symbol, and the other would have been introduced because of a misunderstanding<sup>14</sup>. But, even though it is thought that the leek was the original Welsh emblem, there is no clear evidence to prove it. Some also say that the use of the daffodil as the Welsh national symbol has always been encouraged by the English government because it does not imply any nationalistic references.

Indeed, the leek refers to a Welsh legend according to which a Welsh king ordered his soldiers to wear a leek on their helmets during a battle against a Saxon army. Those leeks on their helmets were used to make it easier for the Welsh warriors to identify their own army during the battle. The Welsh did win this battle against the Saxon invader, and, still according to that legend, adopted the leek as the symbol of their national identity and their patriotism. It is perfectly understandable that the English government would favour a symbol like the daffodil over the leek, a symbol which would not boost Welsh nationalism. The Welsh identity and nationalism have indeed always been quite steadfast, and London does not wish to encourage a separatist fever which already lives within many Welshmen.

## Emergence of a literature

Now culturally speaking, we can say that one of the most important forms of art for a nation is undoubtedly literature. The term “Welsh literature” refers to all literary works written in Wales by Welsh people, but it is generally used to refer to any work written in Welsh language. Welsh literature is one of the oldest surviving literatures in Europe.

Like many literatures, Welsh literature originated from an oral tradition. Tales were told by storytellers who were travelling from village to village. At that time, the main theme those tales were about was praise poetry; storytellers told about the great achievements accomplished by warriors and kings. Those stories were often derived from true, real facts and events, but they were embellished so as to sound more heroic. This period stretches from the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and is known as “The old poetry”. Those Welsh stories did

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<sup>14</sup> Leek and Daffodil (<http://www.wales-calling.com/culture/leek-and-daffodil.htm>).

not originate from the Welsh territory as we know it today; at the time, the Welsh civilisation lived roughly in the North of England and the South of Scotland.

Two major poets were the authors of tales still preserved today, they were the most famous and the ones we know the best as their work are important in quality and quantity:

- The first of those two men is Taliesin. He lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and is the author of at least twelve poems from the *Book of Taliesin (Llyfr Taliesin)*. Those poems are all poems of praise for Welsh kings and famous figures, as it was the major – almost only – literary genre of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, poetry was oral, as we have just seen, and the *Book of Taliesin* was written eight hundred years later, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The book was made of Taliesin's poems and other more recent mystical poems<sup>15</sup>.
- The second major poet from that era is Aneirin. His major work is a long epic poem made of several poems called “*Y Gododdin*”. Aneirin's poems are about heroic battles led by the Welsh kingdom of Gododdin against the Angles. Just as for Taliesin, Aneirin's work was written down in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in the *Book of Aneirin (Llyfr Aneirin)*.

During all those centuries, Welsh poetry remained oral, and all of those tales about brave warriors and kings were told locally by bards. To get the opportunity to be spread more widely, the Welsh literature had to wait until the middle Ages.

From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Wales, which had acquired a greater political, social, and cultural stability, began to give its culture and thus its literature, a greater place and a greater role. The bards and poets of the time professionalized themselves, creating two professional guilds:

The Guild of Poets and the Order of Bards were not only a sort of association bards and poets were members of, but they were founded and organised around a “rule book”. This book described precisely what a bard or a poet's job consisted in, and it defined storytelling and poem writing as crafts which were to respect rules. The rules included for instance how much a poet or a bard could be paid for his work, and what kind of training an apprentice should receive before being recognized as a bard or a poet.

It is also by the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries that many traditional tales and poems were written down. Of course, many ancient stories had not been preserved until then and had been forgotten before having the chance to be put onto paper. But in spite of that, all the tales and poems which have “survived” over time are representative of the kind of literature which used to prevail. Taliesin and Aneirin's books are works conveying all the spirit of Welsh pre-medieval stories, and they never fell into oblivion.

From the 12<sup>th</sup> to roughly the 14<sup>th</sup> century, that is to say until Wales was totally conquered by Edward the first, the professional poets adopted a new style, beginning to write differently.

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<sup>15</sup> The Tale of Taliesin: English Translation ([http://www.celt.net.org/texts/cronicl\\_wech\\_oesoedd/ystoria-taliesin-eng.php](http://www.celt.net.org/texts/cronicl_wech_oesoedd/ystoria-taliesin-eng.php)).

This period is known as *Beirdd y Tywysogion* (Poets of the Princes). At that time, Wales was independent, and its leading families were fighting to defend their land against the Anglo-Saxons. The poets of that era thus wrote about the military feats of the Prince, emphasizing nationalism and patriotism.

Those poets' genre of literature is well presented in a medieval Welsh manuscript: The Hendregadredd Manuscript (*Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*)<sup>16</sup>. Written between 1282 and 1350, it is the earliest witness of the work of the Welsh court poets.

With the conquest of Wales by Edward I in 1284, a different type of poetry developed. Indeed, it was then difficult to praise the Welsh princes and Welsh nationalism since the country had submitted to Edward's army. Wales was now a unified principality, and it was no longer the rulers who were praised by the poets, but those who owned lands, particularly old families whose ancestors had been famous for their military feats. A new genre also emerged, which was satire.

On the whole, many of the poems of that time have survived until today, and several of the most well-known Welsh poets worked at that period.

But the one considered as Wales's greatest poet is Dafydd ap Gwilym. He wrote about nature and love, and it is believed that he had been influenced by poets from other European countries. Indeed, by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of "courtly love" born in France was spreading over Europe, and many poets like Dafydd ap Gwilym were inspired by it.<sup>17</sup>

Another type of poetry emerged between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16 centuries. The prophetic poetry (*canu brud*), was a poetry style which developed to some extent thanks to Welsh nationalism. Those poems were written ambiguously on purpose and aimed at creating a mystical atmosphere. They dealt mainly with the belief that someday, a "Chosen One" would free Wales from its English enemy. Beyond the prophetic and irrational aspect of those poems, what matters is that Welsh nationalism has always remained steadfast. The Welsh have never given up on their identity, on their pride, and those poems aimed at reviving the nationalist fire that burnt within each Welshman.

But the major book known of the ancient Welsh poetry is much more recent than the tales it contains. Indeed, it was not before the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that a book gathering several narrative stories was made by William Pughe, an 18th century antiquarian. The book was entitled "The Mabinogion", but it is now believed that it was a mistaken plural form of the word *mabinogi*, which is found in the book, and which might have some obscure meaning about some divine son. The tales making up the Mabinogion are taken from two ancient books of Wales: the *Red Book* of Hergest and the *White Book* of Rhydderch<sup>18</sup>. Those two books were themselves written by the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and are themselves constituted of ancient tales and poems.

The most mythological parts of the Mabinogion are the Four Branches of the Mabinogion. These stories are at the core of the folklore of the British Celtic peoples of the Western part of the isles. They blend history and

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<sup>16</sup> The Hendregadredd Manuscript (<http://www.llgc.org.uk/?id=253>).

<sup>17</sup> BBC Wales, « Dafydd ap Gwilym » ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/mid/halloffame/arts/dafydd\\_ap\\_gwilym.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/mid/halloffame/arts/dafydd_ap_gwilym.shtml)).

<sup>18</sup> The Mabinogion (<http://www.mabinogion.info>).

myths together, facts and legends, reality and magic, creating a world inside which the reader's imagination can freely wander.

The Mabinogion also includes other tales as well as three romances which are the Welsh versions of tales written by the famous French writer, Chrétien de Troyes.

Apart from literature, the use of the Welsh language mainly developed during the middle Ages. Even though only a small part of the population could read and write, the Welsh language was used in everyday life by the "educated ones": monks, doctors, men of law... The Welsh language had survived and was imposing itself as more than a dialect but as a nation's language.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, yet a new genre of literature developed in Wales. It was born out of the revival of a religious and social movement called *The Welsh Methodists*. This movement was revived by Howell Harris, was based on non-conformism, and aimed at differentiating itself from the English Church. The movement produced a lot of religious material like religious hymns, sermons, etc. Poetry about religious subjects was also written at that time, by Ann Griffiths<sup>19</sup> and others.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the Industrial Revolution, many English people moved to the South of Wales to work in the mines which were developing with the need for coal. A majority of those immigrants learnt the Welsh language, and with this wave of immigration the demand for books, newspapers and periodicals increased. The development of the literary industry had an impact on the cultural life of Wales which became much richer. Lady Charlotte Guest<sup>20</sup>, a wealthy English businesswoman and translator was among those people who went to Wales. She helped the literary industry develop and she is famous for having translated the *Mabinogion* from Welsh to English.

Poetry was still a very important art, and poets went by their bardic names trying to gain recognition and fame. It was at the time of the Norman invasion that the bardic orders were revived, probably under the effect of the threat of seeing the Celtic culture disappear because of the invaders. The Arthurian tradition of tales told in verses and praising the accomplishments of some famous men was thus resumed, reinforcing the feeling that the Welsh people was the only real heir of the glorious past ages, and that it was, thanks to its heritage, the true British people.

The only literary genre which had difficulties to develop was the novel. There were several famous books which had been translated into Welsh, but it is not before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the novel was widely adopted. Daniel Owen was the first fully recognized Welsh novelist; he is the author of Rhys Lewis (1885) and Enoc Huws (1891).<sup>21</sup>

With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new form of Welsh literature emerged, or rather was revived. Indeed, by the beginning of the 1900s, the strong Welsh identity and nationalism re-emerged, nationalist parties like *Plaid Cymru* were created, etc. All that had an influence over the Welsh literature.

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<sup>19</sup> Gwefan Ann Griffiths website (<http://www.anngriffiths.cf.ac.uk/introduction.html>).

<sup>20</sup> Lady Charlotte (Elizabeth) Guest (<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/auth/guestbio.htm>).

<sup>21</sup> BBC Wales north-east - Daniel Owen

([http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/northeast/guides/halloffame/arts/daniel\\_owen.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/northeast/guides/halloffame/arts/daniel_owen.shtml)).

Welsh poets began to re-use the old traditional verse forms in their poems, as a symbol of their attachment to their ancestors' culture, to their roots. Also, poems and novels praised the Welsh identity and nationalism; almost all literature works had a political calling.

### Characteristics of a rich culture

Welsh literature has always been rich; it has gone through several evolutions but it has never lost its ancient origins. Still today, Welsh poems and novels are inspired by themes like the pride of being Welsh, and the totally independent Welsh identity. Time and events do not seem to have had any impact on the strong Welsh nationalism and on its ancient literary traditions. Modern Welsh poems written in traditional verse form are the proof that the original Welsh spirit has survived throughout centuries and that today it is more alive than ever.

But Wales is also known as “the Land of Song”. Indeed, the Welsh musical tradition is as important as the literary one. Welsh music was born millenniums ago with a singing tradition; Welsh ancient tales and poems used to be sung by bards who were often playing the harp while singing.

The harp is indeed the most ancient Welsh musical tradition, it is “Wales alone [which] has the only unbroken harp tradition, dating from prehistoric times to the present day”<sup>22</sup>. This musical instrument did play a major role in Wales’s history, as it is a harpist named James James who composed in 1856 the Welsh national anthem.

*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* (Land of my Fathers) was first composed like any other song, but it became famous as it was sung in singing contests. It got more and more popular throughout Wales and imposed itself as the national anthem. This anthem's lyrics are very representative of the strong Welsh identity and nationalism with translated lyrics like:

*Nation [or country], Nation, I am faithful to my Nation.  
While the sea [is] a wall to the pure, most loved land,  
O may the old language [sc. Cymraeg] endure.*

This song is another example of the Welsh's attachment to their nation and to their millennial culture.

As for religion, the largest one in Wales today is Christianity. About 75% of the population of Wales is Christian, but for a long period, it was the Presbyterian Church of Wales which had dominated.

This religion has evolved from the Welsh Methodist church revived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has been officially separated from the Church of England since 1811. In 1914, the Church of England was declared to be no longer the official church of Wales; this date corresponds to the beginning of the revival of Welsh nationalism by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as we will see.

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<sup>22</sup> The Celtic music of Wales (<http://www.sfcelticmusic.com/Wales/wales.htm>).

We have seen that the Welsh poetic tradition remains uniquely strong, just like its ancient musical culture. These old traditions have also had their place in Welsh festivals called *the Eisteddfods*. These festivals have existed since the 12<sup>th</sup> century at least, and are still held today. The most important one is the Eisteddfod of Wales, lasting a week and featuring artistic competitions. As it has always been the tradition in Wales, music artists and choirs as well as poets compete against each other.

Everything in those festivals is in Welsh language, and they are large manifestations of the vitality of the Welsh culture and of its attachment to its past. Eisteddfods are also held outside of Wales; there are Eisteddfods held in Cornwall for example, in Australia, and even in Argentina, as there are Welsh colonies there.

Eisteddfods are a real proof of the importance that the Welsh grant to their culture and especially to the literary arts. Those literary arts, whether they are oral or written, underline the importance of the Welsh language in Wales's cultural life, as such importance is given to words. Considering the specificities – both linguistic and historic, as we will see later on – of the Welsh language, it may be natural for the Welsh to grant such importance to their national language which stands its ground alongside English and other national languages in the British Isles.

If Eisteddfods are a major event in Wales's cultural life, other events celebrating the Welsh culture hold an important place, especially amongst Welsh speakers.

The Gwyl fairs, for instance, are events held yearly and are close to Eisteddfods as they put several teams in competition through various events: singing, dancing, poetry telling...

Gwyls are held by many Welsh schools – and especially by Welsh-medium schools – and are a true proof of the youth's attachment to their country's culture and traditions. I had the chance as a French language assistant, to attend the Gwyl fair of a Welsh-medium school in Cardiff, Ysgol Gymraeg Gyfun Glantaf, and it was a moving and inspiring experience in many respects.

The Gwyl I could attend in 2009 in Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf in Cardiff was prepared for months by pupils who all took part in the activities and shows planned for the day of the event. As for the event, it took place in a large gymnasium where the terraces had been divided into the four houses of the school, each with its distinctive colour. Those four houses competed by performing various artistic shows such as telling Welsh poetry, singing Welsh songs, playing short plays.

As I was interested in the relationship the Welsh, and particularly the younger ones, had with their culture and their language, I could notice that all pupils felt truly proud of being Welsh speakers, at least at times like these. The Welsh language does not seem to be seen by them as “old fashioned”, it is still quite alive, even within the minds of the youngest ones.

Still during that day, another word that could not but come to my mind was “patriotism”. Indeed, the Wales national anthem *Land of my Fathers (Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau)* was sung by the end of the day, as another assertion of the Welsh people's pride concerning its country, language and culture.



I could not help but think of that strong nationalist feeling as a kind of wall built by the Welsh to both praise and defend their culture and even more, their identity which was threatened for centuries, as we have previously seen.

And it was the final song sung by all the pupils and teachers to conclude the day which confirmed this idea. Indeed, all sang the song “*Yma O Hyd*” by Dafydd Iwan, which is a song putting forward the pride and integrity of the Welsh identity which has always existed and survived throughout the centuries and which is still quite vivid in spite of the threats coming from outside (past invasions, Wales annexation by England,...). The end of the song and chorus are meaningful (translated from Welsh):

*Despite old Maggie and her crew,  
We'll be here until the end of time,  
And the Welsh language will be alive!  
We are still here  
Despite the worst of everyone and everything*<sup>23</sup>

Music and songs are, as we have seen, a major way for the Welsh people to express their love for their land, for their culture, and also the political ideas that come from such nationalism. And on the day they celebrate their patron saint, it is through singing and eating that the Welsh people do it.

Not much is known about Saint David, but it is thought that he was born near the present city of Saint David and that he became the abbot of the city. It is believed that he accomplished many miracles, and one particular miracle is often told:

As David was preaching to a crowd on a hill, a dove flew and landed on his shoulder and the earth rose to lift him up upon the crowd so that all could hear him speak.<sup>24</sup> It is said that he died on 1<sup>st</sup> March 589 A.D., and he has been ever since celebrated as Wales’s patron saint. Celebrations that day are different from the way, for example, that the Irish people celebrate Saint Patrick; traditional songs are sung, meals with traditional food are eaten, and people wear the Red Dragon or the leek as pins or pendants.

If Wales remains strongly attached to its cultural independence as a nation, it seems that its people expresses it through pacific means. When it comes to defending its identity, the Welsh people does it by putting forward its unique culture.

Even though past events with England are not forgotten, Wales wants to exist as a culture which includes numerous traditions in singing, telling stories, writing poetry... All that is done in Wales today to keep those traditions alive is truly important, especially nowadays when globalization tends to “standardize” the world. But, as we are going to see, it has not always been so easy for the Welsh people to celebrate its culture freely throughout history.

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<sup>23</sup> Talk Celtic forum, from a post entitled *Welsh Rebel Music - Yma O Hyd!*  
(<http://www.talkceltic.net/forum/showthread.php?t=108868>).

<sup>24</sup> St David of Wales (<http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/Saints/saint.aspx?id=1309>).

As we have seen, before and after it became a unified nation, Wales has always had to cope with English imperialism and pressures, and it has been quite difficult for this people to preserve and to keep its culture and customs alive through time. Passages and songs we have just read are proofs of the pride of the Welsh nation which has managed to remain what it had always been.

In order to properly grasp the importance of the real struggle Wales has always led to defend its identity, culture and language, we are going to go through the actions and the fights – pacific or not – that the Welsh people has had to lead throughout its history to protect its values from military, economic, political or cultural threats.

## *III – The survival of an independent culture*

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### The resistance until the annexation

During the 7<sup>th</sup> century, as the Saxons were invading Britain, they won decisive battles which had as a consequence, among others, to isolate the future Welsh people in the north. It was at that time that the Britons of the north chose the name *Cymry* for their land and *Cymraeg* for their language.

But the Saxon invaders called them *wealhas*, which meant “foreigners” in their language, and it is from this word that the name “Welsh” came from.

Meanwhile, from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Christian influences began spreading from the European continent and Ireland. Churches and religious monuments were built in what was to become Wales at the time, and those religious buildings were the targets of the Viking raids during the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Vikings destroyed many of the Welsh cultural symbols along with many works written in Welsh language, but thanks to brave Welsh leaders – such as Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, as we have seen - who fought in order to establish a national unity, the national independence of Wales was protected and the Scandinavian cultural influence had nearly no impact.<sup>25</sup>

It was not before the 13<sup>th</sup> century that the independence of Wales became more seriously threatened. As England had got unified by the Normans, Edward I planned to take Wales under English dominion by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Even though Wales was not annexed, it was given the status of “Rhuddlan” in 1284

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<sup>25</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.31

by the English crown. Through this statute given to Wales, Edward I could introduce the English common law system, turning Wales into a part of the country under English rule and dividing the Welsh nation ruled by the last of the Llewelyn dynasty into five counties: Anglesey, Merionethshire, Caernarfonshire, Denbighshire and Flintshire.<sup>26</sup>

These counties thus became part of a ruling England which, of course, favoured the English language and tried to impose it as the unique and official language. In spite of all that, Welsh remained the language of the Welsh people, and English was spoken and used only in the highest spheres of the Welsh society and by members of the Church. Fortunately for the Welsh culture, the Welsh literature had had time to emerge and impose itself as more than a minor literary movement. The *Mabinogion*, as we have seen, is a good example of the importance and quality of works written in Welsh, they represent the characteristics of a unique nation proud of its cultural legacy.

It was two centuries later that Wales's independence became even more seriously threatened with the crowning of Henry VIII (1491-1547) as king of England. As the king, Henry gradually grew concerned about the threat that could represent the lords of Wales if they united their political and military forces against the English crown.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence, Thomas Cromwell, one of the men working in his administration, was asked to find a solution to the Welsh issue. Cromwell decided that annexing Wales and thus incorporating it within the English kingdom would be the best solution to the Welsh problem.

This led to the Laws in Wales Acts (1535 and 1542), sometimes referred to as the Act of Union, which were a set of parliamentary measures turning Wales into a part of the kingdom of England by imposing many of the English laws on the Welsh territory. It was through these acts that Henry's government put an end to the official independence of Wales; the five shires it had been divided into were to become mere parts of the kingdom of England and had to submit to English rules.

### Laws in Wales Acts' consequences

And yet, even though Henry's wish was to turn the Welsh people into English subjects, he and his government could not but recognize the identity and specific culture that people had. In the first pages of the Laws in Wales Act of 1535, the Welsh language, embodiment of this culture, is mentioned – and thus acknowledged – even though it is referred to as a language of “sinister usages and customs”, as Hervé Abalain points out.<sup>28</sup> Mastering and using the English language was presented as mandatory to all those who coveted high responsibilities within the Welsh elite. This was clearly an attempt to “corrupt” the Welsh leaders by making them abandon and disown their identity as Welshmen.

But the people of Wales kept using the Welsh language for years, even though the Acts had made English the only official language in both England and Wales. What really was a threat to the perpetuation of the Welsh language was the abolition of many religious orders in Wales, along with the closure of many

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<sup>26</sup> J. Graham Jones, *The history of Wales: a pocket guide* (1990; University of Wales Press) p.32

<sup>27</sup> John Davies, *A history of Wales* (January 2007; Penguin Adult) p.198

<sup>28</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.163

monasteries. Indeed, religion and education were still closely tied together at the time, the monks were men of letters and it was their role to teach cultural values, customs and of course the Welsh language.

Glanmor Williams (1920-2005), a famous Welsh historian, studied and wrote about the consequences of the Acts for Wales among other subjects related to Wales's history.<sup>29</sup> When asked about the Reformation in Wales on the radio, Professor Williams spoke of the use of the Prayer Book written in English, a language that "the three-quarters of [the Welsh people] didn't understand"<sup>30</sup>, and of the church services and prayers which became spoken in English. Williams also mentions the removal of many religious features inside the churches, such as images, paintings, along with the covering up of church windows and frescos. For the Reformation was a process of breaking away from the official Catholic Church and the Pope initiated by Henry VIII, who wanted his marriage annulled without the consent of the Pope. This led to the creation of the Church of England, and this is why religious writings and symbols throughout the kingdom of England – now including Wales – were removed, altered or replaced. As the Protestant religion was created, it still had to be spread and taught throughout the country, and particularly in Wales.

Until 1563, that is to say under the reign of Elizabeth I, the Church of England had spread and imposed itself on the Welsh territory. But, as we have seen, only a small part of the population of Wales could understand English, and Queen Elizabeth was quite aware of the fact that the Reformation would not have any long-lasting effects if the people of the newly-annexed Wales did not understand what they were praying.

In order to gain influence over the people of Wales, England had to use religion, which was at the time the main political and cultural influence over the people. Elizabeth thus asked that the Bible be translated into Welsh, so that every Welshman could properly understand the new official religion of the kingdom of England. From this initiative came out the result Elizabeth expected, that is to say the conversion of a large part of the Welsh people to Protestantism. But at the same time, the translation enabled the Welsh language to survive through its written form. Indeed, the fact that a book as emblematic as the Bible was published in Welsh gave to this language the importance it had lost with the Laws in Wales Acts which had made it a "second-rate language".

The Prayer Book was also translated into Welsh, and copies of the Bible in both English and Welsh were made available in every Welsh church. One of the aims of the English government and of the head of the Church of England was also to show to the Welsh people to what extent the English versions of the Bible and of the Prayer Book were superior to the Welsh ones, for they also aimed at making the Welsh people want to learn English.

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<sup>29</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the reformation* (University of Wales Press; New edition (23 July 1999)).

<sup>30</sup> Programme 4, People and Belief, from the BBC Radio Wales Millennium History series, *The People of Wales* (1999) - Glanmor Williams's intervention about reformation in Wales (an audio extract can be found on <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=397309&section=3.5.3>).

Things did not quite go as they had expected since the regain of interest for the Welsh language was stronger than the desire to learn English. Dr Gwynfor Evans quotes Edmund Spenser about this issue: “It hath been the use of the conqueror to despise the language of the conquered.”<sup>31</sup>

In his book, Evans speaks of the Welsh aristocracy who kept “turning [its] back on [its] nation” after the Laws in Wales Acts. The fact that so many Welshmen from the aristocracy decided to learn English and to break up with the Welsh Language in order to gain some advantages and/or responsibilities shows that nationalism and patriotism has its limits.

Discussing to what extent men can be corrupted by money or power is not something we will go through in this essay, but it can be interesting to consider some facts:

- Evans speaks of a “Welsh sense of inferiority” which was quite present in Wales especially during the couple of centuries following the Laws in Wales Acts. The Welshmen who decided to submit to the English requirements in order to gain personal benefits may have done so without any intent to betray nor their nation, nor its culture.
- As the Welsh culture and language were threatened on the long run, it was probably not the fact that the Welsh aristocracy turned towards the English that prevented the Welsh culture from being carried on, since it eventually was.
- Finally, we must bear in mind that a man like Gwynfor Evans was more a politician than an historian, member of the Welsh nationalist party *Plaid Cymru*. Knowing this, we need to consider his work differently as his political ideas may alter not the quality but the objectivity of his work to some extent.

### From an “anti-Welsh” attitude...

What is commonly admitted is the fact that the Welsh language, as the main symbol of the Welsh culture, was despised by the English people or, in the best cases, merely considered as a jargon during the centuries following the Laws in Wales Acts. The English, who were about to be called the British, had held in contempt a language and a culture which have for a long time embodied, at least to them, an old-fashioned backwards civilisation. Still during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, one could read lines such as these:

The native gibberish is usually prattled throughout the whole of Taphydom except in their Market Towns whose inhabitants being a little rais’d, and (as it were pufft up into Bubbles) above the ordinary Scum, do begin to despise it. ’Tis usually cashier’d out of Gentlemen’s Houses... so that (if the stars prove lucky) there may

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<sup>31</sup> Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006)

be some glimmering hopes that the British language may be quite extinct and may be English'd out of Wales.<sup>32</sup>

This passage shows rather clearly how the Welsh language was seen and considered by the English two centuries after the Laws in Wales Acts: a jargon “prattled” only by the lowest social classes who did not receive much education and who are qualified as “scum” by the author, unlike gentlemen who were well-educated enough to know and acknowledge the superiority of the English language and who would not have stooped so low as to use the Welsh language.

Even after the 17<sup>th</sup> century, anti-Welsh songs and poems grew popular in imperialist England which was, boosted by the Industrial Revolution, certain of its superiority over other nations and countries at all levels. One of the most famous anti-Welsh rhyme was “Taffy was a Welshman”:

Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief;  
Taffy came to my house and stole a piece of beef;  
I went to Taffy's house, Taffy wasn't in;  
I jumped upon his Sunday hat and poked it with a pin.  
Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a sham;  
Taffy came to my house and stole a piece of lamb;  
I went to Taffy's house, Taffy was away,  
I stuffed his socks with sawdust and filled his shoes with clay.  
Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a cheat,  
Taffy came to my house, and stole a piece of meat;  
I went to Taffy's house, Taffy was not there,  
I hung his coat and trousers to roast before a fire.<sup>33</sup>

In this song which may seem harmless and which is considered as a classic English nursery rhyme today, one can notice several elements representatives of the way Welshmen had been perceived by their English “neighbours” for centuries.

The proper name “Taffy” is supposedly derived from either the river Taff which flows through the Welsh capital city of Cardiff, or from the Welsh first name Dafydd. In this song, Taffy, the Welshman, is a thief, a sham or a cheater, and no good intentions are alleged to him. Also, the “I” who is supposed to sing the song retaliates against Taffy for all the harm that he did. One could see a historical metaphor which may remind us

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<sup>32</sup> Multiple contributors, *A Collection of Welsh Travels, and Memoirs of Wales. Containing I. the Briton Describ'd, Or, a Journey Thro' Wales* (Gale Ecco, Print Editions, United States, 2010). This quotation is used by Gwynfor Evans in order to show to what extent contempt for the Welsh language was high among the 17<sup>th</sup> century “elites” in his book *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.102

<sup>33</sup> Iona Opie, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Oxford University Press, USA; 1951).

of the Laws in Wales Acts created by Henry VIII in order to take Wales into his control because he perceived it – rightly or not – as a threat.

We can find in this song many of the elements that are typical of a sort of xenophobia; but can we speak of xenophobia when speaking of the English/Welsh relationship during the second half of the second millennium?

### ...To classic “Welsh pranks”?

Many of the elements we have gathered so far tend to show that this kind of behaviour the English used to have towards the Welsh was justified by nothing but a sort of “inherited habit”. The contempt many in England had had towards the Welsh people and its culture may have originated from the Laws in Wales Acts by Henry VIII, which created a hierarchy of nations in the British Isles. By imposing the English laws and rules in Wales and by not granting any official status to the Welsh language, these acts which led to the taking over of Wales may have given birth to a social feeling of superiority of the English, and to a “sense of inferiority [imperilling] both the language and the nationhood [in] Wales.”<sup>34</sup>

In a 2009 article in the *Spectator* entitled “*Mocking the Welsh is the last permitted bigotry*”, the question of making fun of other countries and people is discussed. The dominant idea developed throughout this article is that jokes about other countries, languages or people are getting rarer and rarer because of “political correctness”. One has to be very careful and skilled to make a joke about Muslims, Jews, etc. but, according to the journalist, the Welsh are the last people the English can mock rather freely.

The antipathy against Wales, though, is something different, because it is tinged always with contempt, and soured by incompleteness. Isn't Wales part of Britain — part of England, really? What's this nonsense about the revival of a language — don't they all speak English anyway, and why can't they spell Owen Glendower like Shakespeare did? What would they be without us? What do they contribute? And listen, this will make you laugh — did you hear the one about the Welshman and the crocodile...?<sup>35</sup>

The teasing tone is obviously sarcastic and provocative and used to caricature an attitude the English can have towards the Welsh culture and people. “Isn't Wales part of Britain – part of England, really?” is a rhetorical question that would make Welsh nationalists scream. But to the journalist, the mocking adolescent attitude the English have had towards the Welsh is not so much due to an actual resentment but rather to “an

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<sup>34</sup> Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.102

<sup>35</sup> Jan Morris, *Mocking the Welsh is the last permitted bigotry* (22 July 2009; <http://www.spectator.co.uk/the-magazine/features/5200003/mocking-the-welsh-is-the-last-permitted-bigotry.shtml>) - As it seems the original link is no longer working, a copy of the article can be found on <http://www.theapricity.com/forum/showthread.php?t=6501>).

inherited national instinct that allows today's English columnists and tap-room jokers to be as beastly as they please about the Welsh."<sup>36</sup>

## Literature, education and religion

We have seen to what extent Wales's identity, culture and sovereignty have been challenged since the Laws in Wales Acts in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We now have to consider the same period of time, stretching over nearly five centuries, from the Welsh point of view, that is to say by trying to understand how the Welsh culture, language and identity succeeded in surviving in spite of the English rule hostile towards them.

First of all, one must bear in mind that as we have seen, the translation of the Bible into Welsh in 1563 was an unintended sign of the revival of the Welsh language and literature; but it was not the only one. Indeed, a couple of years before the Bible in Welsh was published, the first book written in Welsh was written. It has no title but is known by its first words: "Yn y lhyvyr hwnn", meaning "in this book."<sup>37</sup> This book contains the Commandments in Welsh, along with information and guides about the structure of the Welsh language and how it must be read.

This shows the need the Welsh felt for written works in and about their language, which was even more vulnerable if not written. So all this could partially account for the importance the Bible translated into Welsh had when it was first published in 1567 (later revised by William Morgan and republished in 1588).<sup>38</sup> At a time when the Welsh culture and language were threatened and could fall into oblivion, the Bible played a major role as Armand Le Calvez noticed it: "La Bible a donné aux Gallois une langue classique qui a remédié, dans une certaine mesure, à l'absence d'une université ou de toute autre institution, et elle a maintenu l'unité du peuple à une époque de désintégration sociale et religieuse".<sup>39</sup> So this was one of the first elements which enabled the Welsh culture and language to be carried on throughout the centuries without vanishing, in spite of the English hostility and domination.

Another important element to take into account is the fact that even though the Laws in Wales Acts of 1536 had made English the only official language in Wales, many were those who kept using Welsh on a daily basis, in courts for example, for several decades. It was, as we have previously seen, the Welsh aristocrats who were the most eager to anglicise themselves by learning English and by sending their children to Welsh grammar schools which reproduced the English teaching system.

But from the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, even though Welsh schools taught pupils in English, most of the Welsh population still spoke Welsh on a daily basis.

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<sup>36</sup> Same as above.

<sup>37</sup> Sir John Price, *Yn y lhyvyr hwnn* (1546);

<http://digidol.llgc.org.uk/METS/YLH00001/frames?div=0&subdiv=0&locale=en&mode=thumbnail>).

<sup>38</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.164

<sup>39</sup> Armand Le Calvez, *Un cas de bilinguisme : le pays de Galles* (1970 : Revue SKOL, 22 – Lannion, p.39) quoted by Hervé Abalain in *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.165



Moreover, the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the creation of “circulating schools” by Griffith Jones. He was a minister of the Church of England who decided to literally bring education to those who did not have access to it. In 1731, he began the creation of several circulating schools throughout Wales – pupils in these schools were taught in Welsh, and it is estimated that by the end of his life in 1761, his schools had taught over 250,000 people how to read.<sup>40</sup>

This was fortunate because following the Laws in Wales Acts, there had been a steady decline in the number of literary works in Welsh published yearly. The Welsh language had been deprived from any official status and nobody was there to emphasize the importance of a Welsh literature in order to keep the language alive. Moreover, with the end of monasteries, less and less books in Welsh were written, and the Welsh educational system did not include any university or institution of this kind which could have taught people about the Welsh literature of the past, poetry, etc.

Without a higher educational system, we may guess that it was quite difficult for Wales to give some dynamism to its literary production. As a result, it was not before the 18<sup>th</sup> century that a sufficient amount of new literary works in Welsh were written.

At that time, Welsh Methodist churches as well as new Nonconformist churches began to spread throughout Wales, and the desire for religious books was felt again. If Welsh had always remained the language of cult in Wales, it was from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards that it truly imposed itself as the main language for religious works in Wales since the majority of the population still spoke exclusively Welsh.<sup>41</sup>

But still concerning schools and the educational system in Wales at the time, another system that was set up to bring education to those for whom circulating schools were not available was the Sunday Schools system. Created, among others, by Edward Williams, Morgan John Rhys and Thomas Charles, these schools aimed at teaching on the only day of the week when most people had time to learn: on Sundays. This educational movement was made possible mainly by the implication of Nonconformist sects which also used it as a means to gain influence over larger areas. These schools, just like circulating schools, met with success until about 1870 when the British state began to take care of education itself.<sup>42</sup>

All in all, it is clear that up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, religion and education were still closely linked. Even though monasteries were dissolved during the Reformation, education, and through it the perpetuation of the Welsh language and culture, was taken care of by schools and teachers moved by faith. Whether they were Methodists like Griffith Jones or Nonconformists, the educational system in Wales until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was largely the responsibility of those teachers who gave lessons out of charity and because they had faith in what they did for the community. Of course, this was also a means of making the influence of their respective churches grow.

Those kinds of schools were not attended by the Welsh aristocracy, whose children were sent to grammar schools whose educational system was based on the English's. Because of this, the difference between Welsh elite and the other Welsh social classes has remained through time. On the one hand, there

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<sup>40</sup> Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Modern Wales: A concise history* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) p.138

<sup>41</sup> Dafydd Johnston, *The Literature of Wales* (University of Wales Press, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.168

was the Welsh aristocracy who had embraced English as its language and which was doing its best to fit into the English model. On the other hand, the Welsh people kept learning and carrying on the Welsh language and culture from generation to generation.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, religion underwent some changes within Wales. The Methodist church, which had regained importance during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, broke away from the Anglican Church and became independent. At the same time, several other Nonconformist churches in Wales developed – by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Nonconformist religions were widely dominant in Wales.

The impact of the place and role of Nonconformist religions in Wales was crucial. England, since the Reformation, had always tried to impose the Church of England with services and prayers in English only. But, as we have seen, this goal was never achieved as those who anglicised themselves culturally and socially were the members of the higher Welsh social classes only (the Welsh aristocracy, nobles, etc.).

The development of Nonconformist churches such as the Methodist church represented an opportunity for the Welsh language to be spoken and above all written even more. Indeed, Welsh was the language of those churches who had built their influence thanks to the Welsh people, that is to say the Welsh speakers.<sup>43</sup> The rupture between the Welsh people and its aristocracy was clear, the elites spoke a different language from the rest of the population.

### The Welsh Industrial Revolution

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was also the time of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and with it came crucial changes for Wales. It all began with thanks to the presence of large amounts of iron ore and coal on the Welsh territory. As Britain was turning into an industrial nation looking for profit, the natural resources in Wales led to the establishment of ironworks and coal mines, mainly in south-east and north Wales. Many people, mainly English, moved to Wales in order to benefit from the opportunities and jobs that the exploitation of natural resources would create. Some of those immigrants learnt Welsh in order to fit into the local communities, and little by little an increasing demand for newspapers and literature of all kinds emerged.<sup>44</sup>

This was a vital moment for the Welsh culture and language which eventually had the opportunity to not only be carried on through generations, but also to be taught and exported to newcomers. One could consider that it was at that time that the English really began to pay attention to the Welsh culture beyond common beliefs.

With the Industrial Revolution, Wales had the opportunity to put an end to nearly four centuries during which its culture and language had barely been able to survive and during which the English “psychological oppression” did not stop. Literature through all its forms was beginning to be revived. Several wealthy inhabitants promoted a richer cultural and literary life, such as Lady Llanover whose name

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<sup>43</sup> Geraint H. Jenkins, *The foundations of modern Wales* (Clarendon Press, 1987) p.370-375

<sup>44</sup> Dafydd Johnston, *The Literature of Wales* (University of Wales Press, 1999)

is today that of a society whose aim is “to advance the education of the public in Welsh language, arts and culture by promoting the life and achievements of August Hall, First Baroness Llanover (1802-1896)”.<sup>45</sup> Lady Llanover's wishes came true to some extent as poets were back in Wales, still faithful to the long Welsh tradition that had prevailed until the Laws in Wales Acts. Among the most famous Welsh poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are William Thomas or John Blackwell.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was the novel which finally managed to take its place within Welsh literature. Firstly there were novels translated from English to Welsh before Welsh novelists like Daniel Owen, to mention but the most famous, wrote the first novels in Welsh by the end of the century (*Rhys Lewis*, in 1885, the first novel written in Welsh).<sup>46</sup>

Another reason which accounted for the flourishing of Welsh books was the introduction of printing presses in Wales in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. If these presses were first used to publish religious works, they were used to print all the kinds of literature we have mentioned during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By making it easy to print several copies of books, the printing presses made it possible for the Welsh population to have access to a whole new literature that conveyed the Welsh culture. The important role the circulating schools and the Sunday schools had played then became even more obvious as a good part of the population was literate and thus able to enjoy that new Welsh literature.

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it is estimated that about 800,000 people in Wales spoke Welsh. This was the highest number of Welsh speakers ever, and yet the part of Welsh speakers out of the total population had diminished. This can be explained by the fact that there was a high increase of the total population of Wales during the 19<sup>th</sup> century thanks to the Industrial Revolution.

For instance, concerning the increase of population between 1750 and 1801 (date of the first official population census), the population in Wales had gone from 480,000 to 588,000, and by 1811 it had reached 673,000 inhabitants. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there were about 1,160,000 inhabitants in Wales, 115,000 of which came from England and 20,000 from Ireland. This sudden dramatic increase of the population can be explained by the jobs provided by the natural resources on Welsh land.

Out of these 1,160,000 inhabitants, there were about 800,000 who spoke Welsh, that is to say about 67% of the population. Even though it was the highest number of Welsh speakers so far, it accounted for a lower part of the total population than it had been in the past (by the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, 80% of the Welsh population were Welsh speakers).<sup>47</sup>

Thanks to all these factors, the Welsh culture was not only carried on but also learnt by people who had never had any interest in it before. To some extent we could say that the Industrial Revolution brought economic dynamism in Wales – the nation had been traditionally rural, it was now turning into a more industrialized one –, but it also enabled the nation to develop the main aspects of its unique culture and identity: its literature and its language.

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<sup>45</sup> Lady Llanover Society (<http://www.ladyllanover.org.uk>).

<sup>46</sup> A. O. H. Jarman, *A Guide to Welsh Literature* (University of Wales Press; 2nd edition (November 1992)) p.186

<sup>47</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.173

Wales has always been a nation largely represented by its culture. Partly because of the English domination, it never really had the chance to become neither a major economic nor military power. But it is its incredibly rich culture that has always defined it as a nation. A nation is “a large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular state or territory”<sup>48</sup>, and that is just what Wales is and has always been. As Dafydd Iwan would sing, “we are still here, despite all and everything”, and this is a good way to summarize the Welsh spirit. In spite of all what it has gone through, the Welsh culture managed to survive when so many tried to annihilate it.

Now what has been a major aspect of this unique culture and what has largely contributed to its survival is undoubtedly the Welsh language.

We are now going to take a closer look at it and try to understand what makes it so unique and why it has become such a strong symbol of Wales’s nationhood.

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<sup>48</sup> “Nation” in Oxford Dictionaries (<http://oxforddictionaries.com>).

# THE WELSH LANGUAGE

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# *I – Origins of the language*

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The history of the British Isles, as we have seen previously, dates back to immemorial times, and it is obvious that many tribes, peoples and civilisations have lived there and left traces of their existence in various fields. With wars and invasions, Great Britain had always been a country where there was a real blending of people, cultures and languages. If the English language – which is derived from the language the Angles, the Saxons and the Normans spoke – is a relatively recent language, some languages still spoken in the British Isles date back to the Bronze or Iron Ages, that is to say between 3000 and 1000 BC.

Welsh is one of these languages. It is undoubtedly the language derived from Celtic idioms that is spoken the most nowadays and which has, as we will see later on, an official administrative status, making it much more than a mere dialect.

In this second part of this essay, we will focus on the origins of “Britain’s oldest living language”<sup>49</sup>. We will go through a maximum of information in order to understand how it has become what it is today, and what have been the evolutions and changes the language has undergone since it was first called the “Welsh language”. By studying this, we may be able to better grasp the extent of the importance their language has for the Welsh people. As we have seen, even though it has been threatened and culturally harassed for centuries by the English, the Welsh language was carried on, so it might be interesting to see to what extent it has changed/evolved with time. Answers to these questions will help us to later determine the influence the language has had on the Welsh people’s patriotism and nationalism over time?

## Old Celtic origins

During the first millennium BC, the major family of languages in Europe that were spoken throughout the British Isles and in a large part of the European continent was Celtic. Many Celtic dialects existed at the time and all evolved and changed through time as populations moved through the European continent.

But the Celtic family itself was a branch of the “supreme language” that linguists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century came to call the Indo-European family of languages. Idioms which were part of the Indo-European family are estimated to date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. It is now considered that all modern European languages – English, Welsh, French, German... – all have evolved from this family of languages. What linguists call the “Common Celtic” branch was a family of languages which originated from the Indo-European family.

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<sup>49</sup> Cennard Davies, *The Welsh Language* (Y Lolfa; 2006), on cover.

It was approximately during the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD – that is to say 1500 years after the birth of the Common Celtic branch – that the Celtic languages spoken throughout Western Europe and especially in the British Isles and North-Western Europe began to split into two main families of languages:

- The Goidelic group of languages, which were mainly spoken in Ireland, and which gave birth to three modern languages: Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx (spoken on the Isle of Man).
- The Brythonic group of languages, which were spoken throughout the actual England and Wales territories. Brythonic languages derived from the British language which had been spoken for centuries and which was a language of the Common Celtic branch. Brythonic languages are the ancestors of modern Welsh, Breton, Cornish and Cumbric (the Cumbric language is now extinct).<sup>50</sup>

Before the beginning of the Roman invasion in 43 AD, languages from the Common Celtic branch had had a great influence throughout the whole of Europe. Names of rivers like Danube, Rhone and Rhine or names of cities as far as Bala in Turkey have names with Celtic origins.<sup>51</sup> Out of the families of languages that originated from the Common Celtic branch, three of them spreading from France to Turkey are now long extinct (i.e.: the Gaulish spoken in France and northern Italy).

### Primitive and Old Welsh era

From the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, the language spoken in the regions today occupied by modern Wales was Primitive Welsh. Indeed, it is considered that by 550 the Primitive Welsh language was structured enough to be considered a full language.<sup>52</sup> Few inscriptions in Primitive Welsh have been found, as few were those who could write at the time. It is the changes that some words underwent that marked the beginning of the Primitive Welsh period. For example, the word *bardos* became *bard* (poet), and the word *nemos* became *nef* (heaven).<sup>53</sup> This is due to the fact that Welsh became to evolve into a language which no longer used declensions; the specific endings of words were thus no longer needed.

From the 9<sup>th</sup> century until the 12<sup>th</sup>, Primitive Welsh evolved into Old Welsh. Unlike the Primitive Welsh period, many poems and writings of all sorts which date back to this era were found. One of the most famous is undoubtedly the poem *Y Gododdin*, also known as the *Book of Aneirin* from the name of the bard who, according to legend, wrote the poems to praise the achievements of Brittonic kings and knights in battles:

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<sup>50</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.160

<sup>51</sup> BBC.co.uk, *Wales history* ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/society/language\\_celticbritons.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/society/language_celticbritons.shtml)).

<sup>52</sup> According to the English linguist Kenneth H. Jackson (1909-1991) in his 1953 work, *Language and history in early Britain: A chronological survey of the Brittonic languages, first to twelfth century A.D.*, (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press).

<sup>53</sup> Cennard Davies, *The Welsh Language* (Y Lolfa; 2006) p.10

He pierced three hundred, most bold,  
He cut down the centre and wing.  
He was worthy before the noblest host,  
He gave from his herd horses in winter.  
He fed black ravens on the wall  
Of the fortress, although he was not Arthur.  
Among those powerful in feats,  
In the front rank, a pallisade, Gwawrddur.<sup>54</sup>

If we take a look at the meaning of this excerpt from *Y Gododdin* translated into English, we can see that this kind of poetry is close to the Old English one and even to the Old French one to some extent. Poems orally told which praise brave heroes who fought for justice and to protect the weakest may remind us of stories like that of Beowulf, for instance. Concerning Old French literature, we may think of the books by Chrétien de Troyes, even though they were written much later.

It is also important to note that Old Welsh can be understood by a Modern-Welsh speaker only if he has notes to help him understand.<sup>55</sup> This shows to what extent Modern Welsh has changed since the Old Welsh period. David Willis gives us examples of common names in Old Welsh which are close yet different from their modern form. Here are some examples of words in Old Welsh > Modern Welsh followed by their English translation:

Ir > yr, y (*the*); did > did (*day*); guetig > gwedy (*after*).<sup>56</sup>

Words like these have thus remained almost unchanged with time, even though nearly a millennium has gone by since the end of the Old Welsh period.

## Middle Welsh period

This leads us to the next phase of the Welsh language's evolution: the Middle Welsh period. This period "only" stretched from the 12<sup>th</sup> century until the 15<sup>th</sup>, but it was during this period of time that the *Mabinogion* was written along with many of the manuscripts of the Welsh Law. The changes between Old Welsh and Middle Welsh are rather important as far as vocabulary and sounds are concerned. Indeed, Middle Welsh is closer to Modern Welsh than to Old Welsh, as it would be almost fully understood by today Welsh speakers.

In his book *Reading Middle Welsh*, Gareth Morgan, Professor of Classics and Education at the University of Texas at Austin, speaks of the very little difference there is between Middle and Modern Welsh

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<sup>54</sup> *Y Gododdin* (<http://faculty.arts.ubc.ca/sechard/492godo.htm>).

<sup>55</sup> David Willis, *Old and Middle Welsh* (University of Cambridge; this work can be found on [http://people.pwf.cam.ac.uk/dwew2/old\\_and\\_middle\\_welsh.pdf](http://people.pwf.cam.ac.uk/dwew2/old_and_middle_welsh.pdf)).

<sup>56</sup> Cennard Davies, *The Welsh Language* (Y Lolfa; 2006) p.13



when it comes to pronunciation:

“Welsh was developed early. Much of the Mabinogi is immediately accessible to the Welshman of today. It is especially true that Welsh pronunciation developed very early. If you read the Mabinogi in a modern pronunciation you will be close to the original sound. You will certainly be far closer to the author than a modern actor would be when speaking Shakespeare”.<sup>57</sup>

According to Pr. G. Morgan, there is much less difference in terms of pronunciation between the different stages of evolution of the Welsh language than between Middle or Old English and Modern English. We could guess that this is partially due to the relative stability and calm periods that have been part of Wales’s history. Indeed, when a young evolving language is not influenced very much by other idioms, it is not likely to change a lot as for the pronunciation of words.

The main differences that can be noted between Middle and Modern Welsh concern mostly pronouns, and particularly possessive pronouns like *ei* (his/her), *eu* (their) and prepositions like *i* (to). Those three words were all spelled *y* in Middle Welsh<sup>58</sup>, which may cause some problems when trying to understand and translate accurately works of that time.

But we must bear in mind that at the time, orthography of the Welsh language was not standardized at all, so the language spoken throughout the nation could be sometimes quite different since people tended to write down words according to how words sounded like. But literary works written in Middle Welsh enabled linguists to see to what extent Welsh had become a rich language capable of great flexibility, thus enabling poets and writers to be efficient and precise whether they had to write poetry or official texts and laws.<sup>59</sup>

It is only with the 15<sup>th</sup> century that the orthography of Middle Welsh began to evolve and change, and, according to linguists, these changes marked the birth of Modern Welsh which is more or less the language still spoken today in Wales, even though it has gone through some more minor changes. Stretching from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to present days, the Modern Welsh period can be divided into two parts:

## Early Modern Welsh

This first part of the Modern Welsh period stretches from the beginning or middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the publication of the Bible in Welsh translated by William Morgan. What we know about the Welsh language spoken during that period of time has reached us almost only

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<sup>57</sup> Professor Gareth Morgan, *Reading Middle Welsh* (Book available online through the MIT website thanks to the Gareth Morgan Memorial Endowed Excellence Fund. It was left unfinished with Morgan’s death in 1996. <http://www.mit.edu/people/dfm/canol/index.html>) part 2.2: Pronunciation: Consonants and Vowels

<sup>58</sup> John Strachan and Kuno Meyer, *An introduction to Early Welsh* (Manchester University Press; 1909 – Scanned version on <http://archive.org/details/introductiontoa00strauoft>).

<sup>59</sup> Cennard Davies, *The Welsh Language* (Y Lolfa; 2006) p.15-16

through literature written in Welsh, and especially poetry, the great Welsh tradition. The Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwilym (about 1320-1370) is probably the most famous from this period of time. He was from a family which belonged to the Welsh aristocracy and thus had the opportunity to travel through Wales and to discover many aspects of the life during the middle Ages, which influenced his work. His poems were for the most part about the great topics of the time: nature, courtly love, women, praising noblemen, etc.<sup>60</sup>

Dafydd ap Gwilym's work is one of the major contributions in Early Modern Welsh poetry. His poems enabled linguists such as R. Geraint Gruffydd (professor at the University of Wales before he became director of the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies) to study and analyse the structure of the Welsh language of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>61</sup>

### Late Modern Welsh

It is generally admitted that the Late Modern Welsh period started when the first version of the Bible in Welsh by William Morgan was published, that is to say in 1588. As we have seen, during the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century the Welsh language was in danger of extinction because of the Laws in Wales Acts, and the publication of the Bible translated in Welsh had a great stabilizing effect.

Indeed, deprived of any official status and of any rules or laws protecting it, the Welsh language could have easily disintegrated into various dialects. The Bible was a reference for all Welsh speakers whose language needed a written basis to survive, to enable all Welsh speakers to learn from it.

From then on, the Welsh language kept enriching itself with much vocabulary mostly borrowed from English. Moreover, the Welsh language, or rather the Welsh languages spoken throughout Wales began to truly merge into one unique language. Form of verbs and prepositions became much more standardised, with less differences between the language spoken in a region and the one spoken in another one.<sup>62</sup>

This is how the Welsh language had evolved until about the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the economic dynamism brought by the Industrial Revolution, changes concerning Welsh literature and language occurred too.

As we have seen previously, the great dynamism that Wales experienced thanks to the Industrial Revolution led to the arrival of many immigrants from England and Ireland, mainly. Interest for the language thus grew as newcomers had a desire to learn it in order to fit into the Welsh community, and this led to the need for dictionaries.

We can consider that when a dictionary is published, it is the sign that a language has come to maturity, that it is standardised and grammatically structured enough to deserve to have its vocabulary put down on paper and made available to everybody.

One of the first dictionaries published about Welsh was an English-Welsh one. By 1785, a Welshman named William Owen Pughe (1759-1835; editor, grammarian and poet) undertook to compile a Welsh-

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<sup>60</sup> BBC Wales, « Dafydd ap Gwilym » ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/mid/halloffame/arts/dafydd\\_ap\\_gwilym.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/mid/halloffame/arts/dafydd_ap_gwilym.shtml)).

<sup>61</sup> R. Geraint Gruffydd, *Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Cyfres Llên y Llenor, 1987).

<sup>62</sup> Cennard Davies, *The Welsh Language* (Y Lolfa; 2006) p.16

English dictionary, which represented an enormous amount of work. The first part was published in 1793, and the whole work was published in 1803; it also included a Welsh grammar.<sup>63</sup>

Several other dictionaries were thus published throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and all those who had undertaken those publications had the same goal: make the Welsh language well-documented and widely accessible to all those willing to learn it or to improve their skills at it.

But if many immigrants – especially from England – were willing to learn Welsh in order to fit in, there also was a large part of them who clung to English, thus influencing some of the Welsh speakers into learning and using English instead of Welsh on a daily basis. As English had an official status that made it administratively superior to Welsh, it gradually spread throughout Wales, turning it within a century into a nation where half of the population (mainly in the south and east of Wales) spoke both Welsh and English.

But the will of England to unify its kingdom even more led it to pass laws and rules to promote the teaching of English in Wales, and in all of the now United Kingdom.

What will later be called the “*Welsh not*” was a rule – even though not official – created to discourage children from speaking Welsh. Each child who had been heard speaking Welsh at school received a stick it could get rid of only by giving it to the next child who would speak Welsh. At the end of the lesson, the child with the stick was punished.<sup>64</sup> However, attending schools using the “welsh not” system was not mandatory, and parents knew which schools used it or not. It was quite often parents who believed that English would give a better future to their children than Welsh who agreed with such school rules.

It is worth noting that Nonconformist schools very seldom taught through the medium of English as they were strongly linked to the Welsh language.

The regions in which Welsh remained the only language were the most rural ones, that is to say in mid-Wales and in the north, north-east of the country. Everywhere else, people were gradually learning English along with Welsh, and the importance granted to English because of its official status and because of the opportunities it could give became more and more important.

## The Welsh language until 1960

As a result of the gain of influence of English in Wales, the Welsh language began to lose of its influence from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The number of people who could read, write or just speak Welsh was decreasing and the language was jeopardized once more in its history. In 1891, a census aiming at determining how many people in Wales spoke Welsh returned the following result: 54.4% of Wales’s population (1.5 million) were Welsh speakers.<sup>65</sup> In 1911, the same census was organised: out of a total population of nearly 2.5 million inhabitants at the time<sup>66</sup>, 43.5% spoke Welsh as their primary

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<sup>63</sup> Pughe, William Owen (<http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s-PUGH-OWE-1759.html>).

<sup>64</sup> John Davies, *A history of Wales* (Penguin Adult; January 2007) p.455

<sup>65</sup> Languages in Wales and Monmouthshire

([http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/text/chap\\_page.jsp?t\\_id=SRC\\_P&c\\_id=13&cpub\\_id=EW1901GEN](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/text/chap_page.jsp?t_id=SRC_P&c_id=13&cpub_id=EW1901GEN)).

<sup>66</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.173

language.<sup>67</sup>

So even though the number of Welsh speakers had increased since the total population had increased by 1 million, the proportion of Welsh speakers had decreased. The cause of this decrease is, as we have already mentioned, the fact that the additional one million people in Wales were immigrants mainly from England. As a result, they kept using English as their primary language and made the Welsh speakers a minority in Wales.<sup>68</sup>

Fourteen years later, in 1925, a new Welsh political party was born: *Plaid Cymru*. It was born out of the feeling the Welsh had that something had to be done to resist the English cultural and political oppression. Nearly a century before the creation of the Welsh Assembly and the process of Devolution, the Welsh people felt the need for more autonomy, and especially felt the need to protect their culture and their language. One of the major missions of *Plaid Cymru* was to fight to keep the Welsh language alive through educative measures, and by defending Welsh speakers' interests against the English political dominion. It was felt at the time that the Welsh language had to be promoted so that it could develop and eventually regain the status of official language in Wales.<sup>69</sup>

In 1936, a crisis underlined the fact that the Welsh language had to be protected. The government of the United Kingdom decided to build a bombing school at Pen-y-berth in Gwynedd, in the northern part of Wales. The government wished to build the bombing school on the Llŷn peninsula, considered by many in Wales as a place symbolic of Wales's culture and traditions, a place representing the Welsh identity. About 500,000 Welsh protestors demonstrated against this project, but in vain.

Built in 1936, the bombing school was set on fire in September of the same year by Welshmen who claimed responsibility for this act. Those men were sentenced to nine months of jail but were greeted as true heroes when they had done their sentence.<sup>70</sup>

This event which came to be called *Tân yn Llŷn* (Fire in Llŷn) was one of the first events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which really made the Welsh people aware that their culture and language that made their country unique were still in danger of extinction and that something had to be done in order to protect the Welsh heritage.

Still during the 1930's, new technologies enabled more and more Welsh citizens to listen to the radio. But most programmes which were broadcasted were, of course, in English. *Plaid Cymru*, the relatively young Welsh nationalist party began to protest against this omnipresence of English on the radio. Welsh people were encouraged not to pay their licence fee since no programme was in their native tongue, and, eventually, this led to the broadcasting of some programmes in Welsh from the middle of the 1930's onward.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The 1911 census in Wales ([www.yourwelshancestors.com/pdfs/1911-census-in-Wales.pdf](http://www.yourwelshancestors.com/pdfs/1911-census-in-Wales.pdf)).

<sup>68</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.174

<sup>69</sup> John Davies, *A history of Wales* (Penguin Adult; January 2007) p.548

<sup>70</sup> Same as above, p.592

<sup>71</sup> Same as above, p.670

Now if we want to put this into perspective, it is worth noting that thanks to the 1931 census about Welsh speakers, we know that at the time when radio programmes in Welsh began to be broadcasted, the part of Welsh speakers in Wales had gone down to 36.8% out of a population of about 2.5 million inhabitants. Most of the Welsh speakers were inhabitants of the northern counties of Wales mainly, that is to say counties which were the farthest from England and the influence of English.<sup>72</sup>

Afterwards, things remained more or less the way they were for a couple of decades, events like World War II and economic concerns being at the centre of attentions.

### 1962 onwards: “The fate of the language”

It is by the beginning of the 1960's that the people became concerned again about the survival of the Welsh language thanks to, in part, Saunders Lewis. Saunders Lewis was one of the founders of the Welsh nationalist party *Plaid Cymru* in 1925, and on a radio show at the BBC broadcasted on Radio Wales on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1962, he spoke of *the fate of the language (Tynged yr iaith)*.<sup>73</sup> He encouraged the Welsh people to promote even more its language through different and new ways in reaction to a decrease of the part of the number of Welsh speakers in Wales's total population.

Indeed, between the 1931's and 1961's censuses, the part of Welsh speakers in Wales had gone down from 36% to 26% out of a population of about 2.5 million inhabitants.<sup>74</sup> Lewis thus predicted that if nothing was done to change this trend, the Welsh language would soon be extinct. It seems that his alarmist message was heard since the same year *Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Welsh Language Society)* was created. This society actively campaigned for the Welsh language; it aimed at making the British government give an official status to the Welsh language. With the creation of the Welsh Language Society fighting for the language, *Plaid Cymru* was able to focus more efficiently on other political matters.<sup>75</sup>

The battle led by the Welsh Language Society was won in 1967 when the *Welsh Language Act* was passed in Parliament. The act made Welsh an official language that could be used for legal proceedings or in public administrations. It also enabled the nation to translate any official document into Welsh if deemed necessary.

It thus seems that those who spoke Welsh were taken into account: "it is proper that the Welsh language should be freely used by those who so desire in the hearing of legal proceedings in Wales".<sup>76</sup> With this act, both the Welsh and English languages could be used as official languages in courts or to fulfil administrative tasks.

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<sup>72</sup> Bryn Jones, *Bilingual Education in Wales: the allocation of two languages for teaching and learning* (<http://bilingualism.bangor.ac.uk/people/documents/BilingualEducationinWales.pdf>).

<sup>73</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.177

<sup>74</sup> Welsh language – Data and results from different census about the number of Welsh speakers in Wales ([www.clickonwales.org/wp-content/uploads/5\\_Factfile\\_Language.pdf](http://www.clickonwales.org/wp-content/uploads/5_Factfile_Language.pdf)).

<sup>75</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.177

<sup>76</sup> Welsh Language Act 1967 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/66/contents/enacted>).

It is worth noting that in 1963, that is to say one year after the creation of the Welsh Language Society, the *Election Act* was passed in Parliament. This act allowed ballot papers in Welsh.<sup>77</sup>

Even though it was a victory for the Welsh Language Society, the passing of the Welsh Language Act in 1967 did not mean that its fight was over. During the following years and throughout the 1970's, the Society campaigned for bilingualism on signposts and road signs. So far, they had all been exclusively in English.

Even though the Society led regular campaigns to put pressure on the British government, some less official actions were led to protest more “actively”, but also less legally, against signs in English only. Indeed, from 1969 onwards, many road signs were taken out or painted in green (the colour of Wales) in protest against the domination of the English language.

In 1969 and in 1974, the Welsh Language Society once again obtained what it had fought for and the first signposts and road signs in both English and Welsh were placed in Wales.

In 1979, a real trial of strength began between Wales and the British newly-elected Conservative government. Led by Margaret Thatcher, the Conservatives won the 1979 General elections and one of the things they had promised to do in case of victory was to create a Welsh-language television channel.

But, after their victory, the Conservatives went back on what they had promised to the Welsh, arguing that Welsh nationalism was losing of its strength and influence.

This of course angered the Welsh population deeply, and the reactions that followed clearly showed to what extent the creation of that Welsh-language channel was of importance for Welsh people.

The following year, in 1980, about two thousand Welsh citizens refused to pay the TV licence fee in protest against the government's refusal to create that Welsh-language channel. Even more determined, former president of *Plaid Cymru* Gwynfor Evans threatened to go on a hunger strike if the promise of creating a Welsh-language TV channel was not kept by the Conservative government.

This situation lasted for a couple of months during which the situation between Wales and the British government was rather tense. By September 1981, Gwynfor Evans addressed a speech to thousands of activists in order to maintain their determination. Soon after, the government had no choice but to yield, and by the end of 1982, the Welsh Four Channel (S4C) was created.<sup>78</sup>

In spite of all those victories for the Welsh language, it still was not on an equal footing – at least as far as its official and public statuses were concerned – with English just yet.

Another step towards this equality was taken in 1993 with the Welsh Language Act of 1993 which includes even more laws and rules concerning the status of the Welsh language than the Welsh Language Act of 1967 we just mentioned.

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<sup>77</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.178

<sup>78</sup> John Davies, *A history of Wales* (Penguin Adult; January 2007) p.667

One of the major changes brought by the enforcement of this act was the obligation for all organisations in the public sector to treat both English and Welsh as official languages having both the same status and giving both the same rights to those who speak them indistinctly.

The first part of the act is the Welsh Language Board, which was aimed at promoting the use of the Welsh language and at making provisions for approval of Welsh language schemes which follow the Board.<sup>79</sup> Very recently, on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, the Board was abolished.

Today, the Welsh Language Act of 1993 has lost much of its importance as most of its powers have been transferred to the Welsh Language Commissioner.<sup>80</sup>

We will go back later in this essay to the role of the Welsh Language Commissioner and to the institutions that give to the Welsh language its present status and importance.

Now that we have seen how the Welsh language has evolved from time immemorial until present days, it is rather clear that the history of the language has always been deeply linked to the history of the country. Wales seems to have built its very existence upon its unique identity and culture, and one, if not the, element which represents a large part of the nation's cultural heritage is its language.

As a consequence, if we want to grasp the importance and the role the Welsh language has played and still plays in Wales's cultural independence, it might be interesting to take a closer look at this particular language to try and see to what extent it differentiates itself from other languages.

## *II – The Welsh language's specificities*

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First of all, it must be noted that the Welsh language is an analytic language. Its structure is based on syntax, that is to say it is the order in which words are put that determines the grammatical relationships between the elements of the sentence. In modern Welsh, grammar relationships between elements of a sentence are very often expressed through prepositions, and the meaning depends on the syntactic order.

As we have seen previously in this essay, Welsh derived from Brythonic languages which were considered as synthetic idioms. A synthetic language uses “add-ons”, prefixes and suffixes added up to a word instead of

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<sup>79</sup> Welsh Language Act of 1993 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/38>).

<sup>80</sup> About the Welsh language Act 1993

(<http://www.welshlanguagecommissioner.org/English/Law/welshlanguageact1993/Pages/homewelshlanguageact1993.aspx>).

using prepositions, for instance, to link two words and two meanings.<sup>81</sup> Another particularity of Welsh is that there is no letter *j* in its alphabet.

## Welsh syntax

Welsh's syntax works according to the canonical order *subject – verb – object*. It is different from English whose order is, just like in French, *subject – verb – object*.<sup>82</sup>

	Verb	Subject	Direct object	Prepositional phrase	Adverb
Mi	rodde	i	lyfr da	i dad	Eleri ddoe
(particle)	<i>gave</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>book good</i>	<i>to father</i>	<i>Eleri yesterday</i>
<i>I gave Eleri's father a good book yesterday.</i>					

This is an example of the structure of a basic Welsh sentence compared to an English sentence. The first element that is quite different from English is the fact that the verb is put before the subject. Moreover, the adjective *da* (*good*) is put after the noun *lyfr* (*book*), when the adjective always goes before the noun in English.

But Welsh is syntactically freer than English if we consider the possibility a Welsh speaker has to change the order of words in a sentence to put the element he wishes to put the stress on at the beginning.

In English, in most cases the speaker will have to orally stress the sound of the important element in order to put the emphasis on it.<sup>83</sup>

As for nouns, the way they work is almost identical to English. Determiners precede nouns while adjectives, as we have just seen, go after them.

What must be taken into account is the existence of two “versions” of the Welsh language:

A colloquial one, which is used for informal writing and for speech only, and a literary one used in official texts and literature, for instance.

Among the differences we can notice between those two versions of the language, the main one is about grammatical tenses.

- The first tense is *yn*, the present tense, which can be compared to the Present Simple in English. It is used to speak of daily actions and is constructed with the verb *bod* (*to be*).
- Then comes *wedi*, which is to some extent similar to the Present Perfect in English as far as its meaning and use is concerned.

<sup>81</sup> Cennard Davies, *The Welsh Language* (Y Lolfa; 2006).

<sup>82</sup> Gareth King, *Modern Welsh: A Comprehensive Grammar* (Routledge; 2nd edition - 19 December 2002) p.15

<sup>83</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.214



- Finally come the “inflected tenses”, which do not require the verb/auxiliary *bod*. They include the equivalents of the English Preterit, Conditional and Future (if the Conditional and Future in English cannot be considered as real tenses since they are built with modals, they are full grammatical tenses in Welsh). As for continuous tenses, the Welsh language makes no distinction between them and normal tenses.<sup>84</sup>

## Welsh morphology

What characterises the Welsh language’s morphology the most is probably the consonant mutation phenomenon. All insular Celtic languages share that characteristic and it may be one of the major difficulties to a person trying to learn Welsh.

The consonant mutation phenomenon consists in the changing of the first consonant of a word according to the grammatical context. Gareth King explains that Welsh has three mutations<sup>85</sup>: the soft mutation, the nasal mutation, and the aspirate mutation which are written as follows:

<b>Initial consonant</b>	<b>Soft mutation</b>	<b>Nasal mutation</b>	<b>Aspirate mutation</b>
<b>p</b>	b	mh	ph
<b>t</b>	d	nh	th
<b>c</b>	g	ngh	ch
<b>b</b>	f	m	
<b>d</b>	dd	n	
<b>g</b>	∅	ng	
<b>m</b>	f		
<b>ll</b>	l		
<b>rh</b>	r		

An empty cell means that there is no change.

King also gives us examples of words like the word *carreg* (*stone*) which becomes *y garreg* (*the stone*) when the determiner *y* is used, *fy ngharreg* (*my stone*) or *ei charreg* (*her stone*), each time because of the determiner or the pronoun preceding the noun.<sup>86</sup>

Concerning the differences between colloquial and literary Welsh, what is the most significant difference is probably the use of tenses in their continuous form, that is to say the structures built around the

<sup>84</sup> Welsh verbs (<http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Welsh/Verbs>).

<sup>85</sup> Gareth King, *Modern Welsh: A Comprehensive Grammar* (Routledge; 2nd edition - 19 December 2002) p.14

<sup>86</sup> Same as above, p.15

verb *bod*. Colloquial Welsh tends to use these forms of tenses much more than literary Welsh, often not making the distinction from simple tenses.<sup>87</sup>

## Welsh phonology and pronunciation

It might be interesting when studying the phonological system of the Welsh language to do it by comparison with the English phonological system. We will try to do the same as for the way each language is pronounced and spoken.

First of all, Welsh is a stressed language, which means that unlike a French speaker for instance, a Welsh speaker has to stress a certain syllable of the words he speaks. Even though in Old Welsh words were generally stressed on the ultimate syllable, this is no longer the case in modern Welsh where it is the penultimate syllable which must be stressed.

There are, though, as in most languages, exceptions to this rule. The word *Cymraeg* (*Wales*), for example, must be stressed on its last syllable. It is also worth noting that it was, among other things, that change from the ultimate to the penultimate syllable which marked the shift from Old Welsh to Middle Welsh.<sup>88</sup>

Concerning Welsh consonants and their pronunciation, we must first of all mention that the letters *k*, *x*, *z*, *q*, *v* and *j* do not belong to the Welsh alphabet.

The *k* letter is replaced by the letter *c* which also sounds like /k/ and never like /s/. The *x* sound is created by the combination *cs*, and as for the letter *z*, it is not required as this sound does not exist in Welsh.<sup>89</sup>

But if some English letters do not exist in the Welsh alphabet, there are some letters which are specific to it. They are called digraphs. A digraph is “a combination of two letters representing one sound”.<sup>90</sup> In Welsh, digraphs are *ch*, *dd*, *ff*, *ng*, *ll*, *ph*, *si* and *th*. They all are genuine letters with quite their own sounds. All those digraphs are considered as separate letters except for *ng* and *si*.

As for the other Welsh consonants, they sound just like they do in English. So the differences are:

- The *c* sound in Welsh sounds like the English *c* in, for example, the word *car*. It never sounds like the English *c* in *acid*.
- The *dd* letter sounds like the *th* sound in *the*. It corresponds to /ð/ in the International Phonetic Alphabet.
- The Welsh *f* letter sounds like the English *v* (/v/).
- *Ff* or *ph* sound like the English *f* (/f/).
- The letter *g* sounds like the English *g* in *give*, not like in *age* (/g/).
- *Ng* sounds like *ng* in English: /ŋ/.

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<sup>87</sup> Heini Gruffudd, *The Welsh learner's dictionary* (Y Lolfa ; 2007) p.12

<sup>88</sup> Briony Williams, *The phonetic manifestation of stress in Welsh* (Edinburgh Research Archive; 1999 - <http://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/1033>) p.1 – 5.2.1.2

<sup>89</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.213

<sup>90</sup> “Digraph” on Oxford Dictionaries (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/digraph>).

- *Th* in Welsh also sounds like /θ/, as in *think* in English.
- The letter *r* is one of the major differences between Welsh and English as it sounds nothing like the English /r/ but like the trilled /R/ we can find in French for example.
- The letter *ch* sounds like /x/ as in the Scottish word *loch*.
- Finally, the letter *ll* is specific to the Welsh language. It is a voiceless lateral fricative sound represented in the IPA as /ɬ/.

Being considered as vowels in Welsh, *v* and *w* will be examined in the next part.<sup>91</sup>

Welsh vowels are very often clearly and completely pronounced; they are not partly swallowed because of the surrounding consonants as it is often the case in English, for example.

Vowels can be either short or long in Welsh, depending on the consonant they are placed before.

Welsh vowels are:

- The letter *a* which can be either short or long, pronounced /æ/ when short or /ɑ:/ when long.
- *I* which can be pronounced either /i/ when short or /i:/ when long.
- *E* can be the short sound /e/ or the longer sound /eɪ/.
- The same goes with *O* which can be pronounced either /ɒ/ or /ɔ:/.
- *U* is similar to the letter *I* in Welsh, except in Northern Wales where it is spoken more like a guttural /i:/.
- *W*, which is a vowel in Welsh, sounds like /ʊ/ or /u:/.
- *Y* is also similar to the sounds of the letter *I*. Sometimes it may also be pronounced as a sound close to /ʌ/.<sup>92</sup>

All those sounds can sometimes be quite different from English ones. Moreover, as we have seen, there are letters which only exist in Welsh, some of which requiring practice from a non-native speaker. We have also seen rules such as the mutation phenomenon or the stressing of words which differentiate from English too. But if differences exist between Welsh and English, there are also differences within the Welsh language itself depending on where and by whom it is spoken.

### About Welsh dialects

There are some differences between the Welsh language spoken in Northern Wales and the one spoken in the Southern part of the country. Those differences are mainly perceptible in spoken Welsh and encompass differences in vocabulary, but also in pronunciation and even in the use of grammar.

Even though we will not go into details about those differences, it is worth bearing them in mind as there is

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<sup>91</sup> Cardiff University Website resources (<http://www.cs.cf.ac.uk/fun/welsh/Lesson01.html>).

<sup>92</sup> Gareth King, *Modern Welsh: A Comprehensive Grammar* (Routledge; 2nd edition - 19 December 2002) p.11

also a difference between those two regions of Wales concerning the use of the English language.

We cannot say any more that Welsh is a language associated with the rural world whereas English is tied to modernity and thus much more widespread than Welsh in, for example, the capital city of Cardiff. Nevertheless, the idea that English is linguistically superior to Welsh still exists whereas it has been proven that a language cannot be judged superior nor inferior to another.<sup>93</sup>

There is no clear divide separating the different versions of spoken Welsh, nor there is a clear divide between the social classes supposed to speak English or Welsh, but we will focus more deeply on that matter later on.

The Welsh language has kept much of its Celtic origins throughout time. It is undoubtedly one of today's most complete, rich and structured heir of Celtic languages which were spoken on the British Isles millenniums ago. Being derived mainly from Celtic dialects, it contains many differences from English which itself contains many linguistic elements taken from the languages the Romans, the Saxons and the Normans were speaking when they, in turn, invaded Britain.

During centuries, beginning with the Laws in Wales Act in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, England has tried hard to make Wales a full part of its kingdom, a part which would share the same values, customs, traditions and the same language: English. But despite all that, Wales managed to keep its unique culture alive, and this is one explanation for the fact that the Welsh people are still so proud of its culture.

We are now going to see how today's Wales perceives the Welsh language, what it represents to the Welsh people, and what has recently been done – or undone – to protect this precious linguistic heritage.

### *III – Status of the Welsh language today*

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On 13 February 1962, *Plaid Cymru*'s founder Saunders Lewis gave, as we saw earlier, his famous speech on the radio about the future of the Welsh language. He believed Welsh would disappear if nothing was done for its survival. Today, about only 20% of the population of Wales are Welsh speakers.

In January 2012, a poll in Wales asked 1000 people, both Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers, if they thought things needed to be done in order to protect the Welsh language and to ensure that it would not disappear.<sup>94</sup> 56% of non-Welsh speakers answered they thought the language needed further improvements,

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<sup>93</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.215

<sup>94</sup> BBC online documents, *January 2012 Language Survey*

([http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/southeast/images/pdf/2012\\_02\\_13\\_languagesurvey.pdf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/southeast/images/pdf/2012_02_13_languagesurvey.pdf)).

and about 60% of Welsh speakers answered the same thing. Out of them all, 72% think it is through education that the survival of the Welsh language can be secured.

What is even more interesting is the part represented by those who think Welsh should be optional at school, and the part represented by those who think it should be taught to all Welsh pupils. Indeed, while 55% of Welsh speakers think learning Welsh should be compulsory for all children, 56% of non-Welsh speakers think children should have the choice between learning Welsh or not.<sup>95</sup>

Now even though there are different points of view concerning the future of the Welsh language as something of more importance than mere relics from the past, the language has gained unprecedented status and an influence. There might be less Welsh speakers than ever but the language has managed to survive, becoming a well-structured language with a large amount of vocabulary and quite a decent amount of literary works in Welsh.

### Welsh's official status

As we have seen previously, the *Welsh Language Act* in 1967 gave an official status to the Welsh language which could be used in courts and public administrations again. More recently, in 1993, the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed a new *Welsh Language Act*.

This new act was still one of the results of the campaigns led by *Cymdeithas yr Iaith*, the Welsh Language Society, which had fought for decades in order to protect and preserve the Welsh language. A sentence found within the act itself, in the section defining Welsh language scheme, could sum up the changes it brought: “in the course of public business and the administration of justice, so far as is reasonably practicable, the Welsh and English languages are to be treated on the basis of equality”.<sup>96</sup>

The first part of the new act is made of the Welsh Language Board. It is a statutory board whose duty was the promotion of the use of Welsh and making sure that any of the decisions taken in order to do so would be compatible with other legislations.

In 2004, the board was abolished as many of its prerogatives had been transferred to the new Welsh Assembly created in 1998. Quite recently, on 31 March 2012, the Welsh Language Commissioner was created and the powers and duties of the board were transferred to that person working under the Welsh Government.<sup>97</sup>

The second part of the *Welsh Language Act 1993* consists in the Welsh language scheme. This part of the act explains the rules and procedures required in order to set up a scheme aiming at the promotion of the Welsh language.

But this act gave all those powers to the Secretary of State for Wales. In 1998, with the beginning of

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<sup>95</sup> BBC News Wales, *Welsh language status needs to be improved, BBC survey suggests* (13 February 2012; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-16985298>).

<sup>96</sup> *Welsh Language Act 1993* (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/38/part/II>).

<sup>97</sup> Welsh Language Board; archives of the website (<http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20120330000810/http://www.byig-wlb.org.uk/english/about/Pages/index.aspx>).

the Devolution process and the creation of the Welsh Assembly, all those powers and more were devolved to the National Assembly for Wales.

## The National Assembly for Wales

It has been more than ten years from now since the Devolution process began to materialize. Just like Scotland, Wales felt the need for more autonomy and more independence as for matters which concerned the Welsh people exclusively and directly. What led to the process of Devolution could be summarized in one question: Why is it the Parliament of the United Kingdom in London which takes decisions about matters only Welsh people are concerned with?

The *Government of Wales Act*, passed in 1998, lists all the powers which have been devolved to the Welsh Assembly; it was passed following a referendum in 1997 asking the Welsh people whether or not they wanted the creation of a Welsh Assembly which would have devolved powers. Here is the list of the fields in which Wales is autonomous:

- education
- health
- local government
- transport
- planning
- economic development
- social services
- culture
- Welsh language
- environment
- agriculture and rural affairs.

Also, the role of the Welsh Government is to:

- make decisions on matters regarding these areas, for Wales as a whole;
- develop policies and implement them;
- propose Welsh laws (Assembly Bills).<sup>98</sup>

So we can see that the National Assembly for Wales has been responsible for all matters related to culture of Wales and to the Welsh language since its creation. This was an important fact, for it is the first time in its history that Wales has some official control over policies concerning and impacting its culture and the Welsh language.

Since the creation of the Assembly, the *Government of Wales Act 2006* was passed and brought

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<sup>98</sup> Welsh Government Official Website (<http://wales.gov.uk/about/organisationexplained/responsiblefor/?lang=en>).

changes to the constitution of the Welsh government. This act brought a parliamentary-type structure to the Assembly which was heavily criticised, especially by Welsh nationalist party *Plaid Cymru*. Concerning the culture of Wales and the Welsh language, no institutional changes happened until the new legislation in 2010 and the appointment of a Welsh Language Commissioner.

## The Welsh Language Commissioner

One of the major changes concerning the institutions in charge of matters related to official languages and of the promotion of the Welsh language is the very recent appointment of the Welsh Language Commissioner. This decision was taken on 31 March 2012 and it marked the end of the Welsh Language Board which was part of the *Welsh Language Act 1993*.

It is Meri Huws who is the current and first Welsh Language Commissioner, she was appointed by the Welsh government; Meri Huws used to be in the chair of the Welsh Language Board until it was abolished. Her role, among others, is to enforce the Welsh Language Measure 2011 passed in 2011 which replaced the 1993 *Welsh Language Act*. One of her main roles is the promotion of the Welsh language.<sup>99</sup>

The main roles of the Welsh Language Commissioner are:

- Promoting the use of the Welsh language
- Facilitating the use of the Welsh language
- Working towards ensuring that the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English language by imposing duties on some organizations to comply with standards relating to the Welsh language
- Conducting inquiries into matters relating to the Commissioner's functions
- Investigating interference with the individual's freedom to use the Welsh language<sup>100</sup>

We may now wonder how the schemes defined by Meri Huws and her co-workers are welcomed by the Welsh public opinion. Indeed, measures aiming at the promotion of the Welsh language necessarily have a cost, and it might not be to the liking of everybody to allocate amounts of public money to cultural projects.

Paul Murphy, a former Welsh Secretary and now a Labour MP in the Welsh Assembly, said: "I will be submitting evidence to the new Welsh Language Commissioner Meri Huws, asking her to postpone any plans to increase language regulation for private companies and public bodies until we are out of this recession".<sup>101</sup>

As a Labour MP, he underlines the fact that he totally supports the actions undertaken by the Welsh

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<sup>99</sup> BBC News Wales, *Language commissioner takes over as Welsh Language Board comes to an end* (2 April 2012; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-17577371>).

<sup>100</sup> Welsh Language Commissioner's website (<http://www.welshlanguagecommissioner.org/english/Pages/Home.aspx>).

<sup>101</sup> Martin Shipton in WalesOnline, *Paul Murphy MP warns against 'excessive' spending on Welsh language schemes* (23 May 2012; <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2012/05/23/paul-murphy-mp-warns-against-excessive-spending-on-welsh-language-schemes-91466-31027788/>).

Language Commissioner in order to promote the language, but he points out the fact that in those times of financial crisis and recession, public money should be spent on “more important” sectors.

For instance, he believes it would be wiser to allocate more money to public sectors such as health or education. As an example of the amount of money which ought to be spent on the schemes of the Welsh Language Commissioner, Paul Murphy believes that “the £400,000 plan for meeting translations will simply not be understood by the Welsh people”<sup>102</sup> when times are so hard financially and economically.

For Meri Huws’s plans aim at the creations of standards that all major public sector bodies and some companies receiving more than £400,000 a year in public money – hospitals, administrations, etc. – will have to comply with. Organisations and companies which would not comply could even be given a £5,000 fine.<sup>103</sup>

If the Welsh Language Commissioner considers it a priority, allocating money to the promotion of the Welsh language does not seem to please everybody in Wales.

To give a non-political example, the British Medical Association complained about the fact that priority should not be given to the Welsh language as forcing hospitals and healthcare centres to recruit Welsh-speaking staff would make it even more difficult for them to recruit. The consultation period during which those measures are discussed will end in August 2012, so there is still time left before common ground is found.

## Fighting for Welsh on TV

If there is a vivid debate on whether “large” amounts of public money should be spent on the promotion of the Welsh language in times of financial crisis, there is a debate just as vivid concerning the 20-years-old Welsh-speaking TV channel S4C.

In July 2010, the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which accounts for most of S4C’s budget, decided that the budget of S4C would be cut by one quarter over the four following years, that is to say over the 2010-2014 period.<sup>104</sup> S4C’s budget had been of about £100 million a year until 2011, when it was reduced by 6%; the same 6% cut happened in 2012 and will also happen in 2013 and 2014.

A vivid debate ensued from this governmental decision. If these cuts are the consequences of the financial crisis, what worries the most Welsh nationalists and Welsh speakers is the fact that with less money, S4C is going to have to keep broadcasting good quality programmes. If there should be a decrease in the quality of the shows and programmes broadcasted on S4C, people in Wales could lose interest in the Welsh language as programmes in Welsh would not match the quality of programmes in English. As the Welsh Liberal Democrat heritage spokesperson Eleanor Burnham puts it, “S4C must ensure that the quality and

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<sup>102</sup> Same as above.

<sup>103</sup> News Wales, *Welsh language plan for services unveiled by commissioner Meri Huws* (17 May 2012; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-18103982>).

<sup>104</sup> BBC News Wales, *S4C budget to be 'cut by quarter'* (23 July 2010 ; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-10739166>).



standard of Welsh language programming are not affected”.<sup>105</sup>

For the number of viewers of S4C programmes was about 500,000 viewers per week in 2009, and the channel’s share of all viewers in Wales the same year was 2.1%, which is not a very large part. In March 2010, a report in the Western Mail claimed that almost 200 shows broadcasted on S4C in a three-week period (out of about 900 programmes) had less than 1,000 viewers.

Such figures may be interpreted as a justification for the cuts in S4C budget, but not according to S4C chairman Walter Jones. According to him, those low-audience programmes are pre-school shows, and children under the age of four are not taken into account in the measures which led to those figures. Moreover, and it is the most important to him, “the contribution S4C makes to the Welsh language, Welsh culture and the Welsh economy has to be considered on a much broader basis than individual statistical information which can be misleading and misconstrued”.<sup>106</sup>

Still about those who stood and still stand against the cuts in S4C budget, a lawyer claimed that the repayments of a part of the grant from the government (which is the way through which the budget cuts are planned to be done) are illegal. According to Clive Lewis QC, S4C cannot make annual voluntary repayments to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for this is not allowed by the current legislation. Both S4C and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport acknowledged that fact and admitted “it required primary legislation to change that”.<sup>107</sup>

## Welsh in the written press

There has never been a daily newspaper in Welsh language, although projects to do so were initiated. In Wales, several papers in Welsh language do exist, but they are all regional newspapers, and very few of them are published daily. As the Welsh language is more widespread in some regions of Wales, as we have seen and will see again in more details, local newspapers which deal with local events are more likely to fit their readers.

But one of the most sold papers in Welsh is *Y Cymro*, whose current circulation is estimated at 4000 copies. It has been published weekly since 1932 and is the only national newspaper in Welsh language. It deals with all kinds of issues and events: politics, economics, culture, sports, etc.<sup>108</sup>

If 4000 copies sold every week are a relatively low number and if such a paper cannot compare with other English language weekly papers, *Y Cymro* is another proof, another symbol along with S4C that the Welsh language is still lively. The Welsh Language Society has always feared that Welsh would become an out-dated language relegated to the role of relics from the past.

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<sup>105</sup> Same as above.

<sup>106</sup> BBC News, *'Zero viewers' for Welsh TV shows* (11 March 2010 ; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/8562053.stm>).

<sup>107</sup> The Guardian Online, *S4C cuts would be illegal, says lawyer* (17 September 2010 ; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/sep/17/s4c-cuts-dcms>).

<sup>108</sup> Aberystwyth University, *Mercator Media Monographs — The Welsh Language in the Media* (2006 ; <http://www.aber.ac.uk/~merwww/images/MonograffCymraeg231006.pdf>).

The Society, along with other associations and nationalist party *Plaid Cymru*, has done much to ensure that the Welsh language would have a bright future. It is partly thanks to these associations and parties that things like the Welsh Language Acts and more recently the Welsh Language Commissioner office were created in a will to promote the Welsh language.

# BEING WELSH, SPEAKING WELSH

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Wales's history, as we have seen, has always been tightly linked to its culture and language. Now that we have studied the specificities of the Welsh language and that we have had a look at all the efforts that have been made and are still made every day, we may begin to consider the special link between this unique culture and the strong nationalist feeling that exists in many Welshmen's hearts.

But in order to study this link in more details, we still need to have an overview of those who embody the Welsh culture and language for they are those who keep them alive: the Welsh speakers. Through an analysis of the evolution of those who have been Welsh speakers through time, we might be able to have a clearer understanding of the present situation concerning the "health" of the Welsh language. We will try to determine the profiles of those who are Welsh speakers – what social classes they belong to, the regions they live in, etc.

This will lead us to the role and influence of the Welsh language outside Wales, that is to say in the other nations of the United Kingdom but also throughout the world. We will see where other than in Wales the Welsh language is still spoken, but also how it is perceived in England in particular, as English has always been a threat to the very existence of the Welsh language. If a determined minority in Wales still clings to the Welsh language as it represents an element of pride to them, what is the opinion of the English and of the Welsh citizens who do not speak a word of Welsh?

Finally, we will use all these elements to have a better understanding of the link that exists between the Welsh culture and language and the importance of nationalism in Wales. The Welsh nationalist party *Plaid Cymru* has always fought to protect Wales from, among other things, decisions taken by the British government which could jeopardize the nation's integrity. For most of *Plaid Cymru*'s claims throughout its existence within the British political system have been about preserving Wales's culture, customs, way of life and language. It seems that it is this desire to preserve Wales's uniqueness that led to nationalism and which led it on the road towards devolution; we will see to what extent.

## *I – The Welsh speakers*

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### Some figures: The evolution of the number of Welsh speakers

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the victory of English over the Welsh language, or at least, so it seemed. The Welsh language became spoken less and less during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at such a dramatic rate that everybody thought the language would be extinct by the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

And yet, it is by the end of that same century with the census of 1981 that a change in that trend could be noticed for the first time. Indeed, in 1901, one of the first censuses about the Welsh language in Wales, about 50% of the population of Wales could speak Welsh; in 1991, only 18.5% could speak it.

But the census of 1981 was remarkable because even though the portion of Welsh speakers in Wales kept decreasing, there were more young children (aged between 3 and 14) speaking Welsh than ten years before. This clearly showed that educational measures aiming at promoting the teaching of the Welsh language were proving efficient.

As a consequence of this, in 2001, for the first time in a century, the total percentage of Welsh speakers in Wales stopped decreasing. It had dropped to 18.5% in 1991 and then increased during the 1990's to reach 20.8% in 2001.<sup>109</sup> In 2001, the estimated number of inhabitants in Wales was 2,903,085<sup>110</sup>, so there were about 600,000 people who could speak Welsh in Wales.

Or so they said. There is a sort of reluctance of many people to admit that they do speak Welsh. The reasons for that are various:

- Their knowledge of Welsh is only informal, or they can only speak it and/or understand it when spoken.
- They consider the Welsh dialect they can speak as an idiom too different from “real Welsh” which would be spoken only in the more traditional north-western part of the nation.
- Some people consider it as a dying language, a mere heritage from the past that does not belong to the modern societies we live in.<sup>111</sup>
- They fear that because of the laws granting the same official status English has to Welsh, they will receive official documents in Welsh and not any more in the English they are used to.

But if the total number of Welsh speakers rose between 1991 and 2001 thanks to children who were taught Welsh at school, it seems that it is not enough anymore.

The Welsh Language Board quite recently published a report showing that even though there are a steadily increasing number of Welsh learners, both adults and children, it is not enough anymore today. Indeed, according to that report, the number of Welsh speakers who die each year (about 6,500) and who move away every year (about 5,000) is superior to the number of new Welsh speakers who learn the language.<sup>112</sup>

Now when we speak of “Welsh speakers”, we are referring to people who possess at least some skills in Welsh. Some may only understand it and sometimes read it while others may have a complete knowledge of the language that they were able to acquire at school or thanks to their parents who passed on the language

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<sup>109</sup> Cennard Davies, *The Welsh Language* (Y Lolfa; 2006).

<sup>110</sup> Census 2001 First Results on Population in Wales - Sept 2002 (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/census-2001-first-results-on-population-in-wales/first-results-on-population-in-wales/first-results-on-population-in-wales-.pdf>).

<sup>111</sup> Steven Morris in the Guardian, *Welsh is a wonderful gift': speakers of the language relish new support* (8 April 2012 ; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/apr/08/wales-language-commissioner-welsh-speakers>).

<sup>112</sup> BBC Wales, *Report says Welsh language 'losing 3,000 people a year'* (14 February 2012 ; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-17020261>).

to them. "It's a conscious decision to pass on the language,"<sup>113</sup> says Brieg Powell, a first language Welsh speaker. So would the perpetuation of the Welsh language be a patriotic and nationalist act rather than a natural linguistic process?

It seems that even though during the last two decades the Welsh language has been taught more and more in schools, ensuring that it was passed on to new generations, the number of Welsh speakers in Wales is not yet sufficient to change the way the Welsh see the language. Indeed, many people inside and outside Wales see Welsh as a dying heritage, no more. As a consequence, those concerned about the survival of this ancient language speak Welsh to their children and some send them to Welsh-speaking schools as we will see.

But we must bear in mind that even those for whom Welsh is the first language can speak English. We can say today that "there are almost certainly no monoglot Welsh speakers"<sup>114</sup>, all Welsh speakers also master English. As a result, since English is by far the most widespread and spoken language in Wales, it is very tempting even for those who speak Welsh fluently to use English in their everyday life. Wales needs to improve the status of the Welsh language, as Saunders Lewis had predicted it, in order to make it more appealing, especially to the younger ones who are the future of the language.

The role played by Welsh language TV channels like S4C or by newspapers in Welsh is vital. The media need to offer original and exclusive content in Welsh to the population in order to stimulate the development and use of the language. For why would someone bother learning Welsh if all the things and contents that he/she likes are also available in English?

But on the whole, the reforms aiming at giving all children the opportunity to learn Welsh in school played a major role, as we have seen, in reversing the trend and making the number of Welsh speakers in Wales increase for the first time in a century.

### The role of education

"During the last thirty years a revival of interest in language and Welshness has been reflected in the growth and development of Welsh medium education that has provided an opportunity for new generations to become Welsh speakers".<sup>115</sup> Indeed, during the 1960's, there was a growing demand from parents living in anglicised parts of Wales for schools where their children would be taught Welsh as long as English, and for schools where education would be entirely provided in Welsh language.

As a result, some LEAs (Local Education Authorities) created primary and secondary schools in the Northern part of the nation. Shortly after, as an example, the first bilingual secondary school in south Wales

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<sup>113</sup> Steven Morris in the Guardian, *'Welsh is a wonderful gift': speakers of the language relish new support* (8 April 2012 ; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/apr/08/wales-language-commissioner-welsh-speakers>).

<sup>114</sup> Geraint Jones, *History and Status of the Welsh Language* (24 September 1999; University of Oxford website: <http://www.cs.ox.ac.uk/people/geraint.jones/rhydychen.org/about.welsh/>).

<sup>115</sup> Mercator-Education, *The Welsh language in education in the UK* (2001; [http://www.mercator-research.eu/fileadmin/mercator/dossiers\\_pdf/welsh\\_in\\_uk.pdf](http://www.mercator-research.eu/fileadmin/mercator/dossiers_pdf/welsh_in_uk.pdf)).

was opened at Rhydfelen in the county of Glamorgan in 1962. As these schools met with success, institutions began to support the effort, which enabled Welsh-medium and bilingual schools to develop even more, with teaching capabilities as good as those of any other school.

“By the 1970s, Welsh-medium and bilingual education had become quite widely established”<sup>116</sup> wrote Dylan V. Jones and Marilyn Martin-Jones from the University of Wales Aberystwyth. They used a graph showing the evolution of GCSE and A-level examinations offered in Welsh from 1968 to 1995. Between 1970 and 1995, the number of candidates to GCSE or A-level examinations in Welsh went from 0 to about 16,000 for the GCSE and 1,600 for the A-level.

But the existence of many schools giving children the possibility to learn Welsh was not enough to account for such a rise in the numbers of pupils taking examinations in Welsh. It was the Education Act of 1980, which obliged LEAs to allow for parental choice of school, which changed things for many Welsh parents. From then on they could send their children to a Welsh-medium school if they wished to.

In 1986, another Education Act was passed and granted more autonomy to schools and LEAs concerning their budgets. As a consequence, schools began to aim at meeting the parents’ requirements in order to be the most attractive.

But the most significant change is probably the Education Reform Act of 1988. This act made Welsh a Core school Subject in Welsh-medium schools along with English, mathematics and science. As for all other schools in Wales, Welsh became a Foundation Subject that all pupils could learn from 5 to 16 years old.

Today, the teaching of Welsh and the teaching in Welsh language are even more developed in Wales:

- *Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin* are groups throughout Wales which are in charge of Welsh-medium education at the preschool level. They aim at helping young children develop through activities and games all in Welsh language. They do this voluntarily, only receiving public subsidies from the Welsh Office before the creation of the Assembly of Wales.
- Primary and secondary Welsh-medium schools can be divided into two categories:
  - *Traditional* Welsh-medium schools which can be found mostly in rural areas of Wales where inhabitants very often speak Welsh as their first language. They can sometimes be bilingual schools even though children usually learn English via the media.
  - *Designated* Welsh-medium schools. These schools can mostly be found in the anglicised parts of the nation. They can often teach the entire official curriculum in Welsh. Pupils attending these schools generally come from English-speaking homes and their parents wish that they learn Welsh at school.

Welsh-medium primary schools represented about 25% of primary schools in Wales in 2001, while Welsh-medium secondary schools represented about 23% of all secondary schools in Wales the same year.

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<sup>116</sup> Dylan V. Jones & Marilyn Martin-Jones, *Bilingual education and language revitalization in Wales: Past achievements and current issues* (University of Wales Aberystwyth; <http://dspace.trinity-cm.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/10412/121/1/Bilingual%20Ed.%20final%20version.pdf>).

But in spite of all these efforts made to keep the Welsh language alive, many teachers and parents are concerned about the Anglicisation of the secondary schools population. Indeed, if teenagers study in a school where they speak and use Welsh all day long, when they are outside or during a break, they tend to use English when speaking to their friends, etc. This, of course, is partially due to the omnipresence of the English language in the media, on TV and in their teenagers' everyday life.

In order to counter that trend, some teaching specialists argue that all school subjects should be taught through the medium of Welsh and that in some cases, this should be mandatory. Some disagree with this, arguing that pupils should be given the choice as when they reach higher education they will eventually have to study in English.

But on the whole the results of the educational policies are not bad. In 2001, 19.5% of Welsh children were placed in the "Welsh first language" whereas there were only 18.7% in 1991. This clearly corresponds to the rise of the number of Welsh speakers in Wales between 1991 and 2001 that we mentioned earlier in this essay.

As for higher education, most universities in Wales do teach the Welsh culture and language but not all of them have the same objectives. As a result, there are differences between them in terms of courses available in Welsh, and this has an influence on the number of Welsh-speaking students who attend each one of them.

The acts and reforms concerning education have played a major role in helping Welsh-medium schools develop in Wales. It is thanks to these preschools and primary and secondary schools that the number of people in Wales finally stopped decreasing. The question whether this is enough to enable the Welsh language to compete with English cannot be answered yet for only time will tell, but what we need to take into account is the fact that the influence and importance of the Welsh language is not the same depending on the region of Wales we take a look at. This is a fact we need to consider if we want to have a picture of today's Welsh speakers in Wales.

### The distribution of Welsh speakers in Wales

Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large part of Wales's inhabitants was constituted of Welsh speakers who were rather evenly distributed over the Welsh territory. Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially during the second half, the regions where one could find a relatively large number of Welsh speakers were the West and the North-West of Wales.<sup>117</sup>

However, "There are also more Welsh speakers in the cities and towns than in the countryside" says Peter Wynn Thomas, professor in Cardiff University. According to him, there are more Welsh speakers in Cardiff (about 32,000), Swansea (about 29,000) or in Rhondda-Cynon-Taf (about 28,000) than in rural Powys in Mid-Wales where the estimated number of Welsh speakers is about 26,000 people. But,

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<sup>117</sup> Census 2001 First Results on Population in Wales - Sept 2002 (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/census-2001-first-results-on-population-in-wales/first-results-on-population-in-wales/first-results-on-population-in-wales-.pdf>).



paradoxically, one is more likely to hear people speak Welsh in west Wales than in south-east Wales where there are more Welsh speakers.<sup>118</sup>

There is a simple explanation for this: About 69% of the population of Gwynedd in the north-west of Wales can speak Welsh, which represents 78,000 people.

Now if there is “only” 11% of the population of Cardiff who can speak Welsh, it nevertheless represents 84,000 people as the capital city of Cardiff alone is much more populated than the whole Gwynedd area.

So even though there are much more Welsh speakers in the south-eastern towns and cities of Wales than in the regions of the west/north-west, those Welsh speakers are less likely to meet and to use the Welsh language since they only account for a small percentage of the total city population. On the contrary, in the large region of Gwynedd, even though there are less people than in big southern cities, 69% of the inhabitants speak Welsh and are thus much more likely to speak it when communicating with each other on a daily basis.

Also, the fact that the Welsh speakers living in anglicised parts of Wales live in an “English-only universe” might discourage them from speaking Welsh even if they have the opportunity to do it. It must be very difficult indeed to keep the habit of speaking a language we speak only on rare occasions.

Now as we have seen, we need to make a difference between those who speak Welsh as their first language and who have learnt English via the media and those for whom English is the first language and who have learnt Welsh at school as a secondary language or with their parents.

We may guess that a person who speaks Welsh as his first language will feel more comfortable speaking it than someone who has learnt it at school. Moreover, a person who speaks Welsh as his first language will, in most cases, grant this language more importance whereas someone who has learnt it at school may consider Welsh as “just” a secondary language, a language deprived of real use as English is the language spoken everywhere.

It is mainly in the west and north-west of Wales that most of those who speak Welsh as their first language can be found today. It is commonly admitted today that there is a real divide between a Welsh-speaking part of Wales and an anglicised one. *Cymru Gymraeg* (which would be translated by Welsh Wales) refers to the western and north-western parts of Wales where the Welsh language is still used on a daily basis in order to communicate. The other half of Wales, *Cymru ddi Gymraeg* (Anglo-Wales) refers to the eastern and south-eastern parts of Wales where the population is largely anglicised and English is the only language used in people’s everyday life.<sup>119</sup>

We must bear in mind that in spite of these general facts and the conclusions we can draw from them, there are still, of course, many exceptions concerning the background of the Welsh speakers, especially that of those living in big cities like Cardiff or Swansea.

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<sup>118</sup> BBC Home, *Welsh today* by Prof. Peter Wynn Thomas (March 2007; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/multilingual/welsh.shtml>).

<sup>119</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.247

## The “Three-Wales model”

“The Three-Wales model” is the title of an article by Denis Balsom published in 1985. In this article, he presents Wales as a fragmented nation consisting of three social, political and cultural parts:

- The first part that he calls *Y Fro Gymraeg* (the Welsh-speaking country) encompasses the areas of Gwynedd, Dyfed and some of Powys and Clwyd. This part of Wales is, according to him, the most traditional one, where the Welsh language is still spoken a lot. Most *Plaid Cymru* voters live in these regions.
- The *Welsh Wales* part in the south (including the Gwent and Glamorgan valleys), where inhabitants are in majority Labour-friendly.
- Finally, he calls the third region *British Wales*, and according to him it stretches all over the eastern part of Wales, that is to say the frontier with England, and also includes the far south-west of Wales. In this part of Wales, hardly half of the population consider themselves as Welsh; many are British, not Welsh. Many inhabitants of these regions favour the Conservative party.<sup>120</sup>

This is another example of the tangible differences there are between some parts of the nation that cannot be denied. Even though today there may not be a clear and marked divide between them, there has long been differences which still exist today to some extent.

## Social background of the Welsh speakers

Not many sources concerning a possible between social classes and the Welsh language can be found, probably because of the diversity of social backgrounds Welsh speakers are from. It is difficult to draw conclusions and to define profiles among the Welsh speakers based only on their social classes. Nevertheless, it is rather a matter of perception which determines whether certain customs or some language are considered to be more “middle-class” or “working class”, etc.

Robin Mann, from Bangor University wrote: “[There is] a lack of confidence in non-Welsh speakers to use Welsh, and then there is danger perhaps that the language is going to be increasingly seen as a middle class language».<sup>121</sup> “I think [...] that there are more middle class Welsh speakers than middle class English speakers” he also writes. So, according to him, it is a lack of self-confidence concerning their knowledge of Welsh which hampers Welsh speakers by making them too scared to speak Welsh. People favouring Welsh-medium schools for their children would do it in order to give them a certain advantage, and this attitude would be “middle-class”.

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<sup>120</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.246

<sup>121</sup> Robin Mann, *Welsh speakers and Welsh language provision within the public sector* (July 2011; From the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research Website: [www.wiserd.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/WISERD\\_RRS\\_004.pdf](http://www.wiserd.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/WISERD_RRS_004.pdf)).

It may be chancy to draw clear conclusions and to analyse social profiles based on speculations and on some behaviours. Nevertheless, from my personal experience as a foreign language assistant in Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf in Cardiff, a Welsh-medium school teaching exclusively in Welsh, I have been able to come to some conclusions:

- “Designated”<sup>122</sup> Welsh schools like Glantaf tend to be elitist. There is a certain school level required from pupils wishing to study there. The rates of pupils passing the GCSE and the A-level exams are very high.
- Very often, the pupils and students I taught were from a rather highly-educated background, with many parents of my year 12 students who had done PhDs.
- Many of the pupils spoke Welsh as their first language, and about 70% of all those I asked spoke Welsh at home.
- If many speak Welsh at home, about 80% of them admit that when hanging out with their friends and as soon as they leave school, they tend to use English.

Even though this is not a thorough nor scientific study, I believe that we can say that many pupils and students attending Welsh-medium schools in anglicised areas of Wales come from rather highly educated backgrounds and that this is required in order to be aware of the importance of preserving the Welsh language. As we have seen, today the Welsh language is far from having the same influence and importance as English, especially for the younger ones, even though they are taught Welsh at school. The most attractive things, entertainments, shows in the media, etc. are in English, and as long as Welsh is not as appealing as English, it is the awareness of the Welsh speakers that their language needs to be preserved by being spoken that can save it from oblivion.

### What future for the Welsh language?

In order to ensure that the Welsh language will survive, several elements are required, and they are all inter-dependent.

In order for the Welsh language to exist, there must be Welsh speakers. This is a basic fact but a vital one, and the importance of the number of Welsh speakers in Wales has been highlighted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as their number kept decreasing. In order to ensure the survival of the Welsh language, the number of Welsh speakers must increase.

To achieve this objective, one solution has been set up from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, and that is the creation of Welsh-medium schools and preschools able to familiarize the younger ones with the Welsh

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<sup>122</sup> Dylan V. Jones & Marilyn Martin-Jones, *Bilingual education and language revitalization in Wales: Past achievements and current issues* (University of Wales Aberystwyth; <http://dspace.trinity-cm.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/10412/121/1/Bilingual%20Ed.%20final%20version.pdf>).

language. As we have seen, acts and reforms in education proved successful as an increase of the number of young children speaking Welsh was recorded in 2001.

Another complementary solution is designed to face the lack of interest in the Welsh language of younger generations. In order to ensure that there will be a future for it, the Welsh language needs to be as appealing and attractive as English, through the media mainly. “We need to be ambitious and think big as we look to harness the power of new media and technology to help ensure that the Welsh language thrives”, said the Minister responsible for the language, Leighton Andrews, in March 2012.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, the availability of more digital content, products and services in Welsh language is vital for the future of the language which depends on it.

For there is a need “to show non-Welsh speakers that it is a language worth learning”<sup>124</sup>, wrote Hywel Griffiths in *The Guardian* in 2007. The Welsh language is indeed often seen as rather backward by non-Welsh speakers, with no place in today’s modern world as it would not offer any benefit over English; so why bother learning it?

Paradoxically enough, the Welsh language needs to develop in order to increase the number of Welsh speakers.

Because learning it at school, even if this proved successful, is not enough. “They learn the language techniques in the class but they need to practice in the community”, says Iestyn ap Rhobert, an employee of a company specialized in adult learning in their work places.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, it is crucial that both children and adult learners have the opportunity to make use of the Welsh language outside the classroom. This is why TV channels like S4C or newspapers in Welsh are so important, especially for the Welsh speakers living in anglicised parts of Wales.

For in some regions of Wales, Gwynedd for instance, as the proportion of Welsh speakers is high, it is easier for a Welsh learner to practice the language on a daily basis. But in very anglicised cities like Cardiff, where Welsh speakers are a minority and where the Welsh culture has much less influence than the British/English culture, it is often difficult for Welsh learners to put what they learn into practice. As a consequence, they may get discouraged from learning Welsh as they see no immediate benefit they can draw from it; this is especially the case for teenagers.

Education has changed in a good way in Wales during the past couple of decades. Thanks to reforms and the creation of more Welsh-medium schools, the Welsh youth will keep learning Welsh either as their first or secondary language. But in order to enable those who are today’s children and teenagers to speak Welsh in their everyday life when they are adults – especially when they live in strongly anglicised regions of Wales – many efforts are still to be made.

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<sup>123</sup> *New media and technology vital to future of the Welsh language* on [wales.gov.uk](http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/educationandskills/2012/120315newmedia/?lang=en) (15 March 2012; <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/educationandskills/2012/120315newmedia/?lang=en>).

<sup>124</sup> Hywel Griffiths, *The Welsh language: past, present and future* (19 October 2007; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/oct/19/thewelshlanguagepastpresen>).

<sup>125</sup> Emyr Williams, *What Does the Future Hold for the Welsh Language* (14 February 2011; <http://www.exposureradio.org/2011/02/14/what-does-the-future-hold-for-the-welsh-language/>).

It is the role of media like TV channels and radio stations to offer appealing programmes in order to show there are benefits that can be drawn from the learning of the Welsh language.

Now that we have seen who the Welsh speakers are and what the Welsh language means to them, we may wonder what that language means to other peoples like the English people, and if it has any influence outside Wales.

## *II – Welsh outside Wales*

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In order to emerge as an independent cultural element just as good as English, the Welsh language had to be threatened by foreign influences. There can be no nationalist feelings nor patriotism if there is no external influence and culture to stand against.

### An external threat: ‘the treason of the Blue Books’

One of the first events which made the Welsh people aware of the danger their national culture and language were in and which led to the emergence of a strong identity willing to protect its uniqueness even abroad was the ‘treason of the Blue Books’. With this event, the Welsh people became aware of the cultural and linguistic threat coming from England which could erase all the culture of their own nation.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Wales had been incorporated into the British state, the British government asked that a report be made about the Welsh language and the consequences of it being used instead of English. A commission was thus set up to make a case for English-only education. It was the MP William Williams who had asked for it as he wanted to have an overview of the situation of the educational system in Wales.

For at the time, the Welsh Nonconformists who were in charge of teaching the Welsh people were hostile to any intervention of the British state in educational matters. There was thus a rivalry or rather a competition as we have already partly seen, between those Welsh-medium Nonconformist schools and Anglican schools teaching in English and following the English educational scheme.

The commission in charge of writing the report was constituted of three Anglican commissioners who interviewed 344 people asking them their opinion about education in Wales.

Only about one-third of those people were Nonconformists; the remaining two thirds were Anglican and, as a consequence, often hostile to Nonconformity.

As a result, the report delivered to William Williams in 1847 by the three commissioners was overwhelming. According to it, teachers were incompetent, classrooms unsuitable for teaching children, and the Welsh language heavily criticised:

“The Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales, and a manifold barrier to the progress and commercial prospects of the people. It is not easy to overcome its evil effects».<sup>126</sup>

The report consisted of three volumes and was published in the usual *blue books* format. Its publication led to several upheavals as many Welshmen felt scorned and despised. It was their Welsh pride that was hurt by this report where the worst cases were presented as very widespread and where criticisms against the Welsh culture, people and language were numerous.

It was the Anglican Church which was thus held responsible for this infamous report, and as a consequence relationships between Nonconformist and Anglican churches became even tenser. The influence of the Nonconformists managed to grow in Wales thanks to this episode since even more Welsh people joined those churches and schools which had come to Wales's defence.

For it was the state's role to “serve the nation in a subordinate position, strengthening every aspect of the nation's life,”<sup>127</sup> and with this episode known as “the treason of the Blue Books”, it became clear to many Welshmen that it was not what the British state was trying to do.

This was felt as treason because the state had tried to erase the Welsh nation in order to turn it into an English region where inhabitants would speak English and would share the English culture and customs. Moreover, trying to force the Welsh speakers to believe that the only way for them to get on in the world was through the English language was not appreciated at all by Wales's population.

With this event, Welshmen could feel even more that their culture and language were also threatened from outside. These culture and language they cherished really needed to be protected against external influences, in particular from England's. This led to the birth of a “national awareness”. Wales needed an external threat to develop a strong national identity.

For a long time, the English language had been believed to be superior to the Welsh one, and that is one reason why the British state has long tried to “culturally annex” Wales.

What about today? How is the Welsh language seen by those who live outside Wales? This language is the pride of the Welsh people, but what does it represent to the English today?

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<sup>126</sup> Excerpt from the report quoted by Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.115

<sup>127</sup> Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.114

## A prestigious or old-fashioned language?

With the Laws in Wales Acts, England incorporated Wales. Within a couple of generations, the Welsh aristocracy became completely anglicised, which resulted in an anglicised Welsh elite.

With their leaders turning their back on their native country, the Welsh people felt abandoned, sometimes even betrayed.

As a consequence, a Welsh inferiority complex began to grow. It resulted from the impression that the Welsh language and culture were inferior to the English's. Indeed, many members of the aristocracy or wealthy Welsh landowners who had moved to England, for instance, "deliberately forgot the language of their native land".<sup>128</sup>

For centuries, as we have seen, Welsh remained the language of the people who did not have much self-confidence due to the English cultural oppression and to the fact that English was presented as the only language which could give a better future in the industrializing world.

Today, we can say that this inferiority complex has almost completely disappeared. Hervé Abalain gives us some examples:

- The Welsh language is not only used in everyday life in traditional regions such as Gwynedd or Dyfed but also in several anglicised regions of Wales.
- Welsh speakers can attend religious offices in Welsh language in many churches.
- The Welsh language is spoken today by many intellectuals, high-ranking civil servants, ministers...

Also, Welsh speakers are proud of speaking this language and of carrying on their millennial culture.

All these signs are rather encouraging as the decrease in the number of Welsh speakers has been dramatic throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“[La langue galloise] n'est plus considérée comme la langue d'une société paysanne arriérée, même si le milieu rural reste le plus propice à son épanouissement». <sup>129</sup>

So it seems that the Welsh language has managed to rid itself of the backward, old-fashioned image it has long been associated with.

But is it so clear? Can we really say that the Welsh language has finally been accepted by everybody, especially the English, as an equal to the English language?

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<sup>128</sup> Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.101

<sup>129</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.180

A research led in 2009 along with a report commissioned by the Arts Council and Visit Wales showed some interesting data that need to be taken into account:

One of the first results of this study and one of the most interesting ones shows that some visitors from England felt excluded by the Welsh language. This is a very interesting point indeed as it implies that it would be better for everybody if the only language spoken in Wales was English. Would an English visitor say that he felt excluded by the French language when he visited Paris?

Another result of the study is that Wales is considered as “slightly old-fashioned” and the people “not friendly».<sup>130</sup>

These elements can be used to qualify the information brought to us by Hervé Abalain. Even though there are positive signs showing that the Welsh language is more and more used in Welsh speakers' everyday life, there are also negative signs.

Some Englishmen may still consider Wales as a full part of England and that it should be an English-speaking country only sharing the same culture as England.

### Is there an anti-Welsh attitude?

This attitude we just mentioned which is that of some Englishmen has always been criticised and firmly condemned by some of the most passionate defenders of the Welsh identity.

Some examples of what has been denounced as an anti-Welsh attitude are:

- “Eighteen Assembly Members, representing all four political parties, are calling for an end to what they say is "persistent anti-Welsh racism" in the UK media».<sup>131</sup> This was done in 2000 following several events such as the fact that in 1998 a Sunday Times journalist called the Welsh "*ugly, pugnacious little trolls*."<sup>132</sup> Even though the journalist was reported to police for this, many Welshmen are tired of such insulting behaviour disrespectful of their nation.
- The English TV personality Anne Robinson made incisive comments about the Welsh on a TV show in 2001, saying that she found them “irritating and annoying”.<sup>133</sup>

So can we say some English have an “anti-Welsh” attitude?

It appears that quite often the subjects of controversy are jokes made to entertain the audience or the readers. But sometimes those pranks are gratuitous, and those who say them openly show some sort of resentment concerning the Welsh people and the Welsh nation.

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<sup>130</sup> BBC News, Wales 'old fashioned' says study (9 November 2009; [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/wales/8349935.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/8349935.stm)).

<sup>131</sup> BBC News, UK/Wales: 'Anti-Welsh racism' protest on 2 February 2000 ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/wales/628747.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/628747.stm)).

<sup>132</sup> Same as above.

<sup>133</sup> BBC News, Entertainment: Robinson remarks 'not racist' on 16 April 2011 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1279679.stm>).



It all boils down to the question “is it politically correct?” which is not something we will discuss in this essay.

Speaking of an anti-Welsh attitude which would be true racism may be slightly exaggerated, but it cannot be denied that there are still today Englishmen who – probably convinced of some superiority of the English culture over the Welsh’ – who have a true animosity against Welshmen. As it is the case concerning xenophobic attitudes, the reasons motivating these behaviours are often numerous and varied.

### The Welsh language beyond Wales

If the Welsh language and culture are sometimes disliked by some within the United Kingdom, they are appreciated and shared by people thousands of miles away from Wales.

Indeed, during the British emigration to the New World, many Welshmen settled in America dreaming of a better future. By the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Welsh colonies were founded in what were to become the United States of America.

In Pennsylvania, Welsh Quakers settled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. William Penn, an English entrepreneur and philosopher, had promised them there could found a separate colony ruled by a local government whose culture and language could be exclusively Welsh. Even though that promise could not be kept, other colonies were created during the same period, even though most of these attempts failed.

Later, after the Civil War, 104 Welsh families moved from Pennsylvania to East Tennessee. They first worked as employees around and in the city of Knoxville before founding their own businesses which met with success (industrial companies for the most part).

Today, it is estimated that about 250 families are direct descendants from those 104 families in the region surrounding the city of Knoxville. These families perpetuate the Welsh traditions by, for instance, celebrating Saint David’s day.<sup>134</sup>

But it is probably in South America that the Welsh culture and language are the most present outside Wales. The Welsh colony *Y Wladfa Gymreig* is a Welsh settlement located in the far southern region of Patagonia, in Argentina.

The colony was founded in 1865. It was an idea of a Welsh nationalist nonconformist minister, Michael D. Jones, who had become aware of the threat represented by the influence of the English language. According to him, Welsh immigrants in the United States assimilated so quickly the English language and culture of other immigrants that they would eventually lose their Welsh identity.

As a consequence, he believed that the creation of a separate Welsh colony far from the English ones would ensure the survival of the Welsh culture and language abroad in a “little Wales beyond Wales”.<sup>135</sup> It is

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<sup>134</sup> John Davies, *A history of Wales* (Penguin Adult; January 2007) p.243

<sup>135</sup> Y Wladfa, First Settlers 1865 (Wikipedia; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y\\_Wladfa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y_Wladfa)).

because Patagonia was isolated and remote that the Welsh settlers chose this location to establish their settlement.

In 1862, an expedition sailed to Patagonia and back to Wales declaring that the region was suitable for colonisation.

In 1865, 153 Welsh settlers left Wales aboard the *Mimosa* ship. The settlers comprised 56 married adults, 45 single women and 52 children. Men were skilled in diverse crafts, which was mandatory in order to create a little autonomous society.

The settlement then began to grow in spite of the difficulties. Indeed, several floods destroyed houses and crops, etc. The settlement remained nevertheless successful, it had become a functioning Welsh society where the culture and language were uniquely Welsh.<sup>136</sup>

But in 1914, many immigrants arrived from Europe (mainly from Italy), and the Welsh people gradually became a minority.

Nevertheless, the Welsh settlers and their descendants have left their marks in the region. Many settlements along the valley have Welsh names and many buildings throughout the region date back to the first settlers.

Even though use of the Welsh language has declined over time, it has been preserved. In 1965, as the Welsh celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their colony, a closer relationship between them and the Argentinian population began to develop.

As the populations finally began to mingle a bit more, the Welsh language managed to regain some prestige and influence. Visitors from Wales became much more numerous and the teaching of Welsh developed in the colony as being able to speak Welsh became an advantage to any person.

Several Welsh traditions are still carried on in the Patagonian colony. For instance, eisteddfods are regularly held in several towns of the colony all along the year.<sup>137</sup>

The Welsh settlement in Patagonia has been quite successful in managing to grow and develop over 150 years. Today, we may say that the Welsh culture and language are well-preserved there and that the mingling of the Welsh and Hispanic cultures has been successful so far.

Professor Michael D. Jones rightly felt that the Welsh language was in danger and it was wise of him to ensure that the Welsh culture heritage would not be lost and carried on elsewhere. He can be compared to some extent to Saunders Lewis who, one century later, called on radio for actions to protect and preserve the Welsh language.

For the Welsh language is still threatened, as we have seen, in spite of some positive signs. Some are still inhabited by an anti-Welsh sentiment and the influence of English is terribly strong, even more today.

The Welsh language still has many fights ahead of it in order to obtain the same status and influence as the English language as it has to survive within Wales and to defend itself against external attacks.

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<sup>136</sup> Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.121

<sup>137</sup> Andes Celtig - The Welsh Settlement in Patagonia Today  
(<http://www.andesceltig.com/eng/welsh.patagonia.today.html>).

Being at the centre of the Welsh identity, the Welsh language has always played a central role in Wales's history. We now need to put all the elements we have gone through into perspective in order to tackle one last major question regarding the subject of this essay: To what extent the Welsh language and culture are linked to Welsh nationalism? How important is their influence on Welsh nationalist parties' political claims?

## *III – Language and political nationalism in Wales*

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### From a national consciousness...

As we have seen, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time when the Welsh national consciousness truly re-emerged since the Laws in Wales Acts in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and this led to the creation of several Welsh events, buildings and institutions:

- In 1861, a large eisteddfod aiming at being a national event was held and was thus called the National Eisteddfod. It was a first symbol of the Welsh nation coming together around a typical Welsh cultural event. National Eisteddfods have been held in Wales every year ever since.
- The creation of the University of Wales in 1893 was a sign that there was a real will of Wales to get more autonomy by being able to offer higher education to Welsh students.
- In 1911, it was the National Library of Wales which was created. With a national library, Wales was showing that it could become a nation culturally independent from the rest of the United Kingdom and especially from England.<sup>138</sup>
- Finally, by 1915, the Welsh Guards became part of the famous United Kingdom Foot Guards. Wales was asserting its identity and its very independent existence within the United Kingdom.

Even before those events, demonstrations of Wales's identity revival were numerous during the whole of the 19<sup>th</sup> century even though some remained quite submissive to the English crown.

In 1863, Hussey Vivian, squire of Penllergaer, said in an address at a National Eisteddfod:

“At this time we are one whole compact people. Remember that you are all Englishmen though you are Welshmen. [...] Depend upon it, we must consider ourselves Englishmen”.<sup>139</sup>

Gwynfor Evans gives this example to illustrate the effects the Laws in Wales Acts had on many people in

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<sup>138</sup> John Davies, *A history of Wales* (Penguin Adult; January 2007) p.401-420

<sup>139</sup> Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.104

Wales; he speaks of a “political and psychological oppression of the British state in Wales [which] has been that of the Welsh people themselves”.<sup>140</sup>

Indeed, as we have previously mentioned it, members of the upper and bourgeois classes were the most anglicised people in Wales. It was not Welshmen from these social classes nor from those, like Hussey Vivian, from the Welsh aristocracy who initiated the “19<sup>th</sup> century Welsh national consciousness”.

One of the first elements which led to the spreading of a national consciousness was the “victory” of nonconformist churches in Wales in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nonconformist churches like the Presbyterian Church of Wales were dominant in Wales and this had an impact at a political level.

This enabled radicalism, whose ideas were born with the French Revolution, to grow throughout Wales, convincing people that more drastic reforms in Wales had to be done. Men like David Rees of Llanelli edited radical magazines like *Y Diwygiwr* (The Reformer) through which radical voices could speak against the oppressive power of the official church and the state. Radical publications were to some extent a call to rebel against English institutions which limited the freedom of the Welsh people.

Radical ideas were also strongly hostile to the Church of England. Welsh radicals were actively campaigning for its disestablishment in Wales as most of the Welsh population were nonconformists and as the presence of the Church of England was seen as an invasion of the English culture.

With such ideas expressed in newspapers and magazines everybody could read, life in Wales became more and more politicised and this helped making the Welsh people aware of the fact that their nation had the right to ask – and fight – for the right to make its own choices.

Another element contributing to the development of the Welsh national consciousness during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the Treason of the Blues Books we went through in the previous part of this essay.

To sum it up, the threat represented by the British government and by the English culture and language began to be felt even more deeply by the Welsh people during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As a consequence, a sentiment of national pride and national identity began to grow. But before this sentiment could be turned into political claims, it had expressed itself through a minority of Welshmen who had taken “pride in the language and literature, music and history of Wales”.<sup>141</sup>

The importance of cultural heritage was decisive. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, more and more historical books were being published, making many countries’ history available to many. As more and more Welshmen were learning the history of their nation, and even though some part of it was mythical, a sense of national identity was able to grow. As Gwynfor Evans puts it, “knowledge of [a nation’s] past cannot fail to strengthen emotional attachment to the nation and so deepen national consciousness”.<sup>142</sup>

Also, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Welsh as well as English scholars were trying to

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<sup>140</sup> Same as above.

<sup>141</sup> Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.104

<sup>142</sup> Same as above.

prove that Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* was telling the true story about the kings of Britain.<sup>143</sup>

Written during the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, this book is a compilation of several works and poems about the past kings of Britain. The major work the cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth used in his own book was the *Historia Britonum*, another historical compilation written in both Latin and Welsh. Even though Geoffrey of Monmouth's work is considered today a work of national myth based on very little real historical facts and events, the fact that 19<sup>th</sup> century's historians were considering the possibility that some of the great kings who shaped Britain were of Welsh origins nurtured Welsh pride.

All these elements helped reviving the nationalist sentiment in Wales. As Welshmen were growing increasingly conscious of their belonging to the Welsh nation and aware of the threat England and the British government represented to it, patriotic ideas began to turn into nationalist claims. It was because of cultural elements such as Wales's history, traditions and language that Welsh people eventually became aware of their being part of a nation which could fight for its claims.

### ...To a nationalist political struggle

Still by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of Michael D. Jones's disciples, Lloyd George, became a Liberal Member of Parliament in 1890 as he was only 27 years old. He was a radical and a nationalist.

He and the Welsh Liberal members sat in the House of Commons with two main objectives:

- The disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales which, as we have mentioned it, was seen as a symbol of English domination and will to control Wales.
- The Welsh "home rule". Welsh Liberals asked for some autonomy, not independence. They wanted Wales to be able to make choices for itself and to be able to exercise some of the state's powers within the Welsh territory.

Trying to follow the Irish example, Lloyd George and the other Liberals created Cymru Fydd in 1886. It was a political movement whose aim was to gain self-government for Wales. To achieve this, the movement tried to spread throughout Wales and England, in cities where Welsh communities were large, but it eventually collapsed ten years later, in 1896.

The failure of this political project was due to the growing number of English immigrants who had come and settled in Wales since the Industrial Revolution. As the English community was growing bigger, the original Welsh people were proportionally less and less numerous in the eastern and south-eastern cities of Wales such as Cardiff. Cymru Fydd did not receive enough support to go on. Lloyd George expressed his anger about this:

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<sup>143</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain* (translated from Latin; York University, 1999; [http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/geoffrey\\_thompson.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/geoffrey_thompson.pdf)).

“Is the mass of the Welsh nation willing to be dominated by a coalition of English capitalists who have come to Wales not to benefit the people but to make their fortune?”<sup>144</sup>

It was not before 1925 that two nationalist movements created in 1924 merged into the Welsh nationalist party *Plaid Cymru*.

*Y Mudiad Cymreig* (the Welsh movement) had been founded in the south of Wales by Saunders Lewis, Ambrose Bebb and G. J. Williams. *Byddin Ymreolwyr Cymru* or the *Welsh Home Rule Army* had been created in the north of Wales in 1924 too, and was under the direction of H. R. Jones.

Those two movements thus united forces in 1925 by becoming *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* as they would have much more influence united. For in 1925, the radicals and Liberals of Wales had been disappointed by the consequences of the First World War which could have freed the smaller nations.

Also, the creation of the Republic of Ireland in 1921 had had much influence as far as Welsh nationalist claims concerning “home rule” were concerned.

So what were the party’s claims exactly? Certainly not independence as Saunders Lewis later mentioned it:

“D’abord, ne parlons pas d’indépendance pour le pays de Galles. [...] Nous demandons la liberté et non l’indépendance. En ce domaine, liberté signifie responsabilité. Nous qui appartenons au peuple gallois, nous revendiquons la responsabilité de la civilisation et de la vie sociale dans ce coin de l’Europe.”<sup>145</sup>

*Plaid Cymru*’s primary focus was the defence and the development of the Welsh culture and language. They mainly aimed at making Welsh the only official language in Wales. According to Saunders Lewis, the fact that English was spoken in Wales was a terrible thing threatening the nation’s integrity and cultural independence.

Bearing in mind that linguistic and cultural claims were the party’s principal objectives, let us examine the political goals it had set by 1931:

- The first political objective was to acquire the Dominion status. With this status, Wales would not become independent but would have its own responsible government.
- The second claim was that the culture, traditions and language of Wales be officially acknowledge by the British government and protected.

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<sup>144</sup> Gwynfor Evans, *The Fight for Welsh freedom* (Y Lolfa – 2006) p.127

<sup>145</sup> Saunders Lewis quoted by Hervé Abalain in *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.105

- The third main claim was that Wales become part of the League of Nations whose purpose was to maintain peace in the world. The League of Nations eventually evolved into the United Nations after the Second World War.

The Dominion status would have enabled Wales to have its own government and thus to make its own decisions without breaking up with the British crown, which was not the wish of the party. Later, Gwynfor Evans, who became president of *Plaid Cymru*, explained that what mattered the most to them was that the relationship between Wales and England be egalitarian. They wanted Wales to be able to exist alongside England on an equal footing and with England respecting Wales's cultural independence.

In the first elections following its creation like the general election of 1929, *Plaid Cymru* gathered very few votes. The reason for this is that it was a very young party, but also that not many people in Wales and in the United Kingdom felt concerned by *Plaid Cymru*'s political struggles and goals at the beginning.

### The fight of a minority?

Beyond the party's first electoral scores of the party, we may wonder what part of the population was involved in the fight for the nation's cultural independence.

Until 1930, *Plaid Cymru* was a party for Welsh-speakers only as meetings, campaigns etc. were in Welsh language only. From the 1930's onwards, efforts were made to appeal to more sympathizers. For instance, a another magazine of the party in English was published in addition to *Y Ddraig Goch* (The Red Dragon) which was in Welsh language only.

But these efforts were not enough to make the party grow sufficiently in order to gain some political influence. Moreover, there were members of the party who considered non-Welsh speakers as "half Welsh",<sup>146</sup> which did not help building a strong unity within the party.

In 1931, Welsh speakers accounted for 36.8% of the population of Wales, which means that if the party remained a Welsh-speaking party only, its potential voters could only represent a maximum of one-third of the Welsh population, that it to say less than 700,000 people.

It was also important to the members of the party to rewrite the history of Wales which was too often merely told as a succession of princes and bards until the annexation by England when the history of Wales became the same as England's.

During the general election of 1945, *Plaid Cymru* with its 2,500 members contested seven seats. The same year, Gwynfor Evans became its president and the party began to impose itself as a real political party with independent and original ideas.

Until the general election of 1959, the party gathered more and more votes; its share of the vote had gone

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<sup>146</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.107

from 0.7% in 1951 to 5.2% in 1959.

We may guess that the Second World War had an impact on the influence of *Plaid Cymru* and nationalist parties on the whole. In times of war, people are more likely to feel nationalist and patriotic. It is also worth noting that *Plaid Cymru* adopted a neutral attitude during the Second World War and urged Welshmen to refuse to perform military service.

After the general election of 1959, support for the party declined slightly. In 1961, the number of Welsh speakers in Wales had kept dropping and was of 26%. The loss of influence and importance of the Welsh language during the 1960's can be linked to the declining support for *Plaid Cymru*. As a consequence, in 1962 the former president of the party, Saunders Lewis, gave his famous speech about the fears he had that the Welsh language would eventually disappear.

But in 1966, *Plaid Cymru* managed to enter the Parliament with Gwynfor Evans who captured the seat from the Labour party. This was due to the dissatisfaction of the Labour voters and the importance that *Plaid Cymru* granted to small Welsh communities which were, according to the party, threatened by Labour policies.

During the following decades until the 1997 referendum establishing the National Assembly for Wales, the party stabilised its results at the general elections around about 10%.

As we have seen, the number of Welsh speakers in Wales rose for the first time in a century between 1991 and 2001. It was at that time when Welsh culture and language became more important to the Welsh people that the referendum in 1997 asking the Welsh whether they were in favour of the creation of a Welsh Assembly was a success.

Indeed, the same referendum had been held in 1979, and it had been a resounding defeat with only 20.3% of the Welsh population in favour of the Assembly and 79.7% against.<sup>147</sup> In Scotland, the same referendum held the same year was a success with slightly more than the majority voting “yes” to the creation of a devolved assembly for Scotland.

In 1997 the referendum was eventually a success in Wales too with 50.3% of voters voting “yes”. What is striking is the fact that the Welsh regions where voters voted “yes” in majority are more or less the same where the Welsh language is the most spoken. It is in areas where people are the most attached to their nation and its culture that pro-devolution measures are the most popular.

The 1999 elections to choose the 60 Assembly Members of the Welsh Assembly were a rather big success for *Plaid Cymru*. Indeed, if the Labour party won the most seats with 28 AMs, *Plaid Cymru* ranked second with 17 members, thus becoming the main opposition to the Labour.<sup>148</sup>

As in 2012, that is to say more than a decade later, the number of *Plaid Cymru*'s AMs has gone down to 11.

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<sup>147</sup> BBC News – The 1979 Referendums in Wales and Scotland  
(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/devolution/scotland/briefing/79referendums.shtml>).

<sup>148</sup> Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.143



*Plaid Cymru* is now the third most important political force in the Welsh Assembly as the Conservatives rank second. Labour remains the first with 30 seats. *Plaid Cymru* has actually lost most of its seats in the Assembly with the 2011 election since it was still the second largest party after the 2007 election.

A reason to explain this decline may be, among others, the recession which began in 2007-2008 and which may have led voters to vote for parties whose manifestos focused more on economic matters rather than on nationalist ones.

In 2012, the party elected a new leader, Leanne Wood, who became the first female leader of *Plaid Cymru* and the first non-fluent Welsh speaker person at the head of the party.<sup>149</sup> In this we could see a sign that the party is trying to change to appeal to more voters by getting rid of its image which may be that of an old-fashioned and backward party, especially to the eyes of the youngest voters.

With the “return” of the Welsh language in the 1990’s and the coming-back of a national consciousness, it appears that *Plaid Cymru* is no longer a party composed of a Welsh-speaking minority. Thanks to the efforts that have been made in education and to the victories of the Welsh Language Society which gave back to Welsh some of its prestige, more and more Welshmen, even those who do not speak Welsh, have begun to feel deeply patriotic and nationalist. The successes of *Plaid Cymru* since the creation of the Welsh Assembly seem to be a proof of it.

### Wales towards more autonomy

With the Scottish example, it seems that the process of devolution in Wales is about to continue and that it is not very likely to stop. Following the creation of the Assembly in 1999, two major acts and legislations were created.

In 2006, the Government of Wales Act conferred the Welsh Assembly some legislative powers, like the ability to pass Assembly Measures concerning matters the Welsh Assembly is responsible for (cultural, educational, tourism, environment...). But in order to pass an Assembly Measure, the Assembly had to consult Westminster, so this law-making power was not yet complete.

*Plaid Cymru* heavily criticised the act, mostly because it changed the electoral system by preventing a candidate from standing for both constituency and regional seats.<sup>150</sup>

In 2011, a new referendum was held asking the Welsh people: “Do you want the Assembly now to be able to make laws on all matters in the 20 subject areas it has powers for?” The result of this referendum was clear as 63.5% of people voted “yes”.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> WalesOnline.co.uk, *Leanne Wood becomes first female leader of Plaid Cymru* (15 March 2012; <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2012/03/15/leanne-wood-becomes-first-female-leader-of-plaid-cymru-91466-30546068/>).

<sup>150</sup> Government of Wales Act 2006 – Section 7: Candidates at general elections (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/32/notes/contents>).

<sup>151</sup> Wales Government Official Website – Welsh Referendum 2011 (12 May 2011; <http://wales.gov.uk/legislation/referendumpowers/?lang=en>).

With this devolution referendum, the Welsh Assembly gained direct law-making powers and does not depend on the British Parliament any longer as far as legislative powers are concerned.

Now what is interesting about this referendum is that unlike the one in 1997 where “yes-voters” were mostly inhabitants of the most Welsh-speaking areas, a majority voted “yes” in 2011 in all Welsh constituencies except in Monmouthshire.<sup>152</sup>

Wales made good use of these new powers as several measures have been passed since 2006. Concerning the Welsh language, an Assembly Measure was completed in February 2010. This legislative measure aimed at “promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language in Wales”<sup>153</sup> even more. Another measure completed the same year was about enforcing the obligation local authorities have to “promote culture and encourage partnership to deliver high quality cultural experiences for their communities.”<sup>154</sup>

For Wales autonomy is mainly about preserving its identity and the ability to make decisions for its own people, not about independence. A survey for the BBC done by the end of 2006 gives the following results:

- Almost 70% of Welsh people wanted Wales to stay in the United Kingdom and only 20% were pro-independence.
- 48% of Welsh people thought Wales would lose financially if it left the UK; only 14% believed the opposite.
- But 33% believed Wales’s culture would be enhanced if Wales left the UK, while only 13% believed it would be diminished.<sup>155</sup>

Even though only 20% of the Welsh population was pro-independence in 2007, it is a higher percentage than it had been in the past. Moreover, we have seen that many constituencies of Wales – the most anglicised ones – voted against the creation of the Welsh Assembly, but 14 years later, they all but one voted in favour of more devolved powers for the Assembly.

The Welsh culture and especially the Welsh language are the cement of Wales’s desire for more autonomy. They have had enough impact and influence to make it possible the creation of a national assembly and to give a new boost to the Welsh language, knowing if that will be enough to lead Wales towards independence is quite another matter.

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<sup>152</sup> The Electoral Commission - Referendum on the law-making powers of the National Assembly for Wales (<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/results/referendums/wales>).

<sup>153</sup> National Assembly for Wales Website - Legislative Competence Orders and Measures of the Third Assembly (<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-third-assembly/bus-legislation-third-assembly/bus-legislation-progress-lcos-measures/bus-legislation-progress-lcos-measures-archive.htm#welshlanguage>).

<sup>154</sup> National Assembly for Wales Website - Legislative Competence Orders and Measures of the Third Assembly (<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-third-assembly/bus-legislation-third-assembly/bus-legislation-progress-lcos-measures/bus-legislation-progress-lcos-measures-archive.htm#culture>).

<sup>155</sup> BBC News, *Welsh firmly back Britain's Union* (16 January 2007; [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/wales/6263807.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/6263807.stm)).

# CONCLUSION

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Throughout this essay, we have tried to tackle several aspects of the Welsh nation in an attempt to take into account all the elements that play and have played a role in the shaping of the Welsh identity and culture. The first impression given by the study of Wales as a nation part of the United Kingdom was that it exists and asserts its unique identity in opposition to England. Wales wants to exist as an independent nation, not as a completely independent state.

When considering the role played by the Welsh language in the nation's cultural independence, several facts are quite revealing.

It was first of all that language along with the Welsh culture which made it possible for the nation to survive throughout several centuries and even after its annexation by England. More recently, it was that same language and culture which brought Welsh nationalism back to life by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which led the way towards a structured political party fighting for the nation.

Just like the Welsh nation wants to culturally stand apart from the other members of the United Kingdom, the Welsh language is quite different from English.

Linguists believing in linguistic determinism think that the structure of a language affects the ways in which its speakers conceptualize their world. As a consequence, this could be one explanation for the fact that many Welsh speakers feel different from English speakers and that they cling to their national language so much.

The role of the Welsh language in the will of Wales to stand up as a culturally independent nation is rather clear according to the elements we went through. Throughout all of Wales's history, periods when nationalist ideas were present the most coincided with periods when a regain of interest for the Welsh language and culture was occurring.

Nevertheless, we could qualify this statement by pointing out the fact that during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the nationalist party *Plaid Cymru* was quite present, with rather good electoral results which led to the creation of the Welsh Assembly in 1999. And yet, during this period, the number of Welsh speakers had kept declining until this decline was stopped in 2001.

This could mean that even though the Welsh language and culture have been and are the cement for Welsh nationalism, being and feeling Welsh may not necessarily mean speaking Welsh.

As we have seen, nowadays a large part of Wales's population is English or has English roots, and in several areas of the nation, the use of English is largely predominant. This did not prevent all of Wales's constituencies but one to vote "yes" at the 2011 referendum asking the Welsh people whether they wanted the Assembly to have the power to make laws without needing Westminster's approval.

So it seems that Wales is still on the path towards more devolution. We may guess that this trend will not reverse if we take a look at the Scottish example. But Wales seems more concerned about cultural matters; what seems to matter the most to the Welsh people is the preservation and perpetuation of what makes them Welsh: their language and culture.

We have seen that the safekeeping of the elements shaping the Welsh identity was the first and main objective of *Plaid Cymru* when the party was founded in 1925.

But at the time when the nationalist party was created, the proportion of Welsh speakers in Wales was quite larger than it is today, so we may wonder what direction the devolution process in Wales will take. Indeed, even though the number of Welsh speakers has begun to increase again since the 1990's, it may not be enough, according to some, to ensure that Welsh will be spoken on a daily basis by many. For what the Welsh Language Commissioner is trying to do is not only to make Welsh a language known by many, but also spoken by many in their everyday life. We may guess that this will be the main challenge of the upcoming years for all the defenders of the Welsh language.

Although this essay came to a conclusion supporting the original hypothesis I made, there are elements that can be discussed, minor hypotheses that can be confirmed or invalidated. This could be done using other complementary sources I could not find or obtain.

Yet I was able to gather much information during the time I spent in Wales which enabled me to see with my own eyes what truly is Welsh nationalism. Unfortunately, as I have changed the structure of this essay since I was in Wales, I did not seize this opportunity to make my own statistics about the importance pupils in the school I worked in granted to the Welsh language.

For the Welsh language is, to me, a case on its own. As globalization tends to standardise the world culturally and linguistically with the use of English on a global scale, seeing such a small-sized nation fighting so bravely for its identity and culture is quite impressive.

Wales wants to remain Wales, both within the United Kingdom, but also within the world. Welsh nationalists are often opposed to capitalism as it is, according to them, a system which destroys nations and identities.

I think this is one direction towards which this essay could then lead us to: Why do nations still exist in a world where the free-trade system does not need them anymore? Why people still cling to their nation? A quotation from Professor Raymond Williams's *Who speaks for Wales?* seems to be a good summary of these questions:

“[...] Why [does capitalism] still has need of nations, of loyalty and patriotism, of an exaltation of flags and frontiers when the frontiers are only there to be dismantled and the flags [...] are quickly exchanged for flags of convenience? Why, in sum, in a modern free-trade capitalist international economy, have ‘nations’ at all?”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Raymond Williams, *Who speaks for Wales?* (Univeristy of Wales Press; 2003) p.195

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# APPENDICES

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## APPENDICES

- 1/ Distribution of Welsh speakers
- 2/ The linguistic situation in Wales in 1991
- 3/ Welsh speakers in Wales from 1891 to 1991
- 4/ Votes for the 1997 Referendum in Wales
- 5/ Votes for the 2011 Referendum in Wales

## Distribution of Welsh speakers

Data and results from different census about the number of Welsh speakers in Wales

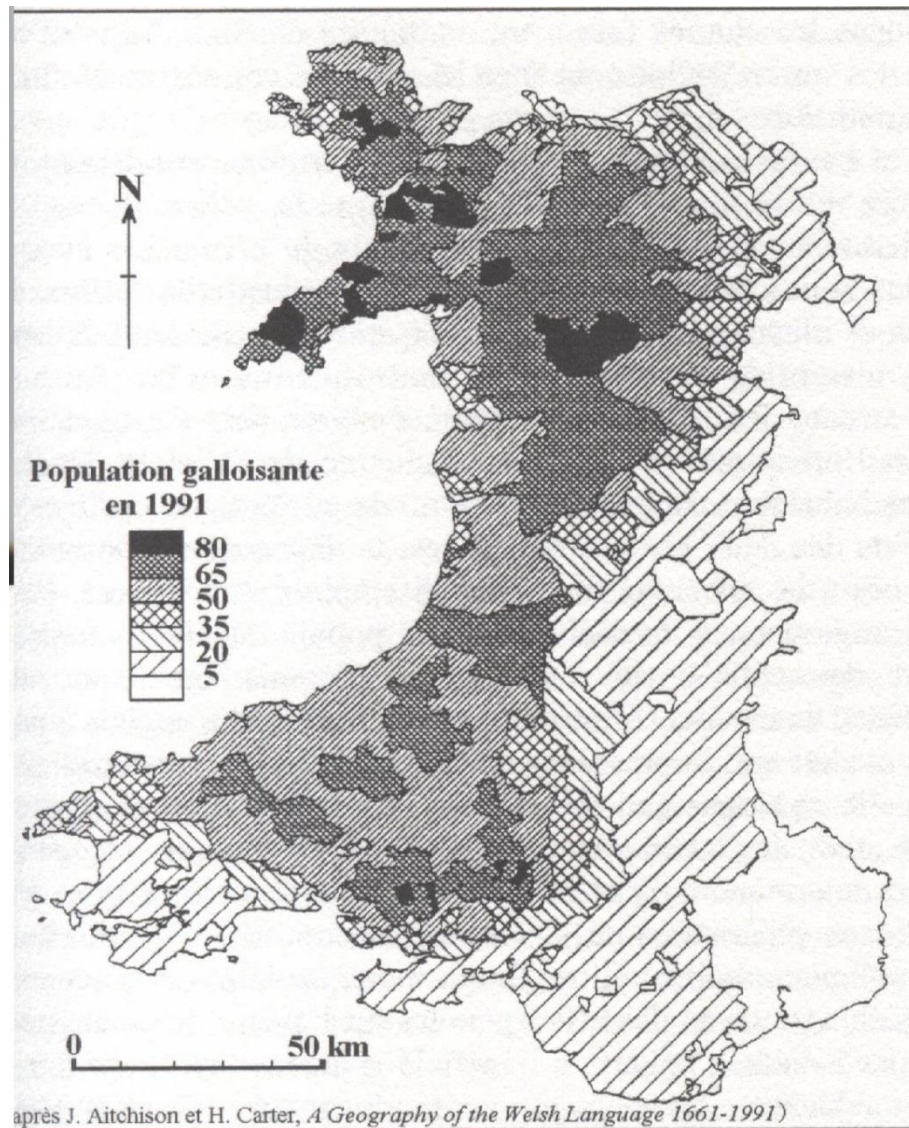
### Welsh speakers/Some knowledge by local authority at 2001 census\*

	Pop. 3+ 000s	Can speak Welsh	%	Some knowledge	%
<b>North West Wales</b>					
Anglesey	64,679	38,703	59.84	45,534	70.40
Gwynedd	112,800	77,482	68.69	85,852	76.11
Conwy	103,316	30,168	29.20	40,985	39.67
<b>Sub total</b>		<b>146,353</b>		<b>172,371</b>	
<b>North East Wales</b>					
Denbighshire	90,085	23,539	26.13	32,466	36.04
Flintshire	143,382	20,231	14.11	30,655	21.38
Wrexham	124,024	17,896	14.43	28,401	22.90
<b>Sub total</b>		<b>61,666</b>		<b>91,522</b>	
<b>Mid Wales</b>					
Powys	122,473	25,511	20.83	36,852	30.09
<b>South West Wales</b>					
Ceredigion	72,884	37,775	51.83	44,634	61.24
Pembrokeshire	110,182	23,689	21.50	32,371	29.38
Carmarthenshire	167,373	83,803	50.07	106,432	63.59
<b>Sub total</b>		<b>145,267</b>		<b>183,437</b>	
<b>Industrial South Wales</b>					
<b>West Glamorgan</b>					
Swansea	216,226	28,585	13.22	48,585	22.47
Neath Port Talbot	130,305	23,203	17.78	37,553	28.82
<b>Sub total</b>		<b>51,788</b>		<b>86,138</b>	
<b>Mid + South Glamorgan</b>					
Bridgend	124,284	13,149	10.58	24,757	19.92
Rhondda Cynon Taff	223,924	27,497	12.28	47,203	21.08
Merthyr Tydfil	54,115	5,427	10.03	9,600	17.74
Caerphilly	163,297	17,815	10.91	27,221	16.67
Vale of Glamorgan	115,116	12,743	11.07	19,454	16.90
Cardiff	294,208	31,950	10.86	47,985	16.31
<b>Sub total</b>		<b>108,581</b>		<b>176,550</b>	
<b>Gwent</b>					
Blaenau Gwent	67,795	6,135	9.05	9,023	13.31
Torfaen	88,062	9,422	10.70	12,742	14.47
Monmouthshire	82,351	7,428	9.02	10,590	12.86
Newport	131,820	12,601	9.56	17,624	13.37
<b>Sub total</b>		<b>35,586</b>		<b>49,979</b>	

Source: [www.clickonwales.org/wp-content/uploads/5\\_Factfile\\_Language.pdf](http://www.clickonwales.org/wp-content/uploads/5_Factfile_Language.pdf)

## The linguistic situation in Wales in 1991

A map representing the percentage of Welsh speakers in the various regions of Wales.



Source: Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.175



## Welsh speakers in Wales from 1891 to 1991

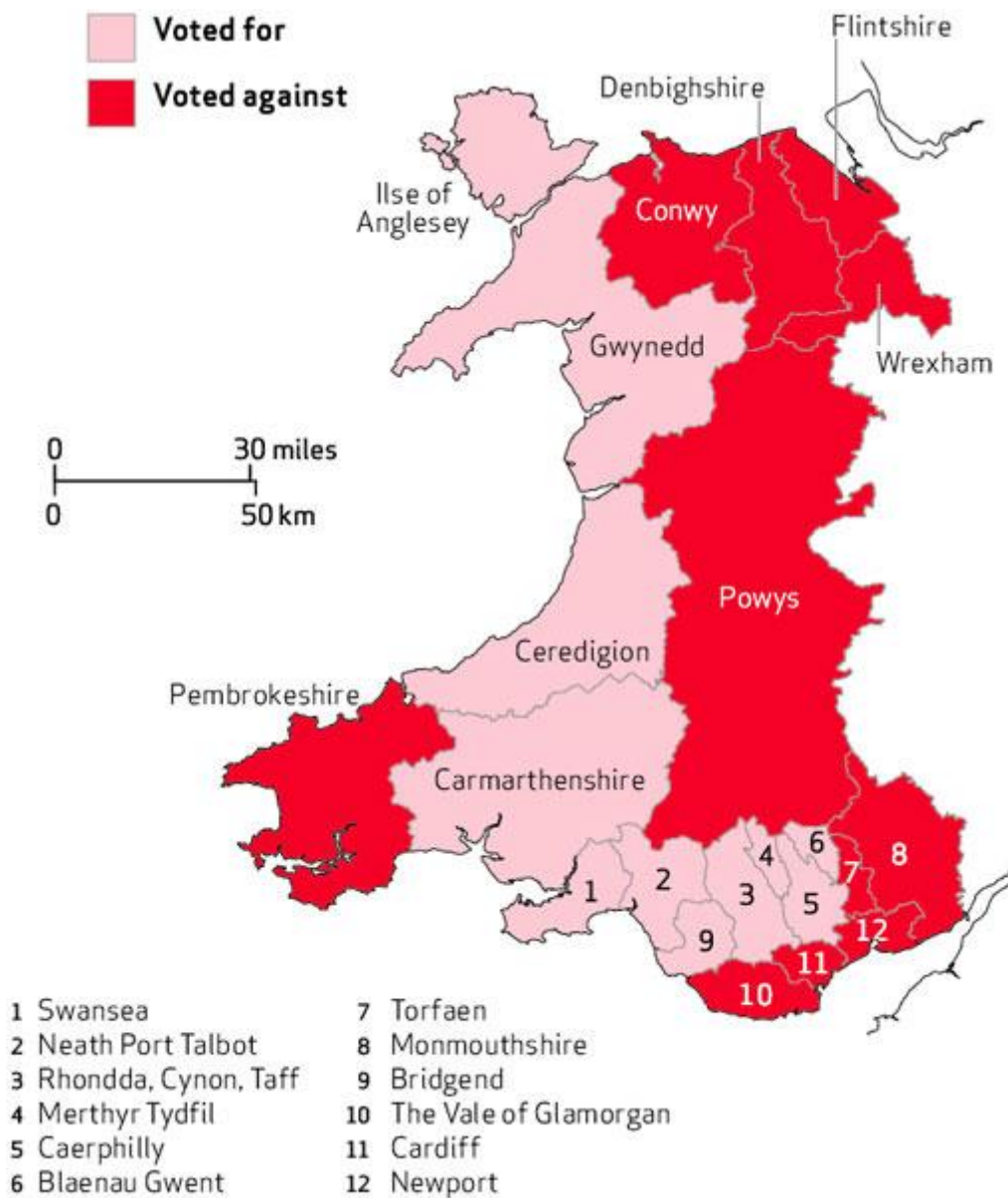
A table showing the evolution of the number of Welsh speakers in Wales from 1891 to 1991. We can also see the number of Welsh monoglots.

<b>Année</b>	<b>Galloisants</b>	<b>% de la population</b>	<b>Monolingues</b>	<b>% de la population</b>
1891	910 289	54,4	508 036	30,3 *
1901	929 824	49,9	280 905	15,1
1911	977 366	43,5	190 292	8,5
1921	922 092	37,2	155 989	6
1931	909 261	36,8	97 932	4
1951	714 686	29,9	41 155	2,1
1961	656 002	26	26 223	1
1971	542 425	20,8	32 725	1,2
1981	508 207	18,9	21 583	0,8
1991	508 098 **	18,7	-	-

Source: Hervé Abalain, *Le pays de Galles : identité, modernité* (Editions Armeline, Crozon, 2000) p.173

## Votes for the 1997 Referendum in Wales

A map showing the Welsh constituencies which voted for or against the 1997 Referendum about the creation of a Welsh Assembly.



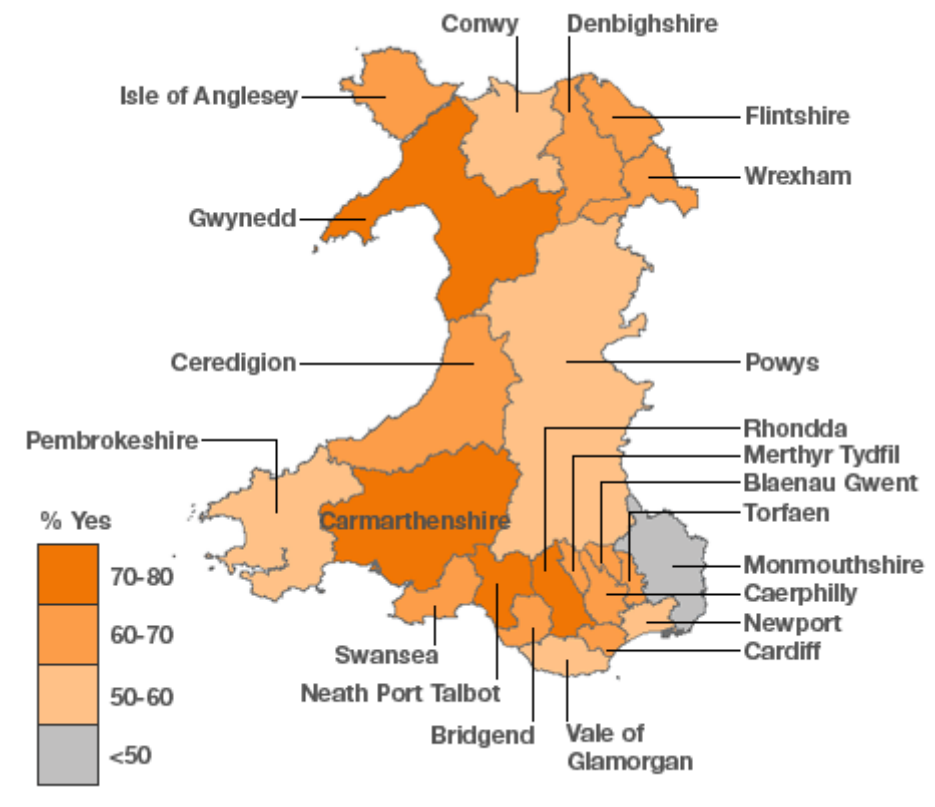
Source: New Labour and the Welsh devolution settlement

(<http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=402770&section=8.1.3>).



## Votes for the 2011 Referendum in Wales

A map showing the Welsh constituencies which voted for or against the 2011 Referendum about granting of even more legislative powers to the Welsh Assembly.



Source: BBC News / Wales Politics, *Wales says Yes in referendum vote* (4 March 2011; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-12482561>).