

# ENGLISH IS A WELSH LANGUAGE

Television's crisis in Wales

Edited by  
Geraint Talfan Davies

iwa

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ISBN: 978 1 904773 42 9

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Sefydliad Materion Cymreig  
Institute of Welsh Affairs

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# Preface

This book is part elegy for past glories, as ITV's regional broadcasting reaches for its final breath; part *cri de coeur* as a nation's visibility to itself is allowed to wither; and part affirmation that this problem can be solved and must be solved. It is based on the knowledge that imaginative solutions are available, and the conviction that television's mirror to the Welsh nation – reflecting the language of the majority – must not be further clouded, let alone discarded.

In the chapters that follow, more than a dozen people – most of them direct contributors to that tradition – describe not only the richness of the programming that has been so much part of the television broadcasting tradition in Wales, but also how much more of Welsh life and culture could have been explored had the space, money and autonomy been available.

The Institute of Welsh Affairs decided to embark on this project in the wake of Ofcom's final report on its second review of public service broadcasting, published in January 2009 only a week before Lord Carter's interim report on *Digital Britain*. It became clear in those two documents that the authors shared a similar view of the future of programming for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: namely, that the case for preserving an alternative news service to the BBC had been made, but that the case for other programming for these nations, while important, was altogether less pressing – a matter to be decided 'in the light of competing priorities'.

Our hope is that this collection of diverse personal statements will be a corrective to the notion that news programming is the only necessary, or even the truest reflection of our society, given the fundamental changes in the Welsh polity that have come about in the last decade. It will, we hope, also be a corrective to the view that what we have at present is an equitable broadcast dispensation for both the Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh-speaking parts of the population: that the one deserves total protection, but that the other must take its chances in a harsher economic climate. This imbalance is an issue on which UK regulators have been silent, although it has to be said that it has also been too little debated within Wales itself.

Patrick Hannan sets the devolutionary political context for the debate, while Kevin Williams traces the route to the current crisis and identifies the risks to a fragile ecology. Dai Smith and Clare Hudson write from the perspective of past and present commissioners of programmes at BBC Wales – the latter having also had executive responsibility at HTV Wales. Peter Edwards and Catrin Clarke lament the lack of indigenous Welsh drama, while John Geraint underlines the role of factual programmes in shaping a society's view of itself, as well as addressing the issue of funding mechanisms. Colin Thomas traces a rich tradition of history programming, and Chris Morris, a talented documentary producer, now teaching at Newport University, pinpoints the role of general programming for Wales in developing younger talents, a point also made by Ronw Protheroe in relation to entertainment. Myfanwy Alexander, a writer of comedy, emphasises changes in the Welsh audience and Jon Gower puts the case for embattled arts programming. Peter Stead places sport and performance at the heart of distinct Welsh popular culture and Trevor Fishlock stresses the importance of storytelling in a nation that has gloried in a rich oral tradition. David Williams carries a torch for well-resourced current affairs journalism, while writer and print journalist, Mario Basini, gives a viewer's perspective. In my own contribution I have tried to crystallise the arguments at the heart of this debate.

This volume has been put together in great haste in order to influence decisions that may well be taken by government ministers in Westminster this summer. I am immensely grateful to all the contributors for agreeing to deliver such thoughtful chapters to such an unusually tight deadline. Thanks are also due to the IWA's research officer, Nick Morris - who was my co-author of the IWA's audit of

Welsh media prepared last year at the behest of the Welsh Assembly Government's Heritage Minister – and particularly to my colleagues, Huw Jones, Julie Barton and Professor Kevin Morgan, on the Assembly Government's Broadcasting Advisory Group. The group's report is in the public domain, but I must stress that my own contribution to this book represents an individual rather than a group view.

**Geraint Talfan Davies**

March 2009

# 1/ English is a Welsh language

Geraint Talfan Davies

In the golden years of ITV's monopoly regional broadcasting was its crucial distinguishing feature but, despite the rhetoric, not its primary commercial driver. The juicy financial fruits of the monopoly masked the intrinsic tension between public service and the commercial imperative. For ten of the fifteen companies – the smaller ones - what they made was not what they sold. They made programmes, they sold advertising. Regional broadcasting was little commented upon by the commentariat, either within the trade press or further field, even though the ITV companies consumed large quantities of food and wine nursing their regional groups of MPs and bored journalists. This would usually come to a head during the passage of successive broadcasting bills, as well-briefed peers and MPs rose to extol the virtues of their home patch and its television company, in the process signing up to a coalition of support for the company in the next franchise beauty contest run by the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

This began to unravel in the late 1980s, as advertising took its first downward turn for a decade and as Margaret Thatcher resolved to reform what she called 'the last bastion of restrictive practice'. By this time the first siren voices calling for consolidation of the ITV network into fewer companies had begun to be heard, giving the Thatcher government, perhaps inadvertently, the green light to swing the pendulum decisively away from public service towards the commercial

imperative by auctioning the ITV franchises. The minister at the time, David Mellor, invented a fig leaf called the 'quality threshold' but the genie was out of the bottle, public service was henceforth to be on the back foot. The resulting auction payments – HTV had to pay £21million annually for its licence – comprised the largest tax on knowledge since the newspaper taxes of the nineteenth century. Thatcher had, at a stroke, weakened ITV at the very moment that it needed all its strength to face competition from Sky and the birth of multi-channel television. Regional broadcasting was to be the biggest casualty.

In Wales although the programming made specifically for the Welsh audience by HTV rose to its all-time peak of twelve hours per week by the late 1990s, costs were driven down. While much of this was a necessary efficiency gain that took advantage of new technologies, there is little doubt that it also placed a severe curb on programme ambition. There was no room for millennial euphoria. Soon some budgets were reduced to a level at which several independent companies decided that commissions were not worth the candle. In one unintentionally poignant series two presenters introduced archive clips from programmes the company could no longer afford to make. More and more programming became extensions of newsroom operations. Craft skills atrophied. Soon, the hours of output also began to shrink inexorably, although, miraculously, those programmes that were above the breadline and retained a peak-time slot still won large audiences, proving that demand had never been the issue.

Ownership had also changed. In the wake of the first auction in 1991 – there was never to be a second – the consolidation virus had taken hold. HTV passed through various hands faster than down a Welsh three-quarter line. Along the way Granada and Carlton abolished all regional on-screen logos in 2001, three years before the creation of ITV plc swallowed up the whole of England and Wales. In 2004 Wales became the only one of the UK nations to be an ITV cost centre, rather than an independent franchise holder. Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands still preserved their autonomous companies. Arguably, that autonomy, partial though it may be in practice, has given Scotland and Northern Ireland more influence than Wales in recent debates.

Perversely, in 2002-3, during the first term of both the National Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, the architecture of the planned

new converged regulator, Ofcom, ignored the nations at the most senior level. Parliament, taking a cue from policy advisors, consciously rejected the notion of representation on its board for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, despite the precedents of Ofcom's predecessors - the IBA and Independent Television Commission, the Broadcasting Standards Commission and, if belatedly, the Radio Authority – not to mention the BBC. The three nations had to make do with a single representative on Ofcom's subsidiary Content Board and Consumer Panel.

By the time that Ofcom came to embark on its first review of public service broadcasting (psb) at the end of 2003, evidence of the attrition affecting ITV's revenues and regional output was already apparent, though it has to be said that this was as much a result of the mismanagement of the ITV network as of the fragmentation of audiences and the growth of internet advertising. The ITC, in its last years, had cobbled a cosmetic initiative – a Charter for Nations and Regions – which traded a reduction in regional hours against a promise of an increased investment of £3million ostensibly in order to safeguard quality. Events would move the argument on before anyone could stop to measure whether the investment had taken place. The pattern was to be repeated several times, although never again with the promise of investment. This is what brought general programme hours for Wales down gradually from seven hours a week, first to four, then to three, then in January 2009 to a mere 90 minutes.

Ofcom took much flak for agreeing to ITV's repeated requests for a reduction in its obligations. It generated a lot of heat at public meetings and conferences in Cardiff, although the regulator had some right to feel aggrieved that its critics were ignoring what was happening to ITV's revenues in a multi-channel world. The attacks upon it were signs of frustration and impotence. The fact that ITV in Wales was a cost centre within ITV plc rather than an independent plc, as in Scotland and Northern Ireland, did not help. It gave us no transparency on costs or other leverage.

At the end of its first review of psb, when it had to complete a hasty additional consultation in the nations before publishing a postscript statement four months after the main report, Ofcom allowed ITV to reduce its non-news programmes in the nations to four hours a week. It also allowed them to show their own current affairs programmes in peak in place of the networked current affairs programme presented by

Trevor Macdonald. For Wales it also called for a new strategic partnership between the BBC and S4C ‘driven by three core principles: transparency, financial commitment and editorial control’.<sup>1</sup> Such an agreement was signed in October 2006, pledging the BBC to increase its spend on programmes for S4C from just under £22million in 2006-07 to more than £25million in 2008-09. The agreement runs to thirty-three pages, rather more than the eight pages that suffice for the agreement on a similar arrangement in Ireland between RTE and the Irish language channel TG4. Whether the different lengths reflect different levels of trust, or simply British legalism is an open matter.

Ofcom is obliged to carry out a psb review every five years. However, the speed of events, and particularly ITV’s decline, persuaded it to bring forward its second review, publishing its Phase 1 report in April 2008. Conducted through ‘the prism of audience needs’ it would attempt to answer ‘the very big questions – Is further intervention needed? If so, on what scale? Why does, plurality and competition really matter in public service broadcasting?’<sup>2</sup>

In Wales many of us shared a sense that much more was at stake this time. Ofcom would have to answer many of the questions it had raised but not resolved in its first review. Early in 2008 the then Welsh Heritage Minister, Rhodri Glyn Thomas, commissioned the Institute of Welsh Affairs to carry out an audit of the media in Wales<sup>3</sup>, followed by a round table discussion by interested parties arranged jointly with Ofcom, a transcript of which was published<sup>4</sup>. Ofcom and the IWA then conducted public meetings in Llandudno, Aberystwyth and Cardiff to encourage responses as part of the Phase 1 consultation. Following publication of Ofcom’s Phase 2 document, Thomas’s ministerial successor, Alun Ffred Jones, convened an advisory group to help shape the Assembly Government’s response.

The IWA’s media audit, which deliberately included print and online within its purview, underlined how much more research is needed to get at a true picture of what is happening to the media in Wales. The annual Ofcom market reports are usually high level econometric analyses, and do not allow you to trace changes in the texture of what is delivered to audiences. Change happens below the public radar. Whole genres of programmes can disappear unremarked. There are no tracking studies of Welsh media output, comparable with some of the content analyses that have been done for UK broadcasting, such as the

work for Professor Tony King's report for the BBC Trust which exposed the London-centricity of news services. Commercial radio content, in particular, is virgin territory. Academic study of the media in Wales is fitful, unlike Scotland.

Although audience measurement is done by one main organisation - BARB, the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board - the use of the resulting data is in the hands of individual broadcasters, and is rarely consistent by the time it surfaces in public, making comparisons difficult. Different measures are often chosen for cosmetic effect. It is no surprise that annual reports by broadcasters are a mix of bullish public relations and hesitant accountability. Methodological changes from year to year make tracking over time difficult. As with ITV Wales, commercial radio data is locked within group structures. On the print side, information about the sales of London newspapers in Wales, their arrangements for regional editioning across the UK, and the profitability of individual Welsh titles, are buried deep.

Despite the obstacles we were able to pull together a fuller picture of the media landscape than ever before, though still sensing that it should be a work in progress. It was not a pretty sight. The decline in ITV Wales output was well known, the scale of the BBC's savings targets over the next five years less so. Beyond the public service broadcasters, Wales appears weaker than Scotland and Northern Ireland in almost every media aspect. It has the weakest commercial radio sector, is the only country where none of its commercial radio stations is indigenously owned, and is the only one whose ITV franchise holder was absorbed into ITV plc.

It was the country that had the lowest population coverage for its disappearing analogue transmission systems, and will still have the lowest population cover for the new digital systems in television and radio. It also has the lowest take-up of broadband. It does not enjoy the benefits of Scotland's scale or any comparable to that which Northern Ireland derives from all-Ireland transmission from the south as well as from Irish newspapers. In print, Wales has the poorest provision, with few newspapers of its own and, unlike Scotland, no special editions of London newspapers. The audit unearthed the remarkable fact that of three million daily newspaper readers in Scotland, only 100,000 are reading papers with no Scottish content. Of two million daily readers in Wales, 1,760,000 are reading papers with no Welsh content.

The Assembly Government's advisory group, chaired by Huw Jones, the former chief executive of S4C, convened late in October, and completed its work in short order, producing a report that the Cabinet endorsed in full and in time for submission to Ofcom as part of the second consultation. Like Ofcom's own Advisory Council for Wales, it argued the case for plural provision in news, an extension of general programming in English, and the creation of a Welsh Media Commission that would allow for and manage a degree of contestability in the public funding of television, as well as facilitating some flexibility in order to respond to technological change and changing patterns of consumer consumption. The Assembly Government advisory group also envisaged that the commission would share operational facilities, probably with S4C, at marginal cost. It thought that the restoration of past and foreseeable lost value of £25-30million in English language broadcasting for Wales should be the minimum policy objective, but that full implementation of its recommendations might cost around £50million.

It concluded that the 'democratic and cultural deficit described in this report is of sufficient seriousness for it to command a very high level of priority and urgency in the formulation of Government policy, as it considers the future of PSB...[and] that it would be wholly unacceptable if government policy were confined to protection of the current resource base of Channel 4 and the BBC.' Its proposals were summarised in Ofcom's final report, but it fell well short of a ringing endorsement, offering it up as something that the government should consider in the light of competing priorities. In the days before publication there seemed to be a flurry of activity to reconcile the Ofcom document, particularly in relation to Channel 4, with Lord Carter's *Digital Britain* interim report that was to be published a week later.

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One word has peppered the debate more often than any other - pluralism. Usually, it has been shorthand for the need to have something other than the BBC. That is not an unreasonable view, but the nature of pluralism needs a little more examination for it is not just about a number greater than 1. The object of pluralism in broadcasting is to guarantee a range of expression, but range of expression is guaranteed not only by having more than one supplier, but also by

variety of programme form and purpose. Any viewer of ITV Wales's *Wales Tonight* and BBC Wales's *Wales Today* will be struck not by difference but by similarity: the same stories covered at much the same durations and often the same interviewees. This is not surprising when you take into account the nature of modern journalism.

The proliferation of outlets, the relentless 24-hour drive of old and new media, as well as the assault on production costs, has created a news processing culture in which, it has been argued, half of news output in broadcast, print and the web, begins with a public relations source<sup>5</sup>. The lower the cost of a news service, the lower the scope for original investigation and the greater the pervasive influence of public relations and the similarity of the end product. In this situation it is not surprising that two similarly resourced newsrooms, in similar time slots, chasing similar mainstream audiences, working to much the same set of journalistic values, will deliver programmes differentiated more by the presenter's clothes than by anything else.

This is not to argue that, therefore, we can make do with one news programme for Wales – at the very least doubling up manages risk and extends the audience – but rather that we need to address issues of journalistic resource and purpose. One shining example of real difference in television news is seen not by comparing the BBC with ITV but by comparing both with Channel 4 news, perhaps the only British news programme to break the conventional mould. As broadcasters in Wales discuss various partnering options – BBC/ITV, S4C/ITV, BBC/S4C/ITV/ANO? – we need to remember that we will end up no better off if discussion is restricted to just how cheaply we can deliver an alternative news service. In fact the sharing of material across broadcast institutions, even across languages, should increase the onus on news producers to differentiate their products in much more substantial ways. It should be a prime consideration in the process of rescuing ITV's news for the nations.

In the meantime, it seems to me to be beyond argument that greater range of expression is guaranteed by the existence, parallel with television news, of well-resourced current affairs programmes or even well-resourced radio journalism than by simply proliferating cloned television news programmes. We have to guarantee different forms of journalism, even within Wales – daily news, daily and weekly current affairs, the single investigation, the studio interrogation and studio

debate, with or without an audience, to name only the most obvious. But this is to restrict consideration of range of expression to expression by journalists. Range of expression expands exponentially if you extend it to dramatists, documentary makers, comedians, satirists and artists of all kinds. Different forms allow different truths to emerge. Which tells us more about the life of a single mother on a council estate in south Wales – a handful of television news reports or Karl Francis’s film *Streetlife*, a drama in the same lineage as *Cathy Come Home*? It is for these reasons that securing a range of general programming with Wales as its focus is no less important than securing competing news programmes.

The Assembly Government advisory group summarised it thus: ‘We cannot hope to see Welsh talents bring genuine diversity to UK networks, if there is not the space for them to develop their own voice at home in the language of their choice. Drama lies at the heart of most high quality television services, yet is all but absent from English language services in Wales. Welsh society and politics lacks the regular challenge of comedy and satire in both languages. Light entertainment taps only a fraction of Wales’s deeply rooted performance culture. The exposure given to the diverse arts of Wales, at a time when arts organisations themselves are seeking new partnerships, is fitful.’

The Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales, Lord Elis-Thomas, once reminded us that ‘English is a Welsh language’. So what is the state of programme services, in the language of the majority, designed for their own national community - since 1999 one of Britain’s internal emerging democracies?

It is this area of general programming that is currently at greater risk than the ITV Wales news service, and whose entire loss from ITV, coupled with retrenchment at BBC Wales, promises the anglophone Welsh audience a diminished and diminishing service in the years to come unless something is done. The Assembly Government advisory group calculated that the value of English language television output in Wales will have dropped by more than £20m by 2013, even if ITV Wales maintains its current investment in Welsh news. If ITV withdraws entirely, its spend in Wales will have dropped in that period from £12.9million to nil, while BBC Wales is currently in the second year of a five year period where it will have to cut its programme spend across all services by £3million per annum. Taken together this is a major reduction in a service that was already far from the full

programme service that the anglophone audience in particular, and the Welsh polity in general, deserves and needs.

This focus on general programming clearly causes bemusement in some, though not all quarters, in Ofcom. Its justification for relegating general programming, in contrast to news, to a ‘nice to have’ rests on the primacy that the public seems to have accorded to news in Ofcom’s research. The tone of Ofcom’s final document may have had a regretful touch, coloured by a realisation that this is just about the worst moment in history to be asking government for money, but there are serious questions to be asked about the hierarchy of public value that Ofcom claims to detect.

There is no doubt that whatever questions are posed to the public about programmes, the importance of news always comes near the top. That is certainly the case when considering programmes made specifically for one region or nation. But it is not the case that the public puts the black spot on general programming for ‘my nation’ or region. For instance, in Ofcom’s research<sup>6</sup> 78 per cent of respondents across the UK told them that ‘providing good quality news about my area was important’, while 61 per cent said the same thing about ‘other good quality programmes about my nation/region’ – 5 percentage points more, mark you, than for ‘high quality soaps or dramas made in the UK’ (56 per cent). The fact that ‘other good quality programmes about my nation/region’ could have scored so highly, even after years in which both volume and production quality declined, says something for their enduring appeal. If the public have a gripe it is about the gap between the perceived importance of these programmes and their satisfaction with what is delivered. The public may like a bargain, but they despise the cheap.

Similarly, while 91 per cent in Wales thought it was important to have news of Wales on more than one channel, 71 per cent thought the same should apply to other programmes for Wales<sup>7</sup>. This is hardly a half-hearted endorsement of programmes made for the home patch. In an era when single party government can get elected by less than a third of the electorate, 71 per cent or even 61 per cent, might be thought a landslide victory. By what reasoning is something supported by six or seven out of every ten people to be cast aside, just because they also thought something else was even more important?

If there is a consistent gap between news and ‘other programmes’, is it

really surprising? Regional news is the only portion of regional programming that has been guaranteed a high profile, early evening slot in the ITV schedule for the past forty years. It has had time, exposure and stability to register in the minds of the individual and the community. Other regional programmes have had a much tougher time pushing their way into the schedules. On ITV they have usually had to make do with the 10.30pm slot after *News at Ten* or even later. Most of BBC Wales's programmes for Wales appear on BBC2, rather than BBC1. Of the 749 hours of general programmes made and broadcast by BBC Wales in 2006-07 only 26 hours appeared in peak hours on BBC1. Only 184 hours out of the total appeared in peak across BBC1, BBC2 and BBC2W. It has hardly been an even contest.

But there is something depressing about resting one's case in the cultural sphere on opinion polls. Are we really to throw aside all deeper assessments of cultural value, the tomes that have been written about the connection between the media, culture, and identity, the role of television in the self-validation of communities? The authors of Ofcom's final report seem to have forgotten the wisdom contained in its own statement on the nations and regions, following its first psb review.

Countering critics who denied that Ofcom's research showed that viewers in the nations valued their programming more than in the English regions, it pointed to a 'wide range of studies conducted over many years' and added the following wise observation: 'Our rationale is not exclusively based on audience research. It is based on the observation that regional programming is required to meet the complex and challenging requirements of a devolved society with diverse cultural identities. These requirements generate *a right to ongoing dedicated provision (my italics)*, which is not necessarily or exclusively dependent on the majority's views at a particular point in time.'<sup>8</sup> What has changed?

There is no mention of 'a right to ongoing dedicated provision' in the Ofcom final report. Although it does set out the ambitions of Wales and Scotland, as envisaged by the Welsh Assembly Government and by the formidable reports of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission, it does not endorse them. The *Digital Britain* interim report makes no mention whatsoever of general programming for the nations, gliding seamlessly from the issue of news for the nations, to network production quotas and UK children's programming. In its own severe calculus, rights don't come into it. The unstated implication is that general

programming for the nations will be an unavoidable, if regrettable, casualty of changed market circumstances. Invidious choices have to be made in straitened times, and this will be one of them. This will be one market failure that will not be corrected.

This is to conceive broadcasting within the nations as simply a costly departure from a UK norm. The Scottish Broadcasting Commission's proposal for a Scottish television network at a cost of £75million per annum or the claims for a fuller service in Wales, assessed variously at £40-50million, are regarded as hopelessly ambitious. They would certainly be major advances on the status quo. But are they really so outlandish in the context of a total spend by the five main psb channels of more than £2.5billion and their ability to extend their service at the UK level to no less than 20 channels<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, such claims seem positively modest when you also remember that in 2007, of the 16,585 hours of programmes produced by just five of these 20 channels – BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, C4 and Five – only 413 hours (2.5%) were made outside England<sup>10</sup>. The challenge for government is not so much how to enlarge the cake, but rather how to rebalance British broadcasting as a whole across the nations.

The only re-balancing contemplated to date has involved UK network programming. There has been a lot of pressure to increase network commissioning outside London, and outside England, with the BBC leading the way with its target of reaching 17 per cent of total output delivered from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – at least equal to their population share. If the BBC has come late to this issue, at least it is now addressing it with energy and commitment. ITV doesn't want to play at all and Channel 4 is stronger on rhetoric than action.

But network quotas address only a re-balancing of production. There is no evidence that they are making any difference to the cultural diversity of UK networks, or to the cultural representation of the three smaller national entities. Those who expect such a change are almost certain to be disappointed. As channels fight for survival in a fiercely competitive environment, we are likely to see a greater homogeneity of output – witness the erosion of Channel 4's distinctiveness. Rightly or wrongly, commissioners are under immense pressure to find the widest common ground. Network commissions and quotas are about a fairer distribution of the spoils, they are not the answer to a national community's desire for cultural self-realisation.

In making the argument at the decision-making centre for a fuller English language service, time and again you will come up against the argument that Wales is already supremely advantaged in television because of the investment in S4C. Its more limited value to non-Welsh speaking viewers is discounted. In this particular debate the elephant in the room is not the BBC, it is S4C. It is not an easy argument to deal with, since time has eroded the perception that S4C was as much a political settlement as broadcasting one – in William Whitelaw’s famous phrase ‘an investment in social harmony’, following one of the most determined and successful campaigns of civil disobedience in the UK in the twentieth century.

Only a handful of rabid letter writers to the *Western Mail* would question the need for a Welsh language channel, even today when the broadcasting environment has made it infinitely more difficult for it to make its mark with the audience. Personally, I have always been proud of the work that we did at HTV at the inception of the channel in 1982 in creating current affairs and rural affairs programmes – *Y Byd ar Bedwar* and *Cefn Gwlad* - that still survive today. Successive Controllers of BBC Wales, including this one, have taken pride in the fact that the BBC has provided S4C with core strands that have made a disproportionately large contribution to the channel’s audience. The case for S4C is still strong, as the only television expression of the Welsh language in the global cornucopia of the digital age, even if, like the BBC’s Radio 3, it is a public good supported by more people than actually use it. S4C has delivered a wider public value, as well as an institutional value in being the only fully autonomous broadcasting organisation in Wales.

But that is no reason for the institution or the politicians or the public to shield their gaze from some of the consequential effects - a too common practice in Wales. For instance, within the BBC in the 1990s I found it difficult to make headway with the case for more funding for English language broadcasting in Wales because the BBC looked at total investment in the nation, rather than at parity of service. In that sense, there was no escaping the conclusion that, to some extent, the investment in Welsh language television and radio, was being bought at the expense of the English language services. In 2007-08 BBC Wales and BBC Scotland both spent around £50m a year on television within their respective nations – Scotland £50m and Wales £47m<sup>11</sup>. Yet if you look at spend on English language television, a huge disparity opens up

– Scotland £48m, Wales £24m, only £1m more than BBC Northern Ireland at £23m.

Of course, the gap cannot all be laid at the door of the need to provide in two languages. The fact that the BBC is a bilingual operation creates its own countervailing synergies that benefit both Welsh and English language programmes. But the gap does help explain why BBC Scotland is able to produce some 93 hours in the drama, comedy, music and arts categories against BBC Wales's 32 hours, despite the fact that output in news, sport and other genres is broadly comparable. Pessimists will say this is not likely to change, that it is difficult to foresee the BBC increasing its investment in output for the nations in the current period of retrenchment. But the BBC is going to have to play a fuller part in this field of general programming than current plans suggest. Decline here, too, has to be arrested.

Within Wales, the difference between S4C's comprehensive standalone service – clearly a model for Scottish aspirations – and English language provision is also stark, a factor that has created much frustration in the creative sector. Following the reduction in ITV Wales output from January 2009, 67 per cent of the total output in English across BBC Wales and ITV Wales will be accounted for by news and current affairs, another 17.5 per cent by sport, leaving only 15 per cent to account for all other programming. In the S4C service – a more normal single channel – those other programmes take nearer 60 per cent. If ITV withdraw from everything other than news in 2010 the imbalance will be even more severe. That imbalance is created by three factors: the existence of two news services, the dominance of sport where live action demands time, and the restricted volume of other programmes.

Although one might make a case for mirroring S4C in English, one does not have to go that far to establish that there is room for more English language content. There is always likely to be a larger provision in Welsh on S4C since it is the sole television broadcaster in that language, but the volume and range of its output does put the low volume of English language output into perspective. For instance, in drama in 2006-07 S4C broadcast 187 hours, while in English only four hours of drama were made for Wales. In music and arts S4C broadcast 193 hours, against only 31 hours across BBC and ITV in English. In light entertainment, S4C broadcast 98 hours, against eight hours in English<sup>12</sup>. Total general programming in Welsh, outside news current affairs and

sport, amounted to 750 hours, against 170 in English. At the very least it underlines the potential for extending and enriching the diet in English. But it also calls into question the fact that in recent years the BBC spend on S4C has been increasing – under the terms of the strategic partnership - while the spend on English language has been decreasing and is set to do so for the next five years.

The scale of this disparity cannot but create long-term risks for S4C, risks that would be significantly mitigated by a richer programme provision in English. The investment of emotional capital by the Welsh-speaking community in S4C has been prodigious, but the channel also depends, crucially, on the support of the non-Welsh-speaking majority of the population. The collapse of English language programming for Wales, would increase S4C's own vulnerability. This is what makes the totality of S4C's recent intervention in the broadcasting scene in Wales difficult to understand.

There was a considerable flurry in the Welsh dovecote when Ofcom's final report revealed that S4C had proposed that it might tender a contract for an English language news service to be broadcast on ITV, hand in hand with commissioning for the first time a news service in Welsh for its own channel, in the process dispensing with the news service it has received free of charge from the BBC since 1982. The proposal that S4C should offer itself as the tendering agent for a news franchise is a good one. Many would argue that if we are to channel public money into safeguarding Welsh news on ITV it would be better done through a third party than through ITV plc, if only in the interests of transparency. Some have seen the S4C offer as in opposition to the BBC's initiative in offering a partnership arrangement with ITV to reduce infrastructure costs, but both initiatives can just as easily be seen as complementary and mutually supportive. It is possible to envisage a three-way partnership.

S4C has been extraordinarily coy about its proposals, becoming the only public broadcasting authority not to publish its evidence to the Ofcom review, although later releasing it in heavily edited form. It is not normally acceptable for a public authority to say so little about something that could affect so much and, governance issues apart, it has left the public with no reliable understanding of the Authority's thinking.

Many will be perplexed that S4C should have wanted to mar the

reception of a valid and sensible proposal in relation to ITV's Welsh news, by simultaneously proposing to ditch BBC Wales's news service and to use its own cash to commission its own. In doing so it tarnished its initiative regarding the ITV news with accusations of institutional one-upmanship, dulling the shine of any wider public interest. It seems an odd thing to have done, unless it is an astonishingly bold and risky negotiating ploy in a year when it is having to renew its strategic partnership agreement with the BBC. It has created a degree of public confusion and not a little uncertainty for affected employees, things public authorities usually seek to avoid.

The issue becomes very relevant to the future of general programming in English for Wales, when you trace through the possible consequences of such a decision. The argument runs like this: If S4C wishes to use its public cash to commission a news service, rather than to receive one free of charge from the BBC, then presumably it will have to divert that cash from its other programming, threatening some loss of value for Welsh-speaking viewers as well as for the independent production sector. At BBC Wales a withdrawal from Welsh language television news, would have the effect of pushing up the cost of English language news, as synergies across the two services are lost. This will risk creating more pressure for economies in BBC Wales news.

Moreover, since the BBC is statutorily bound to supply S4C with not less than ten hours a week, it will also have to replace nearly 300 hours of news – about half its total output for S4C - with other programming which, on past experience will be between 50 per cent and 100 per cent more expensive. Under the current BBC licence fee settlement there is a real danger that any additional cost is likely to have to come out of BBC Wales's other services, primarily English language television, but also Radio Wales and Radio Cymru. If this were to transpire it would produce a net transfer of value out of the English language and into the Welsh language television service, hardly what is required under current circumstances. The public does not know whether S4C sees it differently, but it would be interesting to know whether this possible eventuality was debated at the S4C Authority.

It has put an interesting and useful proposal on the table for safeguarding news of Wales on ITV, but its intentions regarding the BBC's news service, whatever the merits of the argument, has had other consequences: it has done serious injury to working relationships between it and the

BBC, it has unsettled both the DCMS and Ofcom and, perhaps most significantly of all it has opened the door to greater public scrutiny of itself and possibly to the devolution of responsibility for the channel to Wales – something it has always devoutly wished to avoid.

The inevitable dispute between our two main broadcasting institutions is also diverting public debate away from the other issues that need to be debated urgently. What would be the nature of the tender for ITV Wales news? For what period would it be tendered? Would it be an open commercial tender, or would it have a list of selected bidders? Would there, or could there be any requirement for a degree of local ownership? Will the cross-media ownership rules affecting newspapers be relaxed in time for newspaper organisations to participate? Will there be scope for a not-for-profit consortium? Will there be a quality threshold, and if so how high will the bar be set? It also raises issues that go beyond news. If such an arrangement is possible for news, will it be extended to allow current affairs and general programming to survive on ITV? Would ITV play ball?

There is too much at stake for these issues to be settled by consenting adults in private. They must be debated openly. They go to the heart of the cultural life of the Welsh nation, they affect the quality and texture of our living and put at risk that good will between the Welsh speaking and non-Welsh speaking community that has been so hard won. In broadcasting they also blur the historic boundaries of linguistic responsibility, albeit in ways that could be beneficial if handled properly.

S4C clearly wishes to extend its responsibilities into the English language domain. That is bound to raise issues around governance. In making its proposal in relation to ITV it makes the case itself, not necessarily for a bilingual channel, but for a bilingual public broadcasting authority outside the BBC. That would be something that many people, including myself, would support. What would be deeply contentious in the Wales of today would be the management of a significant part of English language media in Wales by an organisation drawn predominantly from the Welsh-speaking community. The obvious answer would be to mutate the S4C authority, but not the management, into a bilingual Welsh Media Commission with a remit that could cover all media - television, radio, online, and perhaps even print.

I have detected some warmth at Ofcom to the notion of a Welsh Media

Commission, but also a worry that, if it existed in parallel with S4C, we could be building an impossibly expensive superstructure for Welsh broadcasting. As it was put to me, succinctly and ironically, ‘How many people does it take to run television in Wales?’. There is substance in the implied charge. But a bilingual, multi-media commission would be a much more cost-effective proposition. It need have no visible effect on S4C’s service. The channel could be run as a franchise from the commission, with its funding still ring-fenced by statute. In fact, it would allow for a healthier separation of the current management board and regulatory functions, creating both greater managerial freedom and more transparent regulation. But there are also more creative possibilities.

The commission could encourage initiatives that cross both media divides and language divides. It might offer other franchises in the English language, much as S4C is suggesting for ITV Wales news. It might even manage the Assembly Government funding now given for Welsh language online journalism, currently managed, rather inappropriately, by the Welsh Books Council. It could have a close relationship with the lottery-funded Film Agency for Wales, providing back office functions or more, and creating more fruitful dialogue and active collaboration between the agency and broadcasters. It might offer tenders for collaboration between broadcasters and arts organisations or higher education.

Above all, it would assemble a critical mass of expertise that would be able expertly to monitor quantitative and qualitative change in Wales’s media environment (preferably including the BBC), informed by its closeness to the audience as well as to the industry. It would allow Wales greater influence and effective autonomy, while still operating within a UK framework. Many in London believe that the reluctance in Wales to contemplate the transfer of responsibility for broadcasting, and S4C in particular, from Westminster to Cardiff is rooted, not in a principled belief in broadcasting as a UK reserved power, but in fear. A bilingual Welsh Media Commission would allow us to grow up.



## 2/ Inventing Wales

Patrick Hannan

It was in May 1970 that I paid my first visit to the boardroom on the third floor of the BBC's headquarters in Llandaff, Cardiff. Across the table from me was a line of five or six grey-suited men, faintly reminiscent of the Soviet politburo watching the May Day parade in Red Square. A big cheese from London was there, as was the president of the South Wales Miners, then a member of the BBC's Broadcasting Council for Wales. It looked like an important occasion and, in a sense, it was more significant than any of us perhaps realised.

A few weeks after that meeting, which was a job interview (or board, as the BBC liked to call it) I was appointed as the BBC's Welsh industrial and political correspondent. I was, therefore, the first person in BBC Wales to have the word political in his title. Perhaps the people who ran the place were prescient because, although we didn't know it then, we were on the threshold of a precipitous decline in traditional industry which was to be matched by the dizzying ascent of Welsh politics.

Industry was the thing in those days. Coal and steel in particular, but by no means alone, defined the image of Wales throughout the world. When we talked about politics more often than not we talked about the politics of industry, closures, unemployment, inward investment and the rest of it. Agriculture, at the heart of so much Welsh life, took its place as a kind of industry too. Rumbling away in the background (and sometimes in the foreground) were cultural matters, in particular vigorous campaigns on behalf of the Welsh language, but the chief preoccupations were work and the economy. Most Members of

Parliament, even those in the Labour Party who were early devolutionists, believed that a strong central government at Westminster was essential to dealing with the needs of a changing country.

But there was something else going on. In 1966, Gwynfor Evans became the first Plaid Cymru MP when he won a by-election in Carmarthen. Like many of the events that were to end in the establishment of a new political and administrative order in Wales it owed a great deal to chance. The sitting Labour member, Lady Megan Lloyd George, had insisted on fighting the general election a few months earlier, even though she was mortally ill. If she had stood aside Gwynfor might never have got to Westminster at all.

His victory, and that of Mrs. Winnie Ewing for the Scottish National Party later that year, created a momentum. Formerly safe Labour seats in Wales and Scotland looked vulnerable to a nationalist surge. The Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, took refuge behind a royal commission on the constitution. Some bombs went off. The Prince of Wales, a terrified-looking twenty-year-old, played his part in emphasising the unity of the United Kingdom by going through a Ruritanian investiture ceremony at Caernarfon. There was a certain sense of instability about the place.

Normal service was resumed, however, with the unexpected Conservative victory in the general election of June 1970. Gwynfor Evans and Winnie Ewing lost their seats, the report of the royal commission seemed destined to go straight from the printers to landfill, the Conservative Party brandished its unionist credentials. And then...another shatteringly theatrical intervention by chance. Edward Heath took on the miners and lost. Labour slipped into power on the back of an inconclusive election in February 1974. Welsh and Scottish Nationalists won seats. In October another election: Welsh and Scottish nationalists won even more seats (14 in total) as Labour squeezed in with a majority of three. It was devolution time once more.

That, of course, was not the end of that. Far from it. But looking back more than thirty years on you can see that the accidents of political life conspired to start a debate about the nature of Britain and its constituent countries, a debate which is still not finished. The devolution train clattered on through the tumultuous parliamentary nights of the seventies only to end in a wreck as it finally crashed into

the referendum buffers. The people of Wales in particular, catatonic with indifference, rejected the idea with contempt. A majority of the Scots voted in favour of a parliament but, thanks to the elaborate referendum mechanics, still weren't allowed to have one. Far from concluding the argument, of course, that simply served to keep it alive. In Wales, perhaps for the first time in history, we'd been sitting in the front row at a national drama brought to us day after day by television, radio and the newspapers. And, it was to emerge later, we were only at the end of act one.

It's possible to see now that what we did in that period was to invent Wales as the kind of political entity it had never been before. Wales is a very divided country: north and south, east and west, Welsh-speaking and non Welsh-speaking, rural and industrial. Now all those disparate communities had something to argue about, argument being a more lively unifying force than agreement.

In all this the Welsh media were crucial. The historian John Davies has pointed out the importance of broadcasting in the construction of modern Wales. His phrase, 'Wales could be defined as an artefact produced by broadcasting', is an elegant summary of the way in which the arrival of the BBC in Wales in 1923 altered perspectives. Once you had a platform from which to announce Welsh news then you had to go out and find the Welsh news to announce from it. A very significant further step was to be taken in the 1970s.

In 1976 I hung up my industrial hat and from then on concentrated solely on politics. It showed how much things were changing, but there was one aspect to the switch of emphasis which, in a sense, went against normal journalistic practice. The basic idea in broadcasting and newspapers is to identify stories in which you think the public will be interested and then present them as entertainingly as possible. In the case of devolution we were dealing with a subject which many members of the public thought tedious and irrelevant but we still had to bang on about it day after day. The reception could be disheartening. In a pub on one occasion a man who had just had his voice box removed got out his notebook and wrote me a message. It said: "I find what you do very depressing."

In the BBC, I can testify, and I believe at HTV and among the editors of newspapers like the *Western Mail*, we thought this long political

struggle was more than just another story, although we were naturally pleased that it made us even more relevant in the Welsh scheme of things. The important point was, though, that whether the average voter was interested or not, he or she had to be told what was going on. Professional and institutional pride insisted that no one should be able to say to us after a referendum that they hadn't understood what they'd been voting about.

It required a lot of ingenuity to bring to the screen the nature of the confection dreamt up by the government on which the people of Wales were to pass judgement. Until that moment, for example, hardly anyone had heard of secondary legislation and even fewer understood it. It was certainly nothing to get excited about, but it was a key part of the plan and it had to be explained. One result was, in those technologically unsophisticated days, that I spent hour after hour with graphics artists as they made cut out models of little civil servants, complete with bowler hats, ready for a primitive animation system by which they were moved in and out of cardboard buildings.

It's difficult to know if this made any difference in the end. Did people vote against the assembly because of what we'd told them, or in spite of it? There was one small indication of our impact. Among other things the broadcasters commissioned opinion polls. At the beginning of the referendum campaign they showed that such was the lack of interest in the whole affair the majority of voters didn't realise that creating an elected assembly was actually government policy. By the time the polls opened at least they understood that much, if not a great deal more.

I think that those of us closely involved in reporting and interpreting that campaign didn't realise at the time the exact significance of what had taken place during those years. When the Welsh people turned the idea down by a majority of four to one I was one of the people who thought that was that, certainly for the foreseeable future. Shrewder minds took a different view. Among them Lord Crickhowell who, as Nicholas Edwards, served for eight years as Secretary of State for Wales in Mrs. Thatcher's government. He told me later he had recognised that once you had taken the lid off that particular box you'd never be able to put it back on again.

So what we did in the seventies, politicians and journalists, was to prepare the way for the day in 1997 when another referendum did

bring a yes vote in Wales – by a majority no thicker than a couple of pages of the Radio Times, fewer than seven thousand votes out of a million. By this time Wales was a different place, its familiar outlines altered by the great economic and social changes that took place during the eighties. Most of the pits were closed, steelmaking much reduced, manufacturing in decline. The year-long miners' strike had started the process in which the authority of all the trades unions was greatly eroded. The call centre was beginning to take its place as the symbol of post-industrial employment.

It's possible to argue that the rise of Welsh politics at this time was at least in part a response to radical changes that had been imposed from outside. In this period quite a lot of Labour politicians began to see the attractions of the European Union as an alternative source of power to a Conservative dominated Westminster. In a similar way others have come to look on a national assembly as an organisation within which they can create a Wales more congenial to them than a model assembled elsewhere.

You can see it in the tone of some of the distinctive policies introduced in the early years of the devolved administration. The end of prescription charges, for instance, was clearly a nod at the welfare state old Labourism of Aneurin Bevan. Reducing the level of fees paid by university students, even if a short-lived intervention, was another policy rooted in an old Labour principle, in this case the aim of liberating poor people through free education.

The message has been clear, if limited in application: the harsh, market-driven policies of the UK regime could be mitigated by the principled egalitarianism of politicians who were more in tune with what their people wanted and deserved. Foundation hospitals? No, thanks. Vote for us and turn the clock back. It's significant, perhaps, that at the end of his long life even Leo Abse, who as a Labour backbencher had been the tireless scourge of the seventies devolution proposals, came to modify his views. The Welsh assembly, he thought, was acting as a useful check 'against metropolitan delusions.'

Welsh politics is different in other ways. The electoral system pushes the parties towards coalition. The Liberal Democrats have been in one government with Labour, Plaid Cymru in another. The Conservatives, pragmatists to their fingertips, have the existence of the assembly to

thank for their renewed vigour after they were virtually wiped out in Westminster and local elections in the nineties.

As parties become more identifiably Welsh, however, another problem arises. Almost as soon as politicians took their places in Cardiff Bay in May 1999, tensions arose between them and London. It was a state of affairs that led directly to the Assembly's decision to sack Alun Michael, its first leader, on the grounds that he couldn't or wouldn't get more money from Westminster. This has been a constant theme of the Assembly's first decade – the search for more power. It's got some and it wants more. It would be surprising if, in the end, it didn't get it, although it might take rather longer than eager politicians like to think. What has happened is that one of the chief preoccupations of Welsh politics has been politics itself. In a sense it has taken its place as one of Wales's major industries.

When I faced that line of seriously-suited BBC men in the spring of 1970 I would never have imagined that we could reach this point so rapidly. Nor would they, I suspect. But they had felt the way the wind was blowing and, by adding the word politics to that job description, they had prepared for what might happen. Other organisations shifted in a similar direction. The *Western Mail*, for example, began to realise that politics wasn't something that happened only in London and appointed a Welsh Affairs correspondent in Cardiff.

The paradox is that the evolution of Wales as a political constituency hasn't been mirrored by a growth in the number of ways of finding out about it. Quite the reverse, indeed. Welsh newspapers, like newspapers everywhere, have cut and cut again so that no one has the time to devote to the details that make up political life. Regional broadcasting by ITV is hanging from the cliff edge by its fingernails, perhaps soon to plunge on to the rocks below. It might be, getting on for forty years after BBC Wales started the whole business, the BBC will soon be the only significant organisation with the resources to examine and explain how public life in Wales now works.

It seems to me that's a dangerous state of affairs. Without pluralism, without competition, journalism inevitably lacks its proper vigour and a necessary sense of adventure. In many ways, indeed, this may be the biggest single problem facing an entirely new form of government. During the devolution campaigns of the 1990s, supporters of a Welsh

assembly argued that it was a vital way of addressing what they called the democratic deficit in Wales: in particular the lack of accountability of the various organisations – quangos in particular – that wielded great influence over people’s lives.

Up to a point anyway, the National Assembly has made a difference, although not as much as its spin machine would have you believe. Many of the quangos have disappeared but we still can’t be certain how their former responsibilities are now discharged. Accountability isn’t the same thing as transparency. The democratic deficit remains because democracy isn’t simply about voting but about knowledge. In not much more than half a lifetime we have between us, the political and media classes, discovered and invented Wales. What everyone now needs are better ways of understanding this new structure. The big question is this: where in the future – the near future - will people be able to look for that?

*This essay is based in part on Patrick Hannan’s book, A Useful Fiction: Adventures in British Democracy, to be published by Seren in May 2009.*



### 3/ The Long Goodbye

Kevin Williams

The 1990 Broadcasting Act was a milestone in the history of Welsh television as well as a millstone around the necks of Welsh broadcasters. The attack on broadcasting launched by Mrs. Thatcher was initially directed at the BBC, her free market principles being incompatible with the BBC's public service philosophy. However, the weight of the changes brought about by the Act fell on ITV, which has gradually reduced its programming commitments, particularly to the nations and regions of Britain. Founded as a regional service in 1955, to counter the metropolitanism and centralisation of the BBC - Britain's only broadcaster until that date - ITV programming hours in Wales have contracted. In the last few years, in response to increased competition and the further weakening of public service obligations, they have almost disappeared.

During the lobbying around the 1990 Broadcasting Act and its aftermath, the chief executive at HTV emphasised that the *raison d'être* of the company was 'the reinforcement of our identity; to present the Welsh to the Welsh and to be proud, in so far as it is justifiable, of who we are'<sup>13</sup>. To do this HTV, the then franchise holder of the Wales and the West ITV region, provided a range of programming which amounted to 12 hours a week at its peak.

News, current affairs and sport figured prominently but there were also light entertainment, documentary, children's and family programmes as well as quiz shows. Not all the efforts at popular entertainment were successful. Quiz shows such as *Ready Money* and *Tellyphonin*, chat shows

such as *Friday Night Live* and the magazine programme *Get Going* which covered leisure activities such as cookery, flower arranging and painting were cheap, low budget television. HTV, however, fought to retain prime time current affairs, bucking the trend of the ITV network to shunt investigative journalism to the late night margins of the service. The award-winning *Wales This Week* continued to be broadcast in an early evening opt-out at 7.30pm., after crucial support from Ofcom.

It is also important to note that the ‘devolution dividend’ in the late 1990s led to more money being spent on drama. HTV promised the Welsh Affairs Committee in 1999 that they would double their drama from 10 to 20 hours per year<sup>14</sup>. The Committee welcomed the promise but appeared sceptical about the company's ability to deliver. This scepticism was well founded. In 2000 HTV was swallowed up by much larger companies, United Media and then Carlton. The result was the abandonment of the commitment to increase drama output and a reduction in jobs<sup>15</sup>.

The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee report, *Broadcasting in Transition*, criticised the speed and way in which ITV had downgraded regional programming and production facilities. It called on the new regulator, Ofcom, to protect and maintain the regional commitments of the Channel 3 licensees. Ofcom, however, presented little or no objection to ITV's withdrawal from its regional commitments. The company's obligation to make non-news programmes for the nations has now shrunk to a mere ninety minutes a week, and is already planned to fall will fall to half an hour when the analogue signal is switched off. Even that is not guaranteed. Under Michael Grade, ITV's executive chairman, the network is redrawing its regional map of Britain, reducing the number of individual news services from seventeen to nine<sup>16</sup>. Grade stresses that the status quo is not viable; obligations to news and non-news programming in the nations and regions are not commercially sustainable. This is unlikely to change as competition will increase following the digital switchover and advertising revenue will continue to fall in an economic recession that at the moment has no end in sight.

Jobs cuts, an increasing emphasis on prime time programming and the standardisation of the product, especially in the area of news and current affairs is the future of ITV. Spending cuts have already impacted on the quality of the regional programming. ITV's spend on

its service for Wales has declined more quickly than the volume of its output. As a result *Wales This Week* is perceptibly changing from a programme driven by hard hitting journalism into a magazine format with shorter, more light-hearted and less substantial stories. The disappearance of the weekly politics programme, *The Sharp End*, already pushed to a late night slot, is another indication of ITV's retreat from Wales.

Relying on the BBC to make up the gap left by the demise of ITV in Wales is misplaced. Its services are already under financial pressure. But the importance of the BBC to Wales cannot be over-estimated. The corporation has played a central role in Welsh political and intellectual life since the creation of the Welsh region of BBC in the 1930s<sup>17</sup>. Today its influence stems as much from its broad range of cultural and community activities as it does from its programme output. As a patron of the arts, a supporter and promoter of sports and sporting events, a major contributor to the economy, a key player in the maintenance of the Welsh language and the primary reporter of politics there are few areas of Welsh public life the BBC does not reach<sup>18</sup>. Most people in Wales identify the BBC as their main source of information<sup>19</sup>.

This dominance is a matter of concern, though it is the weakness of commercial media rather than the BBC's strengths that has created the situation. Politicians have complained about the Corporation's 'virtual monopoly' over the reporting of culture and politics. Its capacity to suck in local talent at the expense of other media outlets has raised questions about its impact on diversity in the Welsh media. However, it is the spats with political figures that account for the hostile attitude of many Assembly Members to the BBC<sup>20</sup>.

How the BBC covers Wales has been the subject of much criticism since its early days. BBC Wales has to operate within a context in which programming policy is overseen by London. In political, economic and cultural terms, the corporation is a 'profoundly London-centric organisation'. In 2004 80 per cent of its budget was spent in London and 63 per cent of its employees were based in Britain's capital city<sup>21</sup>. Successive regimes in Wales have had to fight for resources in a London-biased world, uninterested in much of what happens outside the M25.

Devolution provided a new impetus to the BBC's programming

commitment to Wales. BBC2W, a digital zone dedicated to serving English-speaking Wales, was launched in 2001. It broadcasts daily two hours of Welsh programming in peak time<sup>22</sup>. By 2003-4 BBC Wales was producing 16.9 hours per week. This was a high point and by 2007-08 it had fallen to 14.7 hours<sup>23</sup>. The service will carry on declining. BBC2W will cease to operate in 2009 with the end of analogue transmission. A further reduction in broadcast hours is likely to happen with the savings the BBC has to make due to a less than favourable licence fee settlement. It is estimated that BBC Wales will have to save nearly £3 million every year for the next five years.

The arrival of S4C in 1982 was a significant boost for television in Wales. It provided an impetus for the growth of English-language as well as Welsh language television. Both HTV and BBC Wales increased their English-language output. Making programmes for S4C supported a more Wales-orientated approach in the production values of the whole of Welsh broadcasting. However, the limitation of the service for English speakers in Wales has been highlighted by S4C's success. The Assembly Government advisory group identified a 'significant imbalance' with the reduction of ITV's non-news output and the closure of 2W, as is outlined in Geraint Talfan Davies's chapter above<sup>24</sup>.

S4C could add to this imbalance by drawing further resources away from English language broadcasting. The strategic partnership agreed by the S4C Authority and the BBC Trust represents an increased financial commitment by the BBC to S4C. The increase in the programmes produced for S4C by the BBC without charge – now valued at £22m - means that it is likely that over the period of the partnership more will be spent on Welsh language than English language programming by the corporation. This is in addition to the subsidy S4C receives from the DCMS which has risen steadily since its inception, increasing by more than 20 per cent since 2000 to stand at £94m in 2007.

The gap between the programming provision for Welsh speakers and English speakers is large and growing, and is likely to widen further over the next few years. This is the central predicament facing broadcasting in Wales. S4C's achievement is attributable to the active constituency that has supported Welsh language television. Calls for a dedicated English-language channel have never matched those for

S4C. Nobody has offered to fast to death or go to gaol for an English language Welsh TV channel - yet. A channel may or may not be the right answer. But there is a need for more English language provision, whatever form it takes. Without it Wales is unlikely to build a fully informed, national polity, a diverse and fully developed culture and a successful and innovative knowledge economy.

In recent years we have seen that the broadcasting ecology in Wales is more fragile than we thought. There is an inter-dependency between Welsh and English language services that we damage at our peril. S4C, in particular, needs to show greater awareness of this fragility. Its recent intervention has risked careless damage to English language provision that could have dire consequences. If that provision continues to decline not only will many citizens of Wales cease to watch television that reflects their own society, but Welsh politics and policy making will increasingly take place within an ever decreasing public sphere. And, in a worst case scenario, this could undermine the delicate balance which sustains a distinct Welsh broadcasting system, as well as possibly unravel the process of devolution.



## 4/ Normal Service

Dai Smith

*“There has been a record turn-out for the Government of Wales Election in 2015 and, as we wait to see the exact colour of the administration which will take up office, commentators across the UK are wondering how this has come about in such a short space of devolved time.*

*In the months leading up to the election politicians of all parties have commented on how engaged with the democratic process the Welsh electorate has become. The blip of weary contempt or apathetic disinterest which had dogged the early years of devolved government had all but gone whilst the sentimental pretence of devolution’s self-appointed champions that there was a natural order of consensus in Welsh life has clearly been replaced by the lively, informed debate of a society mature and tolerant enough to promote and thrive on the creativity of conflict and dissent.*

*Wales is set to zing collectively on a world stage with more vibrato than the clichéd Land of Song ever managed solo.*

*The past six years have been remarkable. Wales, more than any other part of the UK, realised as the Great Recession bit, that it had no choice, if it was to stake its claim for fresh growth in the recovery that would assuredly follow, than to assert its distinctive needs and being. To do this it had to express and emphasise both its contemporary culture and its historical legacy in a manner that did not confine its people to one note, but rather let them be defined in concerto. In sum, a Small Nation has proposed a Great Society by systematically developing and sustaining a sense of themselves, in the round and connected, which the people of a participatory democracy require if they are to be engaged and active citizens.*

*The then First Minister, Rhodri Morgan had given the lead in his farewell address to the Senedd. This effectively tied the hands of his rivals, inside and outside his own party, to make more direct and hence imaginative use of the overall budget by promoting the nation's intrinsic well-being through the culture, which is both its heart-beat and its most lasting purpose. He called for a sense of individual worth within a society that aspires to nurture all its members. He spoke not of a singular direction but of multiple journeys, though he gently reminded us that if our Time was our own, our Space was still Wales.*

*Within this space the Welsh people have increasingly in the past six years discovered a sense of themselves through all of the arts of performance, dance, music, song and drama. A sense of themselves in words and images – on the printed page, on-line, on film, on video. A sense of themselves and how others have seen them – in museums, galleries and libraries. A sense of their complex and variegated history, of their bi-lingual presence and their pluralistic future. Above all there has been a sense of an old Country becoming a young Nation which their re-vitalised broadcast media have brought them.*

*Undoubtedly, the turning point came in 2009 when it was fully comprehended that false economic exigencies threatened to reduce the essential flow of that whole Welsh culture in English to the dribbled out flotsam of news gathering and reporting. From that belated realisation came the concerted action which placed the survival of the whole culture of Wales at the centre of the debate around broadcasting.*

*The passing moment of the journalistic sound bite was seen as the cracked mirror it is. The transfer of programme making and craft skills from a UK centre was a material gift that could not disguise the greater reality of a cultural branch plant economy. The crucial linguistic channelling in Welsh that was S4C was seen to be no substitute for a similar articulation of the majority Welsh identity in the English language. The artefact which has always been Wales needed the artifice with which the Welsh have always made and re-made their sense of themselves, in sport and in music, in politics and in literature, in gesture and in image and comedy and song and remembrance.*

*Wales would neither thrive, nor perhaps even survive, without the full broadcasting of Welsh culture, the human artifice made of our time and space in Wales. From 2009 then, it was ensured that 'normal service' would indeed be resumed. There was, after all, no mystery to the renaissance of our politics. The answer lay where it always does: in culture as a whole way of life."*

One person's culture is, of course, another one's poison. It is the pain and purpose of the public service broadcaster to find a means neither to privilege one at the expense of the other nor to patronise some with less than all deserve. In a country like Wales where there is both very finite native resource and infinite choice now available from myriad platforms, the crux has been the ability to corral a range of options within one channel, radio or television, without losing the brand identity that say Radio 1 or BBC 2 have by generic programming; or, if you break into the spectrum of another successful brand - say BBC Wales opting out of BBC1 at peak times in the schedule - that you match or beat the channel's usual audience share in Wales; or you present an unassailable case for special treatment by virtue of the content of the programme and the intended audience - your own people and their otherwise unmet needs.

The problems facing me from the early 1990s, when I became successively Editor of Radio Wales and then Head of Broadcast (English language) for BBC Wales, through the devolution referendum of 1997 and the first elected National Assembly for Wales in 1999, and until I departed in 2000, were precisely of that kind. The times were extraordinarily fluid, even more so in social and cultural terms than politically.

In Wales the major touchstones of a modern Welsh identity were in ruins or fast passing out of history. The defeat of the communal revolt that was the miners' strike of 1984-5, at least in Wales, was no more, in the run of things, than a requiem mass for a coal industry that had lingered more as a collective memory than the force for economic power and social change it had once been. Yet the de-industrialisation of Wales - services instead of steel, call centres for coal - had not replaced cultural fragmentation and social dislocation with a new material cohesion through prosperity.

More to the point, by the mid 1990s this Wales, in material disarray, was a world already culturally formed. It was rifted with the generation-to-generation legacy of its lived experience. Its hard-won achievements as a self-defining, largely working-class society, had been intellectually empowered since the 1960s by the university-led strengthening of the humanities and social sciences that dealt with Wales. The paradox of cultural root and social dis-location continued through the drifting somnambulism of the institutions the Welsh

people had once created with a destination in mind - from organised religion to acronymically reborn unions, from de-racinated rugby clubs to the de-radicalised Labour Party.

It was a paradox that also affected those more conservationist forces which attempted a re-gathering of forces, huddling together for protection – from the burgeoning heritage centres and museums of coal and slate to the braying chutzpah of S4C which was to telecast rugby in Welsh language commentaries to an audience overwhelmingly supportive of the one and ignorant of the other. A more sensible arrangement, a decade later, of shared spoils and available dual-language commentary is an advance that also heralds a possible retreat, if full general programming for Wales in our two native tongues is not absolutely secured into the future.

Such consideration was to be at the core of the way in which I tried, in the 1990s, to build on the concept of a national and normal service in English for Welsh viewers and listeners. This was the team's main priority, alongside the concomitant ambition to have a presence truly reflective of Wales – drama, and documentary and the arts – on the BBC's UK networks. The latter was a hard nut to crack and the post-1997 kernels of Welsh accents, faces and drama backdrops were a long way from fulfilling our aspiration. Our ambition for the English language service in Wales – a normal service indeed – had its detractors even within Broadcasting House in Llandaff, since a substantial transfer of new money saw the spend on English language programmes for Wales move ahead of the spend on programmes for S4C for the first time ever. At the same time Radio Wales was given parity of spend with its co-channel Radio Cymru.

In the belly of the beast digestive juices could rumble discontentedly even for some who worked in Wales' majority language. Put simply, there were some who did not want to accept the cultural baggage that came with it, just as much as it did with the Welsh language. Too many of our news reporting and documentary making teams ventured north of the Tongwynlais Gap as if engaged on an anthropological expedition. There was almost no drama that reflected contemporary Wales other than fey *grand guignol* or a species of celtic grotesquerie along with the odd visiting guest star beamed in from White City courtesy of a bemused London controller.

There were, however, plenty of colleagues, creative and productive, who wished to respond to the eagerness with which I suggested we rip up the script in which we only ever had walk-on parts. Radio Wales was the best place to start because it was, of course, a stand-alone service. Sensitivity to the Welsh demographic profile was key. We did not have the ready-baked audience which, in Scotland, could take BBC Radio Scotland, in larger part, as a home-grown version of the opinion forming Radio 4. Nonetheless, we could not afford to lapse into a mix of local news, pop, chat, and homely advice like a broken-backed Radio 2. We had to reach out across all of Wales whilst bearing in mind the predominance of population in the south and, then, that region's own sub-divided loyalties. Integrity through quality – whether in discussion or in entertainment – was paramount and trust in us could come, too, by seeking the best talent, allied where possible to voice, accent, experience.

This prototypical national service did have to touch all bases but it also had to take the risks a public service broadcaster should automatically feel beneath the skin. An audience deserved exposure to the unknown and unexpected as well as the comfort of self-recognition. We completely re-vamped the schedule. *Good Morning Wales* gave its purpose away in its title and has survived. *Radio Wales* brought daily poetry on air before the popular radio networks did. Short stories were read and dramatised. Built programming and sequences, from history to the arts, increased. At certain points in the schedule no apology was made for addressing directly a Valleys' listenership, a working class constituency, an older audience, in the tone and at the length their actual presence demanded.

There had never been a soap opera in English for Wales. With *Station Road*, a daily saga, there soon was and it migrated, as envisaged, to BBC1Wales as *Belonging*, where it enjoyed a highly successful decade and more. This national radio beacon cradled and nurtured the seeds of general programming that were neglected otherwise. The editor of Radio Wales, Nick Evans, played me some hissing demo tapes of *Satellite City* as we travelled to north Wales to interview Jan Morris – a typically Welsh and unlikely coupling – and the cult radio series became BBC Wales' first sitcom in English and a smash hit, endlessly repeated. Soon Radio Wales scooped not only individual programme awards but the coveted British Radio Station of the Year accolade. By being the best, and ourselves.

The lesson was that an appetite for Welsh broadcasting in English was there if it was good enough and consistent enough. A full service if you like. On television we were restricted to fixed news outlets - *Wales Today* principally - and *a la carte* programme offerings. The latter had to prove themselves, and did so regularly, even if not unfailingly, by holding up their end whenever, to London's self-regarding consternation, we opted out. The dark arts of scheduling have changed in a multi-platform world that can be paused and recorded, but the schedulers in London in the 1990s were often incandescent with rage if we insisted on opting-out of a programme flow designed elsewhere with others than ourselves in mind. We did so because we had a big story to tell ourselves. Karl Francis' film *Streetlife* absorbed most of the drama budget we had in order to look at a modern Wales not recognisable in any tourist guide or heritage pack. John Alexander's ninety-minute documentary on the Tower Colliery story, and its crucial historical antecedents, went out at half that length on network, with its history and complexity flattened. Michael Bogdanov's drama trilogy, *A Light in the Valley...on the Hill...in the City*, was a daring summation of how we had arrived and from where we had come. They won prizes inside and outside Wales, BAFTA and Royal Television Society Awards.

To be frank: to do this, and other similar things, was not always popular in Wales where in the last days of the last century there still existed a foolish playing off of one Welsh culture against another as if numerical dominance in English on the ground threatened to become, on air, domination of an edgier Welsh-language existence. The truth, then and now, is that interdependence, as reflective of a lived historical reality, is the bedrock of any future Welsh identity. One will not outlast the other and one will not be able to substitute for the other. The fight is in common. As we approached the millennium, epic series were commissioned on visual arts, on music, on sport, on peoples' ordinary, other-than-public lives. The language used in broadcast was not the issue, only the validity with which the nature of our humanity in this place over time was expressed.

Let me end with reference to the news outlet which is apparently held as sacrosanct, and somehow hermetically sealed in its own programme making from the wider culture in which it so often, not surprisingly, flounders. In reality, how we weight our news service - its diet of analysis and opinion, its lead stories and its depth of coverage - is a matter of choice more than it is of the availability of newsworthy

stories. Thus the BBC, on behalf of S4C, has perforce shown how an agenda that is Welsh and international, Welsh and British, Welsh and local, can offer a six o'clock news from some centre other than London. Naturally not seen as a problem, as long as it is done in Welsh. What was calculated to be a huge problem, both constitutionally for the UK and institutionally for the BBC, was the prospect of a Scottish Six in English.

At root this was because of the greater element of risk to the political union which devolution appeared to pose from Scotland. But, for the record, the working party I chaired at BBC Wales – myself, David Williams the editor of *Wales Today*, and Iona Jones, now chief executive at S4C - pre-empted the Scottish proposal with a closely argued case for a Six from Wales. No chance, or 'over my dead body' as the then (Scottish) director of nations and regions for the BBC so graphically put it. We persevered anyway. I issued the editorial instruction that *Wales Today* would regularly announce itself as 'Coming from the Capital', and assumed everyone knew which cultural reference point was our lodestar. We treated the people of our about-to-be devolved polity with the respect they deserved. The culture, general programming, was inflected in the news output. Of course, it is always possible to reverse or even halt the trend. Populism is reductionist, where popular culture is open to change. It is the force of the latter which requires linking to politics and policy. A mindless concentration on crime stories and tear-jerkers may be cynically understandable but it is another species of insult to a nation intent on governing and expressing itself.

Nevertheless, I do not believe it can be done for long when the national institutional life of Wales is now so buoyant from theatre to Senedd, from opera to rugby, from the arts to athletics. We cannot allow these, and other numerous examples of the vehicles of our creativity, to be deflated by the myopia of regional news. We advance on all fronts or we will be stuck, spinning endlessly, in the mire where the lack of ambition always ends. After our time the green shoots of our time must not be seen as too sere for growth but as harbingers of the whole harvest that our media must help flourish, protect and then serve to a rightly and expectantly hungry people.



## 5/ Small screen, big screen

Peter Edwards

Devolution changed everything. Once the first steps were taken a new compact was forged between the people and their new national institutions. A democratic choice was made which changed the perspective in Wales from provincial to national. A new United Kingdom constitutional arrangement had been made which is still in the process of changing Britain from a centralist state into a society which is a combination of individuals, communities, regions and nations. This is not just a constitutional change, it is also a cultural shift.

This shift has yet to be reflected fully in the programming offered to the people of Wales. So far news has had the biggest shout. Ofcom's public service broadcasting reviews and the *Digital Britain* interim report emphasise the importance of plurality in news and, to a certain extent, in current affairs programmes. However, having more than one news provider does not, of itself, provide plurality. In a country with a relatively small population there is less finance and fewer people to do this specialist work. There is also a tendency for them to be drawn from a similar educational and social background. It would be a mistake to believe that as long as you have two organisations providing news everything will be alright.

News and current affairs must sit within a much wider cultural context. To allow the people of Wales, as they develop an understanding of their new democracy, to judge the actions of their politicians and leaders, they need to partake in the development of a set of values

which are relevant to them in these new circumstances. It is the wider social context - particularly drama, film, literature, music and the visual arts – that is fundamental to the process of developing new aspirations, purpose and judgement. News and current affairs deal with our immediate problems, they cannot alone give a wider understanding of, or context for a community's sense of purpose or meaning.

David Hare said recently, 'Television has always been run by journalists. Journalists distrust the central claim of fiction, that by lying you get to the truth.' Humanity has always used stories and metaphor to try to understand the purpose and value of its changing lives and this is particularly true for us now. We have a particular need to understand where we, as a small marginalised historic nation, fit into the world. These are questions for us, but also for us to share with many peoples around the world who find themselves in similar circumstances.

The use of stories and metaphor in discovering things about ourselves, as individuals and as a society, is a central responsibility for us in Wales, and not merely a decorative adjunct to a UK system. This is what the Ofcom/Carter documents fail to understand. Wales needs the space and money to enable us to deal with the full breadth of our humanity. We must reject an approach that is essentially provincial, the demeaning acceptance that our role as Welsh people is limited, subsidiary and fixed, and that the broadcasting provision should be tokenistic.

I have now worked at ITV Wales for a surprising eleven years. Previously I had run my own production company and before that I had worked at the BBC, both in Wales and London. In my early days at HTV (as it then was), the company's owners, United, were keen to reduce the £21m. annual licence payments to the Treasury. United were willing to invest in drama to convince the regulators that they had a real commitment to Wales.

This was to be an opportunity for television drama and HTV to become a fulcrum for debate and understanding of our society at the beginning of the devolution experiment. Very early on we produced seventy-six episodes of a series called *Nuts and Bolts*, filmed, set, cast and written by new talent from the post-industrial Valleys of south Wales. The underlying purpose of the series was to deal with the tensions and dilemmas that were exposed at the turn of the millennium. How were we as a people to create a new society out of

the great traditions of the past, the great traditions of egalitarianism and self-help, support for your neighbour and fairness? The question that underlay everything was: which values do we carry forwards?

The series was set against the backdrop of selfishness and money-grubbing individualism which was the cruel and destructive legacy of Thatcherism. It was a soap opera, but it was *our* soap opera, formed out of *our* experience of history and *our* understanding of the challenges. It spoke directly to the Welsh audience, and became that most valuable of cultural experiences, a shared experience between creators and audience. It was hugely successful, regularly blowing the opposition out of the water in terms of viewing figures (but this was at a time when we could replace *Emmerdale* with our own programming at ITV Wales). Even though it was precisely located in a specific cultural, geographical and social environment, it was not parochial and spoke not just to its immediate audience but to communities elsewhere. Later it worked successfully on ITV2.

The series also gave us an opportunity to begin a process of development for a generation of English-speaking talent - writers, directors and actors - to find a pathway and a voice. Many now pursue successful careers elsewhere. It is this pathway that has now been removed for ever from ITV in Wales. There is no comparable opportunity for the present generation.

We were also able to make a series of productions with a variety of financiers and partners that, in a Welsh context, were groundbreaking: in political drama with *In the Company of strangers*, which obliquely used Ron Davies' resignation as a springboard to an imagined future for devolved government; in social drama with *A Way of Life* by Amma Asante, that exposed the roots and causes of racism as a reaction to poverty and social break-down. Again, though firmly set in its geographical context and a precise social and historical background, its message was universal. The film won the BAFTA 2005 Carl Foreman Award for Amma yet though transmitted in Wales by ITV to great acclaim, sadly it was left to the BBC to broadcast it beyond Wales.

It is foolish and socially dangerous to presume that statements and stories of universal worth can only be told from the metropolitan centre. In television, that appears to be the attitude of the major

broadcasters. The BBC is now willing to disperse activity beyond London, and this has helped provide production credibility and a critical mass of activity which has given the lie to the idea that quality can only be produced within the M25. But this form of warehousing does not serve plurality, nor talent development in Wales, as well as truly indigenous output. Now, with the demise of the ITV Wales drama department, only four hours of drama will be produced in English for the Welsh audience - by the BBC.

This is in sharp contrast to the position in Welsh language television, which enjoys around 180 hours of drama through S4C. The contrast emphasises particular cultural and linguistic divisions that are in danger of creating a rift in Welsh society. This artificial division between the languages is not healthy for either language group. The monoglot majority are prevented from taking part in the national debate, while Welsh-speakers have been led down an ever-narrowing blind alley, operating in a phoney cultural bubble. This is an unnecessary cultural division born out of pre-devolution experience.

There are questions about the nature of our community which need reference and communication between both linguistic groups and the longer they are kept apart the more harmful it will become. We need the rough and tumble, the contact with real life, to develop a vital, disruptive, argumentative culture that engages both groups and which will create, via television and film in both languages, a confident community. This cannot be done without a far fuller media provision for Wales in the language of the majority of the population.

So much of this discussion about the confines of broadcasting seems to be increasingly irrelevant. The explosion of content creation and distribution on the internet is the new plurality. It is now of primary importance that public money is used to support fairness and opportunities for every community to take part in this revolution. This cannot happen in a vacuum. There must be a managed period of change with continuing opportunities in the 'old media' as well as support for the new media creators and distributors to ensure that our plurality of vision, information and culture is nurtured and encouraged.

The Film Agency for Wales is funded with £750k annually through the lottery, to support the development and production of film by Welsh talent. It also has other responsibilities for education and

exhibition. With this tiny budget it is the only organisation in the audio-visual field in Wales that creates any choice in both languages. Film is the medium which uses a plurality of finance and distribution which allows the talent to speak directly to the audience without the gatekeepers of broadcasting. It is also a medium, though once believed to have been killed by television, that has, in the modern world, re-invented itself as a dynamic art-form competing at every audio-visual level.

It has its own gatekeepers, of course - mostly more severe than the broadcasters. However, it is an alternative. It is the only other place that artists, creators, producers and ultimately audiences can go in Wales. There is potential via the new digital technologies for new lines of communications to be opened, and an opportunity to re-balance that relationship with the gatekeepers. Film is well-placed, therefore, to take advantage of the new opportunities of digital distribution.

The film agency is currently developing over thirty projects, a mixture of fiction features and feature length documentaries. Another fifteen films have already been produced or are close to production. The list is impressive: Justin Kerrigan's *I know you know*, Nerys Lloyd's *Daddy's Girl*, Elizabeth Morgan-Hemlock's *Mugabe and the white African*, Gabriel Range's *Little Matadors*, Richard Waterston's *Elephants of the Okavango*, Catrin Clarke's *Driven* and *Sleep Furiously*, Gruff Rhys's *Separado*, Rebekah Gilbertson and Marc Evans' *Patagonia*.

With our tiny budget and help from the Arts Council of Wales, the UK Film Council and Welsh Assembly Government, we are showing that the talent is out there and that there is a hunger to speak to an audience beyond the traditional broadcasters. We are also scratching the surface of delivery of a cultural plurality, and delivering efficiently from a diverse constituency to a wide alternative audience. We can look beyond the stifling remit of the broadcasting era, and enable writers and directors to deal with any story in the world from their perspective.

With the potential of high-speed broadband making it possible for individual artists to reach their audience directly, a real revolution is on the horizon. The viewer/consumer will be able to download high quality films quickly and cheaply. There, of course, is the rub. We do not yet know how this process will be monetised, and without that we do not know what kind of economic model awaits us. Therefore the deployment of public money is crucial.

It would be a mistake to make our choices based upon the present structures alone, but it would also be a mistake to ignore the present structures. Television is not going to disappear, it is going to change and the people of Wales need to be able to play a part in that change and not be thrown into a nether world of someone else's control and creation, dangling between irrelevance and invisibility. This is a tipping point of change. All the elements are gathered together: the technology has changed, the audience demands variety, the producers understand the market and the technology. Now is not the time to use public money or regulation to put the clock back. Public money needs to be used to ensure fairness, economic vitality and to enrich people's lives.

The model of the film agency is essentially Ofcom's option 4 – the Welsh Media Fund - writ small. This model works and it could work on a larger scale, giving Wales the plurality, quality and efficiency that is necessary. The variety of voice and aspiration which exists in Wales needs nurture and encouragement. We have structures which have served us in the past, with varying degrees of success, but now if we are really to engage with the breadth and complexity of creativity, finance and delivery then we need to engage with this situation in a way that draws together film, television, dvd, internet, download and cinema. Television is only one part of the future and to underline this point I would like to recommend two YouTube offerings – Taff Wars and Ross Kemp on gangs (the Milk). Here is a part of the future – the talent, creativity and delivery in all its glorious plurality.

We need a pathway to help our community of two languages to move into the future.

## 6/ The drama of belonging

Catrin Clarke

The late nineties was an exciting time to be Welsh. Cymru was deemed to be Cool, a nation bubbling with talent. While bands such as Catatonia, the Super Furry Animals, Manic Street Preachers, Stereophonics and Gorxy's Zygotic Myncci rocked the airwaves, a diverse range of films were coming out of Wales, such as *Streetlife*, *Twin Town*, *House of America*, *Solomon and Gaenor* (an Academy Award nominee) and *Human Traffic*. There were short films being made, shown and winning prizes in festivals across the world; we were seeing, hearing, being represented in and telling our own stories. This was the atmosphere within which I started my career as a writer.

There was a buzz of excitement, too, in the corridors of television and radio. S4C was, and still is, broadcasting diverse and challenging Welsh language drama, but in the English language things were happening too. Radio Wales started broadcasting *Station Road*, which was a 15-minute daily drama set in the fictional South Wales valleys town of Bryncoed. One of the things that was special and ground-breaking about *Station Road* was that it was a place for new and upcoming writers and actors to hone the craft within the relative safety of radio – and be paid for it. The programme lasted only a few years; it's still missed.

Out of its success and popularity came *Belonging*, a family drama set in the same fictional town. With another English language Welsh drama, *Nuts'n'Bolts*, also showing on HTV at around the same time, it did really seem as though this was a new beginning for English language Welsh drama. I had gone from making short films and

working on feature film scripts, to writing for *Station Road*, to writing on the first series of *Belonging*. It was my first television job and was a huge learning curve.

*Belonging* was a drama series on BBC Wales, which was axed in 2008 after a run of nine series. By the end of its run its eight half-hour episodes were the only drama output about Wales in the English language on television. The drama revolved around the Lewis family and the Bryncoed community in which they lived and worked. It was about – well – belonging: to family, to friends, to community.

At the start of the drama the *Belonging* community – like Wales itself – was in a state of flux, changing rapidly but looking forward to the future. Margaret, the Lewis family matriarch, had, after a long battle, been awarded compensation for her husband's death from emphysema – a legacy from his years working in the now-defunct South Wales coalfield. Maybe we didn't realise that this 'new start' we were writing about was, as well as reflecting social changes in Wales as a whole, also symbolising our own lives. They were optimistic times.

As a team – writers, script editors, producers, and then the cast and crew – we worked hard to make the characters as real as possible. We never used plot for plot's sake – plot always came from character. We didn't shy away from dark stories but we always tried to counter them with light, comedy stories. The formula worked; *Belonging* embraced challenging stories with a real warmth, and was an immediate hit with Welsh audiences. Audience figures varied over its run, but were almost always higher than network share, sometimes by as much as ten per cent.

And its success was not just in the valleys. At the time I was living on a council estate on the edge of Cardiff and became a minor celebrity among my neighbours when they realized I was a writer on the series. It was the first time they had seen English-speaking Welsh working-class life reflected back at them in such an accessible way and they loved it, always disappointed that each series was so short – from eight to thirteen episodes a year. It became fun to eavesdrop on conversations in pubs: “Did you see *Belonging* last night? That Vanessa, I swear she's the spit of my auntie.”

For years we've watched other communities reflected: London in *Eastenders*, Manchester in *Coronation Street*. I can only imagine what it

means to the Scottish sense of identity to have the breadth of programmes coming out of Scotland that they do, and as a writer, I still harbour a deep envy of *Ballykissangel*, dated though it now looks. I'd love to write a contemporary Welsh version.

*Belonging* never made it onto network, though there were one or two attempts to get it there over the years. There were many reasons given for its rejection, although a lot of people from outside Wales who managed to see it thought it was good enough. Part of the problem, I think, was its length. There simply isn't a post-watershed half hour slot available. And I do think there was prejudice, too. I was also working on other drama projects and one project in particular was getting good readers' reports before it landed on the desk of a commissioning editor. He took one look at it and saw the word 'Wales.' "I don't want anything with Welsh accents," he said. And that was the end of that.

Nowadays, of course, one would hope that given the success of *Gavin and Stacey*, and Eve Myles in *Torchwood*, this particular prejudice might now have been put to bed.

*Belonging* was, of course, not loved by everyone, nor was it reflective of everyone. But, given the spirit in which it was born, we all hoped it would be a stepping stone, the start of a whole new run of dramas telling stories from and about our beautiful, diverse and cinematic nation. No-one thought it would be a one-off, a little experiment from the regions. But given the figures – BBC Wales has to cut £3m from its budget per year for the next five years, this seems a depressing possibility.

I didn't realise what a privilege it had been to write *Belonging* until that privilege was taken away. After all, my writer friends in England took this as a natural right – writing about their culture across a range of programmes. English programming is culturally dominant way in excess of the reflection of our differing population sizes.

Of course, imported programming is to be welcomed and I know how much pleasure is derived from quality English drama, as well as American and other programmes that hit our airwaves too. But equally important, culturally as well as economically, is the chance to be able to develop our own product. Yes, of course it will be good if we get *Casualty*, and yes, of course, *Torchwood* and *Doctor Who* have been invaluable. But now that we have had devolution, it seems to me that

the next stage in Wales becoming a confident and developed European nation, is to be able to tell our own stories, to see ourselves mirrored on the screen.

Television drama is crucial in giving people a sense of themselves, and the consequences of losing this are that we only see others reflected, never gaining a full and proud sense of who we are. And within Wales, given that Welsh language drama is so rich, this will create a cultural inequality, with the English-speaking majority the poor cousins - hardly a recipe, on either side of the language divide, for confident and coherent nationhood.

A few weeks ago I bumped into a friend in the pub. 'Is it true?' she asked: '*Belonging* isn't coming back?' I told her that sadly, it was true. 'It was the first thing I've ever watched that reflected mine and my family's lives,' she said.

I pray it won't be the last.

## 7/ Convergent Realities

John Geraint

Factual programmes are programmes about real life. They feature real people, real places, real events. But they differ crucially from news and current affairs. Journalists talk about news ‘stories’ and ‘picture-gathering’; documentary-makers are story-tellers with a greater depth and scope and time-scale, visual artists who work on a wider canvas, with a more extensive palette of colours.

In factual programmes, people can appear as *themselves* without being problems, victims, winners, losers, heroes, villains or eyewitnesses. Programmes can be made collaboratively with their subjects – *with* people, not just about them. Viewpoints can be expressed and arguments developed without the need for balance within the individual programme. Aspects of human experience – culture, spirituality, history, science, personal relationships, attachments to place – which may be more fundamental and significant than the pressing issues of the day, can be explored at a moment of crisis or across months or years of patient engagement. The medium itself can become an expressive form, and the format can be constructed and varied to reveal the truth in a given reality.

If all that sounds high-minded, I should probably add that factual programmes can be fun. Indeed, in the last two decades, there’s been a great flowering of factual entertainment. Many brilliant format innovations have taken factual programmes to the top of the charts. Driven by a generation of (mainly) British factual programme-makers, the docu-soap, ‘reality tv’ and constructed documentary formats have

taken on and beaten all other genres not only in reflecting cultural specificities but in delivering mass popular audiences. In an increasingly competitive global market, factual programmes have been the stars which have outshone even drama in cost-per-viewer to the broadcaster. They've transformed the fortunes of whole channels – from *Airport* and *Driving School* for the BBC in the nineties to *Wife Swap* and *Faking It* for Channel 4 and *Ice Road Truckers* for The History Channel in the noughties. The formats and narrative techniques have been snapped up and copied across the world.

Small wonder, then, that any developed national broadcasting system includes a great range of indigenous factual programmes available on a number of different channels and made from a plurality of perspectives. Such provision is regarded as a bedrock of public service broadcasting and a fundamental part of what the citizen-viewer is entitled to expect. Except, it seems, for English-speakers here in Wales. Our needs, it seems, 'should be assessed against competing priorities'. The scale of extra funding required here is 'ambitious' – a technical term used by the nice people at Ofcom to mean 'not on your nelly'. Or, indeed, your telly.

Which leaves viewers in Wales with a double whammy: *only the BBC* making English-language factual programmes in Wales for showing just here in Wales; and *only the BBC* showing factual programmes from Wales on the UK-wide networks.

For much of my career, I probably wouldn't have regarded the Corporation's monopoly as a problem. As a BBC insider, enjoying more than twenty years at Llandaff, I'd seen factual output for Wales grow - from the occasional short-run documentary series like *A View Of The Rhondda* which I produced and directed in 1984-5, to the establishment of a whole department of factual producers which I came to lead by 1994. The expansion has continued with hits across many factual genres produced in-house by BBC Wales (*Hospital*, *Teenage Mams*, *Weatherman Walking*, wildlife programmes with Iolo Williams, a great variety of other offerings) and independents (record viewing figures for Green Bay's *The Story of Welsh* and *Glyndwr: The Last Welsh Prince* and Indus's *Coal House*).

Whilst I was on staff at Llandaff, I certainly knew that factual programmes were also made elsewhere in Wales. Indeed, my wife was

a factual programme-maker at HTV and then in the independent sector. I much admired the work of Colin Thomas and others. But if I'm being perfectly honest, I probably didn't think that programme-makers at the BBC had very much to learn from other broadcasters. It wasn't until I left to become an independent in 2001 that my eyes were opened to my own arrogance.

Working to commission from Elis Owen for HTV Wales (as it still then was) was a revelation. There was a directness of appeal to the English-language audience in Wales, a simplicity - an elegance! - in the editorial line required, that's difficult to express precisely in words (at least without sounding pretentious), but for an experienced programme-maker it was not so much like finding another gear - more like approaching a familiar place on a new road. Stupid me. There was a different angle.

For Green Bay, the new company I'd set up with Phil George, the series we made for HTV/ITV Wales - *Fun In The Sun*, *Summer On Gower*, *Start-Up*, *The Welsh Weekend* and *Fit For A Change* - were also significant factors in building what Ofcom calls a 'sustainable production business'. They enabled us to work with exciting new talent. *Fun In The Sun* and *Summer On Gower* were directed by Nia Dryhurst, a graduate of the European Film College in Ebeltoft. Nia eventually left Green Bay to work with one of the fathers of the modern television documentary, Roger Graef, and his Films of Record in England. Happily, she returned to us, to make a big contribution to *Rivers and Life*, an ambitious high-definition international series shot on the Amazon, Nile, Rhine, Mississippi, Ganges and Yangtze; and to win last year's Best Factual Director BAFTA Cymru award for a feature-length documentary she made about the experience of gay people in Wales.

As recently as the middle of this decade, then, ITV Wales continued to offer a strong and complementary editorial tonality and a broad popular audience for factual content in Wales. But since the consolidation of ITV plc, Culverhouse Cross has lacked the resources to sustain the breadth, quality and volume of this output. Tariffs paid - both to in-house production teams and to independent producers - were rapidly reduced to a fraction of their historic levels. And, by now, all the non-news output is effectively concentrated in long-running, low-cost magazine strands.

As the plurality once offered by HTV Wales has evaporated, there's been no compensating gain in factual output from Wales commissioned by the UK networks beyond the BBC. The other terrestrial broadcasters – ITV, Channel 4 and Five – who, because of their privileged position on the broadcast spectrum, take £2.3 billion in advertising revenue – concentrate their commissions in England to an astonishing degree. ITV has commissioned literally no factual output in Wales in the past three years. The same is true of Five. Nothing. And Channel 4, now promising to up its game, begins from a base of late-night poker, and extreme sport shown in the early hours.

It may seem tangential to the purpose of this volume, but, in fact, the lack of factual content from Wales on the networks that broadcast across the UK is very directly relevant to the issues discussed here. Like the lack of a national press in Wales in print, it means that the experience of Welsh people is both under- and mis-represented – to themselves and to their neighbours. Put simply, few network programmes are made by producers in Wales; so that even when Wales is shown to UK audiences, the perspective is usually that of an outsider looking in.

It's no surprise therefore that, in documentaries, perceptions of metropolitan arrogance and the persistence of unfavourable stereotypes are widely attributed to the lack of sensitivity shown by visiting production teams. During my time at BBC Wales in the mid-1990s, for example, we felt obliged to offer the people of Penrhys a 'right of reply' after an English production team made a BBC network documentary which portrayed their admittedly socially-deprived community as both hopeless and feckless. Part of the problem, one of the residents remarked, was a failure to cotton on to their particular sort of black humour, something he felt sure a Welsh production team would have instinctively understood.

At about this time, with devolution on the horizon, the BBC suddenly realised its record was open to criticism. John Birt was in charge and he'd sent some of his brightest and best off to get a business education. Somehow, I found myself among the first cohort. When it came time to write a dissertation for the MBA I was working towards, my sponsor Mark Thompson, then head of factual programmes at BBC network television, agreed that I should look at the spread of network factual programmes across the UK. With booming production centres in

Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester, the BBC was easily delivering on its public promise to make ‘broadly a third’ of its network programmes outside London. But the problem was that virtually all of it was in England. What I discovered was that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales added together made less than 1% of all of the BBC’s network factual output.

An imbalance on this scale could only be shifted by negotiated but specific targets. Change was effected, after some years of internal struggle and debate, by an act of political will from the top of the BBC (Mark Thompson having risen to become Director General) which gave talent in the nations its opportunity to flourish within the framework of internal output deals and public commitments on spend. The result promises a much healthier and more proportionate picture. But only on the BBC.

Ofcom seems to think that – for factual content - that’s enough. It quotes its own research to suggest that that “news is the genre in which plurality is most important to audiences in the devolved nations”. Well, of course it is; but this may simply be a reflection of the fact that this is the genre that dominates the schedules. Plurality in factual programmes is every bit as important. The audience needs to see on screen the rich diversity of life in Wales in all its facets – and with an appropriate range and variety in tone and style and attitude. No one broadcaster can provide that, however deep its resources, however long its tradition, however well-intentioned and flexible its commissioners.

So much for where we are. But if the point is not so much to describe the world as to change it, what can be done?

One solution I have canvassed is the establishment of an Independent Production Fund to support English-language content for Wales outside the BBC. The fund would be particularly effective in pump-priming the production of factual programmes, where there is a ready market for secondary exploitation internationally.

In line with Ofcom’s acknowledgement of the need for new sources of funding for such purposes, the Independent Production Fund could be established as a market intervention, funded by the Assembly and/or the UK Government, but in leveraging other sources of funding it could be delivered without a level of expense which Ofcom seems to have ruled

out as ‘ambitious’. Models for such a fund are to be found abroad.

Canada, like Wales, is a bilingual nation which borders – and receives television overspill pictures from – a much bigger anglophone neighbour. The Canadian government regards public service content as a bulwark for Canadian culture. It has developed more than a dozen production funds designed to promote quality Canadian content. The funds have commercial and cultural remits, and contribute up to 75% of the costs of selected projects. The Bell Broadcast and New Media fund, for instance, has invested in the production of new media projects associated with television productions since 1997. The process begins with the independent producer who secures a broadcast licence. The independent can then apply for funding for both television and new media elements of the project. The fund is constituted as an arms-length corporation with representatives from broadcasting, the television and new media production sectors and commercial interests.

In Wales, factual content supported by an Independent Production Fund could, initially, be carried terrestrially by ITV Wales, by the ITV network and/or, indeed, by other UK network broadcasters. The broadcaster would contribute a negotiated licence fee. Transmission on Channel 3 would address the issue of audience reach and impact and with it the associated issue of ‘discoverability’. But from the beginning, and with an increasing importance as television viewing ‘converges’ with on-demand services, the content could also be distributed on other digital platforms, and might take forms other than ‘traditional’ linear television programmes.

Initially, the funds available could be calibrated so as to replace the volume of programming already lost from English-language output for Wales outside the BBC, and so as to ensure that, going forward, all such content can be produced at adequate tariffs.

The fund could be administered by Finance Wales along the lines of – perhaps even under the wing of – its excellent Wales Creative IP Fund. Alongside public money from Cardiff Bay and/or Westminster, this would make it relatively simple for the Independent Production Fund to accept private investment – perhaps in the form of a Welsh Media Bond with associated tax advantages – which would be looking to gain a commercial return from the intellectual property created, and its sales potential in international and secondary UK markets.

If it was felt that it would be difficult for Finance Wales, with its overriding commercial imperative, to oversee contestable programme funding which would be bound to have some cultural element, then an alternative home for the fund has already been mooted - the Welsh Media/Broadcasting Commission proposed by Ofcom's Welsh Advisory Council and the Assembly Government advisory group.

All the stakeholders gain something. ITV gets the politicians and policy-makers off its back and gets some popular, quality factual content for and from Wales at a substantial discount from its true cost. The Assembly Government gets a boost to the Welsh economy, safeguarding and creating high-value jobs in a knowledge-driven industry. The producers get quality work and a testing ground for the transition to the brave new media world. And the audience gets more choice and the plurality in the reflection of its own experience which it deserves – and which, whatever Ofcom says, it responds to with warmth and appreciation when it gets the chance to see it.

There will, of course, be those who say that, in this time of rapid and radical technological change, any attempt to make the present broadcasting system deliver plural factual content for Wales is only delaying the inevitable, merely buying time. But, actually, convergence is all about timing. When you're dealing with convergent realities it's really useful to know how rapidly they're coming together and with what force. Because - to quote an old Valleys saying - 'in a collision....there you are; in an explosion...where are you?'

In showing real life in Wales in all its three-dimensional richness, in offering a platform for those whose voice isn't heard and whose potential is circumscribed, in allowing people to appear on screen as themselves or in giving them the scope to imagine whole new futures for themselves, in celebrating all that we are and have been and can be – factual content offered from different viewpoints can give the people of Wales the chance to recognise themselves in the round and triangulate their way forward.

Those plural angles are crucial. They offer the perspective by which we can say "in a convergence, here we are."



## 8/ Standing up among the cogwheels

Colin Thomas

“...a thought provoking , exceptional piece of television. It reminded me of where I’m from.” The comment on the *Coal House* website was typical of the huge response that this multi-platform history series generated. At its peak it attracted 400,000 viewers, more than the number of viewers in Wales watching *Eastenders*.

Reminding us where we are from is an essential part of television’s role and history on television often evokes a warm, sometimes a hot, response from Welsh viewers. The two series on Welsh history in the 1980s, BBC’s *Wales! Wales?* and HTV/C4’s *The Dragon has Two Tongues* generated intense debate; this focussed, in the case of the latter series, into 130 viewing groups arguing about the conflicting views of Wynford Vaughan Thomas and Gwyn Alf Williams and culminating in a packed-to-the-doors debate.

‘History is more than a page in a book’, were the first words of Gwyn Williams in the first programme of *The Dragon has Two Tongues* as he recalled his experience of landing on the Normandy beaches in 1944. ‘History is the buckle that bites your back, history is the sweat you can’t keep out of your eyes, history is the fear crawling in your belly.’ There has been a remarkable flowering of historical scholarship in Wales over the last few decades, its findings articulated by a remarkable group of historians. But the most passionate, and the most articulate about the importance of the past in understanding the present and anticipating the future was Gwyn Williams.

'In Wales today', he wrote in the 1980s 'historical work of major significance appears with the speed, regularity and decision of the guillotine during the Terror. The historian, strenuous at his sullen craft, sees his words pressed into immediate political service by the committed. Nothing so concentrates a people's mind as the prospect of its imminent execution<sup>25</sup>.' It could be argued that the speed with which that 'historical work of major significance' found its way into English language television in Wales helped to avert the national execution that Gwyn Williams dreaded after the huge vote against devolution in 1979, and that the debate sparked by those series made a substantial contribution to the vote in favour in 1997.

It isn't only the work on the roots of our nation that has found expression on the television screen. Welsh feminist historians like Deidre Beddoes, Angela John and Sian Rhiannon Williams have pointed out that all too often Welsh history ignored herstory. Books like *A People and a Proletariat*, whilst claiming to provide *Essays in the History of Wales 1780-1980*, contained not a single contribution by a woman historian. Series like BBC Wales's *Time of my Life* and single programmes like *Land of My Mothers* have set out to rectify that yawning gap.

Risk-taking commissioning also lifted the lid on another aspect of our history that had too often been overlooked, especially by salt-of-the-earth versions of working class history – racism. The Tonypandy riots of 1910, directed against blacklegs and the police, have often been recalled but the Tredegar riots a year later, directed against Jews, rather less so. *People of the Book*, a programme on the history of the Jews in Wales, included a ninety-year-old Jewish eye victim of the riots but its aim wasn't intended merely to challenge the traditional view of ourselves as welcoming and tolerant. 'Breast-beating – or its converse, remorse – are not the most important things in the study of the history of minority groups and immigrants,' writes historian Neil Evans. 'The point is not to praise tolerance, but to uncover the causes of antagonism. Understanding is the thing we need most desperately<sup>26</sup>.'

It was understanding that the series *Colin's Wales*, presented by the athlete Colin Jackson, aimed at, avoiding presenting this aspect of Welsh history merely in terms of race riots and reminding viewers that there were black people in Wales long before the emergence of Butetown a century ago. *Wales – the Making of a People*, presented by

Sian Williams, underlined the fact that immigration has played an important role in the shaping of Wales for centuries.

Television history can help to weld and unite a nation and a quite different Welsh history series made an important contribution to helping viewers to understand the viewpoint of another minority – Welsh speakers. *The Story of Welsh* presented by Huw Edwards was originally made for transmission only in Wales but subsequently broadcast throughout the UK.

‘Small minded’ is one of the many insults thrown at us by writers like A.A. Gill but it is striking how often an historical subject approached initially from a narrowly Welsh interest leads on to a wider perspective. The starting point for *Gwalia in Khasia* was the story of Thomas Jones, a Welsh missionary in India, but inevitably it raised issues about colonialism, minority languages and India’s own treatment of its minorities. Similarly *The African from Aberystwyth*, on David Ivon Jones, the founder of the South African Communist Party, was bound to bring the story up to date, especially as the filming for the programme in South Africa happened just as apartheid was beginning to crumble.

No matter how parochial the starting point, historical series that have sparked co-production interest lead to a greater understanding of the issue from the co-producer’s point of view. *The Last Dawn*, which began as a programme on Welsh soldiers shot by their own side in the First World War, also looked at the wider issues of discipline and punishment in warfare once the Canadian History Channel were on board. Those issues were an important part of the two part series transmitted by HTV.

The lively interaction between academic historians and Welsh television producers has meant that to some extent Welsh historians have been released from the vice-like grip of what historian Ian Kershaw has called ‘the dreaded Research Assessment Exercise<sup>27</sup>,’ which seems to compel academics to talk only to other academics. ‘Most scholarly articles and monographs have a readership of twenty and a shelf life of five years,’ wrote David Cannadine. ‘Academic history as taught and practised in universities increasingly appears to outsiders as at best incomprehensible and at worst ridiculous<sup>28</sup>.’

But in Wales many historians have learnt to do without the

intimidating vocabulary, cautious qualification and statutory quotes from Foucault and Derrida that characterise the output of so many of their colleagues and to reach out to a wider audience. Thankfully the wit of historians like Peter Stead and John Davies hasn't been confined to the senior common room. Peter Stead was happy to take on the role of historical detective in *Whodunnit?* and John Davies seemed to revel in taking time out of the archives and devising ingenious historical puzzles for participants in the popular series *History Hunters*. Deian Hopkin illustrated *How Red Was My Valley*, his history of the Labour Party in Wales, by playing keyboard versions of music from the period and one eminent Welsh historian stepped boldly across the academia/media divide altogether - for six years Dai Smith was the head of English language programming at BBC Wales.

John Davies was the key figure in the 18-part series *Wales, A History*. As well as this kind of comparatively conventional history presentation, commissioners in Wales have often enabled new presenters to find their feet and producers to risk new approaches. In the late 1980s Clare Pollack came at the history of Wales through the interestingly different angle of its film making, in the HTV series *The Dream that Kicks*. Much of Kenneth Griffith's ground breaking style was developed with BBC Wales and HTV Wales - though his *Curious Journey*, featuring veterans of Ireland's struggle for independence, was effectively banned for many years and HTV had its name taken off the end credits. With BBC Wales's support, Green Bay TV were able to take Huw Edwards out of his newsreader's chair and see how he worked out on location; the successful outcome leading to both *The Story of Welsh* and *Bread of Heaven*, a series on Welsh religion, eventually going network.

Long before Gwyn Williams appeared on network television, he was appearing in BBC Wales programmes and a development of the technique used in one of his earliest appearances - the historian suddenly appearing in the event he is recalling - became an important element in his Channel 4 *Cracking Up* series. 'A shot in the arm for boring old TV history' wrote the *Independent* and the *Times* commented 'with Williams in cracking form, this is history without tears.'

Even when Gwyn Williams went out of fashion with network television for a while - the television industry bears some uncomfortable resemblances to the fashion industry - HTV Wales stuck by him,

commissioning a *Welsh Trilogy* series directed by Michele Ryan. As well as a return to the Merthyr Rising and the Rebecca Riots, it included a programme on a little known incident in Portmadoc when the poet Shelley narrowly escaped being shot – the kind of history which would remain forgotten if it wasn't for Wales's own history output.

It has been one of the great strengths of commissioning in Wales that it can include the kind of quirky history that doesn't fit into the landmark series now increasingly demanded by network commissioners. The BBC Wales series *Footsteps* included *The Monks who went to the Movies*, the bizarre story of a group of Breton monks who tried to find a home in Wales. Cardigan's nonconformists gave the exiled Catholic monks a rough ride so a single incident from the past became a way of looking at the wider issue of religious intolerance, just as the attempt to kill Shelley illustrated the problems faced by individualists who speak out against the orthodoxy of their age.

This kind of approach fits well with current postmodernist thinking about historiography. 'The idea of history as progress has been abandoned,' writes Richard Evans, the professor of modern history at Cambridge University. 'Innovation has come above all from historians writing about the marginal, the bizarre, the individual, the small-scale<sup>29</sup>.' But this wariness about great overarching narratives doesn't mean that the notion of learning from the past has been abandoned altogether. 'It really happened,' he stresses in his *In Defence of History*, 'and we really can, if we are scrupulous and careful and self-critical, find out what happened and reach some tenable though always less than final conclusions about what it all meant.'<sup>30</sup>

Simon Schama has spoken of the importance of that process not being confined within the walls of academia. 'Now those walls have been overthrown and television especially – I'm proud to say – has been part of the demolition squad. Public access to the digital archive is stripping away that particular mystery.' Writing of the 'deep-rooted prejudice against the possibility of serious television,' his own series *A History of Britain* demonstrated that it is indeed possible but it is significant that the series implicitly acknowledged its own anglocentricity by including, on the BBC website that accompanied the series, contributions from Welsh and Scottish historians.

Important though the BBC's websites are, it is not enough for Welsh

history to find a platform through the technological equivalent of a footnote, to be overlooked by London-based programme makers who all too often assume that England means Britain and that Britain communicates only through the English language. BBC Wales's bold decision to programme *Coal House* on continuous nights met not with the outrage that has sometimes been the response to opt-out programmes but with acclaim and demonstrated the strong sense of community that still exists in Wales. Indeed that sense of community is strengthened and made tangible to a new generation by programmes like *Coal House*.

A separate Welsh broadcasting 'region' within the BBC in the 1930s was only won through the joint exertions of Lloyd George and Saunders Lewis and, as Emyr Humphreys points out in his book, *The Taliesin Tradition*, 'in the teeth of strong opposition from Sir John Reith,' the BBC's Director General at the time. Humphreys warns against 'synthetic substitutes for their own history' and writes that 'unless a people are certain of their identity and its values, they are fatally inhibited from exercising that degree of creativity which is necessary to reaffirm civilised values in the corner of the globe that they inhabit.'<sup>31</sup>

A Welsh language channel was only won by a vigorous campaign, including the threat by thousands of Welsh viewers to withhold their licence fees and Gwynfor Evans's proposed hunger strike. It may become necessary to wage an equally determined fight to defend English language broadcasting in Wales and the history programming which forms a crucially important part of that broadcasting. It is significant that BAFTA Cymru has an award specifically for television history programmes, and that it is named after Gwyn Williams. He once wrote 'freedom is grounded in the mastery of history. No freedom is possible unless we conquer an historical autonomy, unless we can stand up among the giant cogwheels of history.'<sup>32</sup> His last words in the last programme that he made were, 'We will live if we act.'

## 9/ Once upon a time

Trevor Fishlock

Fourteen years ago Wil Aaron and I set off along the coast of Ceredigion to make the first of the history-and-landscape television programmes we called *Wild Tracks*. In television 14 years is an almost geological stretch of time. We have made 84 half-hour programmes and have seen *Wild Tracks* grow into the most-watched series of its kind in Wales and the most popular regional feature programme in Britain.

The perceptive Menna Richards brought us together when she was director of programmes at HTV. She was convinced of the need for a particular type of storytelling television in Wales and of its broad appeal. The format was deceptively simple. We explored Wales by the most rewarding means, walking the footpaths of moor, mountain and meadow, foreshore and forest, valley and village, navigating by steeples, castles, industrial ruins, battlefields and ancient stones.

Our Wales therefore was easy of access. Our canvas was the striking variety of its landscape, the dramatic and glorious 8,000 square mile jigsaw. In each series of six programmes we walked in two locations in the country's north, two in the middle and two in the south.

Inspirational visual grandeur, then, was a given. But the vigour sprang from the narrative pace, the idea of the quest and from human encounters along the way. We walked a living land of voices, Wales speaking eloquently for itself, often entertainingly and often movingly of love and passion and comic escapade. Forging icy streams barefoot and panting to some ruined rampart were only part of the journey.

Our paths led us to witnesses with vivid memories, and also into the layers of the centuries, to ancestral voices and legends.

I have been a reporter all my working life. Unearthing and telling stories is one of the trade's enduring privileges and pleasures. In *Wild Tracks* we had the frequent delight of discovering the amazing, the extraordinary experiences of ordinary people, and bringing these to public attention. We also enjoyed finding and celebrating men and women, heroic in their time, who deserved modern recognition, a polishing and a place in the hall of fame.

Perhaps mercifully, most people do not have a book in them, but in our experience very many people have a story, an experience, a vignette, a nugget, a stipple, a childhood fragment or a treasured detail transmitted by grandmother long ago. All these illuminate the history and human story of Wales; and we were licensed to fossick. It was always satisfying to hear people say, after a programme: 'I've lived in this place for 50 years and never knew that.'

Over the years we interviewed more than 600 men and women, some of whom told us their stories in the last days of their lives. As a team we were small and relatively inexpensive: director, presenter, cameraman, and a young man or woman to sherpa the tripod. Some people imagined a team of beavering researchers, but really everything grew from Wil Aaron's flair as a director and historian who loves the epic and literature of Wales. We shared a love of stories. And perhaps our enthusiastic enjoyment gave the programmes a certain gleam.

The abundance of stories tested our skills of compression, Wil's in the editing, mine in the writing. On location I minted words freshly on the spot, cutting to the bones of terseness, then memorising and delivering.

It is a little fanciful to say so, but we became gatherers of stories, versions of the wandering bards who for centuries travelled from great house to great house, told tales at the hearth to earn their supper, and carried a laissez-passer to keep them from being whipped as vagabonds.

We, of course, have narrated our adventures at the modern family hearth, the television set that, for all the changing times, remains a focus bringing people together. Our expeditions have explored every part of Wales from the sea to the very inch of the border. And the

programmes have shown what we all share in Wales, what we have in common: the landscape, the scars, the narrative, the national experience that makes Wales what it is. We have taken Wales as we've found it, never idealised it; and in showing Wales as a distinctive land we have reflected its reality.

As an all-Wales programme, directed to speakers of both English and Welsh, *Wild Tracks* has been, I suggest, a significant unifying influence. It has been telling the stories - and Wil Aaron and I believe it important to tell them - at a time when people have grown infinitely more mobile and community roots and traditions have become thinner.

For me, travelling the country and writing *Wild Tracks* has completed a circle of sorts. When I first went to Fleet Street in my twenties *The Times* gave me the gift of independence and sent me to live and write in Wales during years that encompassed profound change and many reckonings. Turmoil in the coalfield was symptomatic of the shrinking of a way of life. The steel industry was in convulsion - and I saw Michael Foot booed in Ebbw Vale. I saw the language campaigns and the trials they generated; protest in the countryside; the Labour party sloughing its old skin; Plaid Cymru making bridgeheads; anxiety about the erosion of village life; and, ah yes, furious argument about broadcasting. In the spaces between the news I developed a way of writing more fully about Wales and its people with frequent essays of around 850 words, off beat stories written in cafes and libraries. London insisted only that that these be readable and free of the sin of worthiness. It was a technique that served me well later in my years as a foreign correspondent.

Of course, I remember the flourishing of independent television in Wales, the creative talent and the journalism that grew in its hothouse, the spectacle of Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, bounding around the mountains, wild-witted and exuberant. At the same time a new tribe of young historians was filling once-arid shelves with the new books they brought back from their expeditions into Wales. For reasons good and bad Wales undoubtedly had a stimulating buzz.

Today the implosion of ITV robs Wales of opportunities and creative possibilities in years when they are sorely needed, and not least because there is no true national newspaper in Wales. Journalism is in decline and there seem to be more people in public relations than in reporting.

Even at the best of times Wales has been short of newspaper reporting talent. Papers no longer provide the career start and opportunities for young journalists they once did. Naturally, I believe strongly in the importance of news and of competition in news at all times. It is part of democracy's health, so much so that the dwindling of the press in Wales, and of ITV, at this stage of the infancy and evolution of devolved government, is as dismaying as it is dangerous.

There is much more to newspapers and broadcasting than news. But newspapers in Wales do not occupy themselves much with the country's historical and social hinterland. And the shrinking of ITV means there will be less scope in future for Wales to talk to Wales in programmes in English. Indeed, my concern is that we shall see less of the public service storytelling that creates a focus and a hearth.

I cannot tell what marvels lie ahead, what media innovation might bring people together, whether our collective narrative has any digital future. I have my doubts. But I have no doubt that in our country of two languages there is significant value in programmes that show us who and what we are and where we come from. Above all, television that builds our bridges and speaks to us all.

## 10/ The mirror of the arts

Jon Gower

An American writer once suggested that a people that doesn't see itself on television begins to believe it doesn't exist. From a Welsh perspective, if one had to depend on UK network television for a sense of self, or, let's go further, a sense of being, there'd be ample room for self-doubt and anxiety. It can sometimes seem as if a mantle of invisibility has been cast over us. It didn't require Professor Anthony King's recent report for the BBC Trust to know that BBC news was London-centric, but it did serve as useful confirmation. Speaking as a viewer, what is true for news is even truer for the arts.

The arts are the most complex, urgent and vivid expressions of our anxieties, pleasures, tastes and desires. We love to, indeed most of us *have* to make things: conversation, clay pots, pickled sharks, love, babies, to make our mark. Art, be it a dancer's gesture, a poet's rhyme or a composer's flourish, may be nothing more than a sophisticated way of making such a mark, emulating that elusive character Kilroy who used to deface walls with the simple slogan "Kilroy woz here." But at least it says that. That we were here, *are* here. And that we are fully and marvellously alive.

The arts in Wales are routinely ignored by network programmes, from *Arena* through *Newsnight Review* to *The Culture Show*. This despite avowals to the contrary. When the inaugural editor of the BBC 2's *Culture Show* came to Wales he promised that things would be different – programmes, he averred, would range widely throughout the UK, both culturally and geographically, and for some three or four weeks

that was the case. But then things reverted to type. A paralyzing Sunday supplement complacency set in.

So network TV – and by this I do not just mean the BBC – routinely, and puzzlingly, cocks a snook at the Dylan Thomas Prize, at £60,000 the largest literary prize in the UK, bigger than the Booker and the Costa, awarded to the best writer in the world under 29 years of age. And ignores, too, the *Artes Mundi* prize, now a globally recognized prize, with a reputation buoyed up by the consistent calibre of the international selectors. In the face of such dismissal it makes Welsh broadcasting all the more important in capturing, explaining and evaluating what's going on.

Much of the media debate about public service broadcasting has tended to focus on news. While one would not disregard news as a cornerstone of psb - indeed it's what many people seem to understand by the term – it's worth reminding ourselves that Ofcom has found that the audience wants a wide range of high quality content reflecting our culture, and moreover, that such programming should 'stimulate our interest in and knowledge of the arts...through content that is accessible and can encourage informal learning'.

For this observer, who's been charting the course of the arts in Wales for thirty years this is indubitably one of the most vibrant times for the arts in Wales. The democratic dividend of devolution is matched by an equally profitable burgeoning of civic institutions and artistic endeavours. Let's not forget that more people partake in arts events in Wales than voted in the general election. Three quarters of the adult population attend an arts event once a year or more. The Welsh Omnibus Survey showed that between 1996 and 2006 attendance at arts events increased by 18% to 69%. A substantial survey by the Arts Council of Wales found that, on average, young people in Wales spent two hours a week participating in arts activities, and 'enjoyment' and learning new skills were the main reasons for taking part.

Communities the length and breadth of the country take part in communal singing, dance, theatre, and amateur undertakings of all kinds are shot with through with incredible energy. Rock, pop or hip hop bands mushroom in pretty much every town and village, with a pronounced presence of the latter in unexpected places such as Porthmadog. Welsh National Opera is on song, recognized as one of

the best companies in the world and now very much settled in its home in the Wales Millennium Centre, a building which has become an iconic shorthand for the country itself, not to mention a magnet for fans of *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*. The Welsh language national theatre company, Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru, will be joined in the spring of 2010 by National Theatre Wales, with John McGrath at the artistic helm, complementing the existing energies of theatres such as Clwyd Theatr Cymru and Sherman Cymru, which have recently had such high impact successes as *Deep Cut*.

Visual artists have an invigorated and invigorating confidence, which they demonstrate both locally and abroad. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Welsh presence at the Venice Biennale, which started with Cerith Wyn Evans' extraordinary light piece that lit up the skies above the Venetian lagoons and had to be sanctioned by air traffic control. This year veteran rocker John Cale will represent Wales. It's an international event at which Wales punches above its weight.

The Hay Festival is a model of its kind and has been exported as a brand to places such as Segovia in Spain and Cartagena in Colombia (and does get a great deal of coverage, thanks to the backing of Sky Arts). But just as organizers of the Edinburgh International Festival now want to use broadband to engage a broader audience – reflecting dissatisfaction with the conventional broadcasters – so too are festival organizers here in Wales, such as the burgeoning Laugharne Festival, looking to the net as an effective way of showcasing the event, and in so doing, bypassing the conventional broadcasters.

The roster of distinguished writers seems to grow by the year – established practitioners such as Nia Wyn, Gwyneth Lewis, Owen Sheers, Niall Griffiths and James Hawes are now joined by younger writers such as Catrin Dafydd and Tom Bullough. Meanwhile filmmakers such as Marc Evans and Justin Kerrigan ply their trades with flair and depth. Wales similarly produces actors who distinguish themselves the world over – think of Michael Sheen, Anthony Hopkins, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Rhys Ifans, Daniel Evans, Matthew Rhys and Ioan Gruffudd. And with Duffy recently garnering a clutch of Brit awards and bands such as the Stereophonics making No 1 albums you'd have to admit a certain buoyancy to the arts in Wales at present.

Which makes homegrown television arts product all the more

important. As a somewhat unfashionable writer, John Cowper Powys, put it in his *The Meaning of Culture*, ‘The art of self-culture begins with a deeper awareness, borne in upon us either by some sharp emotional shock or little by little like an insidious rarefied air, of the marvel of our being alive at all: alive in a world as startling and mysterious, as lovely and horrible, as the one we live in’.

Quantitatively, television arts coverage in Wales is inadequate to reflect the range and breadth of current activity – and I mean, *current* arts. It’s not enough to schedule a programme about Wilfred Owen and think that poetry has had its shaft of limelight. Entire art forms, such as sculpture, dance, or poetry are neglected, year on year and lest anyone think that some of these aren’t that telegenic or televisual one need only view Marc Evans’ sublime film about the Welsh language bardic tradition to know that this is a subject that can sing, quite literally.

With the Assembly Government’s advisory group describing a future landscape for television in Wales where almost 90 per cent of programming would be news, current affairs and sport, with all other subject areas concertinaed into the remainder, then the arts will be struggling for the oxygen of publicity and due consideration. This underlines the importance of creating an English language resource to emulate S4C’s range, depth and consistently high production values. The suggestion that Wales could benefit from the creation of a media commission would allow us to ensure that all aspects of Welsh life are included in the broadcasting tapestry.

Television is not the only outlet for the arts and taking an overarching and joined-up view of arts provision on radio and online would ensure that broadcasting convergence allows us to mirror the complexity, the vivacity and the geographical range of the arts in Wales. This would positively encourage critical debate in both studio and documentary programmes and use online and radio to complement television output (this was achieved to great effect in the BBC’s *Big Read* project which spanned all outlets, including creating space within the most popular programmes for discussion of favourite books, etc. It could also promote direct collaborations between the broadcasters and the arts community, well exemplified in the BBC Cardiff Singer of the world competition – a partnership with WNO - which is a brand *lieder* (sorry).

On a deeply personal note, it reflects badly on the BBC, as the principal

public service broadcaster, that they no longer have an arts and media correspondent, covering the subject area for all outlets within television and radio news. It gives ammunition to the vulgar journalistic choice between hospitals and the arts. A mature country supports both, because they each contribute to the national health.

Qualitatively, the provision is different. Often, high production values pertain. The BBC has as its main offering *On Show* which may fall short of the glory days of *The Slate* - a programme which satisfied both the general viewership and the arts cognoscenti - but it has gained a solid audience for its quality documentaries, and it's certainly not parochial. The last series had Cardiff based novelist James Hawes debunking the myths surrounding Kafka and a drama documentary about Alfred Sisley's painting visits to Penarth. However, as a programme it has moved away from a topical studio discussion and is therefore less contemporary in its feel.

The arts surface, too, elsewhere in the schedule, so that *Welsh Greats*, now in its second series, has profiled actors such as Richard Burton and Rachel Roberts, and singers such as Sir Geraint Evans and Dorothy Squires. But there are signs that in future BBC Wales' arts coverage will be more celebrity driven. That may find a new audience for the arts in more prominent slots on BBC 1, but there is the danger that such a move will be one away from considered, authoritative and authored programmes.

I'll pause to tub thump for a second. BBC Wales also has a resource which might be invaluable to the arts in Wales, namely its arts website, which is currently rather moribund and unengaging. The BBC, with all its web-aligned resources and undoubted skills, really could try a little harder. The current site has loads of material about Dylan Thomas but hardly a word about living authors. There are precious few moving pictures and the site is updated all too infrequently. I'd encourage BBC Wales to use this site as a showcase for its own creativity. Individuals in Wales such as photographer Keith Morris have generated an enthusiastic audience for discussing theatre on his 'Theatre in Wales' website. Surely the corporation could do as much, if not more for all of the other arts?

ITV Wales, despite being in the much-publicized autumn of its days has bravely just started to invest in *The Wales Show*, on screen for forty-eight weeks of the year. The first programmes have had a commendable

spread of subjects, from the ‘WNO Creative’ initiative through profiling harpist Catrin Finch, to items on tribute bands. If ITV Wales doesn’t stay within the framework of public service broadcasting, therefore, we lose 24 hours of arts programming a year. Historically ITV Wales, and before it HTV Wales, has produced a range of arts programmes of which it can be proud. But the erosion of the public service component of ITV has seen this sort of programming crumble into dust in the past ten years.

What’s been lost? *Primetime*, fronted by one of Wales’ best and best informed arts journalists, Nicola Heywood-Thomas, was a long-running series which listed what was on and gave it due consideration. There was even room for genuinely questioning series, such as *Art Attack* presented by Kim Howells, giving an early airing to a withering diatribe against conceptual art and folk music in one and the same breath. If we lose ITV Wales we bring a tradition of brisk and enlightened arts coverage to an end, and lose plurality of both commissioning and content.

One can make the case that the best arts programme made in Wales is S4C’s *Sioe Gelf*, on air for 20 weeks a year and an example of a long-running, quality, accessible magazine show. The English-speaking viewer in Wales does not have this as part of his viewing portfolio. Should ITV Wales be lost the viewer in Wales would be further disenfranchised. Plurality benefits the viewer for arts programmes as well as news and current affairs.

One of the greatest deficiencies in all Welsh television arts programmes, and most radio programmes for that matter, is a lack of critical assessment. This writer is invincibly convinced that the arts, and indeed the culture as a whole, needs honest, informed and entertaining criticism. For a brief period BBC Wales’ *On Show* took the format of *Newsnight Review* and new critical voices began to be heard. For the arts to mature television needs to play a clear role in developing a critical culture, and I single out television because of its accepted role as arbiter of taste and quality. The ‘as seen on TV’ tag still carries weight. It sends people to see things, gets them buying stuff. Look at the way Oprah or Richard and Judy shift books. Currently television arts programmes in Wales play no part whatsoever in creating a critical culture.

It may be that arts coverage will come from other sources in the digital

age. Trinity Mirror has launched its own *Arts Show* on its Media Wales web pages, although the early editions have not been encouraging, underlining the different skills needed to be broadcasters and print journalists. At times I haven't been sure whether this show is parodic of other arts shows, verging on burlesque.

<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/videos-and-pics/videos/2009/02/19/the-arts-show-20-02-91466-22968804/>

It is possible to broadcast material that is the equivalent to relatively expensive conventional television without spending tens of thousands. Seven three-minute films about the Aberystwyth-based author Niall Griffiths were filmed and edited in a day and were uploaded onto Google. They are the equivalent, in information, to a half hour television documentary about him.

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7138860113189165737>

These seven films cost a twentieth of what an episode of *On Show* would cost. In the spirit of *Slumdog Millionaire's* slam-dunk at the Oscars, it intimates you don't need heaps of cash to make something appealing and effective. Arts bodies in Wales and elsewhere in the UK are increasingly bypassing the traditional broadcasters and making their own video material, from Sherman Cymru's e-flyer for the provocative *Deep Cut*, (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZ1R7CjJx6g>) and if you want exciting arts footage, look no further than Sadler's Wells' recent marketing footage for Robert Lepage's latest production. But to find such material you have to know where to look. There's neither electronic programme guide to take you there, nor on-screen trailers, and word of mouth simply doesn't exist. For the time being the numbers game is played most successfully by television.

<http://www.sadlerswells.com/standalonevideo.php?video=/assets/videos/1847321795,9530179001&show=1733&dp=1&show=1733&more=1>

Lest this be seen as London-centric look, too, at the fine promo for Gerald Tyler's site specific theatre performance, *Big Hands*, not shot on a television budget. It may well be that this is one way ahead, with new media providing a complement to conventional outlets.

[http://www.blackengine.co.uk/films\\_files/Big%20Hands%20Web.wmv](http://www.blackengine.co.uk/films_files/Big%20Hands%20Web.wmv)

Of course the creative and cultural industries form a key component of the Welsh economy: the Office of National Statistics Annual Business Inquiry 2005 concluded that 12 per cent of the total workforce in Wales, or some 140,000 were employed in them.

There is another aspect to television and the arts, which is sometimes lost in the debate about public service broadcasting – that television is one of the arts. It needs to evolve much as the other arts do, by experiment, boldness, learning by mistakes. Television commissioners in Wales need to bear this in mind and allow space for programmes which push the limits, push the envelope, such as the Peter Greenaway programme on BBC Wales some years ago which required shunting so much data around in the edit that the mainframe computer almost gave up the ghost. The current trend toward number chasing does not suggest a bold approach which once saw BBC Wales commission a £1 million drama by Trevor Griffiths about Aneurin Bevan which went on to win an RTS award. Public service broadcasting is about providing edgy, risky stuff for fewer people. It's the democratic breadth of it all that truly counts.

Finally, television can be seen in the context of the wider arts sector. As the Scottish Broadcasting Commission's recent report reminded us, 'A thriving production sector is good for film, design, theatre, writing and many other forms of cultural and artistic content.' One can easily imagine a link-up between the new National Theatre and Welsh television. This, of course works the other way, too. Welsh higher education is producing high calibre students in all of the above fields, not to mention media-specific skills, such as those acquired at the Newport Film School, and the many, many colleges and universities which offer media studies and media training.

For the time being, television is an important outlet and mirror for the arts. We need to safeguard and expand what few outlets and inadequate mirrors we have in Wales. Without them the arts are invisible. As a consequence, so too are we.

## 11/ More than light relief

Ronw Protheroe

ITV Wales at its best was the hub of the Welsh community. People used to relate to ITV. Its programmes captured the public's imagination. They knew the presenters by name and in return those working on the channel would make sure they were highly accessible. If, over the years, BBC Wales has taken the role of beneficent uncle, then ITV Wales has been the fun and flighty cousin who everyone wants to invite into their homes.

In its heyday I was involved in making a host of these programmes, working first for HTV and then for my own company. Our aim was unashamedly aspirational – to make us feel good about ourselves and to celebrate our Welsh communities – whether they be in the Valleys heartlands or the tree-lined suburban streets of our cities. They were important to viewers because they were about us and our lives – nothing on network could possibly be the same.

Although they regularly registered figures well above the UK network share, my colleagues and I never needed viewing figures to tell us how popular the programmes were. People, lots of them, couldn't wait to tell us. This added up to a viewer loyalty and an identification with the network that permeated through every village and town in Wales.

At one stage HTV Wales – before it became ITV Wales - was delivering a portfolio of English language entertainment, music and formatted magazine shows: vehicles for home-grown talent to show off their skills - comedians, classical musicians, young pop groups, writers

and presenters. John Sparkes, Owen Money, Mike Doyle, Rhys Ifans, Dewi “Pws” Morris, Caryl Parry Jones and Elinor Jones were all involved in their own television entertainment or comedy series. Musical director Mark Thomas, now composing and recording music for network drama and Hollywood movies, developed his skills at HTV. The company was also a great breeding ground for creative talent *behind* the camera – researchers, producers, directors.

It is the production community that feels these changes first, and I am convinced that most of the Welsh population have not yet woken to the idea that all this is either going or gone, after a drip feed of decline over several years. If we lose all this are we not in danger of losing part of our very identity? If a country is defined by its people and its culture - then surely Welsh television should be portrayed by more than news and current affairs. How can we possibly know who we are and where we are going if all we see and hear are weighty current affairs and serious news? Where is the light relief, the community glue that binds us together?

Important though news and current affairs may be, what excites and stirs the average Welsh viewer is not the daily bread and butter stuff but the programmes that celebrate our uniqueness – our quirks and our creativity - ones that glory in the successes of the past, present and future, the kind of factual entertainment that shines a spotlight on our incredibly diverse character and way of life and makes us smile. They are the programmes that have complete strangers approaching presenters in the street to tell them how much they enjoyed the latest episode and have taxi drivers debating the whys and wherefores of our history, social mores, characters, local stars and ways of life.

As the debate and lobbying for the survival of English language broadcasting in Wales picks up momentum, we must be careful to focus our attention on more than just journalistic output. Without creative storytelling, we in Wales will lose a huge part of our heritage and a capacity to draw the nation together. For instance, we need the room to emulate Ireland where their national entertainment shows such as *The Late, Late Show* have a cult following inside and outside the country.

The key aim of rebuilding what ITV has let go – perhaps in other spaces in the multi-channel world - is a great opportunity for us, the people of Wales, to present ourselves to each other and to the world through diverse creative output, not only journalism. It is a great chance

for us confidently to cement our identity and this has to be done through our humour, music and storytelling. Entertainment and factual entertainment can capture the attention of the viewers – it makes them passionate about a subject. Entertainment programmes create opportunities for Welsh talent to breathe and grow and build a base for success further afield.

Wales is hugely under-represented on the networks - and we always will be until we invest in English-language creative programming here at home. Wales needs to have programmes that can help discover and develop the future Catatonia, Duffy, Stereophonics, Katherine Jenkins, Rhydian, Bryn Terfel in music and Rob Brydon, Rhod Gilbert and Ruth Jones in comedy, Michael Sheen, Matthew Rhys and Ioan Gruffydd in drama.

Welsh people love Welsh programmes – and they don't want them all to be serious or, in particular, worthy. And they need not be expensive - it's all about tapping into a wealth of creativity already here and using experience to mentor emerging talent.

It seems a sad state of affairs that with fabulous facilities and courses available at centres of creative and media learning excellence like the University of Glamorgan's Atrium and Newport University's Film School that there will be very little opportunity for the students to develop and flourish and contribute in Wales. An important nursery slope is being taken away.

If we let all this slip through our fingers we will not only be doing the Welsh audience a disservice, we will also be ignoring the economic potential of entertainment and factual entertainment programming. This is where formats are created. This is where brands can be developed and marketed and where future stars can be nurtured, whose loyalty can be kept.

If, in this knowledge economy, we have to build our own intellectual property it is in this wider programming that we will build it, not in news and current affairs. We must be given the opportunity to get to know ourselves and present ourselves to ourselves, as well as to the world, through our creativity. To be seen as a confident nation via our television content, sure of our own identity, we must show we are first and foremost excellent storytellers and who can entertain as well as inform.



## 12/ Sporting Nation

Peter Stead

It was the publication of John Davies's *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales* in 1994 that first encouraged the Welsh public to appreciate the decisive role played by the British national public broadcasting service in both sustaining and defining the modern sense of Welsh identity. At the very outset of his book Davies had suggested that in Wales, 'to a greater extent than in perhaps any other country in Europe, broadcasting has played a central role, both positive and negative, in the development of the concept of a national community.' In the subsequent debate on the book attention focussed on a cover blurb that boldly suggested that 'Indeed, contemporary Wales could be defined as an artefact produced by broadcasting'.

The notion that almost every aspect of public life and national discourse in Wales is mediated through broadcasting was illustrated on the evening of 8 February 2009 when, Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister of Wales and a politician fully aware of the power of radio, was interviewed by Stephen Nolan on BBC Radio 5 Live. Earlier that day, in Edinburgh, the Welsh rugby team had decisively and stylishly defeated Scotland and Nolan had wanted his guest to explain to a British audience precisely why it was that the Welsh seemed to care so much about the performances of their sports teams. Subsequently listeners might well have reflected on how privileged they were to be party, courtesy of a late evening phone-in, to a national leader so acutely dissecting his country's recent cultural history.

Morgan referred to the role of the successful national rugby team

during the first decade of the twentieth century for it was in that Edwardian period that the modern national sense of Wales was both defined and institutionalised. Moving on quickly, he identified the 1970s as being crucial, for a brilliant flowering of Welsh rugby had coincided with new patterns of social and educational mobility, consumerism, the hugely increased influence of television and a new leisure culture. In dwelling on that decade when the names and personalities of rugby players such as Barry John, Gareth Edwards and a full-back simply referred to as 'JPR' became international symbols of Wales, the First Minister had highlighted that telling moment when Wales ceased to be defined by its industry and began rather to define itself through a pattern of popular culture.

The century or so in which coal and steel had shaped Wales had engendered sufficient energy and confidence to sustain a magnificently dynamic popular culture in which choirs, bands, acting and sport had played a part. In that process two agencies had played a vital role, for both the chapels and schools had placed a great emphasis on public speaking and public performance. Now in the last decades of the twentieth century, as industry and religion declined, the attachment to a performance culture not only remained but deepened and became very much the heart of the matter.

All of this formed the essence of what Rhodri Morgan imparted to his 5 Live audience. Wales, he argued, was at that time a largely working-class society, one about to be further impoverished by de-industrialisation and lacking both an entrepreneurial sector and a significant metropolitan base. In the small towns and villages that constituted the country the ability of young people to express themselves in sport and culture had become the great ray of hope. It was now broadcasting that both reflected and promoted that all-important cultural energy. Ultimately what gave the First Minister's remarkable interview its distinction was the way in which he concluded by urging Stephen Nolan and his listeners to think of Barry John, Gareth Edwards and now Shane Williams in the same light as Joe Calzaghe, Bryn Terfel, Duffy, Catherine Jenkins, Rhys Ifans and Michael Sheen.

Above all, the Wales of the early twenty-first century accepts that popular culture is at its heart, that excellence in performance is what Wales values most and is most treasured when performers relate their work to the Wales that spawned it. And all the while it is broadcasting

that reflects, promotes and showcases the vibrancy of Welsh popular culture. The talents of both performers and promoters that were honed by chapels and teachers' training colleges have been transferred lock, stock and barrel to broadcasting studios. In February 2009, as the 'credit crunch' intensified and jobs were disappearing by the day, the success of the national rugby team, as seen and celebrated on national television, was not an irrelevance as far as the First Minister or the people of Wales were concerned.

Sport, of course, was a major concern of British broadcasting as a whole and what Welsh audiences had always most wanted to see was Welsh success and achievement at that level. The winning of a gold medal by the show-jumper Harry Llewellyn and his mount Foxhunter at the Helsinki Olympics in 1952 may be said to have ushered in an age when Welsh audiences were looking out for televised sport to confirm Welsh identity. The subsequent Olympic successes of Lynn Davies, Colin Jackson and Tanni Grey-Thompson encouraged the notion that, although not competing as a separate nation - unlike the Commonwealth games which were successfully staged and televised in Cardiff in 1958 - the Olympics nevertheless presented Wales with an opportunity to announce itself to the world. The impressive medal haul won by Wales in Beijing in 2008 immediately became a national badge of honour and was celebrated in many non-athletic circles.

The television coverage of the 1958 Football World Cup in Sweden was patchy and the quarter-final place secured by Wales was to be something recalled independently of any definite television images. Far more crucial in those early days was the sport of boxing. Since the 1930s the BBC's radio broadcasts of title fights had made the Welsh supporters of fighters such as Jack Petersen and Tommy Farr feel like citizens of the world. The huge popularity of radio's boxing coverage was unabated in the post-war decades but now, in the television age, there were pictures aplenty of new champions such as Joe Erskine and Howard Winstone and there was an even wider appreciation of how Wales was a leading power in establishing standards of boxing style.

Inevitably the game of rugby stood out in this new age of televised sport. From the early 1950s the BBC's regular transmission of the then Five Nations internationals gave Wales a new status within the United Kingdom and indeed within both the Commonwealth and the emerging dimension of Europe. Far more than in any other sport, and indeed far

more than in any other walk of life, it was international rugby that gave Wales a distinctiveness, respect and dignity that were otherwise elusive. On international days the nationhood of Wales was taken for granted and we all felt a little better for that. It was perhaps the television pictures of the 1955 British Lions in South Africa that first made modern Welsh rugby followers really feel like fully-qualified world citizens. It was no accident that the star of that tour, Cliff Morgan, became the first Welsh sportsman to become not only the BBC's head of sport but also a much-loved public figure throughout the British Isles.

Sports broadcasting was largely a British network matter but from the early days there was a growth in the reporting and the televising of sport at the local level. In Cardiff, as in London, there was an awareness both of the obvious popularity of sport, as attested in newspaper columns, and of the clear advantages of the subject as far as broadcasters were concerned. Sport was cheap, frequently dramatic and a subject that could appeal to a wide range of viewers. The figures revealed that women, young people and the middle classes were just as likely to tune in as the men in flat caps who formed the bulk of those paying at the turnstiles. And so it was that we became a nation who passionately followed swimming, horse racing, horse jumping, wrestling, boxing, skiing, tennis and snooker as well as the more obvious sports. Some of these activities were regularly broadcast live from a wide range of venues throughout Wales. It was the finest moment for many fading halls.

The manner in which sport attracted large and socially diverse audiences appealed to TWW, the independent television company serving much of Wales from 1958 on. With former rugby star Dewi Bebb eventually becoming responsible for sport, the channel developed a confident, stylish and cosmopolitan coverage with the tone being set by journalist Lloyd Lewis. Boxing and football loomed large in TWW's popular magazine programme *Sports Preview*. The tradition was strengthened by HTV, the company that took over the franchise in 1968 with a clear obligation and promise to make programmes that reflected the cultural life of its area.

Amongst the leading lights of the HTV set-up were the accomplished broadcaster and sports enthusiast John Morgan and the barrister Alun Talfan Davies who was the father-in-law of Barry John. Soon there was far more rugby reporting on the channel including programmes in

which Morgan, Barry John and their great friend, the former rugby player and British Lion's coach, Carwyn James managed to convey more about both the poetry and technical skills of rugby than television audiences had previously been aware of. In watching material from ITV's remarkable archive with its curator Owain Meredith, we both agreed that there was a professionalism and eloquence in that reporting that has never been replicated. Meredith also pointed out that the refreshing answers given to questions by sports men and women were characteristic of an era when both interviewers and interviewees had not yet learnt to rely on clichés.

Perhaps for BBC Wales the most obvious surprise was to be the regular coverage of county cricket. Few people outside Wales would have realised that club cricket was so popular in working class villages throughout Wales and that the Glamorgan side was followed as if it were a national team. No other county received so much coverage nor produced so many professional broadcasters. Wilfred Wooller took up the mantle of commentary and dominated the team just as much as he had done as captain and club secretary. Former players such as Tony Lewis and Peter Walker graduated into national broadcasters and in the case of Lewis, a major figure in the politics of cricket.

But it was always its rugby expertise that encouraged and enabled BBC Wales to think of itself as the national broadcasting station for Wales. From the 1970s its coverage of club rugby transformed the status of the sport in Wales and arguably helped generate a degree of pride in local clubs just as their communities were losing their distinctive industrial identity and prosperity. It was the rugby programmes that encouraged youngsters to develop the new mythologies sustaining clubs like Pontypool, Pontypridd and Llanelli and to buy the replica jerseys. It was the rugby coverage which both created the new pride in 'the Valleys' and encouraged a new interest in the sport in areas of mid and north Wales that had previously been soccer strongholds.

At first this phenomenon was hosted by David Parry Jones but soon there was a new breed of commentators with authentic valleys accents and a new punditry that saw former players such as Eddie Butler, Stuart Davies, Gwyn Jones and Jonathan Davies analysing matches in unprecedented detail. Other former players such as Gareth Davies, Arthur Emyr and Nigel Walker followed in the tradition of Cliff Morgan and Onllwyn Brace in becoming television administrators.

In Wales, rugby football was more than a sport: it had become a career avenue akin to the public schools in England as well as a potent agent in the national culture as it helped to determine the way in which public figures conducted themselves and spoke to each other. Rugby was agenda setting, mood determining - a cultural yeast that seemed to make the business of being Welsh somehow a matter of some importance.

As broadcasting set about forging the link between rugby and national identity, one of the most pleasing aspects was the way in which the rugby coverage in effect became bilingual. The Welsh language had been a bitterly divisive factor in the Wales of the 1970s and fears of its aggrandisement had contributed significantly to the massive electoral defeat of the devolution proposals in 1979. When the Welsh language channel S4C began operation in 1982 it was well aware that it had battles to win in many areas of the country. Sport was clearly identified as a way forward and over the years the professional, technically accomplished and unaffected way in which rugby was presented in the Welsh language won good audiences and won the language many new friends. Much bitterness was dispersed as it dawned on hitherto monolingual sceptics that much of Wales's rugby heartland was naturally bilingual and that many Welsh rugby stars, both past and present, were more fluent in Welsh than they were in English. In this respect, television was not only sustaining a notion of national identity, it was deepening and complicating the general sense of Wales.

By the first decade of the new century the whole international position of televised sport had been transformed. The dominance of the English football league in which three Welsh teams competed, the nature of contractual obligations in the new digital age and the relative lack of success enjoyed by the Welsh national football side created many difficulties for Welsh broadcasters. Football was probably the most popular sport in Wales but with so many fans supporting the leading English teams, the coverage of football matters specifically Welsh inevitably took second place to rugby coverage.

In the 1990s BBC Wales opted to sponsor a domestic knock-out cup for Welsh teams but it was difficult to swim against the tsunami of televised premiership football on the networks. In 2008 it became apparent that both Cardiff City and Swansea City were experiencing something of a purple patch but problems experienced by Wrexham and several of the leading Welsh non-league teams highlighted the

difficulty in sustaining the grass roots in the face of an unrelenting emphasis on the top English and European teams. Similarly the coming of professional and regional rugby and a new pattern of television contracts threatened the grass roots of Welsh rugby. All attention was now on the national side and we saw little of the rugby heartland that television had once done so much to celebrate.

Televised sport is all too often concerned predominantly with elite performers and indeed with sporting celebrities. The same can be said for the one low circulation newspaper that constitutes the national press in Wales. There are of course new digital outlets for information and debate but, having helped create a national fascination for sport and a hunger for success, it cannot be said that broadcasters in Wales are currently serving sport in general satisfactorily. Technically the coverage is brilliant but the professional journalism and occasional lyricism that once characterised analysis has been replaced by a more varied presentation. The more technical and physically demanding game of the new century has necessarily called for more detailed analysis by commentators and studio guests and, as if to offset this, producers have introduced a show-biz dimension. There is currently a distinct danger of pandering to audiences and to reducing the experts to a jolly old-pals act staged by a cabal of former players. The curtailment of Welsh coverage both on ITV and BBC 2 is greatly reducing the possibility of improvement in these respects.

There is clearly a need for coverage of a wider range of sports (many sports are only referred to when medals are won at Olympics). Both football and rugby grassroots should be revisited and nurtured, and there are urgent political, administrative and financial matters to be seriously investigated and debated. It is only broadcasters who have the resources and opportunities to tackle this agenda. In Wales there is also an urgent need for a channel able and prepared to appoint an official sports correspondent in a role similar to that played by the BBC's Mihir Bose at network level. The splendid BBC Wales Sports Personality of the Year Award that has been staged since 1954, and which has rewarded men and women from a whole range of sports, has given the channel a unique position in the world of Welsh sport and its prestige is something that needs to be exploited more imaginatively.

In 2009, as Wales set about defending its Grand Slam title, expectations were high and the audience share figures for the televised games against

Scotland and England indicated that the respective figures of 68 per cent and 67 per cent in Wales were roughly twice the size of the audiences in the land of the opponents. More than ever, rugby was top of the public agenda in Wales. What was needed now was for sport to be spoken and argued back into the context of Welsh culture and history.

In 1980 Dai Smith and Gareth Williams published *Fields of Praise*, a centenary history of Welsh rugby. The beauty of their words and thesis made us appreciate the excellence of our rugby in the context of both individual and cultural fulfilment. Now a generation later the need is for a dedicated English language television channel that will, amongst other things, allow us to reappraise the current sporting situation in Wales. As it happens, the need is exactly the same as far as society, the economy, education and the arts are concerned. Currently as a nation we are not talking to ourselves seriously. Sport, just like politics and the arts, is too important to be tightly formatted into news bulletins and thirty minute 'shows'. We need to re-root our sports in a rapidly changing society and culture and it is perhaps only confident and resourced teams of broadcasters who can show the ways in which that can be done.

## 13/ Digging deeper

David Williams

When I was asked to write this essay the first thing I did was reach for my rose-tinted spectacles and look back at a lifetime spent in a golden era of television news and current affairs in Wales. From behind my comfortable lenses emerged images from the past, images of hard hitting reports and investigative journalism which troubled the establishment and delighted the little man on the Caernarfon omnibus. The further I peered into the distance the better the picture appeared to be. It was a picture of well-resourced news and current affairs departments at both BBC Wales and HTV Wales. It was a picture of serious journalists with the time and money to get under the skin of life in Wales.

As I was about to sink further into this warm pool of self indulgence I was brought up sharply by the thought that nothing much is gained by wallowing in nostalgia. So, I took off the specs and rubbed my eyes in order to see more clearly. The images which emerged were surprising and shocking. Surprising because that brief look - through what I thought were corrupted lenses - had in fact revealed a pretty accurate picture of how it used to be in the world of television news and current affairs in Wales. Shocking because I hadn't really appreciated that the world I have known and worked in for most of my professional life is in imminent danger of imploding and disappearing forever.

Why should anyone care? It's only telly after all. At a time of deep depression when jobs are being lost and families broken on the anvil of global greed and selfishness why should anyone get exercised about the

reduction of a few hours in the schedule of Welsh television? It's a difficult question and one made more difficult if, like me, you have spent a lot of your time irritating a great many people, particularly politicians and the influential in Wales.

A great deal of lip service is paid to the need for serious journalism in a democratic society, but while you may get thanks for comforting the afflicted, you rarely get thanked for afflicting the comfortable, nor should you. In a small nation like Wales, it is necessary to create some discomfort. That's just what I have been allowed to do - sometimes encouraged to do - in television journalism for over thirty years. However, the opportunity to continue doing so looks very bleak indeed. Good news for those whose egotistical bubble may have been pricked along the way, but bad news for those whose interests I and other journalists have championed along the years.

But this is not about me. It's about what is going to happen to television in the digital age in Wales if current proposals are realised. It truly pains me to think that, HTV Wales, or ITV Wales as it is now called - an organisation I worked for half my professional life - is about to be switched off, literally. Why does it matter?

It matters because if it disappears completely it will further deny people the information and the insight which they are entitled to in a truly pluralistic society. It matters because news services are not sufficient to explain and explore what lies beneath the surface. It matters because it is vitally important that we preserve, in the English language, a television current affairs service in Wales which will rival, and occasionally trump, the BBC. It would be unhealthy indeed if the BBC in Wales became the only provider of news and, by extension, current affairs programmes, at a time of great political and constitutional change in Wales. I say that as someone who not only worked for HTV, but spent the other half of my career with the BBC, latterly as BBC Wales' political editor and presenter of *Dragon's Eye*, a weekly look at politics.

At HTV I spent a great deal of my time with a programme called *Wales This Week* - ITV Wales's 27-year-old current affairs programmes. I was there when it began in 1982 and - the rose-tinted specs are still off my nose - it is no exaggeration to say that we pioneered a great deal of the investigative programming of the time and took current affairs out of the studio and into the communities in which we lived. That's why it

became so important. It connected with real people and shone a light into their world. It illuminated real problems and concerns and sometimes revealed matters others would have preferred kept under the carpet.

There were, for instance, the many programmes on child abuse in North Wales in which we revealed the shocking treatment of children in care homes. These allegations were denied at first, but eventually there was a major inquiry resulting in a raft of recommendations to protect vulnerable children. I like to think that we contributed to that debate.

When Arthur Scargill's miners locked horns with Margaret Thatcher's Government in the last great industrial gladiatorial battle, *Wales This Week* positioned itself with the families of the miners of one community in South Wales. We may have embedded ourselves with the people of Cwm colliery, but it did not mean that we suspended our critical faculties. On the contrary, we were in exactly the right place to see the conflict play itself out to the bitter end. We did not know it then but those programmes are an important part of the social history of Wales and deserve to be preserved.

Who could forget the night they lowered a noose above the head of Norman Willis, the then general secretary of the TUC, at the last big rally for Arthur Scargill in Wales. The men and women we had been following for more than a year were in the vanguard of Mr. Scargill's Praetorian Guard, but I swear that when that noose was lowered a sadness came over some of their faces as they realised the battle was lost. We tried to convey something of this in the many programmes we transmitted at the time.

The programme also campaigned against injustice wherever it found it and also turned its lens on other communities in Wales which were under threat. Twelve months were spent observing the village of Aberdaron on the Llyn Peninsula as it tried to come to terms with depopulation and the God Tourism. The influx of English holidaymakers – vital to the local economy - brought with it a real threat to the Welsh language and a way of life in that remote part of Wales. More and more villagers in this predominantly Welsh-speaking area were selling their homes to incomers and moving away. Standing tall, and it seemed alone, to try and stem the tide of what he sarcastically called 'visitors' was the granite figure of the poet-priest RS Thomas. This was a time when the arson campaign against holiday homes in

Wales was at its height, and when RS Thomas told me, on camera, that he understood the reasons for the attacks there was an outcry. When I returned from a summer holiday following transmission of the programme I found the newspapers had been full of condemnation for the poet from Lleyn. I wondered how he had been affected by all the criticism and went to see him. He didn't encourage visitors but this was one of the few times I saw him smile.

These are only illustrations of the programming which *Wales This Week* was attempting as part of its job of reflecting the diverse industrial and cultural mix of Wales. No-one tried to influence us. There was no need to. We were a team of different personalities. We knew our patch. We were very alive to the climate in which we found ourselves. Even in very recent years with its resources severely depleted by the impoverished ITV plc management, the programme still manages, in audience terms, to outperform ITV's network current affairs presented by Trevor Macdonald.

One by-product of the early years, I believe, was that we provoked the opposition, in the shape of BBC Wales' equivalent programme *Week In Week Out*, to produce equally interesting and competitive programmes. Competition between us was lively and healthy and served to give a more rounded picture than was possible in the daily news programmes. Not that they were unimportant. On the contrary, BBC *Wales Today* and ITV's *Wales Tonight* – or its equivalent at the time – were both reaching huge audiences.

These news programmes were, and still are, the bedrock of information for many people in Wales, especially given the virtual absence of a national print media in Wales. The preservation of both – with their large audiences – is vital at a time of such fundamental change in Wales. If one were to disappear it would leave a gaping hole in the communications structure of Wales. There is no guarantee that the ITV news audience – very different in its social mix – would migrate across to the BBC. There is a real danger that it would be gone for ever and its disappearance would almost certainly consume the current affairs programmes as well.

We already have the precedent of the death of ITV's *World in Action* in 1998 after decades of exemplary contributions to British journalism. It sent a shudder through the industry. Life went on but something vital

was missing from the fabric of serious programming on our television screens.

Martin Bell, the BBC's former war correspondent, wrote this at the time: 'We are mourning the death of *World in Action*. For 35 years it exposed wrongdoers, shook politicians, made the unholy tremble – and on occasions even changed the law of the land. It told truths governments did not want told. It withstood corrupt politicians. Thirty years ago it revealed that a former home secretary had taken bribes; last year it took on Jonathan Aitken. With its passing, it is time to write the obituary of factual prime time programmes on independent television. Investigative journalism on television will scarcely happen.'

How prescient of the Man in the White Suit. How sadly right he was. Investigative programming of the calibre provided by *World in Action* has all but disappeared from our screens. In Wales we in television current affairs looked to such programmes as our beacon; something to guide us in our journalism. We may not have matched *World in Action*'s lofty standards or always succeeded in emulating its rigour but, for as long as it was there, we tried.

And then it was gone and we felt less secure in our endeavours. Now those of us who have spent our professional lives in this corner of broadcast journalism feel even more nervous as we face the prospect of the loss of regional current affairs programming on the commercial channel. It may sound a little pretentious to compare ourselves with the giants of *World in Action* but the principles which guided us were the same and, to steal the words of others, I would regard the death of programmes such as *Wales This Week* as another example of 'the triumph of commercialism over programme excellence – a media tragedy on a major scale.'

In closing, I'm reminded of the words of another giant in the world of broadcast journalism, the American Ed Murrow, who said of television: 'This instrument can teach; it can illuminate; yes, it can even inspire. But it can only do so to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box.'

We are at the point in Wales when we have to decide what use we make of television. If we lose the resolve to make it an instrument of illumination then surely we will have consigned it to nothing more than

a jumble of wires. If we do that there will be little real light emerging from the box in the corner of the room and we will have failed to preserve something very precious in our lives.

## 14/ Denying tomorrow's talent

Chris Morris

In Wales we are blessed with a vibrant and active academic community, teaching the next generation of young film-makers. From Newport to Aberystwyth, Cardiff to Bangor - Welsh universities, with the Skillset Screen Academy, provide the film and television industry with a steady stream of on-screen and off-screen talent.

There is plenty of evidence that Welsh film students are succeeding. The renowned documentary maker, Paul Watson, recently described the course I run at Newport - Documentary Film & Television - as 'the healthiest in the country'. The DFT students won seven awards at the 2009 Ffresh Festival, the 2009 Wales Royal Television Society award and the 2008 UK RTS award last year for best student documentary.

All the academic institutions in Wales are acutely aware that they are currently producing a generation of programme makers, who are going to have to engage with the seismic shifts in broadcasting that are shaking the traditional broadcast model to its core. They also recognise that the new generation of film-makers - who have grown up with digital editing, imagery and manipulation - are ideally suited to enter this changing world of work.

The Welsh broadcasters and independent production companies have been instrumental in nurturing and encouraging these young film-makers - advising them as they progress through their courses, offering placements, work opportunities and even setting and financing film projects. By studying within Wales the students, who come from all

over the UK and beyond, spend three years immersed in the Welsh broadcast culture. They watch Welsh news and programming, meet television professionals working within a Welsh context, and also engage with the Welsh language.

This dynamic and mutually beneficial relationship has made Wales a very attractive place, not only for students to come and study – but also to stay and build a career after they graduate. At Newport we attract a lot of students from the South West of England. After they graduate most of them remain in Wales to begin their career, as they have little opportunity to begin to build a career in broadcasting if they return home. Autonomous English regional output has been eroded to such an extent that most regional broadcasters can offer only very few opportunities to the next generation.

The Welsh broadcasters however, especially BBC Wales and S4C, have maintained a rigorous rearguard action against the slow attrition of the values and importance of the output by and for the people within Wales. In contrast, ITV Wales has been slowly stripped of time and money, if not ambition.

One of the key reasons that so many graduates stay put is because of the autonomy of Welsh broadcasters to commission their own output. The connections made between industry and academia are real and offer tangible opportunities for both sides: the broadcast industries can tap into new ways of working, fresh ideas, and film-makers connected to younger generations, while the graduates can find valuable opportunities to enter the world of work. The autonomous programmes, commissioned, made and enjoyed within Wales are therefore a vital part of the creative flow that gives some of the exceptional new talent we produce a step onto the first rung of the ladder.

Tom Swindell graduated from DFT in 2007, specialising in camera work. Whilst still studying with us he worked as a camera assistant on a BBC Wales documentary to mark the fortieth anniversary of Aberfan. After graduating, his first job was as cameraman on a thirty-minute documentary for BBC Wales about the 2008 *Artes Mundi* international art prize exhibition at the National Museum of Wales. He went on to direct a ten-minute drama for HTV and ended his first year out from university, directing and shooting the *Arts review of the year 2008* for BBC Wales.

All this work was commissioned in Wales and broadcast solely for a Welsh audience. He was inevitably noticed by others beyond Wales and went on to shoot the titles and stings for *The Restaurant* (BBC 1). He is currently shooting a documentary for BBC4, however his connections with the broadcast industry in Wales are cemented and he is returning soon to shoot a documentary for Indus films.

Nathan Mackintosh also graduated from Newport in 2007. BBC Wales offered him a six-week placement within the factual programmes department. Nathan has highly developed skills, with the camera, portable laptop editing and after effects, and his placement soon extended into a six-month contract. With fellow student Rhys Waters, he developed a pilot programme for Rod Gilbert about *Teen Tribes* in Wales. It was commissioned by Clare Hudson for BBC Wales, made by Nathan and Rhys and broadcast within Wales in March 2008.

They have since left the BBC and set up their own company, Zipline Creative, based in New Tredegar, making commercials, broadcast and corporate work. They are currently finishing off a thirty-minute drama commissioned by South Wales Police and as I write they are shooting a commercial for Aston Martin in Paris. The ability of broadcasters in Wales to commission, take risks and nurture talent is a vital role within the television community.

These are just a couple of examples of the many graduates from institutions across Wales that owe their initial success to the autonomy and flexibility of Welsh broadcasters. With the decline and almost certain total loss of ITV's general programming for Wales, commissioning autonomy within Wales will have eroded again. Fewer opportunities will inevitably lead to a haemorrhaging of Welsh talent to London. Young, enthusiastic talent with a unique Welsh voice will be lost. The links made through these early breaks are fundamental to the long-term health of the broadcast eco-system in Wales.

Why is independence critical? Surely the experienced commissioners, executives and producers in London could commission relevant programmes on our behalf?

Television consumes ideas and the television world is awash with bad ones. The French medieval philosopher Jean Buridan posed an interesting conundrum. He wondered what would happen if you put a

hungry donkey in front of two identical bales of hay. Which one, he wondered, would it choose to eat first? He surmised that faced with too much choice the donkey would not choose either and die of malnutrition! Seven hundred years ago Buridan could clearly see that ‘profusion brings confusion’.

Making choices from the avalanche of ideas that constantly hit their desks takes time and effort. The commissioners will, therefore, like water flowing down hill, often opt for the easiest route, usually going for what they know and trust. That is why talented young programme makers are largely excluded from the network system, why the nations and regions have been constantly marginalized.

Slabs of interchangeable, generic television are farmed out (*Dr Who* to Wales, *CBBC* to Manchester and Scotland etc.) and a lot of noise is made by London to the effect that the networks do value the nations and regions. But the irony is that the television landscape has never been more homogenised or controlled by the centre. In the drive for audience share and big ideas that impact on a shrinking national audience, the local, the regional the individual, the tailor-made, have become marginalised, discredited, eroded and will eventually be lost. But no matter – we have *Dr Who*.

Are we seriously expecting the London-based commissioning system to fully understand and reflect daily the constantly evolving Welsh voice, its idiosyncrasies and its passions? Perhaps that is not even its role.

The vibrant film culture within the Welsh universities should be celebrated. The students are creating short films that reflect the myriad of lives being led in twenty-first century Wales. At Newport the students have been involved in a ten-year social and archival project called *The City*. The film-makers have been charting, through short film portraits, the first ten years of Newport’s city status: its people, its concerns, its problems and its triumphs. This is not the kind of project that will resonate particularly with commissioners in London, but when the project is complete the Welsh broadcasters may be receptive to a programme or a series of shorts bringing these enigmatic and diverse stories to its local audience – if, of course they still have it within their power to commission.

The universities therefore are not only providing talent for the local

industry – but also creating a vast archive of films that chart the changing nature of Wales. Much of this work is of course unseen by the general public – it is not specifically made for public consumption. The key role of local storyteller must remain in the hands of the Welsh broadcasters – it is they who know the stories that need telling, it is they who can place those stories in context and it is they who know (and have access) to a wide and diverse audience. The social consequences of a diminished and impoverished Welsh broadcast culture will not be seen immediately – however over time, as the audience sees less and less programming that reflects their immediate concerns, loves, hates and lives – the vital stories that need telling will eventually remain untold.

Without the ability of the Welsh broadcasters to commission within their own sphere, these are stories, the Welsh public will never probably see. This is what public policy must strive to keep alive.



## 15/ A viewer writes

Mario Basini

In the opening pages of his magisterial *The Revolt of Owain Glyndwr*, Rees Davies outlines two hypothetical but entirely feasible journeys around Wales in the 1390s. The first, by an official of the English Crown, begins in Oswestry and sticks mainly to the Wales directly ruled by that crown. He moves on the king's business around the coast from prosperous English-speaking town to prosperous town, many of them dominated by a Norman or Edwardian castle. The second journey is undertaken by a Welsh-speaking poet who travels around the homes of his patrons among the Welsh gentry. He criss-crosses the mountainous interior of the country, an alien and hostile territory to be avoided like the plague by the English official.

The travellers' routes intersect at only two brief points and they live entirely separate lives. For all practical purposes, says Professor Rees, they inhabit foreign countries. The device works admirably as an introduction to the cultural, political and economic condition of Wales on the eve of Glyndwr's revolt. It is also a graphic reminder to some one-eyed cultural nationalists that Wales has lived with the difficulties and rewards of bilingualism for far longer than they care to acknowledge. And it emphasises the crippling damage caused to a society if deep cultural, linguistic and economic fissures are allowed to broaden into chasms.

If the harsher realities of late fourteenth century colonial Wales have been blurred and softened in the twenty-first century, contemporary Welsh society is in many ways more complex. The mix of a Welsh

language culture and an English community which now includes incomers and second homeowners has been enriched by the vibrant English language, but entirely Welsh culture spawned by the Industrial Revolution. To this we can add the layers of immigration deposited by Africans, Spaniards, Italians and Russian and East European Jews during that era. More recently there have been fresh arrivals - Asian, Polish, Portuguese, Bulgarian.

New cultural, economic and political institutions were needed to give this increasingly intricate society full democratic expression and the room and the means to grow. Among their tasks would be to give the disparate groups making up the new Wales a sense of community by emphasising a past rich in achievement and to forge a new self-confidence with which to face the present and to build for the future. But those institutions that have appeared have been late, slow to develop and not up to their responsibilities.

As one historian recently pointed out, the Industrial Revolution was the first, perhaps the last time economic power in modern Britain shifted from the south east of England to Wales, Scotland and the northern and midland regions of England. But in Wales there was no corresponding development of the political institutions to reflect that shift. Nor has the eventual arrival of the Welsh Assembly eradicated Wales's 'democratic deficit'. In the first place, in the eyes of many, including mine, the Assembly does not yet have the powers to supply Wales with the firm government it needs. It could be decades before those powers arrive.

In the meantime, an equally important and necessary sector for the development of a mature, confident and self-aware nation - the media - has been unable to bear the burden appropriate to it. Among the most important of its functions is to safeguard our still fragile democratic processes by subjecting the decisions and the decision-making processes of our politicians to critical scrutiny. But the weakness and lack of variety of our printed media in particular makes that task virtually impossible.

Increasingly, as our newspapers pour their dwindling resources into "popular" areas such as sport, entertainment and celebrity, coverage of politics, especially local politics, becomes less extensive and more superficial. Nor is that coverage critical enough. Too often it offers anodyne reportage or, worse, criticism which is blindly prejudiced or

made for sensationalist effect. Similar arguments apply to coverage of business, economics and health. Comment is bland, slackly written and addresses the major issues facing Wales too infrequently; reporting lacks the investigative and critical edge that comes with decent journalistic skills and the time to apply them.

There will be no swift or easy solution to the crisis which confronts our press along with the rest of the regional newspaper industry. The fall in advertising accelerated by the credit crunch is already persuading managements focused entirely on maximising profits to step up their efforts to protect those profits by cutting costs and staff. That, it seems to me, can only lead to further circulation falls and loss of advertising. It is a vicious circle out of which there seems to be no escape short of a revolution in the organisation of the Welsh press and the attitudes of their proprietors, or the appearance of benefactors with very deep pockets prepared to commit their money to keeping our newspapers going. Neither seems likely.

The inadequacies of our printed press increases the civic and democratic burden placed on broadcasters. But there, too, there are signs that in the face of increasing economic pressures our television companies and our commercial radio broadcasters are retreating from the responsibilities of adequately representing the nation to itself. The atrophy of ITV's regional obligations has been one of the prime reasons for commissioning this book.

During its 27-year history, S4C has achieved the pioneering task of creating a respected Welsh language television service and earned itself a leading place in Welsh broadcasting. It has made an heroic attempt to become the complete Welsh language channel, mirroring almost all the services provided by mainstream English language channels such as BBC1 and ITV1. Its success has only served to highlight the most glaring gap in the structure of Welsh broadcasting - the lack of a comparable television service for the English-speaking majority.

While the needs of the Welsh-speaking minority are now comprehensively served by S4C, English speakers have to put up with a makeshift service that citizens of any other small nation in the Western World would regard as a breach of their fundamental human rights. They have virtually no historical dramas through which they can learn about their own past and forge a new self-awareness and sense of unity.

Contemporary dramas in which they can see their own society mirrored are scarce. What comedy there is is often stereotypical, based on attitudes to valley life that were outdated halfway through the last century. Historical documentaries are often formulaic and repetitive, aping previously successful formats long after they have lost their appeal.

There are exceptions such as the successful BBC Wales series *Coal House* which provided a genuine insight into the lives of ordinary people in twentieth century industrial Wales. Although some sport - rugby union is the obvious example - is adequately covered, there are too few documentaries and current affairs programmes reflecting the way we live now. Political programmes are often good. The BBC's *Dragon's Eye*, for example, has begun to assume the news-breaking role that was once the prideful prerogative of our newspapers. But they are too few and coverage of Welsh Assembly business is brief and perfunctory. There is no regular English-language equivalent in Wales of BBC1's *Question Time* or S4C's very useful *Pawb a i'Farn* in which members of the public are given a chance to air their views.

The biggest producer of English language programmes about Wales is BBC Wales, but since its programmes are spread over three channels the impression is of a piecemeal and ad hoc service rather than one tailored to contemporary English-speakers' needs. Welsh programmes appearing on BBC1 and BBC2 are often pushed to the extremities of early evening or late at night, reinforcing the impression that they do not matter to those who hold the purse strings in London. The useful digital BBC2W channel was beginning to look like a rudimentary English language service for Wales, though it always lacked the depth and variety that such a service demands. Far too many of its programmes were repeats. Now even that service is being brought to an end.

BBC's London-centric senior managers have too often appeared ignorant of the special needs of the Celtic nations, indifferent to ideas coming from Cardiff and reluctant to fund adequately programmes about Wales. There are signs of change. Recent attempts to make Cardiff a first-class production centre for drama are welcome in that they improve BBC Wales's reputation among its peers and add to the pool of valuable creative and technical skills within Wales. But sci-fi programmes like *Dr Who* or *Torchwood*, however popular, do not add to Wales's knowledge of itself nor do they help to create a more coherent and confident Welsh community. Wales should be able to produce

internationally acclaimed programmes as well as a first class service for its English speakers. But the first priority must always be the creation of the latter.

Some have suggested that S4C harbours an ambition to provide a service for English speakers. But it seems to me that to ask the channel to create such a service would, despite its previous success, be a mistake. Apart from the enormous demands running two channels would make on S4C, an English language service produced from within an organisation set up to serve the Welsh language would be viewed as unjust and unacceptable by most English speakers. It would arouse suspicions that once again they were being treated as an afterthought, their cultural and political needs subordinated to those of the minority. Among the more important tasks of an English language channel for Wales would be to promote a mutual acceptance of the two linguistic traditions that make up modern Wales.

I would favour an English language channel run by a new, stand-alone station perhaps funded along the lines of the system that has served S4C well, a combination of public money and advertising. As I have already made clear, the fundamental responsibility of such a channel would be to illustrate what it means to live in modern Wales and to emphasise the values, sometimes inherited from our past, around which our disparate society can unite.

The cornerstone of a proposed new channel should be as comprehensive a news service as it can afford. It would have the courage and the clout to closely scrutinise our political, public and commercial lives and to safeguard the values of honesty, fairness and public service which should permeate those areas. It would carry carefully researched historical and contemporary dramas, documentaries and current affairs programmes. There should be more programmes about the minorities that now enrich our societies, helping them and us understand their roots, their hopes, aspirations and fears.

One area in which our current system has consistently failed is in the provision of decent cultural programmes highlighting the successes of our opera company, our writers, our rock stars, our unsung artists, our popular singers and classical musicians. The arrival of a major and highly successful new venue such as the Wales Millennium Centre should have triggered a series of new programmes based there. It has

not materialised. Our efforts at 'culture' in the past have too often been marred by pretension and an indulgent use of visual gimmicks. An English-language channel would offer a fresh opportunity to get this important area right. Entertainment programmes in the form of soaps, comedy dramas, stand-up comics and the rest should be encouraged. There is often no better way to examine the quality of Welsh life and of the Welsh character.

The fruitful collaboration between our television companies and film-makers has produced memorable feature films highlighting our past as well as contemporary Welsh life. All three channels - S4C, BBC Wales and HTV - have contributed to this important tradition helping us to understand ourselves and our culture. Now that tradition is faltering, say the film-makers, partly because funding from the broadcasters is drying up. The new channel should encourage producers and directors to return to their roots.

One of HTV's most successful forays into modern drama - certainly in terms of critical acclaim - was the series *Nuts and Bolts*. That it was so successful in illustrating the vitality as well as the deprivations of Welsh urban life stemmed partly from the fact that it was filmed in and around Merthyr Tydfil. Working in, and closely with that community gave the series an authentic voice and illustrated an aspect of Welsh life of great importance to broadcasters, our strong sense of local identity. The individuality in terms of history, culture and language of centres such as Merthyr, Cardiff, Neath, Swansea, Carmarthen, Aberystwyth and Caernarfon should offer our broadcasters a fruitful field of exploration. Some programmes, such as BBC Wales's series of five films, *Valleys*, reflected that individuality admirably. But in my view much more could be done to exploit this important aspect of Welsh life.

Among the most memorable successes of Welsh television has been the tradition of powerful, talented and eloquent presenters offering highly individual, arresting visions of Welsh life and often stimulating controversy and strong argument. They have included the novelist Gwyn Thomas, the great historian Gwyn Alf Williams and, especially in tandem with Gwyn in *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, Wynford Vaughan Thomas. Their work remains the glory of English-language television in Wales. But in recent years this tradition has fallen out of favour, replaced by programmes which are bland and unchallenging. To those who claim there is a dearth of the talent needed to produce

powerful television, I would point to the new breed of able and individual writers, artists and musicians now making their mark. They could provide the passionate, involving edge many of present programmes lack.

The absence of institutions able to reflect the complexity of our society has prevented the full development of our national life. The Welsh Assembly has done much to fill the democratic vacuum and S4C has given our Welsh-speaking minority many of the television programmes it deserves. But the service offered to the English-speaking majority remains partial and inadequate. In terms of quantity and quality it has diminished over the past decades. That bars most Welsh people from taking a full part in Welsh national life and renders Wales's claim to a complete nationhood meaningless.



## 16/ Stop, look and listen

Myfanwy Alexander

Banality and a weary Fabianism have in the past dogged English language television in Wales. Trading in exhausted stereotypes of urban deprivation, grim dramas and shallow comedy has failed to explore the variety of experience and identity of anglophone Wales.

Unsurprisingly, Wales, in contrast to Scotland, has totally failed to achieve network successes with programmes which either harrow or rely upon ‘Ooh, missis, where did I put my leek?’ proto-humour. Rural Wales has been portrayed in ‘neutron bomb’ terms, as an empty landscape to be admired rather than a location in which people live out their lives. Another persistent phenomenon is the ‘suitcase English’ hero: in episode one, we meet the English hero, unpacking his bag for his, necessarily brief, sojourn amongst the strange natives. Even the excellent *Gavin and Stacey* conforms to this pattern, and it is surely a matter of some concern that, when Welsh actors are capable of taking leads in network dramas, they are never employed as heroes in their own country. Where is the Welsh *Ballykissangel* or *Heartbeat*, exploiting the talents of Welsh performers and the beauty of the landscape to create a programme with wide and enduring appeal?

It is perhaps unfortunate that much quality drama, such as *Belonging* has failed to find a network audience because its location is perceived as being both grim and unfashionable outside Wales. The discussion needs to continue: do we persist in trying to ‘educate’ our external market into accepting what we provide or do we, perish the thought, attempt to listen to our customers? Of course, in a perfect world, the

normative aspects of network fashions should be ignored by broadcasters in Wales. Television honestly aimed at serving the real audience in contemporary Wales would deliver the television that the audience deserves, regardless of what suits London.

It could also be argued that, were English language television in Wales to discover its roots, it might, paradoxically, create quirky programmes which yielded revenue because of, not in spite of their Welshness. In other words, if broadcasters in Wales were in the position to create high quality programming to serve their domestic audience without looking over shoulders, laden with chips, towards London for central approval, this healthier atmosphere would raise standards. Television in Britain often suffers from the sense that the centre is elsewhere, ie in America. British television is at its best when serving its own audience with originality rather than aping trans-Atlantic models. The same is true for Wales: by turning homeward to understand and respect their own audience, Welsh broadcasters will have fulfilled their primary function.

Stylish, well-written contemporary drama with a visually appealing backdrop is not synonymous with vapidly or sell-out, though it is fair to say that so little original English drama is commissioned in Wales that it is difficult to know if we have a valid sample. On one celebrated occasion, a commissioner refused to discuss a project based in rural Wales because it was 'not contemporary', providing an insight into a world view which might be summarised as: 'It's all bonnets and knee breeches north of Brecon.' Where are the quirky Welsh comedies, trialled in Wales but capable of finding a wider audience? In this context, it is important to note that the two Welsh-based comedies which have reached a wider audience in recent years, *Mine, all, Mine* and *Gavin and Stacey* have not been produced by Welsh production companies.

Given the levels of talent in Wales, why has home-grown television failed to develop. One answer may be in the bilingual nature of the Welsh broadcasting community. Naturally, in an environment where programmes are produced in both languages, bilingual individuals thrive and people who speak Welsh dominate the Welsh television industry. It could be argued that, with the best will in the world, there is a gulf between Welsh-speaking creators and non-Welsh speaking receivers of media product. It is to be doubted that there is much understanding of changing anglophone communities amongst those in the Cardiff media. Anglophone rural Wales does not, for these

purposes, exist: who would commission a family drama set in Radnorshire? At its best we can be proud of English medium television for Wales, but at its worst it has been Bantu TV, a low grade product deemed sufficient for an unimportant helot class.

English medium television has to be expanded and re-shaped, the question is, how? The first step must be the development of a more sophisticated and layered appreciation of the anglophone Welsh audience. It may be true to say that many people will still cheer at the appearance of Max Boyce in his car coat on match days, but that does not mean that *Hymns and Arias* satisfies their comedic needs. The differences between the English and Welsh audiences need to be explored. For example, *Have I got News for You?* is significantly less popular in Wales than England and the reasons for this need to be uncovered. Searching questions need to be asked as to who is watching English medium television and what do they want to watch. Wales is a diverse nation with many groups who should be served and it is vital that television reflects how life is lived in Wales today.

In this context, the dynamics of the audience need to be understood. For example, demographic information reveals that many thousands of people come to Wales to retire. It is not the place of broadcasting commissioners to approve or disapprove of this phenomenon: broadcasters should be seeking to meet this group's needs, not wish them away. Where is the television for them? Another almost invisible group are the rural young. They occasionally break the surface in earnest discussions about housing problems, but the notion that thousands of young people are living, working and, crucially, enjoying themselves in rural Wales is not reflected on anglophone television.

Discovery of the audience will greatly enrich Welsh broadcasting and should be a cause of pride. Some of the differences between Welsh and English audiences can be intriguing, as is the case with topical comedy. Welsh audiences have a marked preference for non-sneering, socially inclusive satire, reflecting the absurdities of their own experiences rather than personality-based gibes. This is, potentially, a strength which could be developed.

The changing linguistic structure of the Welsh audience also merits careful examination. The success of Welsh-medium education has transformed attitudes to the Welsh language and this, together with

other factors, such as the perceived employment benefits of bilingualism, has led to the development of a far more complex network of linguistic identities. The divide between Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh-speaking families is now less distinct and deliverers of media product need to be aware of this complexity in order to fully serve their audience.

Wales has its own government which requires coverage. While political programming is a democratic necessity, comedy too can raise the profile of the new democratic institution. Satire might do just as much as current affairs to dispel the indifference to the detailed workings of the Welsh Assembly Government that is so prevalent amongst the people of Wales. It might be said that a nation without satire has failed to grow up. However, much of the current political coverage is 'beltway', assuming an understanding of and interest in the machinations of the Bay which is not shared by viewers. There is a serious danger of Welsh democracy falling down the cracks in the floorboards of government and a vital role for broadcasters is to ensure that this does not happen.

Wales is a nation rich in talent but poor in infrastructure beyond the broadcasting institutions. In order to provide quality programming for the future, Welsh programme makers must hunt assiduously for their performers. While a London-based producer can simply turn up to his local comedy club in order to access fresh talent, much of Wales is effectively beyond this circuit. Eisteddfodau provide a showcase for Welsh-speaking breaking talents (although it is easy to imagine a freer, more creative context for young performers) but anglophone emerging talent lacks such a platform. In order to create the quality television which Wales both deserves for home consumption and needs for export, our talent must be developed. In this context, training and education will have a vital role to play: a media-literate nation will produce people who are capable of presenting themselves on web-based platforms and these may provide the proving grounds of future talents.

It is axiomatic that more television does not mean better television but choice has revolutionised viewing habits and digitalisation will increase the pace of this process. The days of an audience as of right are gone and this creates a challenge that should be embraced and welcomed. The watchword is quality which, if intelligent and well-thought out, need not be synonymous with expensive. The age of the dinosaurs is

passing and helped by, for example, changes in editing techniques, Welsh broadcasters are well-placed to become the light, intelligent, fast-moving mammals of the future. Cost cutting could mean, paradoxically, opportunity: if accompanied by brave yet well-disciplined commissioning, there is the potential for creative successes to emerge in a lower cost-base environment because a cheap mistake is *ipso facto* less of a problem than an expensive mistake.

Money should be spent where it will show, on the talent which will create fresh and intriguing television. Ultimately, it is the product which is of prime importance and it is vital that broadcasters learn this lesson from teenage players of console games: when choosing between, say, a DS or a Wii, the first question such young people ask is ‘What will I play on it?’ The platform will, naturally, evolve over time but the one constant is the demand for good programming. Wales, as a bilingual nation, has a unique advantage: many of its greatest talents have chosen to remain in Wales in order to work through the medium of Welsh and this means that the centralist drift is less likely to strip Wales of its talent.

The decline in the volume and range of English language programmes for Wales is to be regretted, and should be reversed. On the other hand, the decline of safe English-medium Welsh programming should be welcomed as an opportunity, not feared as a threat. Anglophone communities in Wales have the right to receive high-quality contemporary programmes reflecting their lives, unmediated by nostalgia. The old road safety formula might be recast to prove helpful for future broadcasters:

**Stop** - peopling your programmes with stereotypes  
and Valleys monoculture.

**Look** - at who your audience really are today.

**Listen** - to the groups at present absent from Welsh TV screens.



## 17/ Who do we think we are?

Clare Hudson

I cut my television teeth working on ITV Wales's current affairs programme *Wales This Week*. The strand encompassed both hard-edged investigation and social documentary. These programmes in the late 1980s were getting 250-300,000 viewers, considerably more than either ITV Wales or BBC Cymru Wales current affairs programmes can attract in our multi channel era. But it isn't just the numbers that matter.

What I learned on that programme, and continue to be impressed by, is how much viewers in Wales value material which holds a mirror up to their society, past and present, which explores the light and shade of contemporary Wales and helps them locate who they are in a broader political and social context. This interest pre-dates the pivotal vote in 1997 for some form of devolved government: it runs very deep and is as much an emotional and cultural response as it is political. That is why any public debate on the appropriate type and level of provision of English language television in Wales has to go far beyond the issue of daily news – and it has to start with the audience.

The audience in Wales offers some unique challenges. First, there is a trap which some fall into as a result of the structure of broadcasting in Wales: namely that S4C is there to serve Welsh speakers, and BBC One, BBC Two Wales and ITV Wales are there to serve those who do not speak Welsh. Nothing could be further from the truth: BBC Cymru Wales and ITV Wales aim to reach the whole population in their output – whether they speak Welsh or not. While S4C is a service aimed at Welsh speakers, it also seeks to connect with those who do not speak

the language fluently but see it as part of the mosaic of identity which living in Wales offers to them and their children.

Another key challenge for us as broadcasters in Wales is that our audiences are outward looking, and they want to watch a range of programmes from a variety of sources. The main UK terrestrial channels, including BBC One, are very popular in Wales, even though Welsh audiences adopted multi channel television earlier than anyone else in the UK. There is considerable irony in the fact that the arrival of digital television in Wales has shown us how powerful those trusted brands - ITV and BBC - still are, despite losing some of their reach to the digital channels. This is both a blessing and a challenge when we remove popular network shows from the schedule and replace them with our own programmes - 'opting out'.

Then there is the issue of investment. A lot of the debate around English language television in Wales has rightly focussed on ITV Wales, where the investment has dropped dramatically over the past few years, and is set to drop still further. But it is important to be aware of the challenge which faces BBC Cymru Wales in this regard. There are two factors at play here: one is the impact of the lower than expected licence fee settlement which means that BBC Wales – like other parts of the BBC – must make considerable savings for the next four years. In Wales these are of the order of £3m per year but the loss of hoped-for new investment, such as the BBC Local project, has also had an impact.

The other issue stems from our unique position as a provider of high quality programmes, including news, to S4C. This is a provision which we value greatly, as it allows us to serve all licence fee payers in both the languages of Wales; however, it does mean that the BBC Cymru Wales investment in television for Welsh audiences has to be split in two. This is the reason that the BBC's investment in English language television for local audiences is much lower in Wales than it is in Scotland and a little lower than in Northern Ireland.

In any conversation about English language television, the story of BBC 2W is bound to come up. This was a service launched in 2001, when we had an expectation of growth in investment over the next five years. It was a zone of programmes in peak-time every night from Monday to Friday, on BBC Two Wales digital only, bringing Welsh content to the heart of the schedule. Symbolically it was important: some

observers believed this could be the forerunner of an English language channel for Wales to match S4C in the Welsh language. It also had the advantage of being a clear and consistent offer to the audience, easily described and found. But, as the available investment for English language television declined, we had to schedule an increasing volume of repeats on BBC 2W, rather than commissioning original content. The BBC 2W schedule was rightly criticised for being ‘too thin’, and viewers complained about missing programmes they wanted to see on BBC Two network. The other challenge was that this service was sitting on a platform, BBC 2, which was averaging, at that time, only about a 11 per cent share of the audience. So with the best will in the world, it was always going to be difficult to bring this additional Welsh content to a Welsh audience, many of whom don’t regularly tune to BBC2.

At the beginning of 2009 we merged BBC 2 Wales and BBC 2W into one service. We shifted our strategy to offering audiences a strong range of local programmes scheduled within the mainstream network framework. Put simply, we want to reach more people in Wales than we ever could with BBC 2W. To do that, we need to be on BBC One, the mainstream channel, which reaches around 80 per cent of the audience in Wales every week - the highest for any broadcaster. In the multi-channel age it still offers the strongest possible platform for reaching people with distinctive content about Wales. Our daily news programme *Wales Today* has the highest reach of all, but programmes like *X Ray* are important, too, for connecting with audiences across Wales in peak-time. Projects like *Coal House* show that, with the right treatment, we can even bring history into the television mainstream and make it accessible not just to people in their fifties and sixties but also to younger families.

In an era of declining budgets it is tempting but lethal to lower your creative ambition. If we have less money to spend, we have to make it count for more by doing things which will attract attention and resonate through the schedule. These often will have a radio and online dimension, in English and in Welsh, to increase the impact. We have several such projects up our sleeve for this year, one about the nature of childhood in modern Wales is launching as I write this article. Our view is that we should try to do fewer things but on a bigger scale – content which makes a lasting impression on the audience, and gets them talking. We cannot expect in the multi-channel age that audiences will watch something just because it is Welsh, they won’t. But they will

if you offer them Welsh content which is lively, entertaining, thought-provoking, and distinctive.

Contrary to what some believe, nobody in the BBC in London dictates to us where we schedule our programmes for the audience in Wales. But we have to deal with the reality that our viewers don't just switch on BBC One or BBC Two to see programmes about Wales: they also want to see *The Apprentice*, *The One Show*, *Spooks*. We cannot simply swamp the BBC One schedule with Welsh programmes, just because we think it will be good for them. Our job is to schedule the best possible mix of Welsh and network programmes. Experience and research have shown us that that is what audiences want. They rejected decisively the idea of a sealed zone of Welsh programmes. What they do want is original, high quality programmes about Wales that don't look second-best alongside major network series. When we get it right, we see the impact in buoyant viewing figures for our opt-out shows.

In a world where there is less investment and there are, for very sound reasons, Ofcom quotas which impose minimum numbers of hours that we must transmit, commissioning will always be a difficult triangulation exercise. We have to commission enough volume to meet those quotas, but we won't please anybody if we do that at the expense of quality, surprise, originality and impact.

It has been pointed out elsewhere that there is a serious risk that almost all output in English for Welsh audiences will be in the news, current affairs and sport genres. These are of course key genres – hugely important to our audiences, and to delivering our public purposes. The power of *Wales Today* to connect with audiences all the year round is truly impressive, as is the success of our rugby programme *Scrum V*. But if all English language output were to be reduced to news, current affairs and sport, the broadcasting landscape for the viewer in Wales would be pretty monochrome.

Series like *Hospital 24/7*, or the forthcoming *Frontline Afghanistan* about Welsh soldiers serving in the war, offer a different kind of deep dive into modern Welsh life. *Coal House* gave the whole viewing audience, across the generations, the chance to explore the nature of community and how it has changed over the decades and it reached, among others, people who never watch the news or see a current affairs programme. Our research showed that two thirds of the Welsh population said they

had seen the programme, and it was our most popular non-sport show for over six years. Now more than ever we should try to lead our viewers to places they never knew they wanted to go – through factual, arts, entertainment and fiction, holding that mirror up to who we are, and offering a sometimes surprising reflection.

The genres which cost the most – drama and comedy - have an extraordinary power to connect with our audiences on a deep emotional level, and to explore the nature of family, work, community in a way which embeds itself in the psyche long after the series is over. At their best they combine characters with universal appeal with a robust sense of place. Boyd Clack's sitcom *High Hopes* and the drama series *Belonging* have proved very popular for this reason. This autumn we will be launching a new drama set in a more urban environment, and I hope, with a peaktime BBC One slot, it will soon make its mark.

But there is a problem - the cost per hour of non-soap drama and sitcom is usually at least three times that of factual. But you don't usually reach three times as many people when you offer drama rather than documentary. So the amount of drama I can commission will never be as much as I would like – something any commissioner in UK television will tell you these days. We want the BBC Wales schedule to be as richly textured and varied in terms of genre and subject matter as the investment levels will allow, but that requires making some painful choices.

As everyone knows, production for the BBC's television networks has been a major success story in Wales over the past few years. *Doctor Who*, *Torchwood*, *Sarah Jane Adventures*, *Tribe*, and so many more titles are proving that we can and do make world class television programmes here. We aim to build on that success over the years to come, and we are determined that some of the programmes we make, like *Torchwood*, will reflect Wales and Welsh people to the wider UK audience. But however good at that we are, there will, I believe, always be a need to offer strong relevant programmes about Wales specifically for the Welsh audience. Nation should indeed speak unto nation, but to be confident and effective in that we also have to be able to talk to ourselves about who we are and what we wish to become.

Undoubtedly the audience will gradually embrace the idea of non-linear consumption of television, broadband connections permitting in this

intractably hilly and patchily populated country of ours. The iPlayer, the Sky Plus box, and the development of devices which allow us to access the net from the sofa in front of the television, will all begin to change our viewing behaviour. But for the time being the ability of the mixed local and network schedules of ITV Wales and BBC One Wales to capture large audiences for Welsh content is showing considerable resilience. This is why nobody who cares about Welsh broadcasting can be comfortable with ITV's retreat from what has been a valuable and successful connection with the audience over several decades.

We know that when we get it right, the audience graph climbs pleasingly in the right direction. But something else even more magical and unquantifiable happens too: you overhear people on bus stops talking about that programme they saw last night, discussing, arguing, bringing their own personal relevant experience into the conversation, and the BBC web pages start to hum with reaction and interaction. Suddenly you understand all those broadcasting buzz words like connection, and appreciation and engagement – and you know that broadcasting great television for audiences in Wales really can make a difference.

## Notes

### 1/ English is a Welsh language

<sup>1</sup> *Statement on programming for the Nations and Regions*, Ofcom, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> p1 *Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review - Phase One: The digital Opportunity*, Ofcom, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> *Media in Wales – Serving Public Values*, Geraint Talfan Davies and Nick Morris, IWA, May 2008

<sup>4</sup> *The future of Welsh broadcasting, Proceedings of an IWA/Ofcom seminar*, IWA May 2008

<sup>5</sup> *Flat Earth News*, Nick Davies, Chatto & Windus, 2008

<sup>6</sup> p44 *Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review - Phase One: The digital Opportunity*, Ofcom, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> p153, *The Digital Opportunity - Research Annex 5*, Ofcom, 2008

<sup>8</sup> p14, *Statement on programming for the Nations and Regions*, Ofcom, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> BBC1,2,3,4, CBBC, CBeebies, BBC News 24 / ITV1,2,3,4 / Channel4, More 4, E4, Film4 / Five, Fiver, Five USA

<sup>10</sup> *Nation and Regions Production Trends*, PACT, November 2008.  
The figures exclude news and the output of GMTV.

<sup>11</sup> *Annual Reports 2007-08*, BBC Wales, BBC Scotland.

<sup>12</sup> This calculation is the best estimate that can be made given the different way in which broadcasters report on programme categories.

### 3/ The long goodbye

- <sup>13</sup> Huw Davies, Chief Executive of HTV Cymru/Wales, *The Western Mail*, 27 March 1991.
- <sup>14</sup> Welsh Affairs Committee (1999) *Broadcasting in Wales and the National Assembly* London: HMSO Stationery Office. P 11.
- <sup>15</sup> Equity (2002) *Submission to the National Assembly Culture Committee on the Communications Bill* Cardiff: National Assembly.
- <sup>16</sup> Memorandum by ITV submitted to Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry into *Globalisation and its impact on Wales* January, 2008.
- <sup>17</sup> Davies, J (1994) *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales* Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- <sup>18</sup> Jones, M (2004) 'Forward' *Defining a nation: Wales and the BBC* Cardiff: BBC Wales.
- <sup>19</sup> Williams, D (2003) 'Stirring Up Apathy' *Agenda: The Journal of the Institute of Welsh Affairs* Winter;
- <sup>20</sup> see Williams, K (2003) 'An Uneasy Relationship: The National Assembly and the Press and Media' in Barry Jones, J and Osmond, John (eds) *Building a Civic Culture* Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs for discussion of relations between National Assembly and the media.
- <sup>21</sup> Morgan, K (2004) 'London v The Rest: The Polycentric Challenge' in *Defining a nation: Wales and the BBC* Cardiff: BBC Wales.
- <sup>22</sup> The problem of filling airtime meant that the output of 2W is composed mainly of repeats. This - together with the loss of certain network shows on BBC 2 - was unpopular with the audience.
- <sup>23</sup> *Communication and Content - The Media Challenge for Wales*, 5.14.
- <sup>24</sup> *Communication and Content - The Media Challenge for Wales*, 7.5.

## 8/ Standing up among the cogwheels

- <sup>25</sup> “The Welsh in their history” by Prof. Gwyn A. Williams published by Croom Helm 1982. Intro.
- <sup>26</sup> Neil Evans, *Immigrants and Minorities in Wales 1840-1990: A comparative perspective*, in *A tolerant nation?*, University of Wales Press 2003, p31
- <sup>27</sup> Ian Kershaw “The Past on the Box: Strengths and Weaknesses” in “History and the Media” edited by David Cannadine published by Palgrave Macmillan 1992 p 119
- <sup>28</sup> David Cannadine, *G.M.Trevelyan – A life in history*, Harper Collins, London 1992
- <sup>29</sup> Richard Evans “In Defence of History” published by Granta 1997 p291
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid p 253
- <sup>31</sup> Emyr Humphreys “The Taliesin Tradition” published by Black Raven Press 1983 p228
- <sup>32</sup> Op cit p20

## Contributors

**Myfanwy Alexander** has been the sole writer on the only long-running satire show in Welsh broadcasting, *The LL Files*, broadcast on BBC Radio Wales, and launched in the run up to the opening of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999. She has also contributed to the BBC Wales current affairs programme, *Dragon's Eye*. She was brought up and still lives in Llanfaircaereinion, Montgomeryshire.

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**Geraint Talfan Davies** is chairman of the Institute of Welsh Affairs and of Welsh National Opera. During 12 years in ITV he was successively head of news and current affairs and assistant controller of programmes at HTV Wales and director of programmes at Tyne Tees Television. He was controller of BBC Wales from 1990-2000. Recently he contributed to *The Price of Plurality*, published by the Reuters Institute of Journalism, and has published a memoir and essays on the arts, media and devolution under the title, *At Arm's Length* (Seren).

**Peter Edwards** is an independent producer. His career began as a roadie for Hull Truck Theatre company and, after a year as a drama teacher in Merthyr Tydfil, moved onto BBC Wales where he directed and produced pop music and drama. After the award-winning *Penyberth* he joined the inaugural team of *Eastenders*. Llundain Lliw, his independent company was formed in 1986 producing *A Mind to Kill* which has sold to 90 countries worldwide. He also produced John Godber's *Up 'n Under*. In 1998 he was appointed head of drama development at HTV. Productions included *Nuts and Bolts* (Royal Television Society Award) and *A Way of Life* (Carl Foreman Award 2005).

**Trevor Fishlock** was a journalist on *The Times* for 17 years, reporting from Wales 1969-77, India 1980-83, and New York 1983-86. He was later Moscow correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*. He is a past winner of the International Reporter of the Year prize in the British Press Awards. He has authored several books on Wales, India, America and Russia, and writes for television and radio. He is also the presenter of the long-running *Fishlock's Wild Tracks* on ITV Wales.

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**Jon Gower** is a freelance writer and radio producer based in Cardiff. He was BBC Wales' arts and media correspondent between 2000-2006, and had previously worked as a current affairs journalist with HTV Wales. To date he has ten books to his name, including *An Island Called Smith* which won the John Morgan award, while his first Welsh language novel, *Dala'r Llanu* has just been published. Jon is a board member of National Theatre Wales.

**Patrick Hannan** is a writer and broadcaster who has covered public affairs in Wales for more than three decades. During that time he has been industrial editor of the *Western Mail* and political correspondent for BBC Wales, as well as producing documentary programmes for BBC2, BBC Wales and HTV. He is a regular contributor to Radio 4 as a writer and presenter. His books, published by Seren, include *The Welsh Illusion*, *Wales Off Message* and *When Arthur met Maggie*.

**Clare Hudson** is head of English language programmes at BBC Wales, a post she has held since 2000. Prior to that, she worked for HTV Wales, as a reporter then as editor of the current affairs programme *Wales This Week*, and later as head of network factual development where she developed and produced programmes for ITV, Channel 4 and Five. She began her career as a print journalist and came to Wales in 1981 to work on the investigative magazine *Rebecca*.

**Chris Morris** runs the highly regarded BA (Hons) Documentary Film & Television course at the University of Wales, Newport. He has won several BAFTA and RTS awards for his documentaries, and has worked for twenty years in the television industry in London and Wales.

**Ronw Protheroe** is a former head of entertainment at HTV Wales. In 1992 he set up Alfresco TV, now part of the Boomerang Group, where he is still actively producing entertainment and factual entertainment programmes. Shows he has produced have won many awards - BAFTA Wales, Royal Television Society, Rose D'Or, New York TV and Film Festival, San Francisco Film Festival, Celtic Film and Television Festival and Banff.

**Dai Smith** holds a research chair in the cultural history of Wales at Swansea University and is also chair of the Arts Council of Wales. From 1993 to 2000 he was successively editor of Radio Wales and head of broadcast (English language) at BBC Wales.

**Peter Stead** is a writer, broadcaster, cultural historian and chairman of the Dylan Thomas Literary Prize. He has previously lectured in history at the University of Wales, Swansea. He writes on the history of cinema, sports and theatre and amongst his publications are studies of the writer Dennis Potter and the actor Richard Burton. He broadcasts regularly for the BBC on cultural and political matters and was a member of the government panel that chose Liverpool as the European Capital of Culture 2008.

**Colin Thomas** was a BBC staff director until he resigned in 1978 over censorship of programmes he had directed in Northern Ireland. Since then he has produced and directed for RTE, S4C, C4, ITV and BBC. His programmes, many of them award winning, include *Hughesovka and the New Russia*, *Border Crossing* and *The Dragon has Two Tongues*.

**David Williams** is an independent television producer who has spent more than 35 years in broadcast journalism in Wales, winning numerous awards for his work, including two Baftas. He began as a reporter with the BBC's *Wales Today* before moving across to HTV Wales as the presenter of the current affairs programme *Wales This Week*. He rejoined the BBC as the editor of *Wales Today* and, more recently, was BBC Wales' political editor and presenter of the weekly political programme, *Dragon's Eye*.

**Kevin Williams** is professor of media and communications studies at Swansea University. His latest book *Read All About It*, a history of the British newspaper, is to be published in June by Routledge. He wrote *Shadows And Substance: A Media Policy for Wales* in 1997 and has contributed numerous articles on the media in Wales to various periodicals and academic journals.



As technology and market forces radically change the world of television, regional broadcasting has been the biggest casualty. ITV in Wales could soon be left delivering nothing other than a nightly news programme. BBC Wales's service is also facing severe curtailment.

In seventeen personal statements by people who have contributed to broadcasting in English for Wales, they describe not only the richness of a home-grown tradition, but also how much more of Welsh life and culture could have been explored had the space, money and autonomy been available.

This book is part elegy for past glories, part *cri de coeur* as a nation's visibility to itself is allowed to wither, and part affirmation that this problem can be solved and must be solved.

As the UK government decides on the future of public service broadcasting, this book reminds us that imaginative solutions are available and that television's mirror to the Welsh nation – reflecting the language of the majority – must not be further clouded, let alone discarded.

**Contributors:** Myfanwy Alexander, Mario Basini, Catrin Clarke, Geraint Talfan Davies, Peter Edwards, Trevor Fishlock, John Geraint, Jon Gower, Patrick Hannan, Clare Hudson, Chris Morris, Ronw Protheroe, Dai Smith, Peter Stead, Colin Thomas, David Williams, Kevin Williams

£9.99

978 1 904773 42 9

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