

# the welsh agenda

## Hope for the Future? Young voices on 2016's political earthquakes

Jonathan Cox on The Audacity of Hopelessness  
Laura McAllister on A New Reality in Welsh Politics  
& a special report: tackling obesity



MAKING  
WALES  
BETTER

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## editorial

To say 2016 has been a game changer in terms of politics gives new meaning to the term understatement. In the last twelve months we've seen a Welsh Assembly election that decisively changed the makeup of the Senedd, a referendum on the UK's EU Membership and most recently, an American election that will have ramifications across the world that we can't yet imagine.

Whether you think the changes Wales will be facing are for better or worse, there is surely one thing that everyone agrees on: that we are now in a period of significant flux, and that it's likely to last a fair while.

It's not just the political landscape that is going through a period of change. It has also been a significant year for the IWA, including waving farewell to our former Director Lee Waters after his election in May. We wish him well in his new role. Now, at this crucial time for Wales, it's clear that the IWA has to be even more ambitious than ever and that's why we're pursuing some of our biggest challenges yet. There is much to play for. So I'm delighted to be leading the IWA into its 30th year and we look forward to celebrating and reflecting with our members in 2017.

Our project on energy, 'Re-energising Wales', is undoubtedly testing, but the work it will deliver over its remaining two and a half years could offer a wholly alternative economic strategy for Wales. You can read more about this later in the magazine.

We're also developing our health project, which aims to put some of the recommendations from our 'Let's talk cancer' project into practice. We're specifically looking at the issue of delays in healthcare settings and want to challenge the NHS to think differently about this persistent problem to improve the experience of health care for patients and their carers across Wales.

The UK's intended exit from the EU affects every area of policy and our thinking on it will span across our priority areas. We're working on some exciting plans for next year, and we look forward to updating you all on this.

We are serious about coming up with practical policy solutions that really can make Wales better and we want more people to be part of this process. We want to engage more and more people in the work that the IWA is doing, and we're passionate about engaging with a wider plurality of voices. We want to involve more women, a greater proportion of younger voices and, vitally, people from different backgrounds across Wales. It won't be a question of throwing the baby out with the bathwater - we shall of course continue to build on our strengths and continue to value the expertise of our current membership base - but if 2016 has taught us anything so far, it's that we need to listen to people whose experience and perspective differs often dramatically from our own.

In the last issue of *agenda* we ran a series on 'unheard voices', those perspectives you wouldn't normally hear in the lead up to an election campaign. In this issue, we're continuing to give a voice to some of those people who can often be ignored. Our cover story features students from Cardiff and the Vale College and three of those students offered their thoughts on the events of this year. It's safe to say that they didn't hold back. We're also really pleased to bring attention to one of the growing crises facing our health system: childhood obesity. Our special look at the issue includes pieces from Clare Critchley, Paul Thomas and Katie Palmer. Finally, Mat Mathias takes on the role of having the 'Last word' in this issue, bringing some much needed humour to the events of the last few months.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the *agenda* and join us in looking forward to what is to come from the IWA in its birthday year. Your support is vital to the survival of the IWA and our ability to work effectively at this crucial time for all of us.

Thank you.

**Auriol Miller,**  
IWA Director.



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# Taking the IWA into its 30th year

**Sion Barry** discusses the future of the IWA with its incoming Director, **Auriol Miller**, and Chair, **Helen Molyneux**.

Next year the IWA celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary very much in a listening and collaborative mode under its new director Auriol Miller and chair Helen Molyneux.

Ms Miller took up her role this month

from Cymorth Cymru, the umbrella body for providers of homelessness services, housing-related support and social care services in Wales.

Prior to this she worked in international development for nearly 20 years in five different countries, including in leadership roles for Oxfam in Sudan and Russia.

And it comes as the charitable status organisation, in a process started by her predecessor and now Labour AM for Llanelli Lee Waters – supported by its board chaired by Helen Molyneux – moves to a more streamlined and focused modus operandi.

This has seen it deliberately coming off the treadmill of continuous events to focus instead on four themes that encompass some of the biggest challenges and opportunities facing Wales; the economy, governance, health and education.

Ms Molyneux, who recently stood down as chief executive of personal injury legal firm NewLaw, which she founded, said the organisation was now on a much sounder financial footing – but could always do with additional revenue and resource.

Sitting in the IWA's modest offices in Cardiff Bay besides the new director, Ms Molyneux, who took up her chair role in 2014, said: 'Funding is very difficult to come by, so we started doing lots of events. But what happens then is that you spend all your time and resources organising them... and for things that don't generate that much cash.'

'So the decision we took pretty early on with Lee [Waters] was to be quite ruthless in what our objectives were and what we were trying to do as an organisation. It was then a case of matching our business model to our objectives.'

'And that was quite a tough decision as it meant cancelling lots of stuff that was quite 'comfort blanket like' but was something we had to stop doing.'

As a result the IWA, pooling the considerable expertise of its membership base, has established working groups to take forward research on its themes. One of its first outcomes will be from the economy group before Christmas.

Specifically, this will be looking at the potential of different investment vehicles to

support renewable projects in Wales.

This forms part of the group's wider body of work looking at how Wales can become a net exporter of renewable technologies and reduce its own carbon emissions by 80% by 2025.

And while the IWA will continue to rely on membership fees of around £70,000 a year, and fewer sponsored events, it is actively seeking funding to support its themed approach.

Ms Molyneux said: 'If you take our economy-energy project it is a massive undertaking, so we went out to get funding support. And we have got backing from the Jane Hodge Foundation for three years, and we have just secured funding from the Friends Provident Foundation as well.

'That means we have got a project that we can all work on now and don't have to rush around all the time doing all sorts of events to distract us.

'There will be proper outcomes that they [funders] will measure us against.

So it makes us very focused and helps us to achieve our objectives. And it demonstrates that it is easier to get funding from people if you have an identifiable project with identifiable outcomes, from which they can justify their funding.

'So, financially we are fine, but organisations like ours will never be flush with cash, nor should they be. It is a hand to mouth existence, but what I would like is a bigger mouth and bigger hands, as we want to do more things and grow the IWA.'

While some might perceive the IWA, whether fairly or not, as a body speaking to an older and professional male dominated interest group, Ms Miller is determined that it speaks to and engages with a much wider audience. It currently has around 900 members, including around 80 Corporate Members. It has a small workforce of seven.

Ms Miller said: 'I think it is about providing a platform and a forum for discussion about some real big ticket issues that are going to be affecting all parts of the economy.

'And there are very few places that you can do that in a way that is impartial and non-party political and I think that is hugely valuable at the moment.'

Describing herself as not coming from the

'Cardiff Bay bubble' she said the IWA was in a collaborative mindset and would not seek to duplicate the work of others.

She added: 'It's also about providing a different angle, but also to look out and see what is going on in different parts of the world.

'That is where in particular my previous experience is going to be useful. I am not

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**'We are not going to be throwing stones at Welsh Government from the side-lines but it will be about how do we help and how can be bring a different perspective to the table.'**

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saying it has to be the same old same old in any shape or form, but it is about having a different perspective on things.

'Coming from a strong campaigning organisation like Oxfam, I understand how to make change happen and an understanding as to how that happens.

So who is going to help us to make that change happen? It is about being very nuanced and targeted, but is also about putting together perhaps some unusual partnerships as well.

'Sometimes you can have allies where you don't expect them to be. I think not being in and of the Cardiff Bay Bubble is a benefit.

'Of course the politics is interesting, but I am not party political in that sense.

I think there is huge energy out there from people who feel similarly and are we harnessing and focusing our respective efforts so that we are not duplicating and pulling in different directions.

'So it is about bringing other voices to the table that have not traditionally been heard and making sure we are talking to people who are not in the middle or top of the pile, but are further on down.

So what are their aspirations for what they feel Wales should look like and what assets do they have that we can talk about more?'

The IWA has always seen itself as a

'critical friend' of decision-makers in Wales, regardless of sector.

Ms Miller said: 'We are not going to be throwing stones at Welsh Government from the sidelines but it will be about how do we help and how can we bring a different perspective to the table.'

As for where she sees the IWA in five years time she said: 'Obviously sustainable and financially viable, but a growing organisation able to flex its muscles in terms of its resources and how it adapts to changing issues as they come up, which is all classic small organisation stuff.'

And she hopes she can bring her international experiences, and contacts, to bear.

She said: 'My classic example would be living in DR Congo and flying across the frontline to get from one side of the country to the other. And I get some of the logistical transport challenges between north to south Wales but of course in a totally different way. But there are ways around that.

In Russia one of the things I did with Oxfam was work with community groups to address post industrialised single company cities.

'There are lots of parallels actually with parts of the Valleys and the ship building communities of the north east of England.'

But again she sees a key part of the IWA's focus going forward as helping to give a voice to people in Welsh society who 'feel vulnerable or have been marginalised.'

She added: 'I want to hear women's voices very loudly, I want to hear diversity and what young people have got to say too.

'There are a lot of young people's groups around the country so can we provide a platform for pulling some of this together?'

'It is not just people who have say 20 to 30 years of professional experience under their belts whose voices matter.

'The world is changing and we have to keep up with that. And we cannot do things that are just good for Wales, but we have think about what is good internationally.'



**Sion Barry** is the Business Editor of the Western Mail.

# THE AUDACITY OF HOPELESSNESS

Jonathan Cox maps out a route from hopelessness to hope –  
through the recovery of Wales' tradition of community organising

**“THE ONLY WAY FOR COMMUNITIES  
TO BUILD LONG-TERM POWER IS BY  
ORGANISING PEOPLE AND MONEY  
AROUND A COMMON VISION...  
[COMMUNITY] ORGANISING  
TEACHES AS NOTHING ELSE DOES  
THE BEAUTY AND STRENGTH OF  
EVERYDAY PEOPLE.”**

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, DREAMS FROM MY FATHER**

# THESE COMMUNITIES AND THEIR PEOPLE ARE [NOT] ACTUALLY HOPELESS, BUT... THEY OFTEN FEEL THAT WAY IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE. PEOPLE FEEL THAT DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT THEM AND CHANGES ARE DONE TO THEM

Growing up in Bargoed in the 1980s and 1990s, the dominance of the Labour Party was total: 'stick a red rosette on a donkey around here at election time, and we'd vote for it.' While this was occasionally murmured wistfully by those worried about the lack of opposition or the quality of some local politicians, it was mostly proclaimed to me proudly – as a badge of honour, a token of resistance to Tory rule.

Had I been able to see into the future, the 12-year-old me would have been astonished to foresee Valleys communities ignoring the pleas of the red rosettes of the Labour Party establishment, the major trades unions, and most church, chapel and civil society leaders, calling on them to vote Remain. More astonished still to witness them align themselves with Nigel Farage, Michael Gove and Boris Johnson to vote for Brexit.

The conventional frames used to help us understand why people voted one way or the other – political allegiance, numbers of Eurosceptic activists locally, net contributors to or beneficiaries of EU funding – do not map easily onto how Wales voted. Areas like Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan that might have been predicted to vote Leave on the basis of relatively large numbers of Conservative voters, high profile Eurosceptic representatives, and a high UKIP vote in the 2014 Euro elections, voted Remain.

The Vale of Glamorgan makes an interesting case study. Back in 2014 UKIP topped the poll on a 37% turnout, so Leave campaigners must have been hopeful. As it happened, the turnout for the Referendum more than doubled to 76% and Remain

pipped Leave by 50.73% to 49.27%. Clearly the Undecideds tipped the balance for Remain in the Vale and Monmouthshire, outweighing the significant Eurosceptic vote.

A community organiser's job is to listen to what makes people angry and help them channel that anger into campaigns for social justice and the common good. Since the foundation of Citizens Cymru Wales in 2014, I have met hundreds of community leaders across the nation, and kept doggedly asking: 'What makes you angry? What would you like to change in your area? What are you going to do about it?' I have a little black book in which I list all the injustices people describe, but not once has leaving the EU even been mentioned. So I have a hunch, rooted in those hundreds of 1-2-1 meetings, that there is a simple factor that explains why Cardiff, Monmouthshire, Vale of Glamorgan, Ceredigion and Gwynedd voted Remain, while the rest of Wales voted to Leave. Not sovereignty, not the economy, not immigration – but hope.

There is a hard core of Europhobes and a hard core of Europhiles in every area, but I

believe that hope played a defining role in influencing the Undecideds who swung the Referendum. In metropolitan Cardiff, with its booming economy and highly educated population, the average Undecided has hope for the future. Similarly, the Vale of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire are economically prosperous and the prospect of a decent job and a pleasant living environment equals optimistic Undecideds. Undecideds in Ceredigion and Gwynedd, the heartlands of the Welsh language and nationalist identity, did not derive their hope so much from the economy (Gwynedd has the lowest wages in Wales) but from the positive outlook within the EU for small countries like Wales, seeking to define themselves against a larger and dominant neighbour. As one community leader told me, the EU recognises Welsh as a co-official language, 'a higher status than it is accorded at Westminster.' If you have hope for the future, why upset the status quo?

And so to the rest of Wales. My proposition is that Undecideds elsewhere did not feel enough hope in their future to vote Remain. If you are living in a Valleys community that saw its economic lifeblood cut off thirty years ago, where your kids face the prospect of low-paid insecure employment, and where the town feels like it is in a terminal spiral of shops and services closing; well, the fact that the EU funded a bypass or the pedestrianisation of your town centre is unlikely to have had much impact on your decision.

Lacking hope normally leads to inaction, so why did so many people bother to take action and vote in numbers as great as at a typical general election? Barack Obama wrote a book about the 'Audacity of Hope' in which he called for a revival of a political

## CHAPELS AND UNIONS THAT WERE ENGINES OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRATIC ACTION HAVE LONG SINCE LOST THEIR CENTRAL PLACE IN COMMUNITIES

# THE REFERENDUM WAS A CRY OF ANGUISH – A RELEASE OF FRUSTRATION THAT HAS BEEN SIMMERING FOR DECADES

tradition based on the idea ‘...that we have a stake in one another, and that what binds us together is greater than what drives us apart, and that if enough people believe in the truth of that proposition and act on it, then we might not solve every problem, but we can get something meaningful done.’ That for Obama was the ‘Audacity of Hope’. I think that the vote to Leave the EU, particularly in areas which are net beneficiaries of EU funds, demonstrates the ‘Audacity of Hopelessness’.

I do not mean by this that these communities and their people are actually hopeless, but that they often feel that way in the face of injustice. People feel that decisions are made *about them* and changes are *done* to them. A mantra of community organising is ‘if you don’t have a seat at the [decision-making] table, you are probably on the menu!’ This resonates with many communities in Wales, where even beneficiaries of funding or government programmes lack a real sense of agency at local level. You can see why the call to ‘Take Back Control’ struck a chord. Prior to the Citizens Cymru Wales launch in 2014, we organised a major community listening campaign called ‘10,000 Stories’. A hundred civil society organisations participated, and listened to 100 people each, asking them ‘what is the biggest issue putting pressure on you and your family? What would you most like to change in your community? Do you feel like you have the power to change these issues?’ What was striking was the overwhelming lack of power people felt they had to influence the destiny of the community in which they lived.

If you lack hope about the future of your family and community, feel alienated from democratic decision-making, and live in a place where, by and large, your vote doesn’t really count because only one political party has a chance of winning – well, what do

you have to lose? The Referendum offered people an opportunity to express their frustration and give the Establishment a kicking. A chance to ‘take back control’ when, for once, every vote really counts. We witnessed the audacity of hopelessness.

So one way of interpreting the Referendum result in Wales is as a cry of pain from those people and communities who have not shared equally in our wealth and opportunity, lack hope for the future, and feel a profound lack of power and agency to change their communities for the better.

Hope and a sense of human agency are essential to the flourishing of people and communities. The answer to this very modern problem is to reawaken and revitalise a tradition that is embedded deep in our communities, but now lies latent in decaying chapels and converted miners’ institutes. The community organising method that Obama describes above, resonates strongly with the historical practice of chapels and trade unions that organised people and money (their own!) in pursuit of a common vision, nurtured community leaders, and profoundly influenced the destiny of those places.

The prospects for this kind of revival may seem bleak. The chapels and unions that were engines of local leadership development and democratic action have long since lost their central place in communities. Moreover there is a broader crisis of association, with huge swathes of the population of our nation not part of ‘anchor’ civil society organisations, the groups which have deep roots and a commitment to the common good of the wider community. If we want to organise, we must first find ways to relate and belong.

Citizens Cymru Wales is building alliances of schools, churches, mosques, unions and residents’ associations to try and restore this tradition and train ordinary

people to be effective community leaders – particularly in areas where hope and agency are at their lowest ebb. The work is painstaking and slow – and relentlessly prioritises issues chosen by the people leading the campaign (another of our maxims is to ‘never do for someone what they can do for themselves’) and where they can *touch, taste or feel* the change they have made. Every time young people from Merthyr walk across the zebra crossing outside their youth club, or when white working class cleaners at a major Welsh university open their paycheck and see the Living Wage, or when Muslims sit down for a meal at the first halal Nando’s in Cardiff, or when farmers from Pembrokeshire prepare the housing to welcome Syrian refugees – then they feel the power, agency, and hope that comes from leading change.

The Referendum was a cry of anguish – a release of frustration that has been simmering for decades. We have a choice about how we respond. Will we now try and put the lid back on and return to business as usual? Or instead seek to turn down the heat and engage with the widespread feeling of hopelessness and alienation from our politics and democracy. If the latter, then we must focus on fostering the belief that change is possible. Hope and human agency are the currency of everyday democracy. As the Organiser turned President reminds us, change comes from organising communities. If we take that challenge seriously, then maybe we can move on from the audacity of hopelessness and see what is possible when our communities are imbued with the audacity of hope.



**Jonathan Cox** is Lead Organiser of Citizens Cymru Wales, the national home of community organising.



# 'An absolute garbage pile of a year'

Images: David Wilson

Politics students **Nikkita Harris, Victoria Rendell and Ben Filer** discuss the implications of Brexit, and learning to live with decisions imposed on them by older generations

It doesn't take Nikkita Harris long to say what she thinks. The seventeen-year-old from Barry says that 'it's been an absolute garbage pile of a year.' It is the week of Donald Trump's election to the White House, and the young people studying A Level Politics at Cardiff and Vale College clearly feel that the world has taken yet another turn for the worse.

'For a start,' says Nikkita, 'we're 17 and we don't have a say in our future.' Votes at 16 may be on the way, but too late for this cohort of sixteen and seventeen year olds. Nikkita gives voice to a feeling that 'we're vastly outnumbered - every time there seems to be [an opportunity for change]

younger people are outvoted by older people and it sabotages us.'

The only gleam of hope that she sees is in engagement: 'Lots of my friends didn't used to want to know about politics, but this year they've been a lot more engaged; they're getting themselves informed and they're getting a lot more vocal.'

But recent events have Nikkita feeling pessimistic about the future. 'Trump doesn't have an internationalist view. He and Farage are anti-globalist. And each of these shock victories gives fuel to the next one. Marine Le Pen and the right wing in Germany will feel like they're on the rise.'

Victoria Rendell, also 17, comes from the Rhondda. She is still perplexed at the vote to leave the European Union. 'Where I live, the majority of people voted to leave - but we receive the highest level of support from the EU'.

Victoria is resigned to learning to live with the result, but is worried that politics has become 'much more about fear and turning people against each other.'

'A lot of older people are stuck in their ways about diversity,' she says, expressing disgust at the way in which the refugee crisis was co-opted as part of the campaign to leave the EU.

Ben Filer, from Cardiff, is 22 - but didn't vote in the referendum. 'There was so much mud-throwing around the time of the campaign, from both sides. I don't think either side had a good message.' Ben retains an 'open mind' and doesn't regret not voting: 'I'm happy that a democratic decision has been taken,' he says.

Ben's abstention on June 23rd is not an indicator of political inactivity. He is one of six members of his family who recently joined Labour, primarily to vote for Jeremy Corbyn in the party's leadership election. 'Politics is becoming more relevant to people - not just the middle class, he says.'

All are agreed that the role of the media in presenting the political world is a negative one. Nikkita contends that 'the media can bring out the worst in people,' and Ben adds that 'the media are the

biggest part of it' – 'it' being the 'anti-establishment thing' that has propelled Brexit and Trump and, in Ben's view, 'has people... shooting themselves in the foot.'

It is striking that mention of the media immediately brings up Twitter and the concept of echo chambers and widespread sharing of biased articles and a proliferation of parodies. Social media takes precedence over traditional media and perhaps contributes to the broadly globalist perspectives of millennials. 'I rarely read an actual newspaper apart from the Metro on the train,' says Victoria.

Depending on how you look at it, this borderless

**“There was so much mud-flinging around the time of the campaign, from both sides. I don't think either side had a good message.”**

internet media can be a blessing or a curse. It has been a huge week and a huge year in world politics, whether you think the results have been a 'pile of garbage' or not. But sitting in a building from which you can just about see the Senedd, talking politics with these bright young people, there is no mention of Wales.

'Unless you're actively looking for information, you can't find it,' says Ben, 'a lot of people simply forget about Wales on a national level.' Nikkita cheerfully admits that before she undertook work experience there a couple of years ago, she had no idea what – or how much – went on at the Assembly. Victoria adds: 'You turn on the news and see the Houses of Parliament. We live in Wales, and so many decisions are taken at the Welsh Assembly, that we should get to hear a lot more about what goes on there.'



# Escaping the exam factory: why teachers are leaving



**Dylan Moore** fears that much-needed curriculum overhaul will be overshadowed by a data culture that distorts the purpose of education and demoralises students and teachers alike

The headlines merely hint at thousands of individual human stories. 'Half of teachers could leave the profession in two years' (*Telegraph*); 'Teacher shortage becoming a classroom crisis' (*BBC*); 'Teachers are leaving as government falls short on recruitment' (*Guardian*); 'More teachers than ever quitting classrooms' (*Sky News*). And despite the diverging education systems on either side of Offa's Dyke, these are not headlines relevant only to England. 'Unmanageable workload forcing teachers to consider leaving profession' (*South Wales Guardian*); 'Recruitment crisis in the classroom as nine in ten teachers say excessive workload to blame' and – in an echo of *The Telegraph's* claim – 'Almost half of Wales' teachers thinking of leaving

profession' (*Wales Online*).

To redress this desperate situation, a report by the Social Market Foundation has recommended paying a premium to teachers who work in schools in poorer areas; here in Wales, Plaid Cymru's election manifesto included a promise to give a 10% rise to teachers in a bid to enhance the status of the profession. The esteem in which teachers are held is certainly something that Government, teachers themselves and society as a whole need to grapple with – an issue finally and deservedly on the political agenda. Pay, to an extent, is a sideshow.

Experienced teachers' salaries, despite real-terms reduction over the last decade, remain competitive – and in actual fact it is *only* the good level of pay relative to other viable options that means we have a recruitment and retention crisis rather than a total collapse of the teaching workforce. Many teachers' mortgages, taken out on the strength of a decent and reliable salary, have trapped them in a job they have fallen out of love with. Nobody goes into teaching for the money, but sometimes it is an economic equation that retains people. However, more and

more teachers are voluntarily opting for reduced hours contracts in an attempt to rebalance their lives and ward off mental health issues; others, like me, are opting out altogether.

I was attracted to teaching by the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the next generation. My first letter of application boldly stated that I was 'answering the [UK New Labour] Government's call for high quality graduates to seek a career in teaching'. My enthusiasm for literature as a vehicle for exploring life as well as improving literacy was matched by an educational climate that, while it had its problems, retained enough flexibility to allow for lessons in the library spent reading for pleasure, projects to publish anthologies of pupils' creative writing and just enough spare energy to run theatre trips and a debating club. In those now far-off seeming halcyon days, there was even time to eat your lunch and chat to colleagues about the outside world.

Ask most teachers who have been doing the job for more than five years and they will tell you that the job has fundamentally, irrevocably changed.

Some things are better. There has been a digital revolution, reflecting the changes in society as a whole. Important strands such as education for sustainable development and global citizenship have been seamlessly incorporated into curricula. Assessment for learning is now so normal that it is difficult to think of it as something that was once new.

But several large shadows hang over education – and I am not referring to those cast by the various ministers who have had a ‘mixed’ reaction from teachers in Wales and England as their reform agendas have been driven through the system at pace. Owen Hathway, Policy Officer at NUT Cymru, has summarised the situation neatly: ‘issues around workload and accountability are pushing excellent teachers out of the profession. Action is certainly needed to help empower the profession to maintain the dedication to teaching that attracted them to the role in the first place.’

On workload, I identify with all the usual touchstones of teacher-leaving-the-profession articles that appear on my social media timelines with ever-increasing regularity. Teachers are worn out by the unrelenting everyday demands of the job, preparing for, delivering and then following up on four or five all-

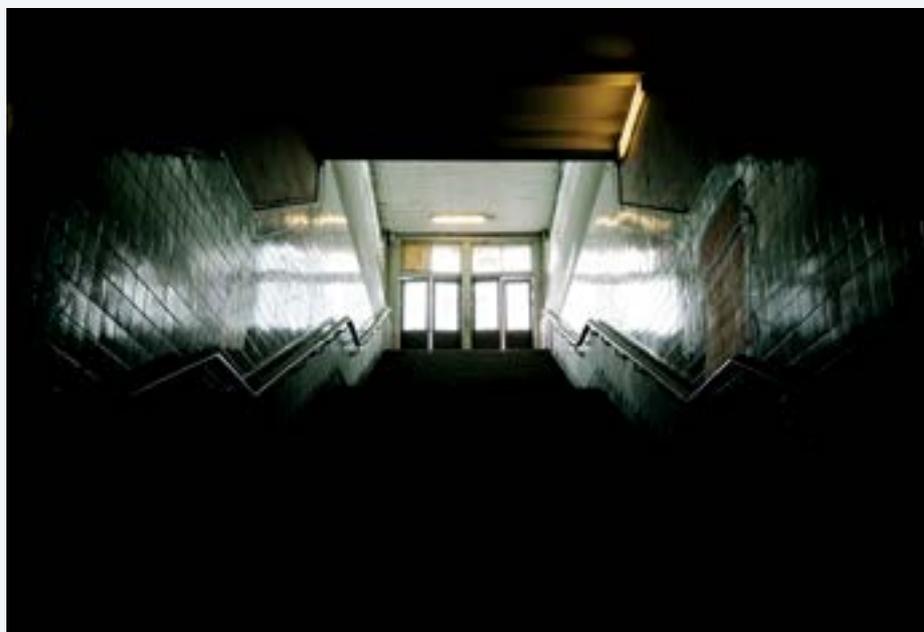
singing, all-dancing presentations a day in front of a difficult audience. We are also mentally tired; the price of an unending cycle of deadlines and that nagging guilty feeling that nothing can ever be truly finished. But we are professional adults and plenty of people who work just as hard will be first to point out that teachers still benefit from generous holidays which go at least some way to compensate for the relentlessness of term-time. Any real guilt should be reserved for an acknowledgement of the fact we have allowed a Kafkaesque culture of bureaucracy to divert our attention away from students and onto spreadsheets.

The direction in which education has moved, on both sides of Offa’s Dyke, has been driven by a culture of *ultra-accountability*. What is valued today – by governments, by inspection bodies and exam boards, and, sadly, by many senior leadership teams within schools – is the *measurable*. And what we know instinctively as teachers, working every day at the so-called ‘chalkface’, is that what is most valuable in education is *immeasurable*. We came into the job to inspire young minds, to fire pupils’ interest and ability to learn. It may sound hopelessly idealistic, but perhaps we need a reminder of our true vocation: to light

a spark of interest in a subject that will last somebody a lifetime. On many days, our greatest achievement will be to turn a scowl into a smile, or to help somebody realise that they *can*, or to offer a listening ear missing elsewhere in a young person’s life. All of these successes are *results*. And yet, in today’s increasingly tortuous edu-speak, results mean only one thing: turning Level 4s into Level 5s, Ds into Cs, As into A\*s. Numbers and letters on more and more virtual pieces of paper and labyrinthine databases expanding like the universe into infinity.

The way things are currently organised, most days it feels that actual children are in the way of the running of a school. Being a teacher today means submitting to a rolling programme of deadlines; poring over datasets in order to prove that you are doing what you say you are doing, which by the time you have finished make you realise you have lost the time you would need to do what it is you are trying to prove you are doing. Actual lessons seem like something to get over and done with. Even the verb we now choose to describe what goes on in classrooms betrays the politico-corporate takeover of our ‘learning environments’. We no longer teach; we *deliver* lessons.

Of course, regular assessment and progress checks are vital in ensuring we keep tabs on where pupils are at in their learning. Examinations, tests, parents’ evenings and annual reports have been a feature of the educational landscape for as long as anybody can remember, and rightly so. But rather than being milestones, ‘continuous assessment’ has become exactly that. Quality continuous assessment – the encyclopaedic formative knowledge all good teachers have in their heads about their pupils – has been devalued and replaced by raw, often meaningless or misleading, data. One quality school report a year allows meaningful engagement with parents and a genuine reflection of progress; the requirement to measure student progress against prior data that has been incrementally inflated by the student’s previous teachers, all of whom were under





Our children's futures depend, in many ways, on the quality and enthusiasm of the teaching workforce. We need teachers with can-do attitudes who encourage open-mindedness, allow mistakes, promote creativity and are positive about their job.

extreme pressure (read: professional coercion) to make sure she was 'on target' creates a nonsensical mountain of paperwork that serves no purpose other than to waste everybody's time.

A report commissioned by the NUT earlier this year, looking at the impact of accountability measures on children and young people in England, is titled *Exam Factories?* The question mark is entirely unnecessary, and its findings apply as much to Wales as to England. Negative impacts of the hegemonic data culture were recorded across issues as important and as various as the breadth of the curriculum, teacher-pupil relationships, pupils' emotional health and wellbeing, and students' perceptions of the purpose of education. In other words, the entire point of education is being undermined and undone by its own internal systems, with the added implication of long-term, untold and serious knock-on damage to individuals and to society as a whole.

Between us (I include teachers as well as politicians, examination bodies, the media and the wider world in this), we have created a vicious circle. Quite apart from its soul-sapping pointlessness, what the endless emphasis on data generation and analysis ultimately betrays

is a fundamental lack of trust. Relying on predictive algorithms and graphs that assume linear progress means we are running schools like sausage factories, and children – if you've ever met one you will know – do not behave like sausages. Variables at play affecting our frontline education workers' ability to 'deliver results' include family breakdown; the weather; the lack of a breakfast; a missed bus; drug abuse; the time of day; a fight at lunchtime; fancying the boy at the back or the girl at the front of the class; junk food and Xboxes. If you give it too much thought, you realise it's an impossible job. Without the requirement to quantify everything, it's a challenge to relish; in the current climate, the still rich rewards are heavily outweighed.

The irony is that in making pieces of paper the end goal, we further devalue learning. It is, actually, deeply dissatisfying to see students who have been endlessly drilled in a narrow range of skills and taught to pass a test receiving 'excellent' results that outstrip those of others who have a more genuine aptitude for and love of a subject, but whose idiosyncratic approach might place their answers outside of ever-narrowing criteria. It is even more soul-destroying to be a part of

that system, to feel yourself becoming – rather than an inspiration – just another brick in the wall.

Our children's futures depend, in many ways, on the quality and enthusiasm of the teaching workforce. We need teachers with can-do attitudes who encourage open-mindedness, allow mistakes, promote creativity and are positive about their job. We have thousands of people who fit the bill already in schools. But we are in grave danger of losing many good, experienced teachers as enough becomes enough. I am – actually – optimistic about the opportunities arising from Donaldson, especially given that teachers themselves will be leading new curriculum implementation. My concern is that data-and-accountability culture will cast its long, dark and troubling shadow over Welsh education's bright new dawn.



**Dylan Moore** is Comment & Analysis Editor at the IWA. He taught English in Welsh comprehensive schools from 2002-16.



# the welsh agenda special report: **Tackling Obesity**

**Clare Critchley** outlines the stark details of Wales' huge obesity epidemic; **Paul Thomas** calls for ambition, understanding and common sense in our approaches to encouraging active lifestyles; and **Katie Palmer** emphasises the importance of educating communities about food choices

# a major public crisis

—Clare Critchley

This September, teary parents across Wales will have waved off another fresh-faced cohort of four year olds, skipping off into the autumn sunshine for their first day at school. A rosy image, of which memories are made. Considerably less rosy, however, is the stark fact that more than a quarter of those children will be overweight or obese.

Across Wales, 26.2% of reception aged children (rising to 31.7% in Merthyr) are now officially classified by Public Health Wales as overweight or obese. Wales has a higher average number of overweight and obese children than England; more shockingly, the Welsh average is higher than in every single region of England. Only Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan have lower numbers than the English average. The link between obese/overweight children and deprivation is now incontrovertible both in Wales and England but what should worry policymakers here is that even when compared to socially equivalent areas of England (the North East, the North West) our children are simply fatter. What's more – the figures for obese and overweight children seem to be consistently coming down in England. In Wales the picture is mixed. Both Cardiff and Vale and Hywel Dda UHBs have reported more obese 4-5 year olds this year than last.

## Percentage of reception aged children (aged 4-5) who are overweight or obese:

<b>England average</b>	<b>21.9%</b>
North East	23.7%
West Midlands	23.1%
North West	22.9%
South West	22.3%
<b>Wales average</b>	<b>26.2%</b>
Merthyr	31.7%
Gwynedd	30.7%
Carms	30.7%
Pembs	30.2%

Obviously one caveat when comparing these figures is that in Wales we are looking at very small local authority areas (Merthyr, RCT) and comparing them with much larger regions (the West Midlands) in England. If you dig down into the English figures, you can find higher numbers which makes the comparison less unfavourable to Wales (Cannock Chase 29.1%, Redcar and Cleveland 27.4%). It is not hard, however, to find evidence that we are facing a major public crisis. Research last year by McKinsey Consulting found that obesity cost the UK economy \$73bn a year. At 3% of GDP, this is the second highest human-generated impact after smoking (\$90bn), costing more than armed violence, war and terrorism combined (\$67bn). Figures for the economy as a whole were not available for Wales specifically but overweight/obesity was estimated to cost the Welsh NHS nearly £86m or about £1.5m every week (Welsh Government, 2011) That is close to 1.5% of total healthcare expenditure.

Expensive government publicity campaigns have had little or no effect

**Across Wales, 26.2% of reception aged children (rising to 31.7% in Merthyr) are now officially classified by Public Health Wales as overweight or obese.**

on the figures; obese children are likely to become obese adults and realistically neither set are going to pull on their daps any time soon to join in their local park run. Which is why putting the emphasis on *physical activity* as opposed to *exercise* is key, otherwise we are, quite literally, trying to run before we can walk. Paul Thomas (see overleaf) says he was fortunate enough to grow up in an area where being physically active was a natural part of life; I suspect most of us born in his generation would say the same thing. Crucially, we were also allowed by our parents to wander free for hours in local woods or fields. And the physical landscape of Wales hasn't changed: it is a tragic irony that we suffer such a high level of inactivity while we are blessed with such abundance of beautiful and accessible countryside. Note that after Merthyr, the three unitary authority areas with the highest levels of childhood obesity are Gwynedd, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire; the problem is not lack of access to outside space.

I am not naive enough to be advocating a return to a halcyon *Swallows and Amazons* existence. And yet. As a mother of two young boys, I think we parents have a huge role to play in getting our children active by letting them take risks: climbing trees, walking on walls, rolling down hills. Paul Thomas mentions free-running. Children are natural born free-runners, and what's more, the benefits of all this activity is not just physical – young people will reap huge rewards in terms of the confidence so sorely lacking in schools across Wales. I love the concept of 'physical literacy' because it isn't about team games, or any form of organised sport, it is our children's birthright and as we wave them off to school again this autumn, it should be as high a priority for all of us as the dreaded spelling test or reading logs.



**Clare Critchley** is a freelance trainer who works with young people.

# a team sport

—Paul Thomas



I was fortunate to grow up in an area of the south Wales valleys where being physically active was a natural part of life. Whether it was playing team sports or exploring the natural environment, being active has always been something that formed part of who I am. I can say I have benefited immensely from what that activity and more formal sport has provided me with, from a healthier life to learning how to lead and negotiate as part of a team.

Physical activity has been a bit of an afterthought in terms of approaches to health improvement, obesity and raising educational outcomes. Everyone knows they need to move more and more often, but we still see rising levels of obesity. Whilst the evidence for the benefits of increased physical activity on physical and mental health have been well established, alongside the increasing evidence of

academic improvement, there has been a lack of coordination in looking at how we can bring together all organisations and programmes in order to create a network of opportunities to build physical activity into people's lives.

The insight gained from Sport Wales' surveys have led us to identify a series of elements that would encourage increased participation in sport, but would be equally applicable for wider physical activity. These will come as no surprise to anybody with an interest in this field:

- **Increasing Motivation**
- **Building Confidence**
- **Growing Awareness**
- **Improving Opportunities and Resources**
- **Better Experiences**

That's common sense, I hear you say – and yes it is, but it is little seen in the way we do things. The challenge is ensuring that the offer meets these elements in a way that resonates with those for whom activity is not a lifestyle. We have to involve a wider range of organisations and people in the work we undertake to ensure that becoming active is a natural part of people's lives throughout Wales.

Whilst providing opportunities for a lifelong relationship with being active is important, we have to start with our schools, ensuring that all our young people leave formal education with the skills, confidence and motivation to be active. We have a huge opportunity in Wales with the development of the new curriculum to banish the negative experiences of PE that so many adults who are inactive carry with them. We can deliver something more

## We have a huge opportunity in Wales with the development of the new curriculum to banish the negative experiences of PE that so many adults who are inactive carry with them



holistic and enriching for our children, which takes them on a positive journey. I passionately believe that every child should have a rounded experience from our education system, including being able to learn how to become active, building the confidence and motivation to continue into adulthood.

Sport Wales has championed the role physical literacy should have in the new curriculum and I firmly believe we are on the cusp of a groundbreaking change that can benefit a generation of young people. Great new initiatives such as the Wales Institute for Physical Literacy (WIPL) at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David are providing evidence that having a positive experience of activity from an early age is crucial; it frames the relationship for life.

To support consistency and communication it is key that we establish a collaborative network with education, FE & HE, sport development teams, leisure services, health professionals, early childhood care and support providers, local sports clubs and businesses. Through a collaborative approach, we will develop

a structure of community-led solutions, engagement and change. We have talked about this for far too long, and it is now time for action.

Our work starts in early parenthood, then Meithrin and child care providers and continues across the lifespan with primary and secondary age pupils enjoying circus skills, outdoor adventure experiences, cycling, free running and modified versions of sports in order to provide a broader experience of what it possible. It includes using technology and 'gamification' strategies to maintain high levels of engagement into adolescence. Working organically with clubs and others these approaches create a natural

## We have to move away from bombarding people with campaigns about what they should and shouldn't do

fit with the lives of our young people as well as driving improved health and linking together our communities.

Beyond the school gate and into adulthood we have to recognise that the way in which people want to experience sport and activity is changing. The growth of social media, the use of technology to track and motivate and the ways in which the working day is changing are all issues that those engaged in sport need to have an understanding of in order to create an offer that moves with people's lives.

For those who are inactive or who have had a previous negative experience we need to build confidence and motivation. I firmly believe that this isn't about 'telling' communities what they need to do, as I state above: it's about working with people, listening to them, and acting on their needs. It's got to be a grassroots movement, where friends and family are motivating each other, workplaces are allowing time for people to become active and we have a wide range of opportunities to keep people moving throughout their lives. This new way of thinking is now more like 'crowdsourcing', allowing each community to see, think and create its own solutions to its unique issues.

In the current climate, with reducing budgets, we must share outcomes and pool our knowledge and resources. We have to move away from bombarding people with campaigns about what they should and shouldn't do. We can produce strategies and plans that look good and have actions that we all agree on, but we too often miss the individual at the end of these: their voice, their life. We can only succeed if we take the population with us.

In a nation the size of Wales, with the natural resources available to us, we should be ambitious for our communities. There is no reason why we couldn't become one of the most active nations in the world. But no one organisation can achieve this; it will take a team.



**Dr Paul Thomas** is Chair of Sport Wales

# making healthy food fun

—Katie Palmer

Many factors influence the way we think and behave around food. We are bombarded by marketing messages through social media, television and cinema and we receive mixed messages from the media about the latest research into what we should or should not be eating. We are influenced by the food environment around us whether that be vending machines in leisure centres, the abundance of takeaways, buy-one-get-one-free offers in supermarkets or the school meals of our children. How we respond to these messages will depend on our level of education or knowledge, our intrinsic values, our income, how we are feeling and how those around us are behaving.

Making food choices is complex; the food system is complex. But policymakers need to gather evidence, and to understand and work with this complexity in a holistic way – the consequences if we fail to do this are potentially catastrophic for the environment as well as for our health. Many are arguing that the UK's national obesity strategy is inadequate in this respect: the failure to address tighter controls for online marketing is an example. So if the national framework to influence obesity is lacking, what next?

The Sustainable Food City approach – establishing a city-wide cross-sector food partnership and developing a joint vision – aims to operate at a local level to influence policy across the broad range of areas that food touches on in order to make healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of place.

Food Cardiff is one of the few UK cities to be awarded Bronze Sustainable Food City status to date. Its strength has been its ability to join up and influence work across sectors; across departments within Welsh

Government; between Welsh Government, local government and public health; and linking 'bottom up' experience with 'top down' policymakers. This can be illustrated through Food Cardiff's experience of developing the *School Holiday Enrichment Programme – Food and Fun*.

It is an established fact that deprivation is linked to obesity – 28.5% of reception aged children living in the most deprived areas of Wales are overweight or obese compared to 22.2% in the least deprived (Childhood Measurement Programme, 2016). We know that those with lower incomes purchase foods higher in salt, saturated fat and sugar and foods lower in fibre and protein than those on higher incomes (Kantar for Welsh Government, 2016). We also know that, despite the significant progress being made, 45% of

**28.5% of reception aged children living in the most deprived areas of Wales are overweight or obese compared to 22.2% in the least deprived**

4-5yr olds in the most deprived quintile suffer dental decay versus 24.9% in the least deprived quintile (Picture of Oral Health, 2016 Cardiff University). We also know that accessing healthy affordable food is often a challenge in some of the most

deprived parts of Wales.

However, what has not been recognised by policy makers until fairly recently is that school holidays present a significant additional financial pressure on families. Around 44,000 children in Cardiff can't access their free school meal allocation during holidays and parents struggle with extra food costs and funding childcare. In Cardiff it was found 35% of children attending a holiday club were skipping one or more meals on the days they were not attending. Sustainable Food Cities helped bring this issue into focus with the 'Beyond the Food Bank' campaign, which aimed to tackle the root causes of food poverty; school holiday hunger was the issue that the Food Cardiff Partnership decided to tackle.

From the seed of an idea shaped by Food Cardiff to a national pilot within 18 months, the development of the multi award winning *Food and Fun* model is testament to true partnership working between the Cardiff and Vale local public health team, public health dieticians, Cardiff Council education catering and Sport Cardiff. The partnership has widened further, with the rollout of the pilot being coordinated by the Welsh Local Government Association and evaluated through Decipher.

The aim of *Food and Fun* is to capitalise on public sector assets (i.e. schools and staff) and build on existing programmes such as Nutrition Skills for Life and Making Every Contact Count to support families in deprived parts of Cardiff. During *Food and Fun*, children received not only healthy meals but also enrichment activities such as nutrition skills education, daily sport, gardening, music, Love Food Hate Waste workshops, even 3D printing. Parents were

**During Food and Fun, children received not only healthy meals but also enrichment activities such as nutrition skills education, daily sport, gardening, music, Love Food Hate Waste workshops, even 3D printing.**

invited to join in on the last day of each week, sharing a meal and learning through their children's experience, taking the opportunity to take English classes or digital inclusion sessions and making new friendships whilst their children were occupied.

It isn't known yet if *Food and Fun*

will make a significant impact on health outcomes such as obesity. What we do know is that *Food and Fun* is putting the principles of the Future Generations Act into practice. By working with multiple partners across Wales it is touching on many of those key factors that influence diet (education, knowledge, food accessibility). With future support, *Food and Fun* has the potential to expand in reach and scope – for example by involving the Welsh Food industry in inspiring a new workforce and developing a more localised supply chain. It could also act as a tool in developing policy around the adverse childhood experiences which are known to influence unhealthy behaviours leading to outcomes like obesity.

The Future Generations Act provides the legislative framework to promote partnership working: the Sustainable Food Cities approach has demonstrated it is an effective mechanism for its delivery. With Brexit on the horizon, there is an

opportunity in Wales to shape our food system differently to reduce these diet-related inequalities, but this will require all parties to be around the table to ensure the best interests for Wales' economy, its health and its environment.



**Katie Palmer** is the Sustainable Food Cities Coordinator for Food Cardiff. She is also a member of the Wales Food and Drink Industry Board and the Wales Food Poverty Alliance. The Cardiff and Vale Public Health team won the Improving Health and Wellbeing and Reducing Inequalities category at the NHS Wales Awards 2016 for the *Food and Fun* School Holiday Enrichment Programme.



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# Aberfan: Not History Yet

**Geraint Talfan Davies** recalls the horror of Aberfan, fifty years on, and considers the legacy of the disaster – and how it may have been reported differently today

**I.C. Rapoport's** photo series, 'Aberfan: The Days After', originally appeared in *Life Magazine* in November 1966



Even after half a century certain images of Aberfan are still sharp in the mind: the local bobby carrying a small girl in his arms amidst anguished head-scarved mothers, the lethal spreading smudge of slurry down the mountain side, later the line of Italianate arches over the graves of the 144 victims, 116 of them children mostly between seven and ten years of age. That these images are all in black and white seem to have locked Aberfan even more securely into the archive of a colour-blind history.

My own direct contact with the disaster on 21 October 1966 was fleeting, but its memory is nevertheless fixed. At the time I was a raw trainee journalist with the *Western Mail*, a mere six weeks under my belt. In those mobile-phone-free days news travelled more slowly. The first I knew of the disaster was a phone call, not from the paper, but from my fiancée, a physiotherapist at Cardiff Royal Infirmary. She rang to

say her department had no patients as all ambulances had been diverted to an accident somewhere in the valleys.

I hurried into the office to be despatched not to Aberfan but to the Rhymney Valley, where water supplies had been disrupted, but with instructions to get round to Aberfan from the north. The cars of rescuers and television crews clogged the roads, including an incongruous old Rolls Royce commandeered by ITN. I had to walk the last mile or two.

An exceptionally wet October had been draining colour from the village and stability from the tips for days, but I still recall the shock of turning a corner into a road that, like every other road in the valley, traversed a slope. On the upper side a school, on the lower side a terrace of houses – and filling the space between a towering wall of black slurry, part of a liquefied flow that burst through the low mist at 9.15 that morning

with, we learned later, the force of 100,000 tons of energy. It was impossible to imagine that anything had survived. Miraculously, some did.

The paper already had a seasoned team in place, many of whom had become familiar with covering Wales's periodic colliery disasters, although they found the unparalleled poignancy of Aberfan overwhelming. Even its most experienced industrial correspondent became physically sick. I was soon ordered back to the office in Cardiff where, later that evening, foreign journalists camped in the newsroom to gain access to phones and telex. It was already clear the event would become part of our history, and of the history of coal – to be mentioned in Wales alongside Senghenydd and Gresford, but in a category of tragedy all of its own.

There are many facets to the story of Aberfan and the disaster's aftermath: the

unimaginable ongoing pain of a community that lost a generation of its children, lessons about the accountability of corporations and their capacity for insensitivity, the slow incremental way in which government and society responded to even the most urgent needs of public safety, but also government's capacity – when it wants to – to move mountains, in this case quite literally. And alongside this, the tension between commemoration and privacy – the benefits of catharsis and the risks of re-traumatisation – that resurfaces at each decennial anniversary.

It also had a wider psychological impact in Wales in a period of economic, industrial and political turmoil for Britain as a whole that ran in parallel with world-wide seminal cultural change. In 1966 the USA and North Vietnam were feeling their way towards peace talks. It was also the year Mao Zedong launched his 'cultural revolution', and in which South Africa's Prime Minister and champion of apartheid, Henrik Verwoerd, was murdered.

In Wales the beginnings of political devolution were only two years old – the Welsh Office, under its newly-created Secretary of State for Wales, still finding its feet. In the General Election of March 1966, Harold Wilson had converted a majority of four into a majority of 96, although only three months later Plaid Cymru's Gwynfor Evans defeated Labour in the Carmarthen by-election to win the party's first Parliamentary seat.

Aberfan stayed stubbornly in the news for decades to come, but at a conference on the Aberfan experience held at Cardiff University's School of Journalism in September this year, what silenced the audience was hearing how the trauma of that day still affects people 50 years later: children who escaped, siblings of the dead, parents, teachers, rescuers, and even some journalists. Flashbacks, panic attacks triggered by a child's voice half a century on, survivor's guilt. Several had decided to speak publicly for the very first time, some were unable to finish. It is not history for these people.

Professor Stephen Jukes, of Bournemouth University, has not only

made an academic study of the trauma involved in disasters – Aberfan, Dunblane, Columbine and, most recently, the shootings in Munich – but has also had direct experience of them as a former Global Head of News for Reuters. Speaking at the Cardiff conference he was adamant that investigation should never be neglected, as the search for justice can be part of the recovery process. The broadcaster Vincent Kane, who reported live from Aberfan for BBC Wales on the day of the disaster, criticised the media – in a powerful, forensic lecture – for being pedestrian rather than passionate in its pursuit of truth.

With the possible exception of the *Merthyr Express*, the media did not warn of what was to come, while the speed with which the public inquiry was convened and the thoroughness of its proceedings and report possibly obviated the need for further press investigation. But we are still left with the question, how different would it have been today?

In 1966 'immediacy' did not enjoy the enabling technology it exploits today. Although radio and television were able to tear up their schedules, the era of 24-hour news was still more than 30 years away. In British broadcasting this was still a world of only three television channels and, in radio, of the Home Service and the Light Programme. No local radio, other than offshore pirate stations. No BBC Radio Wales or BBC Radio Cymru.

As for the Press, morning and evening newspapers were still rigidly separate, and in Wales more fulsomely staffed than today. Most national newspapers had full-time Welsh correspondents. Rupert Murdoch's purchase and transformation of *The Sun* was still three years away. *The Sunday Times* Insight team, although three years old and quick off the mark on Aberfan, had not yet achieved the reputation it did under the later editorship of Harold Evans. Social media were not even a gleam in anyone's eye. In 1966 news travelled slowly, breathy rather than electronic. On the day, many of those in the village itself did not know the full extent of the disaster.

Can we be certain that, in the same

circumstances, we would be any better served by media today? Although the 24-hour news cycle would certainly have increased the pressure, local journalistic resources are now slimmer. How big and experienced a team would local print/online media have been able to muster? Local broadcasting capacities, on the other hand, are substantially greater. But these resource differences across the years may be marginal compared with the differences in social attitudes, changes in terms of deference to authority and attitudes towards safety and consumer protection, the last partly brought about by Aberfan itself.

It is easy at this distance to forget the forces of conservatism that allowed the tip above Aberfan to grow, and its danger to go unheeded. Despite its shameful protestations to the contrary, during the course of the inquiry the National Coal Board could not possibly have been unaware of the general danger posed by tips or of the specific threat of posed by tip 7 at Aberfan. The springs that liquefied the tip were plain to see on Ordnance Survey maps.

The tip had slid before in 1944 and 1963 but, unbelievably, the disaster was not at that time a 'notifiable accident' because no colliery workers had been killed or injured. Despite forthright criticism of the NCB by the public inquiry chaired by Sir Edmund Davies (invariably described in the Press as 'Mountain Ash born'), it took three years for this to be changed by the Mines and Quarries (Tips) Act of 1969, and another five years before safety at work was addressed more comprehensively by the Health and Safety of Work Act of 1974.

It was not until 2007, 41 years after Aberfan, that Parliament legislated to give effect to the concept of 'corporate manslaughter', and then only after further disasters – particularly *The Herald of Free Enterprise* sinking in 1987 in which 193 died – and a Law Commission report in 1996.

What Kane described as the 'Aberfan conundrum' was a secret living in plain sight. 'They knew. They all knew,' he said, 'the Council, the Aberfan community, anybody who read the *Merthyr Express*, the school's headmistress, the colliery employees who worked on top of the tip and who were



still tipping until the tip started to go, and all the managers and engineers who were eventually pilloried by the tribunal.' All but a few councillors and the headmistress looked the other way. What was the 'fear that dared not speak its name which paralysed the possibility of action?'

Kane's answer? 'How can we fail to conclude that the underlying cause was the intense pressure brought to bear on a frightened coal mining community by the policy of widespread and rapid pit closures implemented by the National Coal Board, supported by the National Union of Mineworkers and two governments, Conservative followed by Labour, with the objective of making coal viable.'

One must not forget that the 1960s was still an era where the producer interest dominated, none more so than in the coal industry. The NUM felt conflicted – torn between the agony of the disaster, loyalty to an industry nationalised less than 20 years before, and fear of pit closures. It had been nervous about questioning tipping lest it

affect the viability of pits.

This was a tough decade for coal, in which two-thirds of pits were closed – a more intense period of closure than in the more controversial period under Margaret Thatcher. Across Britain the numbers employed in the industry fell from 583,000 to 283,000. In 1959 there had been 151 pits in Wales, by 1969 there were only 55 left. Aberfan's colliery, Merthyr Vale, hung on until 1989, coincidentally, the year of another, different disaster – Hillsborough.

It was this sense of vulnerability that also led the NUM to support the coal board Chairman, Lord (Alf) Robens, who was seen – closures notwithstanding – as a robust champion of the industry. It is the survival of Lord Robens – a politician turned captain of industry – that seems most astonishing to the modern eye. In today's media climate it is impossible to imagine that he could have avoided resignation.

The swift announcement of a public inquiry only five days after the disaster might have bought him time, but the

inquiry's excoriating verdict on the coal board – 'a terrifying tale of bungling ineptitude' – would today surely have created unstoppable pressure from newspapers 'out for a scalp', almost certainly egged on by a vitriolic torrent on social media. That apart, the formal demands of accountability today are considerably greater, even without bringing the possibility of corporate manslaughter charges into play. The relevant Minister today would not have the option, as Richard Marsh did, of turning down Robens' cosmetic offer to quit.

In only one regard was the official response to the disaster – after shameful prevarication and financial bargaining by the NCB – swift and imaginative, although even that was tarnished by one last act of meanness.

Aberfan changed our landscape. Although legislation to support land reclamation had been put in place before the disaster, through the 1966 Industrial Development Act, only three sites of

# It only takes a little space To write how much we love you But it will take to the end of time To forget the day we lost you.

industrial dereliction had been reclaimed in Wales before Aberfan at a cost of £28,000. Those sites covered only 100 acres.

The disaster gave the work unforeseen momentum. Within a month a derelict land unit was established within the Welsh Office. In 1976 it transferred into the two-year-old Welsh Development Agency. In the 35 years after the disaster nearly 35,000 acres were reclaimed at a cost of £340 million. Only half of that work was directly related to the legacy of coal.

It is the one field of governmental response that, even at this distance, one has to applaud for its resolve, thoroughness and transformative impact. It has been the most lasting and beautiful memorial to the dead. That is why it is so sad that even this act of restoration and restitution was marred by the crass insistence of the Harold Wilson's Government, in the summer of 1968, that the Disaster Fund should contribute £150,000 towards the £750,000 cost of removing the tips above the village in their entirety.

In his memoirs Wilson saw no problem in asking the villagers to dip into their fund which, he said, 'was almost an embarrassment to its trustees'. It had raised £1.75m, £25-30m in today's prices. The only thing more remarkable than the insensitivity of the request was the initial quiet

acquiescence of the trustees and the fact that Charity Commission raised no objection. The Commission's passivity was in marked contrast to its earlier callous nitpicking over grants to bereaved parents with its infamous direction to the trustees that:

*before any payment was made each case should be reviewed to ascertain whether the parents had been close to their children and were thus likely to be suffering mentally.*

The trustees refused to heed this direction.

It was Ron Davies MP who, in his first days as Secretary of State for Wales in 1997, sought to make amends on the issue of the contribution to the removal of the tips by forcing a reluctant Treasury to repay the £150,000. Davies personally delivered the cheque to the Disaster Fund Committee. In 2007 the Welsh Government, not the Treasury, paid another £2m to bring the sum into line with inflation.

By far the most systematic examination of the history and lessons of the disaster was published by Iain Maclean and Martin Johnes in 2000. This work had the benefit of access to papers released in 1997 under the 30-year rule. Those papers only confirm in spades the obvious intransigence of the coal board, the legalism of the Charity

Commission, the inadequacy of the Mines and Quarries Inspectorate, and the weaknesses of a small local authority – Merthyr Tydfil – that is even smaller today.

Later, Iain Maclean summarised some of the lessons: that governments should protect consumers not producers; that politicians should not run quangos; that negligent corporations should face serious penalties; that regulators must not share the culture of the regulated; that transparency matters and that inconvenient evidence should not be suppressed; and that voters in safe seats are marginalised. To that could be added the lessons that were learned about the ubiquity and longevity of post-traumatic stress and the need to address it professionally.

Aberfan was an extraordinary event in an extraordinary period. In the days, months and years that followed, the story took a familiar path from catastrophe, through grief and sympathy, intrusion and recrimination and the slow breakdown of resistance to learning. In all this the suffering of individuals and a community had a long and unbroken continuity that is difficult to grasp. But there has been healing too. The village has a new school. A new generational equilibrium is being built.

In contrast to the grey chaos of 21 October 1966, the memorial to the dead in Aberfan's cemetery today gleams immaculately white. Flowers add vibrant colour. Oddly, this pristine state seems to bring the event sharply into the present. Verses on the graves are simple. In one, for John Anthony King, aged 9, his mother and father speak for themselves and for everyone:

*It only takes a little space  
To write how much we love you  
But it will take to the end of time  
To forget the day we lost you.*

 **Geraint Talfan Davies** is a former Controller of BBC Wales and former Chair of the IWA.

# Wales United?

**Adam Price** calls for a government of national unity to negotiate the ‘serious, but not hopeless’ challenges for post-Brexit Wales

2016 will be one of the punctuation points of Welsh history. Not perhaps in the way that I had hoped for back in May. The Welsh people’s verdict on 19 years of Labour-led government was more of a dashed semi-colon, hesitant and halting, but not the emphatic vote for change for which so many of us yearned. Neither a vote of confidence nor of no confidence, this was a collective shrug of the national shoulders perfectly reflected in that dramatic tied vote for FM.

No, it was the referendum that marked the end of an era, an inverted exclamation mark, in which the Welsh Working Class once again, in Gwyn Alf Williams’ darkly colourful phrase, ‘tossed into a ditch of irrelevance’ the Welsh intelligentsia that purported to represent them, with all too obvious echoes of 1979. The Welsh Nation is having one of its periodic existential crises, and I must admit to spending my own share of time under the national duvet.

But I’ve emerged from this sense of national loss to embrace a spirit of new opportunity. In short, – to paraphrase Karl Kraus – while things in post-devolution Wales up until this point can be said to have been hopeless but not serious, now they are serious but not hopeless. Perhaps this deserves a little explanation.

The record of government under devolution has been disappointingly lacklustre. It has not been disastrous. But it has not delivered the kind of transformational change that many of us were hoping for. In other countries the kind of steady-as-she-goes managerialism that is Welsh Labour’s default style would not be a

major problem, and may even be a virtue in a world where grand technocratic schemes often become unstuck. The problem is that Wales is a country crying out for radical new thinking. As Matthew Parris recently argued, Wales is not an emergency – it’s chronic. In other words, we’re beset by problems that are so deeply ingrained that we hardly even notice them.

The political eruption that was Brexit was, at least in part, an exasperated response to a complacent political establishment whose version of trickle-down economics – the city-region as neoliberalism’s branch plant – has left hinterland communities like the former coalfield areas of south Wales or south Yorkshire as dry as a sun-bleached bone. In post-devolutionary Wales, politics, starved of the oxygen of change, has slowly become stagnant, stale and stuck. A ‘miserable consensus’ – as novelist William Owen Roberts has put it – created in the Senedd a political culture that had become far too cosy and inward looking: a circular chamber, encased in glass, to which no-one is listening, not even sometimes it seems the people in it, tap-tap-tapping away on their terminals. This is a Parliament that far from becoming the cockpit of Welsh history is in danger of becoming the bell-jar of Welsh democracy in which all visible signs of life are rapidly extinguished.

Since 1999 we have become a country of piecemeal change, when what we needed was a radical disjuncture – a fundamental break with the past. In some sense the political class began to embrace the same

approach to institution building – neo-functionalism – that Jean Monnet famously adopted in the case of the European Union. Devolution – like European integration – in this worldview became a historic inevitability, the pace of which depended more on technocratic ingenuity than popular struggle. We had become a land of devocrats not dreamers.

Now the whole monolithic edifice of Welsh progressive gradualism – which encompassed not just the parties of the Left and centre-left but the re-branded Welsh Conservatives too – has come tumbling down, not just on the 24th of June but also with the election of a rambunctious climate-change denying, anti-Welsh language, migrant-baiting free-marketeer hard right rump. The idea that history is on our side has been displayed as a comforting delusion. *Wythnos yng Nghymru Fydd* has two endings once again – and if we want the more appealing future for our country, then we are going to have to fight for it.

I have to say that this injection of agency back into Welsh politics is no bad thing. We live in a period in which history is accelerating, carrying with it risks but also opportunities. This is surely good news for those of us who privately sighed at the thought of Welsh independence always being twenty years away.

But in the short-run, this also presents some hard strategic choices for Plaid Cymru, which will also help define the forward trajectory of Welsh history.

Parties that have big, bold change projects at their heart – parties of the left, national liberation movements, the Greens – often find themselves agonising about the compromises that taking power almost always inevitably involves. In 1967 the Communist Party of India (Marxist),

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itself a left-wing breakaway from the original CPI, split itself asunder on the question of whether to enter a united front coalition on a regional level. The majority prevailed, ushering in one of the most impressive records of achievement on literacy in the developing world through decades-long hegemony in Kerala. But in West Bengal a group of younger activists accused the leadership of a grubby power-grab and withdrew to the jungle to foment revolution. The ‘Naxalites’ are still fighting their guerrilla war to this day.

Post-Brexit, I’m a nation-builder not a Naxalite. Wales finds itself at a unique historic crossroads that requires those of us who believe in a national future for Wales to work together to secure it. In practical terms that should involve a time-limited government of national unity to provide the kind of collective leadership we need to chart our own course, all the more imperative as the topography of these islands is terra-formed anew before our very eyes.

Such an idea has few takers at the moment. I expect it will founder on antipathy in my own party as well as Labour’s prevailing monopoly power culture.

For Wales this is perhaps a wasted opportunity. If you indulge in a bit of fantasy politics for a moment, and fuse together talent currently wasted on Labour back-benches as well as on my own and add in maybe even a co-opted David Melding, it’s

not difficult to come up with a ministerial team with the kind of vision and verve that the Government currently lacks and Wales so desperately needs. A Labour Party fuelled by the creative energy of Corbynism, while immunised from its chaos, might be more open to the radical possibilities the new government would surely represent. For Plaid the prize of a statute of self-determination, recognising the people of Wales as sovereign, and paving the way for a multi-option referendum on Wales’ future in the event of Scottish independence might go a long way to sway the sceptics. Indeed for the Welsh national cause this is a historic chance that only comes along perhaps once in every generation.

For now at least Plaid finds itself in the curious position of being both the official opposition and the Government’s life support system. We have decided to use that power responsibly. For us the job of an Opposition is not to defeat the Government at every turn but to implement our own alternative programme. This tactic of constructive opposition is something of a political innovation, and it may give clues to the kind of relationship we might envisage between a future Plaid Cymru minority administration and a Labour or indeed Conservative Opposition.

It’s too early to tell how well the Compact will work. Some ministers seem alive to the genuine potential that such an

arrangement brings to do things differently and do different things, probably achieving more than they would be able to while acting in isolation. But there are worrying signs too of old habits dying hard and a timid, risk-averse and visionless administrialism that, for example, cancels the Commonwealth Games bid unilaterally with zero consultation but puts nothing new in its place.

Plaid will always be in the business of putting country before party. But political patience has its limits which will be tested if this experiment in co-habitation between Government and Opposition fails to deliver. If there is not a palpable change in direction, if we suffer more years of drift, then I can easily envisage a situation where, if the current First Minister stands down as widely predicted in 2019, then my party will seek to block the election of his successor, forcing an early election. The installation of a Plaid Cymru Government on the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the Assembly may yet prove the kind of positive exclamation mark that Welsh politics needs – though in the maelstrom of the moment a ‘Wales United!’ is not without its own powerful appeal. One way or another I doubt we can afford as a nation to postpone change for a full 54 months.



**Adam Price** is Assembly Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr



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## Assembly No.5: A New Reality

**Laura McAllister** looks back on the high drama of the fifth Assembly's first hundred days and argues that a pluralist approach will be key to regaining citizens' interest and engagement in politics in Wales

The 'first one hundred days' is a predictable platitude that features in job interviews for just about any senior role these days. The candidate's spiel usually sets out some high-level goals, including some quick wins, moves to establish trust and good relations in the team, and developing a profile for the new appointee.

Evidently, after the results of the fifth Assembly election this May, the 'hundred days' task posed a challenge for the successful applicant in waiting, Labour's Carwyn Jones. Few had expected his party to do as well as it did. A return of 29 of the

60 seats with just one loss after 17 years in charge, from a campaign that did little to enlighten or excite and which generated a near 8% fall in its popular vote was a brilliant haul, and just about as good as anyone in the party could possibly have hoped for. But uninterrupted electoral success brings with it considerable risk unless it is accompanied by a commitment to renewal, and is underpinned by a receptiveness to change and to properly integrate fresh blood (over a third of AMs are new, after all).

Carwyn Jones was left waiting to be crowned First Minister not just because

Labour did not win a majority of seats but because, this time, he faced more confident, determined and multi-faceted opposition from Plaid Cymru, the Conservatives and UKIP. It was this political cocktail that generated the fascinating challenge from Plaid leader, Leanne Wood. The concessions necessary to establish a new Welsh Government had to incorporate deals with two of the four opposition parties. The deals were done without too much fuss – but make no mistake, *deals* they were. It is surely important, not only to be honest about our evolving politics, but also to take some of the pejorative out of our reporting of events as we all begin to properly navigate the muddy waters between minority and coalition governments as traditionally understood and function. George Orwell said that ‘The slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.’ We might want to watch our political language – body and speech – as we manage the new growing pains of devolution. To date, there has been an unhelpful propensity to view events around the Senedd as if they were a shrunken and less professional version of Westminster.

It was the agreement worked through in a relatively short time and announced on 18th May – the ‘Compact to Move Wales Forward’ – between Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru that allowed Carwyn Jones’s name to go forward unchallenged as Wales’s new First Minister. He then formed his first cabinet of what some called a ‘minority Labour government’. However, arguably, the inclusion of the last Liberal Democrat AM standing, Kirsty Williams (who assumed the important role of Cabinet Secretary for Education) means the Welsh Government could just as easily be called a ‘coalition’ or a ‘confidence and supply’ arrangement, given the huge range of operational interpretations and real precedents for such constitutional notions.

Indeed, in the wake of the 2007 ‘One Wales’ coalition between Labour and Plaid Cymru, some of us predicted very different future conversations about the impact in Wales of multiple, competing parties and a semi-proportional voting system – one that gives any party getting the support of around

## It is important not only to be honest about our politics, but also to take some of the pejorative out of our reporting of events

one in ten voters some representation. Scroll on to 2016 and what was always going to be a tough election for Labour, where a body of new UKIP AMs was virtually guaranteed and Plaid Cymru were led by a much better known and more popular leader. The theatre around the First Minister nomination had its roots in all of this, augmented by Leanne Wood’s whopping win against a prominent government minister in her home constituency of Rhondda. Some claimed those first weeks after the 2016 election made Welsh politics look a ‘shambles’. Far from it. We should remind ourselves that this was one of the very few times since 1999

## The jibe that it resembled an episode of *Borgen* was telling: clearly it was meant as a criticism but, in truth, it was a sound analysis of a new reality

that people in Wales (and, indeed, the rest of the UK) bothered to tune in to events in the Bay. The jibe that it resembled an episode of the popular Danish political drama *Borgen* was telling: this was clearly meant as a criticism but, in truth, it was a sound, factual analysis of a new contextual reality. Those operating in pluralist political cultures will warn that absolutely nothing should be taken for granted when no party wins an outright majority. The days of trying to implement a manifesto in its entirety in a single, unchallenged government programme for five years are gone. That means that respect for the official (and other) opposition is both wise

and necessary if governments are serious about delivery. That said, those parties not in government need to raise their collective games: the days of divided, unstrategic, frivolous opposition in the Assembly chamber and in committees were numbered once the arithmetic of the fifth Assembly became clear. In this context, Plaid Cymru’s publication of its ‘Programme for Opposition’ after the first 100 days is an interesting development, especially given the predictable blandness of the ‘Programme for Government’ which is heavy on populist rhetoric and light on targets and delivery mechanisms.

If we continue to choose to understand ‘normal’ things like May’s appointment of a First Minister as shambolic and amateur, we are at risk of reflecting back to ourselves some long-standing and outdated misconceptions about how politics is done and will likely miss the winds of change blowing around us. Wider events this summer have seen the most brutal body blow to our political classes everywhere and it’s hard to dispute that it is mission critical time for democracy as we understand it. They have exposed, not for the first time but rarely more dramatically, the chasm that exists between citizens and those who claim to represent them. Many holding the reins of power might find this new context frightening and disconcerting, but repeatedly refusing to listen to what they are being told will this time be tantamount to political suicide.

Recent debates, prompted by new Plaid AM, Steffan Lewis, as to the liveliness of the Chamber are to be welcomed. He was right, for example, to question the continued value of computers at each desk in the Chamber. We were all a little naive back in those heady days of 1999, seeing ICT as a straightforward and uniformly positive technological innovation destined to improve

political debate, and even policy outcomes. Of course, there is some proper and effective use by AMs, but much of the keyboard tapping really reflects the stresses of hard-pressed AMs catching up with emails during less stimulating contributions from their colleagues. And, in the absence of more enthralling and challenging debates that require full attention and engagement, this is likely to continue and so further alienate those watching.

Given the Compact was agreed for the first hundred days, it is inevitably based on policy areas where there was clear political consensus and manifesto congruence: free child care and access to new drugs in the NHS. It scarcely needs saying, but we were in a very different place when we were first assessing the value and import of the Compact. The referendum votes cast on 23rd June have changed everything, and only fools would suggest that they understand the reverberations of such fundamental change on domestic politics in Wales.

So, policy aside, the establishment of three liaison committees on finance, legislation and the constitution has the potential at least (as recess has not given us an opportunity to properly assess as yet) to be hugely significant. At the very least, they might counterbalance some pretty short-sighted drives by previous governments across each of these three areas. In the

good thing. A brave politician not only uses it, but positively welcomes it in the spirit of iterative improvement. In the last Assembly, many of us expressed publicly our unease at the nervousness around proper scrutiny and a wider culture of suspicion for robust challenge. With the Wales Bill scrutiny process squashed into a tiny, and pretty disrespectful, window to suit the legislative calendar space of the UK Parliament, it means that constitutional liaison can help line up a more strategic and concerted challenge to some of its critical flaws.

Outside plenary, nowhere was the dearth of effective scrutiny manifested than in the Assembly's committees, whose forensic approach at times felt a bit like being 'savaged by a dead sheep' (to quote Denis Healey on Geoffrey Howe). The Compact references a specific commitment to improve this. Hallelujah! The Assembly is to behave like a proper parliament, it seems. Alongside this, the focus of the new Presiding Officer, Elin Jones, is also much welcomed and a departure from the 'big tent' engagement focus of her predecessor. In an early statement, she indicated that improving the internal architecture of the Assembly was her priority. Changes ushered in through the Business Committee will be critical and must be embraced by every party if they are to work. The election of committee chairs by secret ballot is

The incorporation of a communications brief within the Culture, Welsh Language and Comms committee is also potentially significant and, needless to say, the committee dealing with implications from Brexit will be crucial.

If the first hundred days of the fifth Assembly have taught us anything, it is that the theatre around the start of term was simply a precursor to what is likely to be a period of constant churn and change. Bringing the sole Liberal Democrat into Government and Labour's arrangement to agree budgets with Plaid Cymru will not totally ensure a lack of volatility in the mathematics of the chamber. Nathan Gill's defection from the UKIP group was perhaps widely anticipated, Dafydd Elis Thomas leaving Plaid Cymru to sit as an Independent was dramatic if not entirely surprising.

The vote to leave the European Union has superimposed a dimension that is as problematic as it was unplanned. Clearly, we will never know how the agenda of the new minority/coalition/confidence and supply government might have played out should the vote have been to remain. Now, there is absolutely no doubt that every decision, every policy, every debate, every committee enquiry will have a new international, inter-governmental, inter-parliamentary dimension to it. Handling this new context requires first, facing up to the new realities around the double challenge of sharing power and managing widespread public alienation. Then, it requires nothing short of a crusade to re-engage people with the institution which was meant to bring politics closer to them. I believe that the two things go hand-in-hand. A tougher, more credible, more purposeful – and controversially maybe, a more *typical* and *traditional* parliament – needs to embrace change on both sides, government and legislature, to make citizens feel that the National Assembly and devolution is worth all the fuss.

## The events of this summer have exposed the chasm that exists between citizens and those who claim to represent them

absence of formal coalition, they offer the opportunity for what was elliptically called 'formalised joint working on future priorities'. For Plaid, earlier opportunities to shape the direction of some critical legislation is surely more relevant than relying on the ping-pong of plenary and committee scrutiny once policy proposals are more mature; earlier sighting of potential problems with budgets and laws, and more informed scrutiny as a result. If we have learnt anything from the Draft Wales Bill, it is that pre-legislative scrutiny is a damn

long overdue, but only time will tell if this results in sharper scrutiny, less party loyalty and greater independence. The role of committee chairs in framing better debates in the chamber will be critical, as will much stronger interactive and social media engagement. If the interested lay person has the opportunity to better engage with live committee proceedings, it might promote more fleet of foot challenge from members and better follow-ups to witnesses, most of whom would concede that they have a pretty easy ride at committees.



**Laura McAllister** is Professor at Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre. She is also a Trustee of the IWA.



# Assembly No.5: Coming Home

**Huw Irranca-Davies** makes the shift from MP to AM

Having made the journey from Westminster to our Welsh parliament in Cardiff, my early impressions are very positive. Whilst there are parts of political life (and many friends) in San Steffan I'll miss, it does feel as if I've come home at a fascinating time.

More constitutional and legislative and tax-varying powers are heading to Wales. It is a truth universally acknowledged (sic) that despite the begrudging nature of the current Wales Bill, there is an inevitability that a more durable and workable and clearer devolution of power must be put in place, sooner rather than later. Everyone sees the necessity for this except the current UK government. It will come, to reflect the will of the people of Wales.

Built on 17 years of devolution (it's still young!) and a growing public mood of support, you can palpably sense the growing

confidence of this democratic institution and government. Witness the willingness of the First Minister and Welsh Government to assert Wales' voice at a UK and global level in constitutional, social, environmental and economic matters. This is no longer the first tentative steps of the Assembly and Government of 17 years ago as it found its feet, and found its place in the order of things. Increasingly – and as it should be – Wales speaks loudly and confidently on the UK and world stage.

So, Carwyn Jones FM demands of the UK government a say for Wales in shaping Brexit and approving finalised terms; is one of the most prominent voices in much-needed UK constitutional reform; personally leads trade missions to the US or China to drive our inward investment; and fronts-up the battle to retain steelmaking in Wales. This is not a 'by-your-leave' second-tier devolved administration. It is a Welsh Government, and a Welsh Parliament, putting itself alongside the other devolved nations and the UK parliament and speaking with an equal voice, and demanding full

parity within the UK.

In other ways, you can see the growing confidence of our Welsh parliament too: Committees of the National Assembly having independently elected chairs for the first time is a significant development, meaning that we will see increasing

**Increasingly – and as it should be – Wales speaks loudly and confidently on the UK and world stage.**

muscularity of scrutiny of the executive; there is a mood for innovation on the floor of the Senedd to allow increased scrutiny, more room for backbench input, and to add some 'edge' to debates (though I must say, old and new faces in the chamber don't seem to be lacking fire or passion); and – whether driven by the necessity of political arithmetic or a desire for a different politics – the inclusion of LibDem Kirsty Williams in a Labour Cabinet, and the need to reach agreement with Plaid Cymru on some issues, means that that old vision of a 'different style of politics' in Wales is indeed appearing.

And this all means that Labour must govern as we campaigned, 'Together for Wales': for the good of Wales, and reflecting the will of the people of Wales. The early signs are good. And it's good to be home.



**Huw Irranca-Davies** is the Labour Assembly Member and former MP for Ogmore.



# Assembly No.5: Why we're here

**Mark Reckless** is pleasantly surprised by his new working environment but unimpressed by the Cardiff Bay establishment

My first impression of the National Assembly for Wales has been just how welcoming it is.

Some UKIP colleagues feared a frosty reception when seven of us arrived newly elected. However, we find that for most AMs day to day human contact and courtesies come before any political adversity. Meanwhile, Assembly staff led by Claire Clancy took professional pride in welcoming us equally to other AMs and as the first party to join the Welsh Assembly since its inception.

I was immediately struck by the common culture which runs through the Assembly and its staff. There is a genuine desire to help and support elected members, with all staff working together in that common cause. That is a contrast with the Westminster Parliament, where departments work more in silos and there is less of a common culture among its employees.

In part, the difference reflects the relative size of the institutions, but also a greater focus in the Assembly on current needs rather than historical practice. We are also

very fortunate in the buildings and setting we have here in Cardiff Bay, although whether they will remain so fitting 150 years from now I do not know.

Politically, having served as an MP from 2010 to 2015 and as an AM since May this year, the most obvious contrast between Westminster and Cardiff Bay is a role reversal between Labour and Conservative.

The self-belief and confidence, as well as the potential arrogance, which accompanies a dominating political position belongs in Wales to Labour. Meanwhile, Welsh Conservatives strike me as meeker and more searching of approval than their brethren across the Severn, Wye and Dee.

That dominating political position seems to draw to Labour at least some of the bright, practical and politically ambitious who might have forged their career in a different party were they in England. If there is a Labour establishment in Wales, then its outlook is as technocratic and managerial as it is social democratic. Either way there is a chasm between Carwyn's Labour in Wales and Corbyn's

UK Labour, and one which more autonomy alone may not be enough to bridge.

In respect of Plaid Cymru I have had a steeper learning curve, observing its differing internal strands, as well as its adversarial yet symbiotic relationship with Welsh Labour.

Committed and charismatic campaigners win many non-Welsh speaking working class votes in particular constituencies, from Leanne Wood in Rhondda to Neil McEvoy in South Wales Central and Nigel Copner in Blaenau Gwent, but Plaid struggle to scale up such local success.

Plaid's support for Welsh independence inspires so much of what the party does in the Assembly, including their burning desire to make our democracy work here, yet they must hide that if they are to win outside their heartland.

My party often refers to the 'Cardiff Bay establishment'. I recognise that it has its nuances, but that establishment is real. One defining feature is its support for a continuing process of devolution, rather than a stable settlement.

Plaid's support for independence often seems theoretical and for the future rather than practical. Welsh Labour's support for ever more devolution deprives them both of a unionist identity and definition against Plaid Cymru, so they leave much traditional Labour support behind. Welsh Conservatives perplex their supporters by demanding more powers for the Assembly, yet then call for Wales to copy what their government does in England. All this makes political space for UKIP.

The Cardiff Bay establishment is also defined by group think on particular subjects. There will be particular assumptions and

I was immediately struck by the common culture which runs through the Assembly and its staff. There is a genuine desire to help and support elected members, with all staff working together in that common cause.

shibboleths which will be defended against any criticism, however illogical or unpopular the position may be. Anyone outside the consensus is to be dismissed as lacking in understanding of Wales. At its most self-righteous the Cardiff Bay establishment speaks as if its common assumptions embody the Welsh nation.

A current example is the approach to student finance. All largely accept that the current policy of fee subsidies to approximate the pre-2010 English regime is unsustainable. Yet the Diamond Review, set up to address that issue, is stacked with sectional representatives, and told four months before it reports not to make any savings after all.

The Cardiff Bay establishment justify this by telling me there is a peculiarly Welsh belief in 'progressive universalism', as if this is distinct from the traditions of Bismarck and Beveridge.

At its most self-righteous the Cardiff Bay establishment speaks as if its common assumptions embody the Welsh nation.

So, we hand out £1,000 cheques to anyone who wants to be a student and 'means tested' maintenance grants to students from families earning up to £81,000. This may be Liberal Democrat penance for what Nick Clegg did in 2010, but it is not progressive.

Too often Welsh Labour fails to test the fashionable nostrums of Welsh establishment thinking against the interests of those they were set up to represent. Hence why we are in the Assembly.

**Mark Reckless** is UKIP Assembly Member for the South Wales East region, and former MP for Rochester and Strood.



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# Industrial Policy Rules

In the wake of the ‘steel crisis’, **James Foreman-Peck** runs the rule over industrial policy options and warns against company-specific state intervention

The present Conservative UK government’s announced commitment to an industrial strategy in general, and to support steel in south Wales in particular, raises some interesting questions about how far they will go. I argue here that the likelihood is that they will, and should, restrict themselves to ‘horizontal’ (general) rather than ‘vertical’ (sector or firm-specific) policies, although the ‘too big to fail’ principle must no doubt continue to carry weight.

Just as we can identify two broad approaches to industrial policy, in turn two types of horizontal policies can be distinguished. First, those influencing the legal and institutional framework. These include policies affecting corporate obligations on pension funds (of special interest in the case of Tata Steel). Second, those policies that modify technology and markets for inputs (energy is a particular concern for steel) and output (steel prices on the London Metal Exchange reached an

unprecedented peak in 2008 and a record low in March 2016).

Whereas horizontal policies apply across all industries, albeit with varying importance, vertical policies do not. Vertical policies are structural, altering the relative importance of industries and firms; they are the components of traditional industrial policy. With some exceptions these policies have targeted single firms or industries according to two different principles. One is ‘picking winners’ –

supporting those industries or businesses that the authorities deem to have great potential or fundamental importance. The other principle is 'helping losers', firms and industries in trouble. The crisis of the 1930s, the oil shocks of the 1970s and the financial crisis of 2008 all initiated bursts of this second type of assistance.

A compelling objection to traditional (vertical) industrial policy is that it is more prone to 'capture' by special interest groups and lobbies. The principle of profit maximisation is that *all* activities should be undertaken up to the point where the marginal revenues balance the marginal costs. Corporate activities include lobbying for state support, not merely for

## Big, highly visible, sector-specific projects, exemplified by Hinkley Point C and HS2, appeal to governments

subsidies and tax concessions but also for the elimination or exclusion of rivals. At least one international study – by Ades and Di Tella – has shown vertical policies encourage corruption and the reduction of policy effectiveness. Lobbying is one reason that international trade treaties take so long to negotiate; powerful opposed corporate interests press to gain advantage and not to lose out.

Big, highly visible, sector-specific projects, exemplified by Hinkley Point C and HS2, appeal to governments: they can point their electorate to tangible achievements (if the schemes are followed through to fruition). Such projects are also likely to be able to pay for powerful lobbyists to press their advantages on decision takers, unlike small enterprises. This is not to deny that government has a special role to play where infrastructure is concerned, nor that the UK government has not excelled itself in this respect – as London Underground commuters will confirm. But they should look seriously at alternatives and be willing to change

policies when circumstances change. (There is a strong case that the official cost benefit analysis for HS2 was far too optimistic and that the cost of electricity to be supplied by Hinkley Point C will be much higher than previously estimated.)

A qualification is that even market-oriented governments can be compelled to concede support when the collapse of a very large enterprise is expected to undermine political support for the entire market economy; most of the £2.5bn support for British Leyland was dispensed by Mrs Thatcher's government. In the most recent crisis the Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds/HBOS were beneficiaries of state largesse, on grounds that they were 'too big to fail' and that banks are special cases.

Horizontal industrial policy on Tata Steel in South Wales rules out a special deal on the pension fund, though general pension fund legislation could be considered (but is unlikely). Most attempts to lower energy prices will run up against climate change policy. Inconsistently, the UK government has mitigated the impact of climate policy with over £50m in compensation to Tata Steel. This is a firm-specific approach – a vertical policy. To be consistent the government would need to relax its renewable energy drive. In the long run, imaginative solutions, such as a cable linking up with the Norway-Denmark cheap electricity system, may be workable without undermining climate change policy.

Steel price intervention in principle looks possible; capital goods industries like steel not only suffer greater cyclicity in demand than, say, consumer goods industries but they also often have high ratios of fixed to variable costs. It makes sense when demand collapses for a profit maximiser to cut prices so long as they are above marginal costs, because then at least some revenue will be earned to pay for fixed costs. Price-cutting will damage the competition, so that during recessions firms with the biggest reserves or borrowing powers (such as state enterprises) will survive the longest. In such cases there can be justification for anti-dumping tariffs and/or

state supporting loans, particularly when combined with updating and restructuring.

Chinese excess steel capacity seems to have triggered low prices and increased Chinese market share, perhaps breaking WTO rules. But the previous UK government wanted to remain friendly with China – much more than did the US, which imposed an anti-dumping duty of about 265% in March on cold-rolled steel from China (the EU duty is from 13% to 25% for cold-rolled steel). The previous UK government is also alleged to have argued strongly against retaliatory raising of tariffs on steel imports in the EU to the levels adopted by the US, but claims the opposite. In any case steel tariffs remain low.

The remaining instrument that does not fall foul of other policies is the supply of a large cheap loans to keep Tata afloat for a while, as indeed the UK government has pledged. Coupled with the recent recovery of steel prices this may be sufficient. Another possibility worth exploring beyond industrial policy, since a key concern of government is unemployment, is enhanced active labour market policy. As found by Nickell and Van Ours, in the Netherlands this proved even more effective in bringing down unemployment than the contemporaneous free market reforms in the UK. Perhaps more active labour market interventions could be utilised to prevent unemployment rising.

A horizontal industrial policy is a rule-governed industrial policy less likely to be manipulated by special interest groups and less likely to neutralise other existing policies. Government loans to Tata Steel can be presented as a horizontal policy (even if the loan offer was otherwise motivated and that it looks at first sight like a vertical firm-specific policy) because of the distinctive problems of capital goods industries in a world economy without national tariff autonomy. After Brexit there will be less excuse for not adopting higher anti-dumping duties and therefore for granting government loans.



**James Foreman-Peck** is Head of Economics at Cardiff Business School.

# Breaking barriers, rebuilding families

**Corin Morgan-Armstrong** celebrates the successes of Invisible Walls Wales, a radical and innovative approach to supporting prisoners' families – and calls for its wider roll-out

When you work with offenders, I believe the most powerful way to engage and motivate is to talk about family. That is not to say that family interventions work is easy, or that it represents a magic bullet for rehabilitation. But having worked intensively on establishing Invisible Walls Wales (IWW) at HMP & YOI Parc, Bridgend, the very tangible results of the project speak for themselves.

IWW arose out of an inspection report ten years ago that identified a lack of input with children and families at the privately-run prison, the largest in Wales (and second largest in the UK). It is a sector-leading model that we have developed ourselves: made in Wales and exported, in various forms, to other prisons in the UK and internationally.

There are three strands to the project: an overhaul of the prison visits facility; the institution of a family interventions unit – the first of its kind anywhere, with a dedicated 64-bed facility that opened in October 2010; and a new approach to partnership working, with community and

**In these families, everyone is suffering. But however broken it may look, the project wraps around all of it.**

statutory services, with charities and other organisations with whom prisons might never normally engage.

Supported over its initial four-year period by a Big Lottery grant, there is real

potential to mainstream the project – but also an existential threat to its continuation. It would be bitterly ironic if such an innovative and successful project, made in Wales and exported elsewhere, were to be left to become a flash in the pan.

In June 2016, HM Inspectorate of Prisons declared that children and families work at Parc is 'innovative, radical' and 'probably the best they have seen in the UK'. IWW has required a culture shift, turning centuries of entrenched culture on its head. Prison visits have always operated as a security function, with a primary – or, often, sole – emphasis on eliminating the delivery of contraband to prisoners by a minority of visitors.

Despite that all the evidence points to positive family engagement as being a major factor in reducing reoffending (by up to six times, according to Home Office and Ministry of Justice statistics), the majority of prisons don't do it. Being a private sector prison actually informs our choice here: doing positive family engagement well is cheaper and more efficient than not doing it. Our major challenge, not only for prisons, but for society, is that currently six in ten boys with fathers in prison will end up serving time themselves.

Prison visits halls are unique spaces, where worlds collide; the only place where inside meets outside. Therefore, it is within this carceral geography that we have a unique opportunity to do some amazing engagement work. Moreover, this should not be a choice: we have a moral obligation to do so. From Kampala to Cardiff to the big Texas penitentiaries, visits halls the world over have traditionally been austere, clinical, boring, dirty, intimidating places. To make our visits hall family friendly required a radical change of thinking. Fortunately, Janet Wallsgrove, Director at Parc, and Jerry Petherick, MD of G4S, were fully supportive.

In the summer of 2010, we instituted a departmental shift, with Family Interventions replacing security as the

team managing the visits. We revamped the visits hall to create an environment that is colourful, inviting, warm, cheerful, comfortable, relaxed... normal. It now resembles the food hall at an airport, or a university refectory. There are still a small minority of those determined to bring in contraband, there sadly always will be – and we are still focused on preventing this, working alongside the police – but in a smarter way.

But the plus side is that we can now focus on the previously forgotten majority. Now, visitors to the prison arrive at a cheerful, low-key, informal reception centre run in partnership with Barnardo's, pass through security spaces decorated with Dylan Thomas themed murals and covered walkways built by prisoners themselves. Parc is the biggest Category B prison in the UK, and we are doing everything we can, especially for children, to mitigate fear and anxiety.

The results are obvious: previously, physical altercations in the visits hall witnessed by family members and children averaged one a week; since the reboot, we have had one in six years. This is symptomatic of the culture change, with de-escalation taking precedence over alarm.

Success can be measured in lots of ways; one is in simple statistics. Of the UK prison population at large (85,000), 48% have regular family contact; at Parc, this rises to 69%. We have between 400 and 500 children visiting every week, in addition to closed and non-contact visits. We work with Barnardo's, Gwalia (housing tenancy support), the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Scouts, Safe Ground UK, Action on Addiction, St John Ambulance, Cadets and South Wales Fire and Rescue to provide activities and homework clubs. IWW is a community resource where inside meets outside.

'Invisible Walls' comes from the idea that where we can show the prisoner's family that he is making a positive effort, and where we can show some of the effects of his incarceration on his children – including

bedwetting and night terrors – then there’s positive change on both sides. We work with social services, the probation service and the prison to identify twenty families each year who are deemed to have a ‘heightened need’. Usually, there will be children in care, or at risk of being taken into care; there will be substance abuse, partners with major debt problems and the prisoners will be repeat offenders with significant criminal lifestyles. In these families, everyone is suffering. But however broken it may look, the project wraps around all of it.

We employ four mentors who are responsible for five families each; their role is to bring all of the statutory services together to produce a tailored package of intense specialist support. It is perhaps a mark of the project’s success that from hundreds of applicants, the four postholders have all been with us since the project’s inception – and all are keen to continue.

IWW has exceeded all of its contractual obligations, and our hope is that Welsh Government and National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Wales will consider their role in mainstreaming

the project. Every prison is different, but we have already established a network of likeminded practitioners who have set up similar schemes in Belfast, Liverpool, Wolverhampton, Norwich and the West Country. Two public prisons in the Netherlands have adopted the idea; we have had visits from the forward-thinking President of Malta, who wishes to reform the antiquated prisons system in the Maltese islands; there has been a ripple effect worldwide: we have worked with colleagues as far afield as Kampala and Melbourne. We have had endorsements and visits from Michael Gove when he was Justice Secretary and previous UK prisons ministers. Prince Charles, Prince Edward and Princess Anne have all been here – but so far there has been no commitment from Welsh Government.

The impact of IWW has been astounding. The headline figure, to be confirmed at publication in 2017, is that we are expecting to evidence reoffending rates among 80 high risk families cut to around 10%. There has been a significant turnaround in school attendance. All

children enter the project categorised either ‘at risk’ or ‘isolated’ – no child has left the project in this category. Dads have gained sole custody of their children, including one who had entered the scheme from a position of not even being allowed to visit them. Family members have received education and training, and been treated for substance misuse, which has in itself seen an approximate 72% reduction with the prisoner clients post release. Our four-year goals for replication were achieved at the end of year one.

Given that it costs around £80,000 a year to keep children in care, and a further £50-60,000 if the fathers reoffend, there is a huge financial incentive to invest in the project. It’s successful, it’s cost effective – and it’s Welsh. IWW now exists in different forms in different countries – but there is a real danger that in Wales it will disappear. Wales should not let it go.

 **Corin Morgan-Armstrong** is Head of Family Interventions at Parc Prison, Bridgend.



A scenic outdoor setting with a lake in the foreground and a dense forest of green trees in the background. On the left, a man is suspended in mid-air, swinging on a rope that hangs from the top left corner. On the right, another man is sitting on a large, weathered log that extends from the right edge towards the center. The sky is clear and blue.

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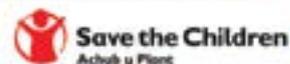
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# Poor Wales

**Christine Chapman** calls for a continued focus on eradicating poverty, as flagship Welsh Government programmes begin to slip from view

If you talk to people who have direct experience of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty programmes such as Communities First, Flying Start and Families First, the responses are generally favourable. Such interventions, which are designed to improve the life chances of those who are poor or at risk of falling into poverty, tend to be welcomed positively. As an Assembly Member who represented one of the poorest constituencies in Wales for seventeen years I have seen for myself the life changing impact of these programmes.

In Flying Start areas, more three year olds are now registered on school rolls and many more are immunised before their 4th birthday than before, thus affording them a greater chance of being able to take advantage of educational opportunities. The Families First programme has been

very effective in providing much needed multi-agency support to families facing the traumas of real or potential poverty. Across Wales between April 2013 and March 2015, individuals accessed more than 200 Families First projects over half a million times.

As a result of the provisions of Communities First, over a thousand parents of early years children involved in the programme reported reading with their children three or more times in a typical week. In addition, 6,000 children with whom Communities First worked improved their rates of school attendance and more than 11,000 had demonstrated improvements in their academic performance.

All of these outcomes are very important in preventing future poverty and we should not dismiss them. At a time when there are massive societal inequalities, these programmes, by helping to prevent future poverty and strengthening families and communities, are filling the gaps in opportunity which the more affluent take for granted. That said, there is no room for complacency and the Welsh Government's own

commissioned evaluations show that improvement is needed.

Poverty is not inevitable. It is a political choice. The fact that there are huge inequalities in the UK is a result of design, not chance. It is simply unacceptable in this day and age that the wealthiest 16% in Wales own as much as the other 84% combined (even if that makes Wales much more 'equal' than the UK as a whole). The magnitude and complexity of poverty is such that it would be a mistake to see the eradication of poverty as a matter for Welsh Government anti-poverty programmes alone. The UK Government must take responsibility. Most of the levers affecting poverty rates in Wales remain in the control of the UK Government and their continued austerity measures are pushing more people into poverty.

That said, there is a job of work to be done by the Welsh Government in maintaining focus and momentum in its contribution to eradicating poverty. The enquiry on poverty and inequality undertaken by the Communities, Equality and Local Government committee (CELG),

which I chaired in the Fourth Assembly, reported that whilst the UK Government is principally responsible, nevertheless the Welsh Government must go bolder and deeper in its attempts to make Wales a truly equal country where all its citizens can reach their potential.

Like many, I am disappointed that the poverty issue seems to have slipped somewhat from the minds of the Welsh Government. There is apparently no Minister for Poverty. I am sure that there is an implicit commitment by the Government but it should be more explicit in its intentions if it is to signal its seriousness and passion about helping to change the lives of the poorest in Wales. And given that poverty is so toxic, it is disappointing that it is still a low priority - where it should be driving everything else. As a recent Joseph Rowntree report argued, there should be a drive to bring together the expertise and resources of all stakeholders if we want to eradicate poverty in the UK within a generation. Equally, there should be a renewed

determination that this is possible and not just a false hope. The Welsh Government is in a key position to drive that passion and work collaboratively to inspire the other players in local government, the public sector, business and the third sector to do their bit for Wales.

Welsh Government must realise that the ongoing uncertainty caused by Brexit and the spectre of future cuts can only have a very demoralising effect on those who are making great efforts to add social capital to the lives of the poorest. The Welsh Government needs to be seen to be on their side and, just so there is no room for doubt, it must have the clarity of intent to vocalise its determination to eradicate poverty.

Despite the welcome fact that recent unemployment figures in Wales have improved on last year, poverty in many working households is still very real. One of the recommendations of CELG's poverty report last year was that the Welsh Government should ensure its economic development strategy is clearly aligned with its policies and interventions

aimed at tackling poverty. This advice seems to be being heeded at last with the establishment of the new Ministerial Task Force on the Valleys. The Valleys are one of the most chronically impacted parts of Wales in terms of poverty. Early indications are that lessons are beginning to be learned about what will work in a sustainable way. I am very impressed by the approach that former CELG member and now Minister Alun Davies is taking in ensuring that a more holistic partnership of agencies is brought together to support local communities and restore a sense of hope. Long term economic growth is about benefitting everybody. The Welsh Government's anti-poverty programmes and its economic strategy must be joined at the hip. If that fails to happen, then our poorer communities will continue to be left behind.

**Dr Christine Chapman** was Assembly Member for Cynon Valley from 1999-2016.

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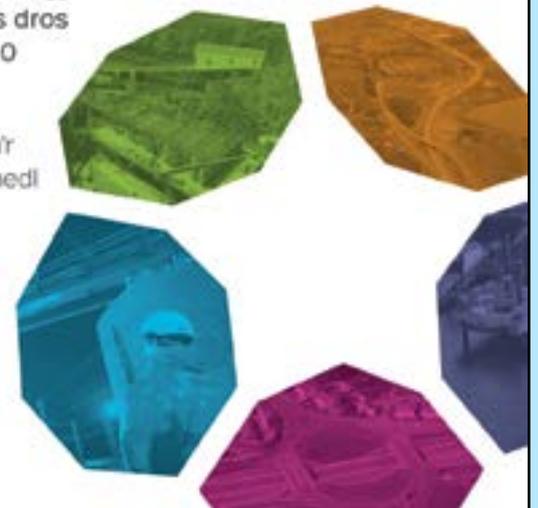
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# Are we caring for our children?

**Karen Graham** and **David Dallimore** argue that childcare provision is about far more than getting parents into work

Since devolution, there has been a strong child-centred approach to policy making by successive Welsh governments, but according to a number of children's charities, in recent years there has been a lack of vision and leadership, which the Children's Commissioner for Wales says jeopardises children and young people's outcomes. This is evident in childcare policies where economic considerations have increasingly replaced a focus on children's overall developmental needs.

During the 2016 Welsh Assembly election campaign we saw an unprecedented focus on childcare, with Labour forming a government having promised '30 hours free childcare a week for the working parents of three and four year olds, 48 weeks of the year'. While the offer will be welcomed by parents of young children across Wales, the policy commitment raises a number of important questions.

First, the policy is focused on the relatively short-term economic gains that come with increasing women's employment

through providing care for children when they are working. Access to paid work has traditionally been seen as the single best guarantor of family welfare. Policies to increase the affordability and availability of childcare therefore aspire to alleviate child poverty, reduce welfare dependence and increase tax revenues. Increasing the labour supply of underemployed women is seen to have benefits for the economy as a whole and, it is argued by some, also promotes gender equality.

However, in recent years, the rise of in-work poverty has challenged this simple assumption. A 2015 report by Aleks Collingwood for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that working families in Wales are at greater risk of poverty now than they were a decade ago, with part-time working households – most likely to be those trying to balance work and caring responsibilities – at greatest risk. Simply increasing childcare is, on its own, unlikely to be effective in achieving economic goals or tackling poverty. Yet there is national and international research

evidence suggesting that providing publicly supported, high quality learning and developmental opportunities and care to young children creates significant opportunities to prevent and alleviate child poverty (for example, John Bennett and Collette Tayler's 2006 report for the OECD: *Starting strong II: Early childhood education and care*). Over the longer term an integrated package of quality care and early learning promotes young children's intellectual development, leading to better educational outcomes and life chances overall. Yet there is little consideration of these longer-term goals within recent childcare policy in Wales.

It also remains to be seen whether the political promise to support increasing economic independence and aspirations of families can be delivered with the current infrastructure of childcare provision in Wales. Most three and four-year-old children in Wales currently receive either part-time or full-time Foundation Phase early learning in schools, therefore we do not have in Wales a large, established

independent childcare sector to step up and provide more childcare. Even in England, where early education is predominantly delivered by a market of private and voluntary childcare providers, a similar increased offer is proving difficult to deliver. The increased childcare offer is also being considered during a period of uncertainty for the sector where austerity, increasing employment costs and changing regulatory demands challenge the sustainability of existing daycare for preschool children and the after-school and holiday childcare that working parents of older children often rely upon. The solution in many areas of Wales is likely to be in developing childcare that ‘wraps around’ existing Foundation Phase provision in schools, yet the ability of schools to deliver this themselves is untested. Some do not have the physical space, while others lack the willingness. Schools often see themselves as providing education and not care. This also highlights a more fundamental question as to whether primary schools, as they currently exist, are the best places for children to be spending their earliest years. A recent review (Siraj, 2014) commissioned by Welsh Government concluded that there are considerable weaknesses in Foundation Phase, the successful delivery of which should

provide the greatest support and improve the long-term life chances for children, particularly those living in poverty. Finally, a consequence of increasing childcare for three and four-year-olds in schools will inevitably be a decrease in childcare for the under-threes. The relatively small number of childminders and day nurseries in Wales that parents currently rely upon will struggle to survive if more children are cared for in schools. Furthermore, pre-school playgroups and *cylch meithrin* that currently offer valuable pre-school experiences in local communities will close. This could be particularly damaging in rural areas that have suffered from the closure of village schools. Transport for pre-school children is not provided by most local authorities.

The promise to provide an offer of 30 hours free childcare might provide the opportunity to address these key questions. It is certainly an opportunity to examine the current split system of education and care and develop services to enable children to access more high quality early learning, and make working parents’ lives easier.

In 2014, Welsh Government commissioned an independent review of childcare structures to determine whether they are truly fit to efficiently and effectively support high quality

early childhood education and care. We made a clear recommendation for systemic change that brings together the sometimes competing needs of the parent to work and the child’s care and education. The review recommended an overhaul of the current system to reduce the tension between the disparate systems of care and education in Wales. It stressed the need for a simplified offer that focused on the needs of the child, determining that a piecemeal offer to get parents back into work would be detrimental to children. Positive outcomes, we concluded, rely on a high quality system of early childcare education and care within a cohesive regulatory framework.

Yet despite these recommendations, Welsh Government continue to support separate regulatory systems for childcare and education, with a crossover that sees some 700 settings in Wales subject to both. Childcare providers report that attempts to streamline and integrate the two systems are chaotic and overly bureaucratic.

It is clear that a strategy for structural reform is needed to allow for managed evolution of provision to protect the rights of all children across the early years sector and to prevent undermining ongoing quality improvement in the sector. This includes the work of the Care Council for Wales in relation to qualification development and regulatory change intended to bring about greater consistency and improvement in quality.

Almost everyone agrees that increased support for early childhood is welcome but the short-term need for low cost, high quantity provision to support parents’ work should not be paid for by denying children high quality integrated early childhood education and care that evidence shows can have significant longer-term social and economic impact.

Prof Karen Graham is Professor of Early Childhood Studies at Glyndwr University; Dr David Dallimore of Bangor University is Director of Melyn Consulting.



# Wales leading the way: reviewing Diamond

Hannah Pudner welcomes Sir Ian Diamond's progressive plan for the future of higher education in Wales

The Diamond Review has finally reported – we had a long wait, but the consensus indicates it was worth it. The recent raft of recommendations build on last January's interim report, an impressive document which gathered the evidence and set the scene. The review's broad and ambitious brief left many sceptical. Indeed, it is no mean feat to create an affordable, sustainable higher education funding system that works for *all* HE students (not just the full timers as is currently the case, but part timers and postgrads too). A system that has both widening access and world class quality at its heart. Driving the economy and delivering social justice. And all in a finite and pressurised budget.

While other nations in the UK are struggling to create long-term approaches to higher education that reach all parts of the sector, has Wales really provided the most progressive blueprint for HE in the UK thus far? Has it really offered a solution to problems that have vexed politicians and policy wonks since mass HE provision became the norm? The initial response from the likes of NUS, the Universities and Colleges Union, political parties across the spectrum in Wales and institutions, suggests that maybe it has.

And while it is too soon to judge success, indeed these are still a raft of recommendations at the moment, what is clear is that Wales has a plan. And that leaves even the most sceptical of us reason to be optimistic.

## All modes, all levels

Diamond was not simply looking for a solution on tuition fees, or research funding, or even just reducing costs in a time of difficult budget settlements; it was indeed doing all of this, but most importantly it sought to create a sustainable funding settlement for the whole sector, students and institutions alike – whether they be full time, part time, undergraduate or postgraduate, research or taught. A system based on ability, not ability to afford. One might not think that's radical, yet remarkable as it is, it will be the first in the UK to offer something for everyone, and more for those who need it, when they need it.

Like the sun in the solar system, until now full time undergraduates have been at the centre of our HE system, eclipsing all other types of students and modes of study. Of course this is an important cohort of students, but their dominance was disproportionate and at the expense of funding for part-time and postgraduates.

There is an urgent rationale for Wales (and the rest of the UK) to be investing in part time provision. Demographic changes mean that the proportion of younger people is shrinking; to keep economically successfully the UK needs to expand and develop its workforce. This means developing the workforce we currently have, not simply relying on an influx of new graduates. An effective way to do this is to enable people to study whilst they work, and Diamond's recommendations support this aim. The problem and solution are no different elsewhere in the UK, and yet part time numbers in England

have declined by 40 per cent in recent years, much more sharply than in Wales – time for them to look over their western border perhaps?

There is of course the social justice imperative too. For many studying part time, the responsibilities of jobs, mortgages and caring mean a full time course is simply not possible. For others, a disability means a full time course will simply not meet their needs. There are many reasons why people cannot study full time, despite being ready and able to study at university level.

If that is the case, why would we not want to make our universities as open as we can? If we are not a nation that enables, indeed encourages, learning through one's lifetime, we are not doing what is best for our economy or our people.

And in turn, by not providing support for postgraduate study, are we not implicitly saying that postgraduate study – and the personal economic advantages it can bring – is just for those who can afford it, for the wealthier – and therefore encouraging the mantra that advantage breeds advantage. When we say we want to widen access to education, are we saying that's only to bachelors degree level, and that beyond that is fair game? Again, it makes no economic sense for us to limit access to postgraduate study only to those who can afford it. And it flies in the face of social justice too.

## Maintenance, maintenance, maintenance

Tuition fees have undeservedly dominated the debate on higher education for decades. Fees are very important but the focus on this ignores the killer issue: maintenance. As NUS Wales' 2014 research Pound in your Pocket showed, right now the level of maintenance, in either loan or grant form, does not cover the actual cost of living. Unless a student can find another source of income, they will not have enough money to pay rent, eat, travel and live. This is why students

**Progressive is progressive,  
even when it's relative**

drop out. Or why they work unsuitably long hours, or why they survive on credit cards and payday loans – then do less well in their studies, turn down valuable extra-curricular activities and work placements, and ultimately become less able to capture the benefit of their qualification. Unsurprisingly the poorest students, without the safety net of financially supportive parents, are the most vulnerable to this happening.

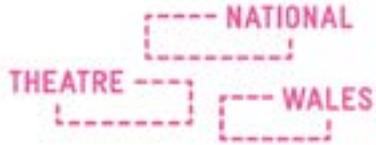
The greater focus on maintenance recommended by Diamond, to the tune of the minimum wage, bolsters the chances of the least advantaged students to stay at university, free from the pressures of high-interest loans and longer than appropriate hours in paid employment. It will mean the outcome of their study is richer in substance and stature. And it means the public purse investment in that individual's study is a sounder one.

The Diamond recommendations on maintenance are the most progressive within the UK, but progressive is a relative concept – relative to rising fees in England, slow economic activity in Wales and austerity everywhere. But if there is only money available to fund maintenance for students or less tuition fee debt for graduates, the commitment to social justice demands maintenance for students be prioritised. In the context of existing public finances, the status quo, let alone removal of fees in their entirety, was not a viable outcome of this review. Instead, with the financial backdrop as it is, and the fact that our universities operate within a UK-wide HE system, the focus must be on offering support to students in all modes of study to access and stay in HE. A progressive system, with a universal element at its heart for all students, delivers this objective.

Wales now needs to work hard on developing its economy and proving to prospective students that a degree is worth their investment; that the rewards are worth the graduate debt. Because if they are convinced, they'll be supported to stay on course, whether full time, or part time, undergrad or postgrad. With those who need most support receiving the most support. We cannot take implementation for granted, but what is for sure is that Wales has the opportunity to lead the way in delivering a progressive HE system that can support all students, as well as our institutions.

**The greater focus on maintenance recommended by Diamond, to the tune of the minimum wage, bolsters the chances of the least advantaged students to stay at university**

**Hannah Pudner** is Assistant Director (External Strategy) at the Open University in Wales and a former Director of NUS Wales. Hannah holds an MA in Higher and Professional Education from the Institute of Education, London.



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PROJECT: 2018-2020 / 2018-2020 / 2018-2020

# A Welsh community health and social care service

**Lyndon Miles** calls for renewed strategic direction to streamline health and social care services in Wales

We are well aware that our population is getting older. In 1948, approximately 48% of us died before the age of 65. That figure is now 14%. The number of people living beyond 85 has doubled in three decades, and is expected to double again by 2037. While that is very welcome, this growth in the numbers of elderly citizens is matched by an exponential increase in the number of cases of dementia and other age-related illnesses – a trend that is unlikely to peak in our lifetimes. The resultant challenges to the NHS are well known. Despite record spending and higher numbers of staff working than ever before, waiting lists are growing. Accident and Emergency Departments are packed with elderly patients waiting in corridors for hospital admission and everyone in the system seems to be struggling with workload pressures. In short, demand is outpacing

service expansion and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Dealing with this altered demography will require a step change in the way the public care sector operates. It has long been recognised that the NHS, in Wales and the UK more generally, does not have a good community-hospital balance. There is too much focus and reliance on hospital services and insufficient investment in community-based health and social care provision. This ‘system dysfunction’ has its origins in the Acts of Parliament which separated social care from the NHS in the 1940s, and the ongoing ‘independent contractor’ status of GPs, dentists, optometrists and pharmacists – a situation that puts these professions technically ‘outside’ the NHS.

Calls for change have been loud and persistent. At the start of this century, a national review of hospital services (*Access and Excellence 2000*) stated that

an expansion of ‘intermediate’ community health care was needed in order to improve hospital efficiency. This was reinforced by the 2003 Wanless Report, probably the most comprehensive review of health and social care in Wales since the start of the welfare state. This concluded that the health of people in Wales is relatively poor; that Wales does not get as much out of its health spending as it should; and that the configuration of health services puts an unsupportable burden on the acute hospital sector – the most expensive part of the system. The team warned that ‘actions to reconfigure provision... and raise productivity are needed alongside a rebalancing of the system to meet need earlier in the “care pathway”. Increasing acute capacity is not only of questionable efficacy, it is also a very costly response to the (demand) problem’.

Since 2003, our Chief Medical Officers have repeated this message. In 2009 the

**Much has been written about the ‘Berlin Wall’ between health and social care... Is it time to finally integrate these two public services?**

CMO stated that 'Wales needs to have a strategic rebalancing of health investment from a model of treatment to one where we readjust our focus to doing as much as we can to promote health and prevent our population from needing treatment in the first place'. In her 2013/14 annual report, the previous CMO confirmed that although people are generally living longer, there remain appalling health inequalities with significant avoidable mortalities, rising levels of chronic illness, and increasing difficulties for patients in accessing care. She described the major role community based healthcare plays in meeting these needs, and again called for expansion of new models of care - including that of specialists working with primary care professionals in the community 'to contribute to the efficiency of the overall system'.

The evidence base behind these calls for strategic change is strong for each of what one might call the three broad categories of community based health and social care.

- Firstly there are **health promotion and preventative services** that engage the whole population. Public Health England estimates that 40% of NHS expenditure is for the treatment of illnesses caused by preventable factors, such as poor diet, alcohol and lack of exercise. But because the NHS struggles to deal with the daily illness-demands that it faces, health promotion and other so called 'upstream' services have not had the emphasis that they need. The effectiveness of such services have been proven in many countries, notably in Sweden, which has had GPs linked to physical activity programmes for over 30 years and, in a more extreme demonstration of the effectiveness of community-based care, in Cuba.
- Secondly there is a **refocusing of medical and health treatment towards a more community-based provision**, rather than in hospitals. In my view, the 'gap' between the hospital service and primary care noted by Wanless and others has widened since those reports. The rapid growth in medical technology,

## the health of people in Wales is relatively poor... Wales does not get as much out of its health spending as it should and the configuration of health services puts an unsupportable burden on the hospital sector – the most expensive part of the system

investigations, treatment options and staff numbers has mainly occurred in the hospital sector, with the community side having had far less support and focus. The development of an 'intermediate' service in the community, by developing skills and (crucially) capacity by shifting some hospital staff to a community base, would support the care of complex cases and develop 'substitutional' services to provide more appropriate alternatives to hospital referral. This policy has also been proven internationally, especially in Scandinavia, where the need for hospital beds and hospital staff was reduced by expanding their community base. However, such shifts are not easy to deliver unless they become a focused top political priority for the country.

- Finally, there is the matter of **the frail elderly** - those who have been living independently but who have a degree of cognitive dysfunction and memory impairment. When these patients develop acute illnesses, such as infections, their fragility often results in the need for hospital admission. Unfortunately, irrespective of the nature of the acute illness, a hospital admission may result in such deterioration of their mental state that lifelong institutional care becomes necessary. We know that if, instead, we could provide treatment and support in the familiar surroundings of their own home though short term interventions such as hospital at home services, virtual community wards, better use of telecare and telemedicine, and rapid access

ambulatory care clinics, outcomes are better. Many patients may then maintain their cognitive state and independence of living for years after recovery from the acute illness. Some of these schemes are delivered in some places in Wales but they are clearly not systematic. Although the NHS has had an aim to avoid such admissions for more than two decades, a recent King's Fund report estimated that a shocking 50-60% of patients in UK acute hospital medical beds, mainly the frail elderly, may have been better cared for at home or in community-based facilities. Now, if in my individual clinical capacity I caused harm to half of my patients, I would expect to be struck off the medical register, yet we tolerate such system deficiencies when they affect our most fragile and least vocal members of our population. The current arrangements are both inefficient in service provision, and, far more importantly, profoundly unkind to the individuals involved.

All of the above is well known to NHS managers, and it is clearly the case that we've had lots of commendable strategic plans and multi-agency working on this agenda. The framework for developing the community using 'localities' is in place, and the frequently heard mantra is about developing the community service and the need for 'transformational' change. However, the demands on the hospital sector are now so huge, with almost all of the political and media focus on hospital performance and waiting times, that community health

# Wales is sufficiently small and innovative to develop a bespoke and sensitive 'community health and social care service' that would be the envy of the UK

care development is often marginal and poorly funded. The King's Fund calls these 'piecemeal initiatives', which fail to achieve strategic change.

So it is a legitimate question, in the light of the findings and predictions of the Wanless Report, to ask if we are collectively making sufficient strides in re-balancing the system. Unfortunately, as Wanless found, amongst the mountains of collected data and statistics there is very little information publicly available which measures progress in this particular area. That, in itself, is part of the problem identified by Wanless. However, available information gives pointers to the challenge we face. According to Health Statistics Wales, our NHS has appointed an additional 14% of consultants over the past five years, even though hospitals appear saturated (total admission episodes are unchanged in the same period).

Disappointingly, the published number of community-based nurses in Wales (district nurses, and mental health/learning disability nurses) has fallen from 851 (2009) to 613 (2014). This fall illustrates the disadvantages of the community sector within an 'integrated' NHS: they are disparate services, out of the spotlight with little voice or influence. The funding of GP services as a

proportion of NHS expenditure has fallen and the number of social workers is less as austerity bites. None of this is to decry the successful initiatives that have developed in the community in some areas, or the undoubted success and world-leader status of some aspects of NHS care in Wales, but to examine progress in making a strategic change which is policy. The published figures do not suggest that we've made sufficient changes to face the future.

The 'vertically integrated' structure (i.e. hospital, community and primary care in one organisation) of our health boards was established to facilitate a strategic shift of services to the community, but it is pertinent to ask if they will ever be able to do this in the face of such strong party-political and media pressure to deliver their hospital sector. To use the 'drowning' metaphor, it is difficult to shift resources from recovery to that of preventing people from falling into water if you are spending all your resources on recovery. But if Wanless was correct, a failure to make that strategic shift will require an increasing proportion of the Welsh Government's budget to be spent in our hospitals, much to the loss for other sectors. If 'integrated' LHBs cannot be facilitated to deliver this change, should the

community sector be managed as separate organisations in order to push through the required strategic shift?

Much has also been written about the 'Berlin Wall' between health and social care. Our community health and social care teams, with some staff working for the NHS and some for local authorities, struggle to overcome the challenges of cross-boundary working that have dogged progress for decades. Is it time to finally integrate these two public services? Whatever the difficulties of cross-boundary working, it is indisputable that we will not be fully able to shift expenditure from unnecessarily filled hospital beds to community services until there are unified budgets for health and social care, because community social care is so fundamental to health care delivery. Such unification of budgets is a big task, one that's been in the 'too hard to do' box for decades, but the demographic change we face suggests that it is essential and will become more difficult to do as time goes by.

Whatever our individual opinions on these questions, the 'future' demographic challenge pointed out by Derek Wanless in 2000 has now arrived - that the viability of the hospital sector, and thus the NHS as a whole, depends on a transformational change in community-based health and social care. Somehow we need to create a shared vision for that care across the NHS and political spectrum. Wales is sufficiently small and innovative to develop a bespoke and sensitive 'community health and social care service' that would be the envy of the UK - be that within the management structure of the NHS or within local authorities. But perhaps the challenge for all of us is that, although such a strategic shift will deliver longer term sustainability for healthcare in Wales, it may cost a little more in the short term, is unlikely to improve performance as soon as next year and will certainly not hit the headlines.



**Lyndon Miles** is former Vice Chair of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board.

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# Early steps on the path to NHS sustainability

**Toby Watt sets out a detailed case for ensuring the NHS in Wales has its current funding pressures eased and works toward long-term financial security**

Health was the winner in last month's Welsh budget announcement, a sprinkle of good news for the sector in the midst of the most financially difficult period in its history. The total budget for the NHS next year is set to rise 2.2% in real terms, double the increase from the previous year and well above budget growth in recent years.

This 2017/18 budget increase is, however, much lower than the average increase of 4% a year that the English NHS has received since 1948. The economic downturn in 2008 and national policy of fiscal consolidation has halted this trend, resulting in much lower increases in recent years.

While health is in need of a quick injection of funding, finding money for healthcare by cutting other public services will not provide a solution over a sustained period of time. We must consider the context of this additional funding. The announced increase in the total Welsh budget for 2017/18 was just 1% in real-terms, less than half the growth in the health budget, relatively speaking. This comes off the back of a 3.4% real-terms fall in the total budget for Wales from 2015/16 to 2016/17. Finding additional funding for health is therefore very tough and has consequences for wider public service. In this context it might be tempting to conclude that the NHS is unsustainable – a cuckoo in the nest of Welsh public services which in the end could crowd out all other services.

Funding has been tight in the recent past and in our report *The Path to Sustainability*, we laid out the short-term

financial challenge facing the NHS. From this it is clear that even with welcome additional funding in 2017/18 the NHS in Wales faces a tough few years.

Part of the strategy to tackle both long and short-term tribulations in the NHS is Prudent Healthcare, a well-documented set of values that encourages the efficient allocation of resources to promote the best possible treatment for patients. For instance, it encourages the popular reform of moving patient care out of hospitals and into the community wherever possible. There are four major principles of Prudent Healthcare that were developed by the Bevan Commission through engagement with clinicians, managers and patients:

- Achieve health and wellbeing with the public, patients and professionals as equal partners through co-production
- Care for those with the greatest health need first, making the most effective use of all skills and resources
- Do only what is needed, no more, no less; and do no harm
- Reduce inappropriate variation using evidence-based practices consistently and transparently

It is hoped that these principles could improve the quality, appropriateness and value for money of NHS services. Our analysis finds Prudent Healthcare would not increase the total cost pressures for the NHS. It is also possible the approach could reduce demand pressures on the service in the longer term.

Even considering the potential contribution of Prudent Healthcare, if demand pressures continue to grow due to the ageing population, increasing costs and increasing prevalence of chronic conditions, then we projected a funding gap of £700m in three years' time (over 10% of the current budget).

In order to reduce spending pressures

in line with this expected budget, NHS Wales would have needed to continue with a stringent public sector pay deal as well as achieving whole sector efficiency savings one and a half times the UK long-run average.

However the relatively generous budget increase announced in October has changed significantly the short-term outlook, as shown by the sharp increase in the budget line below.

This injection of funding will certainly go some way to relieve immediate financial pressures on the NHS. But as additional funding is scarce, the health system has a clear responsibility to use that funding well.

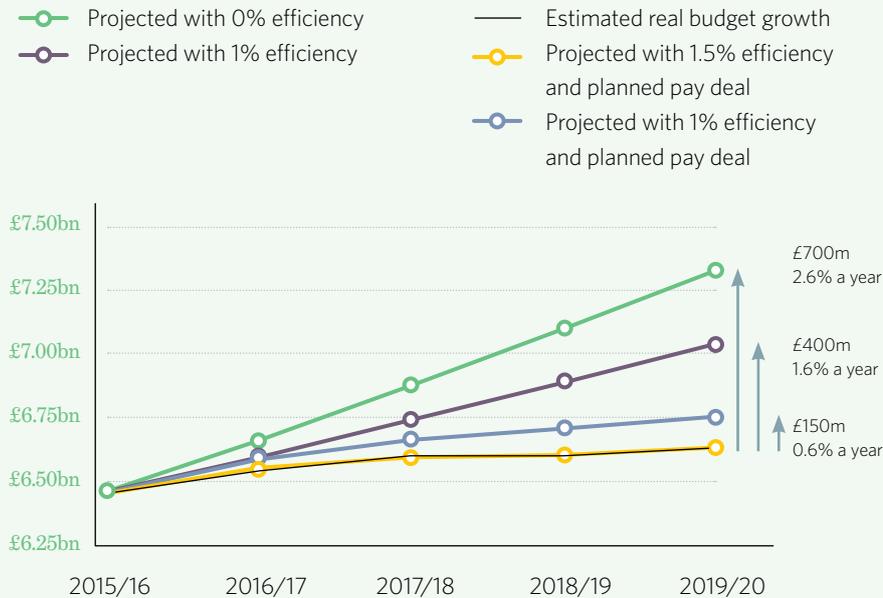
Following the increase in 2017/18, we still expect at least three further tough years of low funding growth, requiring greater than average efficiency savings and restricting NHS staff pay. The additional funding could be used in two areas to alleviate short-term pressure.

Firstly, it could be used to help relieve immediate funding difficulties experienced around the health service. In the same vein the extra funds could reduce the need for efficiency savings in the short-term. However it is important that the NHS continues to focus on efficiency, in order to maintain a health service that is free at the point of use.

Secondly, the money could be used to support NHS staff going forward. The greatest threats to the delivery of the NHS's plans for the future are funding constraints and workforce shortages. A large proportion of the NHS's efficiency savings will come from the 1% cap on public sector pay by 2019/20, while historically healthcare workers' earnings have increased by around 2% a year over and above inflation. Sustaining this pay policy is likely to result in healthcare workers' pay falling relative to other occupations and sectors, making life harder for an already overworked NHS staff. This additional money could be put into the training of more NHS staff, which

## NHS Wales funding pressures in 2019/20

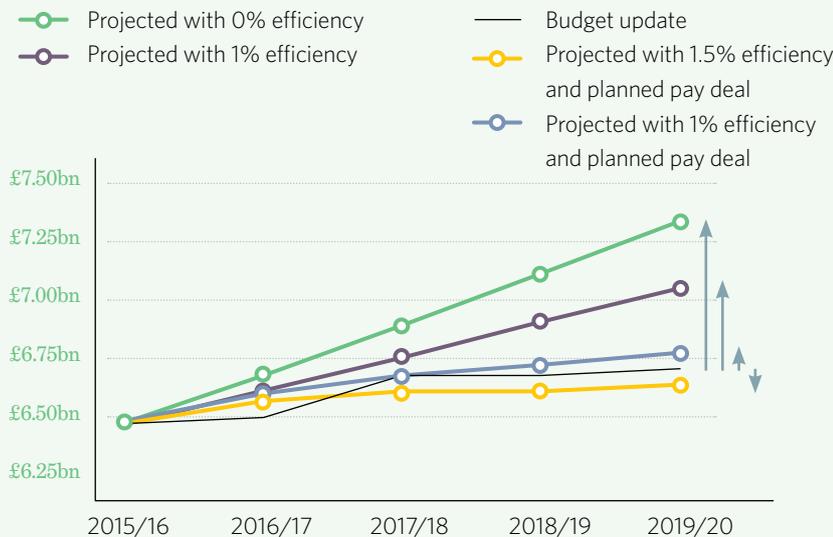
Projected pressures with various efficiencies, and planned pay deal



The Health Foundation © 2016 Source: Health Foundation analysis

## NHS Wales pressures with budget update

Projected pressures with various efficiencies, pay deal and budget update



The Health Foundation © 2016 Source: Health Foundation analysis

would improve the work-life balance of current staff and help reduce the growing reliance on agency staff. At a time where it is more important than ever to meet the need to recruit, retain, motivate and improve the performance of the healthcare workforce, more funding in this area could be welcome.

If the short-term funding challenges are managed, in the long-term the NHS in Wales could be fiscally sustainable. But it would require both that the NHS maintains its trend rate of efficiency savings (of at least 1% a year) and that funding is allowed to grow at the same rate as UK economic growth (expected to be 2.2%). However, this is assuming that NHS Wales provides the same quality and range of services as it does today, leaving no money for quality or technological improvement. The availability of short-term funds in a sector that is already struggling to manage tight budgets creates a problem, even though it is a welcome one. More money creates an internal struggle between short-term delivery and long-term sustainability.

The budget increase announced by the Welsh government is a welcome recognition of the pressures on the health service in Wales. But the NHS faces long-term challenges, and public finances in Wales will be under considerable pressure for the rest of this decade. It is therefore essential that this additional money is used to support the transformative change and improved efficiency that will help the health service in Wales to continue to meet patient needs. Being able to recruit and train the skilled staff that are at the heart of high quality care will be critical, and alongside funding, the NHS in Wales needs a comprehensive workforce strategy. If this immediate and sustained action is undertaken long-term sustainability could be possible. And, what is more, we may be able to allay a calling cuckoo.



**Toby Watt** is an economist at the Health Foundation and a PhD student at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He is co-author of *The path to sustainability*, a recent report on funding pressures for the NHS in Wales.

Profile:

# Barry Morgan, Archbishop of Wales

**Greg Walker** considers the ministry and legacy of Archbishop Barry Morgan, who will retire on January 31st 2017



It is one of the ironic paradoxes of the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales that its leaders have tended to play an outsized role in public affairs, and that despite the increasing diversity of our society in recent decades and Wales's Nonconformist heritage. Barry Morgan's time as Archbishop of Wales, which will come to an end in the New Year, is a case study in how this influence has perdured.

That an Anglican leader may intervene in the public square is not unusual in recent times. Archbishop 'GO' Williams played an instrumental role in persuading the Thatcher Government to establish S4C while Archbishops George Noakes and Rowan Williams each played roles in promoting social solidarity in the midst and aftermath of the Miners' Strike while also building civil society support for devolution.

Barry Morgan's dual societal and Christian role has been played out in important positions working with national organisations such as the University of Wales, Shelter Cymru and the Welsh Centre for International Affairs among others. To use a phrase of his poetic authorial subject, R.S.

Thomas, Barry Morgan has been 'a troubler of the Welsh conscience' on matters social and political.

Though few doubt he has leftist political leanings, he has stayed clear of partisanship while not failing to intervene on matters that strike to the core of Gospel imperatives to welcome the stranger and shelter the dispossessed. His commission on homelessness in Wales with Shelter Cymru in 2007 was a landmark of its kind and helped keep this critical issue in the political eye. His advocacy, along with other churchmen, such as Aled Edwards, for refugees and immigrants has been notable. His clear commitment to the Welsh language, a constant throughout his career, is well-recognised.

Combining both natural charm and the imbued urbanity of a Grammar school boy educated at two of England's most august universities, Barry has the knack of disarming those who disagree with him and putting at ease the unacquainted. In leading the Church as Archbishop of Wales (the lead Bishop of seven) since Rowan Williams left for Canterbury in 2002, he has faced

the same issues as most other Christian leaders in the West in dealing with the triple challenge of disputes over women's ministry, human sexuality and the impact of declining congregations.

Barry's response to each of these has been firmly progressive and pragmatic. In engaging with the last of those challenges, declining congregations, the church is exploring new and varied approaches to engaging with what is becoming, or has already become, a post-Christian society. Structural reforms of the church are being taken forward to reflect this, though at a pace that befits an institution that appropriately thinks (and acts) in a timeframe of decades and centuries. On the issue of gay and lesbian people in the church, Barry has been one of the most forward thinking Primates of the Anglican Communion, consistently advocating inclusion. The Church in Wales, as a result, has no policy insisting on the celibacy of gay clergy within a civil partnership, unlike the more riven Church of England.

Barry's stewardship of *Cymru Yfory* from 2004 - a forerunner to the successful



2011 referendum campaign on legislative powers for the Assembly – turned out to be a fruitful one. But his interest in devolution and matters such as nuclear disarmament have gathered some critical barbs, including from a former Conservative Secretary of State for Wales. In a brief riposte to this criticism, the Church tartly quoted Desmond Tutu: ‘when people say that religion and politics don’t mix, I wonder which Bible they are reading’. An intervention attempting to resist the then UK Government’s cuts to S4C in 2011 were less impactful, but that in the 21st century, civil society figures still beat a path to Llys Esgob when necessary speaks volumes about the esteem in which he, and his office, is still held.

Morgan’s theological liberalism – a Modern (or Broad) Churchmanship in the parlance – is not always to the taste of some of the Evangelicals or Anglo-Catholics in his own large and diverse diocese. But Morgan surprised some when he spoke out publicly against the apparently blasphemous staging of *Jerry Springer: The Musical* at the Wales Millennium Centre in 2006, without fear of

being thought *démodé* by those outside the church. With typical conscientiousness, and unusually for a blasphemy protester, he took the trouble to watch the production before delivering a verdict.

Also counter to a *secular* variety of liberalism was his opposition to one of Wales’s innovative health policies regarding adult organ donation. Though the Archbishop was surely right to raise fundamental issues around the ‘ownership’ of the human body and the possible instrumentalisation of death, the arguments for the proposed policy were in my own mind, and those of others in the church, compelling.

To avoid the genre of hagiography we have to consider where things have not gone to plan. Numbers of communicants have followed the trend of those in most Western nations (sharply downwards), though this wider contextual fact will not console a leader charged with leading evangelisation. The church has ‘dropped the ball’ by ignoring the Archbishop’s strong advice to take the ‘no-brainer’ step of making Llandaf the permanent seat of the Archbishop of Wales,

rather than allowing any of the bishops to lead the church. Being based in Cardiff would allow his successor the sort of convenient access to the corridors of influence that Barry has enjoyed.

These matters should not cloud Barry Morgan’s manifest achievements. Respect for him extends well beyond the boundaries of Wales and the UK through his work in helping to lead the World Council of Churches and the Anglican Communion. He is a globally recognised Christian leader in this respect, particularly in Anglican circles.

Barry’s ministry has been a fine vintage for both for his church and for our society. No doubt he will continue some of this work in a much-deserved retirement.

**Dr Greg Walker** is a Fellow of the Institute of Welsh Affairs and was a lay member of the Governing Body of the Church in Wales (2003-2006).



# Re-Energising Wales: Thinking differently about the Welsh economy

**Shea Jones** outlines a new project from the IWA looking at the potential of renewable energy for Wales

**“It is time for the country to take a clear-eyed look at how ambitious it wants to be for its economic future and what sort of changes would be required to achieve its ambitions. There is no point espousing unrealistic targets and no point in specifying any target whatsoever without a strategy that might achieve it.”**

‘An economic strategy for Wales?’  
(IWA, 2015)

Since devolution many have questioned the dividend to Wales in terms of economic performance. In 1999 our GVA was 72.4%. In 2013 it was 72.2%. This demonstrates a failure of Wales to grow in comparison with the rest of the UK. Parts of Wales are amongst some of the poorest in Europe.

2016 has brought further worrying news for the Welsh economy. The first few months of this year were characterised by the threat of Tata selling off its UK operations, including its plants in Port Talbot and Llanelli, a ‘strategic disaster’ for Wales according to First Minister Carwyn Jones. Then came

the referendum on Europe. The day after the referendum the value of the pound plummeted. At the time of writing in mid October the value of the pound has shed 5% in less than seven trading days. Questions are being raised about the certainty of funding previously guaranteed for Wales. A National Assembly for Wales Research Service report recently summarised that ‘Wales is anticipated to receive around €5bn of EU funding during 2014-2020. Leaving the EU is likely to see access to most if not all of this money disappear in the future.’

If there was ever a need for an answer to Wales’ economic problems it is now. As the IWA’s 2015 report ‘An economic strategy for Wales?’ stated, we urgently need to create an ambitious strategy for the future. Over the past six months we’ve been working on a project which aims to do just that.

‘Re-energising Wales’ looks to create a blueprint, which could be adopted by decision makers, to make Wales a net exporter of renewable energy by 2035. There is no hiding away from the fact that this project is challenging, but there’s also no hiding away from the fact that we need to have a clear strategy and vision for Wales’ economic future.

The project won’t only address the

economic challenges Wales faces, but will present options to meet challenging environmental and decarbonisation targets and include potential solutions to address the looming energy gap facing the UK following moves to stop unabated coal-fired power generation by 2025 and the phasing out of ageing nuclear reactors.

The political climate also raises both opportunities and challenges. We are in the early days of this assembly, a prime time to influence the policies of each party. The project itself is set to run for three years and we anticipate the outcomes will be ready for manifestos at the next assembly election. Yet Brexit has dominated the political agenda in the last few months. If the Welsh ‘Programme for Government’ is anything to go by, the fact that energy is hardly mentioned and there is a complete omission of any mention of ‘energy efficiency’ doesn’t bode well for the Government’s priorities over the next five years. It will be a task to persuade decision makers to focus on the potential of energy for Wales, while hours of debating time is being devoted to the specific implications of leaving the EU.

So, how are we going to convince the Brexit-obsessed Government and Assembly that energy policy could be

the answer to both our economic and environmental woes?

Firstly, we've assembled Wales' leading thinkers on the economy and energy to take part in this project. Chaired by Gareth Wyn Jones, the project's steering group boasts representatives from the academic, policy and practitioner's fields as well as many of the energy network operator companies themselves. We've spent a long time planning this project to ensure it achieves its potential and have broken the project down into six specific work packages.

The project's first work priority, which is due to be delivered in the first year of the project, focuses on energy demand and energy efficiency. The project held a workshop in July to highlight and debate current demand and supply data and assess where current gaps exist. On the back of this workshop, the plan for this work package is to undertake an initial analysis of energy use in Wales focusing on the domestic, commercial, industrial and transport sectors.

We will then use this data and analysis to develop a programme for energy saving, that – if implemented – could increase efficiency and reduce demand across Wales. The way we currently consume energy – largely generated by fossil fuels – is inefficient and any move to increase renewable energy needs to address this first.

This year we will also be undertaking work using the Swansea Bay City Region as a case study. The study will project how future demand could be met by the increase of renewable energy projects and what kind of projects would be needed to do this. Given the current discussion around the Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon and the challenges still facing Tata in Port Talbot and Llanelli, Swansea is the ideal starting point for showing how renewables could transform a local economy. Far from the current centralised energy model, which relies on a national grid and energy usually produced far away from where it is used, the project will explore the potential for a decentralised

energy model, where energy is produced close to where it is used.

These are just our priorities for the next few months and the years that follow will seek to undertake the kind of work that can genuinely get us thinking differently about the Welsh economy. Putting our eggs into the renewable energy basket is genuinely ambitious, but if we carry on with no strategy and the current sticking plaster solutions to our economic problems then Wales' future as a thriving nation looks in doubt. Let's not just think differently but do things differently and then we really might be able to have the kind of strategy that will deliver a devolution dividend for Wales.

 **Shea Jones** is the Re-energising Wales Project Coordinator. If you would like further information about this project please contact him on [shea@iwa.org.uk](mailto:shea@iwa.org.uk)

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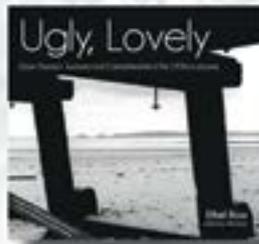
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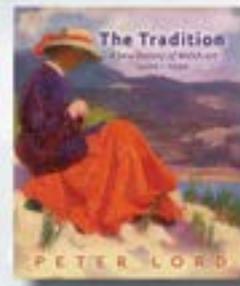
A stunning 1950s photo album made by Ethel Ross depicting the places that Dylan Thomas wove into his work in Swansea and Carmarthenshire is published alongside the first UK edition of the Dylan Thomas playlet *Lunch at Mussolini's*.

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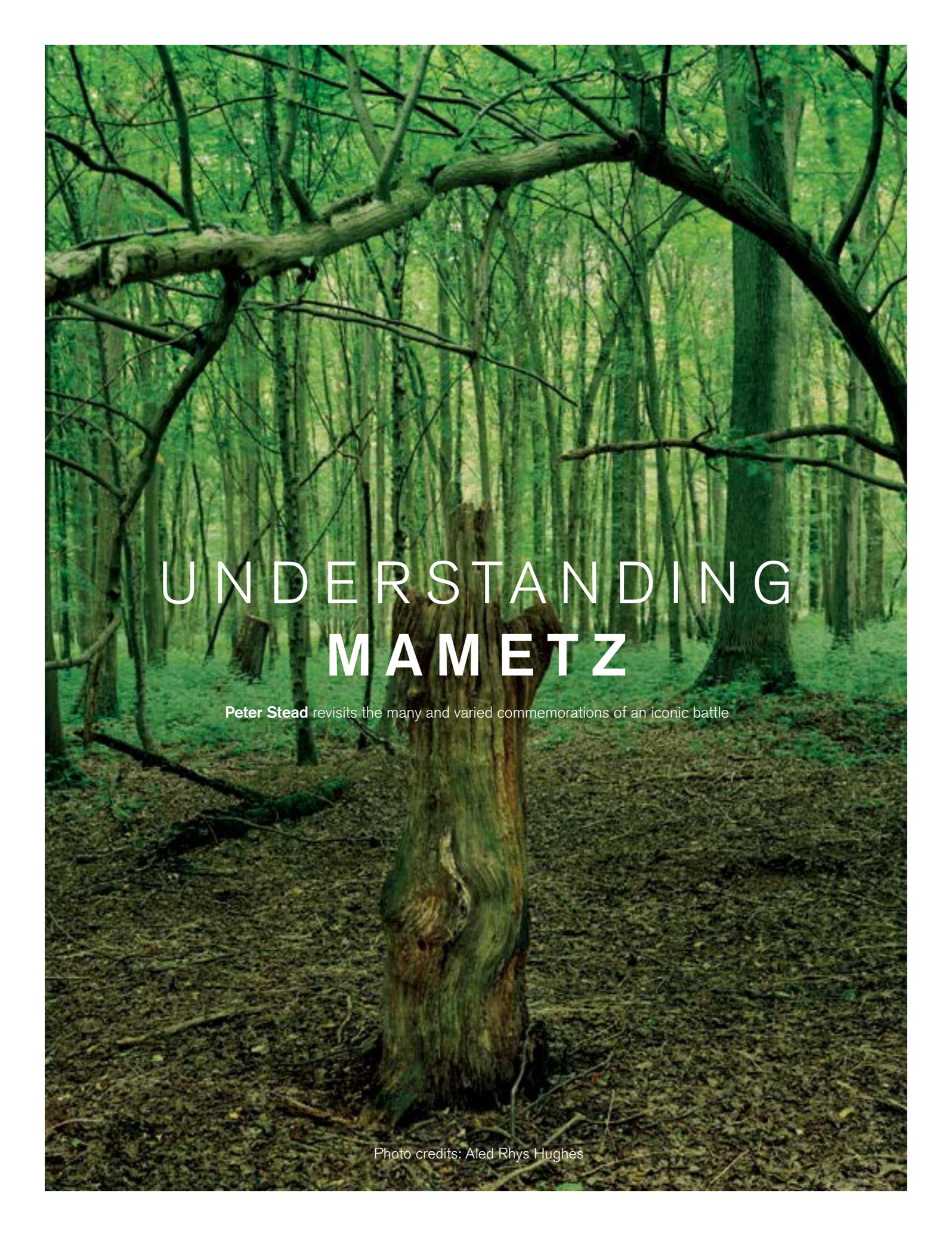
-Murdo Macdonald, Planet

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A photograph of a dense forest with a prominent tree stump in the foreground. The forest floor is covered in fallen leaves and twigs. The trees are tall and thin, with a thick canopy of green leaves. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting a daytime setting. The overall mood is quiet and somewhat somber, reflecting the historical significance of the site.

# UNDERSTANDING MAMETZ

**Peter Stead** revisits the many and varied commemorations of an iconic battle

Photo credits: Aled Rhys Hughes

'The name of Mametz Wood, perhaps like those of Aberfan and Senghennydd, is embedded deeply in the Welsh psyche'. That was the suggestion made by Robin Barlow in his remarkably clear, judicious and timely volume *Wales and World War One* published in 2014. Today few would argue with that assessment, but younger Welsh readers might well be surprised to learn that, however deep the embedding in particular individual and family lives, it had actually taken many decades for there to be any sustained academic or public analysis let alone discussion of Mametz.

Looking back I can recall no mention of Mametz at the schools and university where I studied Welsh history in the 1950s and 60s. As students we nearly all shared an antipathy to that old chestnut exam question on the causes of the First World War, and one sensed the relief of both teachers and pupils when courses tended to expire before battle commenced in 1914. Subsequently one came to appreciate that for mainstream historians the story of domestic politics and social issues took a defining precedence. Diplomatic history was a tedious sideshow whilst military history with all its acronyms, confusing regimental titles, detailed maps and tactical analysis was best left in the hands of specialists and veterans' organisations. What mattered most it seemed, not least in the Wales of the early Twentieth Century, were elections, strikes, and ultimately the rise of the British Welfare State and the rebirth of the nation.

The story of how Mametz wriggled free and gradually entered the public consciousness is quite fascinating. At first there were what we might call 'outliers', one-off volumes, interesting in themselves as reflecting individual experiences and flights of fancy but not particularly in need of being incorporated into the consensual narrative. We all knew of the Welsh dimension in the career of Robert Graves as outlined in his 1929 autobiography *Goodbye to All That* but it was to take years before anyone stopped to analyse what he was saying about Welsh soldiers in the trenches. Similarly with Llewelyn Wyn Griffith's *Up to Mametz*, a volume now regarded as a key Welsh text, but one which, as Jonathan Riley



has explained in an excellent reprint, only sold a thousand copies when first published in 1931. These were interesting authors providing a good read, but 'so what' said the historians and their public. The same was true of all the poets and artists, and not least David Jones: they had catered for belle lettrists and aesthetes; meanwhile historians had other important stories to tell.

The turning point first came with individual readers fortuitously picking up references and then realising that there were countless memories waiting to be released, myriads of fascinating stories yet to be told, huge chapters in our history that remained unopened. The late Colin Hughes has explained how in 1946 he happened to hear a radio dramatisation of David Jones's *In Parenthesis*, which recounted the story of a 1916 battle in which the author had fought. Hughes, a non-professional historian, then commenced research on what he had worked out was officially described as 'the action at Mametz Wood'. He visited both Jones and Wyn Griffith and then wrote to the *Western Mail* inviting replies from those with memories of the fighting. There was a rich response and in 1982 Hughes was able to use this material in his seminal *Mametz: Lloyd George's Welsh Army at the Battle of the Somme*.

Without doubt the modern story

of remembering Mametz begins with the erection on the battlefield of David Petersen's dramatic Red Dragon sculpture in 1987 following fundraising by the south Wales branch of the Western Front Association. At last there was an appropriate focus for formal and informal Welsh visitors to the area but it was still to take a few more years for the events of July 1916 to be fully incorporated into the mainstream of Welsh cultural identity.

In 1998 the BBC producer Chris Morris picked up a copy of Wyn Griffiths' book at Hay and a few years later he asked the poet Owen Sheers to go to Mametz to make a short film about the 1916 battle and its depiction in the works of that remarkable group of poets writers who had actually experienced the fighting. Whilst the film crew were at Mametz, the linked skeletons of twenty soldiers were discovered and this subsequently gave Sheers the material for his poem *Mametz Wood*. The skeletons are graphically described, not least the dropped open jaws (of 'those that have them'):

*as if the notes they had sung  
have only now, with their unearthing,  
Slipped from their absent tongues.*

Now indeed it was time for those notes to be sung in a rapidly changing Wales

in which school teachers were armed with new curricula far more attuned to contemporary, local and cross-cultural issues, now broadcasters were on the outlook for documentary themes and, of course, the internet had encouraged a new army of people wanting both to tell and read particular stories. In a culture in which anniversaries tend to set the agenda it was clear, as 2014 approached, that the commemoration of the Great War was set to transform the place and practice of History in the life of Wales. The veterans themselves had lived out their lives and now it was time for a new age to take up the matter of 1916.

What has now happened is that the public has reclaimed history from academics and in that process the pace has been set by local historians, local societies, local libraries, internet users and broadcasters. In what has been undoubtedly a historiographical revolution pride of place has to go to the cascade of individual stories as families and local researchers reveal just how many ordinary Welsh soldiers communicated their thoughts in letters and diaries and brought home souvenirs and photographs that had been tucked away in corner cupboards. This material has now been given exposure and used to great effect by writers, editors, exhibition organisers, composers, broadcasters and on-liners. There can be few Welsh citizens who have not been given a completely new understanding of the horrors of the Western Front and of how articulate and sophisticated were the responses of the common soldiers recruited from their very own community.

Our commemoration of the War has amounted to a melancholy but utterly worthwhile and enriching festival. My personal highlights have been the NTW staging of Owen Sheers' drama *Mametz* in a barn and wood near Usk, an evening spent relishing the words of Wyn Griffith, David Jones, Sheers himself and ordinary Welsh soldiers and in which we, the audience, 'went over the top'. There were exhibitions galore in Aberystwyth, Swansea and throughout Wales but the one that moved

me most was the NMW treatment of *The Art of Mametz* with Christopher Williams' formidable depiction of the battle's savagery surrounded by the images, words and art of those who had been there at the time. My visit to the gallery coincided with schoolchildren listening to the rendering of songs composed by Helen Wood and based on war writings. Supported by the Lottery, Swansea University researchers used a Roll of Honour belonging to Caersalem Newydd Chapel which listed 81 members who had served in the War to explore the impact of that experience on the community of Treboeth. Personally, I was disappointed by the musical characterisation and staging of Ian Bell's WNO opera *In Parenthesis* but what was more generally pleasing was the way in which much of the forbidding aura surrounding David Jones was brushed away and a variety of broadcasts and exhibitions permitted a new appreciation of all his work and he has been duly awarded an enhanced status in the Welsh pantheon.

Of course, Wales being Wales, the broadcasters entered the scene with all guns firing as it were. The best thing on television was the three part national BBC 2 series *The Somme 1916: from Both Sides of the Wire* presented by the military historian

Peter Barton. Using German sources, Barton convincingly argued that their superior military intelligence and a more developed sense of defensive tactics in what was inevitably a war of attrition ensured heavy British casualties in all the battles that constituted the fighting in Picardy in 1916. In the programme *Wales at the Somme* there was interesting archaeological evidence that used the discovery of additional German defences in the Mametz Wood to show how unfair the criticism had been of the initial fighting of the raw Welsh troops. Otherwise this programme, which focused on the family of the former rugby player Gareth Thomas, was misjudged and the producer would have done better to have worked with the authors of the excellent booklet *The Great War in the Garw*: we would then at least have learnt something about Gareth's two uncles who died at Mametz and the (unnamed) village of which they were a product. The value of using qualified presenters was evident in excellent programmes led by Owen Sheers (on David Jones), Kim Howells (on artists), Eddie Butler (on particular towns and especially Swansea) and Deidre Beddoe (on women).

There will be few complaints from



the Somme area about any shortage of visitors from Wales. Our politicians, broadcasters, researchers and families of the deceased have certainly walked where our heroes fell. It is almost miraculous then that in so many programmes what was conveyed was the gently undulating contours of this chalk landscape, its totally ageless pastoral beauty and above all its haunting emptiness. It's as if the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a whole, let alone the bloodiest battle in history, had passed this place by. Much of this is fully conveyed in the photographs of Aled Rhys Hughes which have been on exhibition in Wales and are now published in a volume entitled *Mametz*. Several of these photographs are quite stunning but ultimately I find this a confusing publication. At its best it is essentially a celebration of the unchanging beauty of rural France, those photos which include minor items of war detritus seem staged and trivial whilst those which include small Welsh flags unfortunately border on the ludicrous. In an accompanying essay, the poet Jeremy Hooker eloquently relates the photographs to the thoughts of David Jones but his argument that '*This wood in France is a Welsh wood... an outpost of the Welsh nation*' indicates that we are heading into shaky territory somewhat removed from the experiences of 1916. Just as it could be argued that David Jones is at his best when he is dealing with real people rather than myths, so war photography is most meaningful when we see something of the men who did the fighting. I found that the best of these photos had far more effect when used as individual illustrations in other publications. Here the photographer has rather over-egged it. One of the essential points about Mametz was the sheer difficulty of hand-to-hand combat in a wood. As Andrew Green has pointed out, the spirit and menace of Mametz Wood is best captured in Edward Henry Handley-Read's 1916 painting of that name which is in the Glynn Vivian.

For some years now Jonathan Hicks has played a prominent part in offering politicians, his readers and his pupils at St. Cyres School

in Penarth a fuller understanding of the place of the Great War in the history of Wales. In his latest volume *The Welsh at Mametz Wood* he attempts, as Michael Renshaw did in an earlier and reprinted volume, to come to some conclusion on the controversial issue of how the Welsh soldiers performed at Mametz and in this respect he confirms the general consensus that Hughes, Barlow and most military historians accept: the initial mistaken optimism and bad decisions of generals led to heavy casualties but, overall, the troops themselves fought bravely. He explains the identity and role of the various units of the 38th (Welsh) Division and tells the story of the six day battle. Throughout his account he briefly fills in the career background of those doing the fighting. All of this adds up to a veritable and invaluable Mametz compendium.

Undoubtedly it is the career details, often accompanied by quotations from letter, diaries and newspapers, as well as photographs, that give this book its true value. In his earlier crime novel, *The Dead of Mametz* (2011), Dr. Hicks illustrated that the men fighting in France were only a day's travel away from home: at one point the military policeman Captain Oscendale takes a few days to nip over from the Front to chase up a line of inquiry at a brilliantly evoked copper works in Swansea. We are reminded that the whole story of Mametz has two settings, one in Picardy and one in Wales. In telling the story of the battle Dr. Hicks constantly reminds us that the soldiers, however raw, had taken with them to France the skills, values and personalities they had developed at home. His point is that the troops, including the 4,000 Mametz casualties, were the products of a distinct but varied Welsh society, 'a citizen force' who were fighting because of the degree to which they related to a society that had given them an identity. This was far less to do with any modern or ancient sense of a Welsh nation but rather with the skills, pastimes and cultural values that had characterised Edwardian society in Wales. It is in the work of historians like Dr Hicks and Gwyn Prescott (who has looked at rugby's response to war) that we discover the full lives of Welsh soldiers and the richly textured

and dynamic society that they had helped to create and for which they now fought.

Professor Huw Bowen has quite rightly urged us to study Mametz in the context of the wider battle of the Somme that was being fought by the British Army and we need to recall that there are sections of Picardy that will forever be part of Accrington, Sheffield, Barnsley, Leeds and Grimsby, not to mention Newfoundland. Of course there was a strong Welsh dimension in the recruitment and deployment of Welsh volunteers, and there may well have been traces of prejudice in some contemporary military assessments, but we do a grave disservice to those soldiers of 1916 if we use them to buttress our own political sense of Wales rather than considering their own cultural values. Mametz, the Somme as a whole, was a great tragedy. The commemoration of 2016 has left me horrified by all that the men and their families went through but I am also left with a tremendous pride in the Wales of which they were products. In their work, chapels, choirs, unions, teams and communities they had developed skills, loyalties and values that they knew were worth fighting for. I have no doubt that in Wales we lost a remarkable generation and we had later to pay a price for that. The 600 who died at Mametz are a convenient focus for the more than 30,000 Welsh combatants who died in The Great War, a War after which Wales was never quite the same, perhaps never quite so complex, confident and dynamic.

- Aled Rhys Hughes, *Mametz*, Seren
- Jonathan Hicks, *The Welsh at Mametz Wood*, *The Somme 1916*, Y Lolfa
- Jonathan Hicks, *The Dead of Mametz*, Y Lolfa



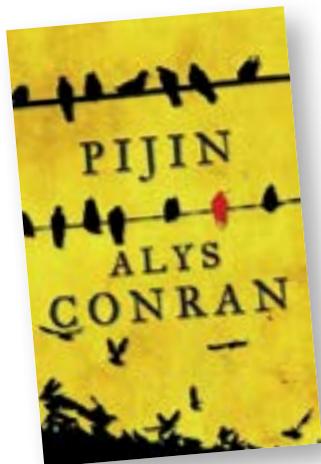
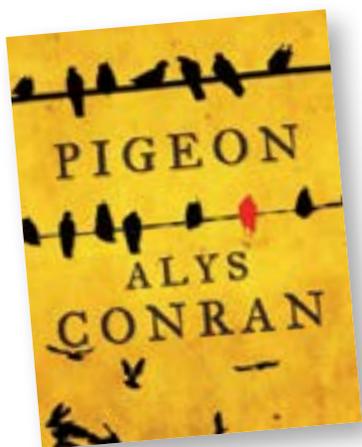
**Professor Peter Stead** is a writer and broadcaster. He provided the Foreword to Frank Richards' *Old Soldiers Never Die* in Parthian's Library of Wales series.

# Reviews

Pigeon & Pijin | The Eisteddfod | Ritual, 1969 | Crossings: A Journey Through Borders | The Immigration Handbook | Asylum | Tryweryn: A Nation Awakes – The Story of a Welsh Freedom Fighter | The Greasy Poll | Our Changing Land: Revisiting Gender, Class and Identity in Contemporary Wales

## The peculiar case of Pigeon and Pijin

Lleucu Siencyn reviews two versions of the same book and assesses the implications of a Welsh literary first



*Pigeon*, the debut novel by Alys Conran, was published by Parthian Books in May this year. *Pijin*, by Sian Northey, was published on exactly the same day. You needn't be a fluent Welsh-speaker to work out that the latter is a translation of the former.

There will always be debates and discussions on the relative value and importance of literary translations. Although (one would hope) it's fairly easy to understand the importance of translating Welsh-language books into English – the ability to introduce our excellent literature to the wider world – traffic the other way round can sometimes, frustratingly, cause confusion. 'If all Welsh-speakers can also speak English fluently, what is the point of translating

*Under Milk Wood* into Welsh?' Even the word 'translation' can be misleading. Many authors, including T James Jones, who turned *Under Milk Wood* into *Dan y Wenallt*, preferred the word 'adaptation'.

Literary translation is not always an easy subject to broach, particularly in Wales. It can open a can of worms full of misunderstandings and prejudices. Which makes that day in May, when *Pigeon* and *Pijin* came out simultaneously, even more peculiar. Parthian Books were justifiably proud of the literary first when they said ahead of the launch: "This month, for what we believe to be the first time ever in Wales, we will launch one novel in both Welsh and English on the same day."

Translation itself isn't unusual, nor is translating from English to Welsh. However, releasing the two versions simultaneously, and co-promoting both, had never been done before. There would be risks involved, of course. What if the translated version sold better than the original? Or what if it didn't sell at all, because we can all read the English version anyway?

The dual publication in two languages prompted some interesting discussions during the book's promotional tour. And rather than detract attention from the novel itself, I think it added a valuable dimension to its main themes and characters. The blurb describes the novel as a 'tragic, occasionally hilarious and ultimately intense story of a childhood friendship and how it's torn apart, a story of guilt, silence and the loss of innocence, and a story about the kind of love which may survive it all.'

It's also a book about language, memory, and the tragic consequences of forgetting. The eponymous hero is a young boy called Pigeon, whose life is a disaster. He lives in a damp shed, his mother is mentally unwell, his stepfather is abusive, and the respectable middle-class Welsh-speaking community shuns him. The only good things in his life are his best friend Iola, who looks up to him, and his strange obsession with words.

Both Iola and Pigeon are fluent Welsh-speakers, as are most of the cast of characters, which of course is common in many small towns in north Wales. Much of the dialogue includes words or phrases in Welsh, and they are not necessarily explained in English. When I read the English version first, I wondered how these words might appear to a non-Welsh speaker – was I able to

## Literary translation is not always an easy subject to broach, particularly in Wales. It can open a can of worms full of misunderstandings and prejudices. Which makes that day in May, when *Pigeon* and *Pijin* came out simultaneously, even more peculiar.

understand the book a little better than them? Then I read Sian Northey's translation, and I became even more fascinated. How could Sian convey these potentially alien-sounding words back to Welsh? What happens when a dialogue appears in the language it was meant to be originally – does it lose the impact and subtlety of the English version?

Sian Northey has managed to remain true to the central theme of dual language by including a number of English words and phrases in her translation. She inverted the text, so that the flow of Welsh on the page is occasionally disturbed, just as the Welsh words disrupts the original English version.

Where the two versions get interesting is towards the end, when Pigeon returns after spending a considerable stretch in a prison in England. This experience has caused him to

forget his Welsh, and he now speaks English to Iola, although she still tries to speak Welsh to him. This is very cleverly conveyed in both languages, each one offering a different type of poignancy: more direct in Welsh, and more opaque in English. The 'hiraeth' of losing your language is immediately understood by most Welsh-speakers. However, these feelings sometimes go unacknowledged in English.

This, for me, is the central theme of the novel, which succeeds in exploring the decline of the language without glorifying its status or speakers. I found the loss of Pigeon's Welsh utterly heart-breaking, but very truthful. It's not so much that he has rejected Welsh, but that Welsh – and the well-behaved chapel culture as portrayed in the novel – has rejected him, and was unwilling to offer a hand of friendship or hope.

In an interview in the *New Welsh Review*, Alys Conran explained how she chose the unusual name of the main character:

'Look up pigeon in your good field guide, if you have one', says Simon Barnes in *The Bad Birdwatcher's Companion*. 'You will probably find that the pigeon does not exist'. I felt that about many of the children I knew growing up. Their stories pecked around in the background, unheard. The child whose mother left his hair uncombed every time after the nit treatment, little black bugs paralysed in his mousy locks. The girl who regularly had cigarette burns on her china-white hands. The faltering teenager who told what was done to her at youth club, and was disbelieved. There are a lot of pigeons in Wales.

Growing up in rural Welsh-speaking west Wales, I also knew a lot of pigeons – and they were also left out on the fringes of the more 'respectable' society. These pigeons don't often appear in Welsh-language literature. But thanks to Alys Conran's excellent debut, and Sian Northey's remarkable translation, they do now. I would recommend this book to anyone, whatever language they choose to read.

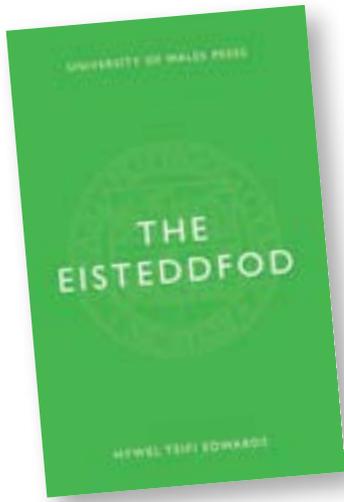
Sian Northey has managed to remain true to the central theme of dual language by including a number of English words and phrases in her translation. She inverted the text, so that the flow of Welsh on the page is occasionally disturbed, just as the Welsh words disrupts the original English version.



Lleucu Siencyn is Chief Executive of Literature Wales

## The Eisteddfod

Hywel Teifi Edwards  
University of Wales Press, 2016  
Jon Gower



This brisk and jaunty history charts the Eisteddfod's evolution from its beginnings as a 'medieval testing-ground-cum-house-of-correction for professional bards and minstrels' into a popular festival. Along the way we hear about skulduggery and bardic shenanigans, such as the way in which Maelgwn Gwynedd weighted a 6th century competition in Conway between bards and minstrels by insisting that they should warm up by swimming the river. Weighted down by the harps they carried on their backs, the minstrels promptly lost. As Hywel Teifi Edwards teasingly admits, this is a story that deserves to be true.

The noun 'eisteddfod' derives from the verb 'eistedd' (to sit) and literally means a sitting together, but despite the fact that such

sit-ins or sit-downs have been taking place in Wales since at least as far back as 1176, this book concentrates on the National Eisteddfod, one of Europe's largest and oldest festivals.

One of the consistent pleasures of reading this little tome is the humour and irreverence consistently at play. The Gwyneddigion, exiled Welsh in London, are described as a 'breakaway group of malcontents,' while the famous Caerwys eisteddfodau are 'clinics for the examination of failing bards.' Referring to chapel-driven censorship of carnal verse, the author suggests that Nonconformity was finally showing its teeth, or perhaps its dentures.

This is history engagingly told, the text shot through with the bigger-than-

and 500 dollars to boot. It tells of the huge crowds who saluted their heroes in the festival's Victorian heyday and of some bitter rivalries between poets, who would stoop pretty low to gain a crown, including doctoring each other's work on the sly.

The volume also looks at the way in which the Eisteddfod reacted to the times, not least to the psychic damage wrought upon Welsh speakers by the iniquities of the so-called Blue Books, which catalogued the educational wants and moral laxities of the Welsh as observed by monoglot English inspectors. It charts the way in which its principal literary competitions reacted to wars and world events, not forgetting that perennial bardic concern – the Welsh

**The Gwyneddigion, exiled Welsh in London, are described as a 'breakaway group of malcontents,' while the famous Caerwys eisteddfodau are 'clinics for the examination of failing bards.'**

life character of the Eisteddfod's principal chronicler. So there are funny neologisms, such as 'epicitis' – referring to an outbreak of epic poetry that persisted long after other countries had recovered from it and turned to the novel and drama for literary sustenance. And sometimes the gags come in the shape of aphorisms: 'From time to time, the prospect of competition, like the prospect of hanging, does concentrate the mind.'

Much of *The Eisteddfod* concentrates on its literary output down the centuries, including its manifestations in Chicago in 1893 where the winning bard won a chair

language itself. Not that this was always safeguarded, as there were dark times when people would have been happy to see it turn into a celebration of music rather than literature and have readily shed the ancient, stubborn language like an unwanted skin.

In some respects the book (first published in 1990) is already a tad outdated, as it predicts a dearth of young poets when the Eisteddfodau of recent years have seen a bright generation of gifted bards shine and illuminate quite brilliantly. But as an entry-level guide to the peripatetic cultural circus that is the Eisteddfod this is as good as its gets, and Edwards continues to be its most affable guide.

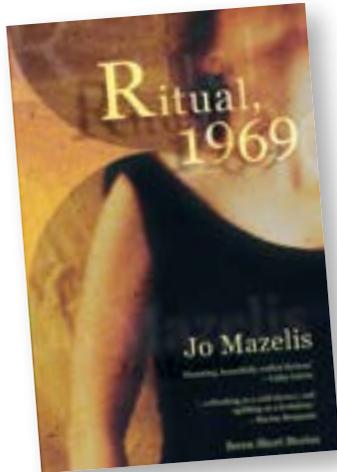
**Much of *The Eisteddfod* concentrates on its literary output down the centuries, including its manifestations in Chicago in 1893 where the winning bard won a chair and 500 dollars to boot.**

**Jon Gower** is a writer and broadcaster. He is currently writing a book about the artist John Selway.

## Ritual, 1969

Jo Mazelis  
Seren, 2015

Steph Power



There is a haunting strangeness to Jo Mazelis' third collection of short stories, *Ritual, 1969*; an unsettling mix of recognition and displacement within the sharp-angled, grainy photography of her prose. In nineteen tautly written tales, the award-winning novelist proves once again adept at opening doors onto closed worlds.

Mazelis shows no desire to co-opt our sympathy for her conflicted and downtrodden female protagonists. Nonetheless, she catches and holds us fast in scenarios which are at once liminal bordering on the supernatural, yet wholly real and anchored in the everyday. Indeed, liminality is an important key to this collection. In it Mazelis explores, without succumbing to grimness or inertia, a range of themes around adolescence, death, isolation, abuse and, above all, what it means to be a girl or woman. Each story is either located in the past, or alludes to one through consequences or the tricks of memory.

'Ritual, 1969' is one of five tales which focus on an event in that particular year. However, there is no obvious reason for the date, nor are these happenings directly linked from story to story. Or are they? Is

**Between each of Mazelis' characters and their tales lies a tapestry of possibility; of similarity and difference linking them and the reader. Time becomes dislocated or held in suspension...**

the unnamed 'dead girl (who is not really dead)' of the opening 'Levitation, 1969' the same girl who is ritualistically held aloft by five chanting others in a seeming addendum to the title story? This latter concerns a 'teacher, a woman of around forty' who could just as easily be a portrait of that same, troubled child now grown, disappointed, into a dyspeptic pre-middle age.

Between each of Mazelis' characters and their tales lies a tapestry of possibility; of similarity and difference linking them and the reader. Time becomes dislocated or held in suspension – just as happens in ritual spaces, which the author evokes in a profusion of ways from the literal to the metaphorical; from faintly macabre children's games and unhappy ghosts seeking closure to the unending rackets of adult life in which petty-minded gossip gets repeated, chant-like unto ennui. Over all hang the cycles of abuse and its counter, survival, which get handed down the generations.

Fathers are everywhere: absent, neglectful, and often menacingly present. In 'Prayer, 1969', following his funeral, Mazelis writes of (another?) teacher, 'As usual the memory of her father took on an almost tangible form.' In 'The Green Hour', a girl meets the painter Rodin and will become his model and lover. Of her first impressions we are told, 'He reminded her of her father. Except that her father's gaze came with a disapproving silence.'

Mazelis is deft at suggestion; from phantasmagoric threat to wry social observation, saying much with a few well-chosen words. The eponymous Mrs

Dundridge, for example, 'was extravagant with boiling water. She bathed every day. Her neighbours often commented on it.' Throughout, there is a catalogue of boredom and uncertainty threaded with despair and a mainly, but not entirely, psychological violence. Yet Mazelis' authorial voice is never bitter or morose, nor do her protagonists become mere passive victims. With an uncanny ability to look sideways at her subject, Mazelis ensures that we remain sceptical of quick judgements or moral assumptions. Her neglected children can be cruel, just as her tyrants can show sudden generosity.

This collection, as with Mazelis' earlier work, succeeds not only through the succinct beauty of her writing, but because she never allows herself to wallow or preach. A strong sense of play and a stoic optimism underpin the grit à la film director Mike Leigh, blowing fresh air into each, powerfully ambivalent tale: 'Fail at everything. But listen. Listen. Flowers, leaves, branches all reach for the sun.'



**Steph Power** is a freelance composer and writer on music and culture for *The Independent*, and *Wales Arts Review* (as music editor) and she is editor of a forthcoming bimonthly, *Sounds Like Now*. Her poetry has been published by *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Poetry Wales* and *The Lonely Crowd*.

## Crossing Borders

### Crossings: A Journey Through Borders

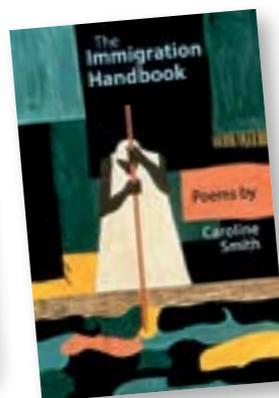
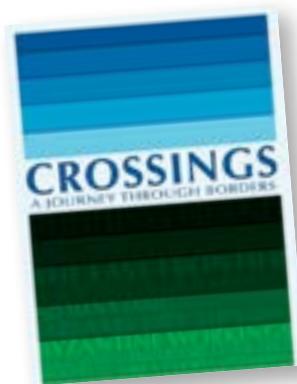
Nicholas Murray  
Seren, 2016

### The Immigration Handbook

Caroline Smith  
Seren, 2016

### Asylum

Eric Ngalle Charles  
Hafan, 2016



Dylan Moore

'Contemporary global politics are dominated by the worldwide refugee crisis,' asserts Nicholas Murray in the opening sentence of *Crossings*, an attempt to produce a multi-faceted meditation on the very idea of the border. Comprising twenty-five essays divided into two uneven sections, the book crosses literal frontiers all over the world and perambulates around the idea of borders in Murray's adopted home county Radnorshire.

Murray is a genial guide, both to places and ideas. His careful prose strikes a warm and gentle tone, easily letting the reader in; it's like reading Paul Theroux without a linear journey. Instead, we cross borders of class and privilege in Geneva and at Eton (where Murray makes the terrible *faux pas* of requesting a fee), get ripped off by Romanian train ticket conductors on the Transbalkan Express and make the acquaintance of Chinese hyper-capitalists. We visit the literary border country of James Joyce's Trieste, cross the left-right divide in politics

and even meditate on the ultimate frontier between life and death.

As the specificities of Europe's crisis – Schengen, the collapse of respect for the Dublin Regulation, the role of Turkey – are argued over in the day-to-day media, Murray's choice to strip back the arguments to philosophical fundamentals is a useful one. What are borders? What function do they serve? Could we do without them?

We begin in Melilla, one of two Spanish enclaves in Morocco. In recent years, the 'tiny thumbprint' has found itself on the frontline of an upsurge in international migration and the often ugly politics that has been its complement. Murray, an erstwhile assistant secretary of the Bermondsey Labour Party, comes across as being firmly on the liberal left when it comes to issues of migration – not that the politics is dominant or overt.

*Crossings* comes from oblique, unexpected angles and hits a turning point in

chapter 13 – 'In Praise of Frontiers' – which quotes the unlikely source of Régis Debray. As a former comrade of Che Guevara in Bolivia, the now ageing French intellectual is perhaps an unexpected advocate of the frontier. Murray himself mostly characterises borders as 'divisive, even racist, unnecessary' – but Debray comes from a culture where Utopia comes *sans frontières* to the extent that he can joke about it only being a matter of time before we have Customs Officials Without Borders. More seriously, Debray tackles the idea that a borderless world would be a homogenous one, and celebrates the idiosyncrasies of feeling allegiance to one's own particular *quartier*.

In some ways, it's a shame Murray doesn't go further in presenting Debray's ideas or in countering his arguments, perhaps more disappointing still that Debray's book – which seems likely to have been the catalyst for his own – is the only serious reading he seems to have done on the matter. But *Crossings* is not that kind of book. Instead it's experiential. Murray's thoughts about borders are not definitive. Relating his own teenage experience of feeling depressed and 'divided', his only real conclusion is that his own being 'not an easy believer' has led to his life split between travelling the world and 'the fugitive margins' of New Radnor. Having said that, *Crossings* is a book to revisit and ruminate on further, especially as world events unfold.

Also published by Seren, Caroline Smith's collection of poems, *The Immigration*

**Relating his own teenage experience of feeling depressed and 'divided', his only real conclusion is that his own being 'not an easy believer' has led to his life split between travelling the world and 'the fugitive margins' of New Radnor.**

## The writing is raw, intense and veers violently, like the lives of refugees themselves, between the tragic and the farcical, the impossibly savage and the banal.

*Handbook*, is a far more specific affair. Taking as its cue Smith's role as asylum caseworker for a London MP, the poet opens up a series of windows into the lives of refugees caught up in the bureaucracies of the UK asylum process. Titles hint at the tension between people and system. 'Mrs Shah's Complaint', 'Jozef Rexha - salesman', 'Mr Giang' and 'Dr Gopha' all deal with individuals with names and, therefore, voices - but just as in reality, it is the cold, impersonal language of bureaucracy that dominates: other poems include 'Selection', 'Asylum Documents', 'Pro Bono 1', 'Spouse Visa', 'Removal', 'Home Office Files' and 'New email address' and 'Surgery Note 2'.

The language of paperwork perhaps

diminishes the power and quality of *The Immigration Handbook* as poetry, but it certainly works to bear out the opening epigraph, a quotation from Lord Bingham: 'It reduces the weight otherwise to be accorded to the requirements of firm and fair immigration control, if the delay is shown to be the result of a dysfunctional system which yields unpredictable, inconsistent or unfair outcomes.'

The experiences of the 'characters' in the book - almost certainly based on real people - strongly suggest that the asylum system is indeed dysfunctional, and the realism within Eric Ngalle Charles' docu-drama *Asylum* provides further direct proof. Charles, originally from Cameroon, is one

of the founders of Swansea-based Hafan Books, which has been publishing the work of refugees themselves since 2003. *Asylum* is an insider's view of the process. Comprising poetry, prose and drama, the book follows an 'everyman' asylum seeker, Abdul from Eritrea, as he navigates the Immigration Interview Room at the Home Office, Migrant Help, Lynx House and the Trinity Centre in Cardiff.

The writing is raw, intense and veers violently, like the lives of refugees themselves, between the tragic and the farcical, the impossibly savage and the banal. *Asylum* is unvarnished and all the better for it. Charles' recent success with a show at the Southbank in London - *My Mouth Brought Me Here* - makes his a name to watch and a voice to listen to.

**Dylan Moore** is Comment and Analysis Editor at the IWA.



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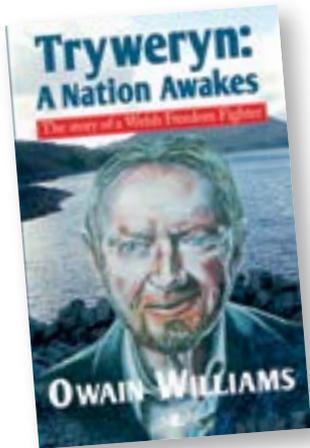
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**Taking Wales to the world and bringing the world to Wales**

## Tryweryn: A Nation Awakes - the Story of a Welsh Freedom Fighter

Owain Williams  
Y Lolfa, 2015

Aled Eirug



*Tryweryn: A Nation Awakes* is the intriguing and entertaining autobiography of Owain Williams, otherwise named 'Now Gwynus' after his home farm on the Llyn Peninsula in Gwynedd. He is also known as a former leader of the violent nationalist *Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru*, (Movement for the Defence of Wales) and one of the 1963 'Tryweryn bombers'. In the 1990s, Williams turned to conventional politics and set up his own local nationalist party (if that is not an oxymoron): *Llais Gwynedd* (the Voice of Gwynedd).

It is a derring-do account of one of the leaders of a small strand of Welsh nationalism that arguably owes more to

the Republican violent tradition of Ireland than contemporary Welsh nationalism and its less romantic journey to national self-determination through the committee rooms of Westminster and Cardiff Bay. Apart from the dramatic arson attack on the bombing school in the same area of Gwynedd in 1936, the recent history of Welsh nationalism has not only been peaceful but pacifist.

A romantic figure, Williams worked on a Canadian ranch before returning to Pwllheli to run a trendy espresso bar while driving an American Ford Customline. His beliefs were formed by his frustration with Plaid Cymru's 'stagnant pacifists bereft of ideas or vision'. In spite of Wales's unanimity against the proposal, the party was unable to stop the drowning of the Tryweryn Valley in the heartland of Welsh speaking Wales and in this book, Williams describes his action in planting an explosion at the electricity transformer for the site, which roused a new national consciousness. The reservoir was built, and Williams went on to attempt to blow up an electricity pylon at Gellilydan, near Trawsfynydd - but this time he was caught. After a year in prison, he again found himself pursued by the police for his involvement in other bombing incidents, and he went on the run in Ireland before being arrested at gunpoint at Birmingham Airport.

Williams was shunned by the official Welsh nationalist movement in the 1960s but his intriguing links with Irish Republicans cannot be dismissed lightly. In his time in Ireland, he was sheltered by Sean Mac Stiofain, one of the founders and the first chief of staff of the Provisional IRA, who, according to Williams, knew the Welsh

**A romantic figure, Williams worked on a Canadian ranch before returning to Pwllheli to run a trendy espresso bar while driving an American Ford Customline.**

scene very well. The author does not speculate, but it would be intriguing to know whether these contacts were maintained during the heyday of the Provisional IRA's fearful campaigns in the 1970s and 80s.

This was the period of the emergence of the Welsh Language Society and the Investiture of the Prince of Wales in 1969 which polarised the nationalist movement and isolated those who opposed Prince Charles as the successor to the Welsh Princes and Llywelyn ein Llyw Olaf. Williams was brought back to stand trial at Caernarfon Assizes but was acquitted on charges in relation to an arson attack on a nightclub. However, the police had not finished with him, and he alleges that Special Branch tried to kill him by cutting through the brakes of his car.

For the past 26 years, he has been a Gwynedd councillor, standing as an Independent Nationalist in the name of Llais Gwynedd, and has been a thorn in the side of the Plaid establishment in what has traditionally been its stronghold. This autobiography also raises some interesting questions that the author obviously does not wish to pursue, namely how widespread was the conspiracy of his bomb-laying organisation, MAC, what the link was with the other convicted leader of 1960s nationalist terrorism, John Jenkins, and whether there was a link with the arson campaign against holiday homes in the 1980s, either in terms of the people involved, or in practical support provided.

Williams, for possibly understandable reasons, fails to address these questions, but this does not detract from a ripping good yarn told by an engaging story-teller.

**Williams was shunned by the official Welsh nationalist movement in the 1960s but his intriguing links with Irish Republicans cannot be dismissed lightly. In his time in Ireland, he was sheltered by Sean Mac Stiofain, one of the founders and the first chief of staff of the Provisional IRA, who, according to Williams, knew the Welsh scene very well.**

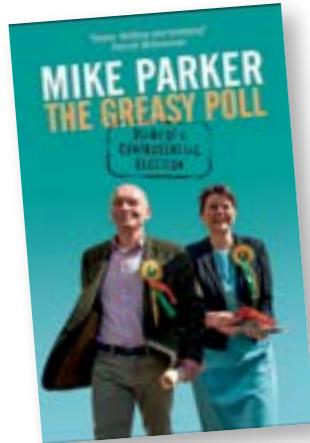
## The Greasy Poll

Mike Parker  
Y Lolfa, 2016

This is a scintillating read, brilliantly and honestly written by a writer who became the Plaid candidate for Ceredigion in the 2015 General Election. I read this pager-turner in less than a day and was captivated by his diary of a dramatic and dreadful year that should warn any self-regarding fool against venturing into the profoundly depressing morass of what passes for party politics.

Parker is incisive, charmingly, and sometimes naively, idealistic, and describes in unnerving detail how he was totally shafted by the cowardly nastiness of the *Cambrian News*, whose editor, Beverley Davies and lead reporter Chris Betteley, should forever hang their heads in shame for concocting a story based on an article written by him fourteen years previously in which they accused him of attacking English incomers (such as Parker himself!). The delight of this book is the author's honesty and fair-mindedness and sufficient emotional intelligence to understand that as a novel candidate for Plaid in Cardiganshire – English, gay, living 4.9 miles out of the constituency, and wearing an earring that was only removed in the latter stages of the campaign – he was up against it in a traditional rural and conservative constituency.

Whilst he brings to life his relationships with his fellow candidates, including the callow Huw Thomas and the perpetual Welsh learner, Mark Williams, he is at his best describing the interplay with his own party, and especially the cultural jump many needed to make in the constituency to accept an English candidate for Plaid. His portrayal of Leanne Wood is touchingly human and captures the emotional vicissitudes of the election campaign, while his fleeting vision of local Assembly Member Elin Jones as an all-seeing Angela Merkel figure, who knows everyone worth knowing in the constituency, will linger in the memory.



## Our Changing Land: Revisiting Gender, Class and Identity in Contemporary Wales

Dawn Mannay (ed.)  
University of Wales Press, 2016



This book revisits seminal writings about Wales and Welsh life in the nineties, and owes its existence to two publications – *Our Sisters' Land* (1989), a groundbreaking work which dealt with changing identities in women's lives as they managed the balance between private and public lives, and *Contemporary Wales*, published between 1987 and 2014, described as 'arguably the leading journal of modern Welsh public life for over three decades'. It affords the opportunity for academics to reflect in a contemporary setting how Wales has developed – or regressed – in twelve chapters that consider three distinct yet overlapping themes, Wales,

The collection highlights the increase of social inequality since the nineties, and analyses the role of women within education and the sacrifices they have to make to get a foothold on the ladder of professional development.

Welshness and Language; Education, Markets and Gender, and Welsh Public Life, Social Policy, Class and Inequality.

There are important contributions here by Non Geraint, updating Gruffudd's work in 1997, on the theme of language use in schools and communities, the editor's own article on gender and housework and the legacy of the 'Welsh Mam' for Welsh women, and Adamson's depressing reflection that, in fifteen years of devolution, little has improved for the poor.

The collection highlights the increase of social inequality since the nineties, and analyses the role of women within education and the sacrifices they have to make to get a foothold on the ladder of professional development. Whilst the editor of this fascinating collection of essays strives to stay optimistic about Wales' progress since devolution, her dark warning expressed in a poem by one of the new voices contained within this collection is powerful and ominous:

*And I dream of a future, where the  
government try  
To do right by the people, just living  
their lives  
But we're stuck in a system, funding's  
cut by the knife.*

**Aled Eirug** was BBC Wales' Head of News and Current Affairs from 1992-2003 before becoming the constitutional adviser to the Presiding Office of the National Assembly of Wales from 2006-2011. He has also been chair of the Welsh Refugee Council and of the British Council in Wales.

# 'Fancy a crack at the Last Word?' they asked at the special IWA Bunker.

## Mat Mathias

'Ooo how exciting,' said I. The reason for the yes is that I have never experienced having the last word before, at all, never, in my life ever.

Then I found out it would be for *Agenda* which is printed and everything. Now that's even more exciting. Printed copies of anything are great, something real that I can hold in my hands; that I can keep. Don't get me wrong, I am no Luddite, I enjoy reading online as much as the next person but it's so bloody modern, so bloody ephemeral, so bloody here now and gone now in a minute, it's real but at the same time not real at all, like Brexit or a manifesto commitment.

Give me printed anytime. I've still got my favourite *Agenda* from last year where the cover featured Stephen Crabb's face staring out at me looking all *grrr* and manly as if out of shot he's wearing rugby kit or military combats and after the photo shoot he is off to chop wood with an axe or enjoy DIY.

I'm informed by the younger generation – with their beards, quinoa and in a few years only being able to travel in Europe with a visa – that the problem with print is that news happens so fast that by the time you read something, it may already be out of date. That, of course is bull mud; news is happening as fast as it always was, although perhaps a little weirder. What we get more of is fuff or opinions as facts. When something happens I want to hear from a professionally trained, well briefed journalist telling me what, why, who and when, not from Barbara just because she comes from the over the road.

But maybe the Pokemon catchers are correct. Maybe this is why I am not allowed the last word in any part of my life. The world is going bananas. In the time between me writing and you reading, Jeremy Corbyn may already have been challenged in the annual Labour leadership competition. If I could offer one bit of advice to Labour, which I am sure they will be glad to hear, it's to make sure there is an extremely lengthy and nasty lead up to the announcement. Nothing says joyous engagement more than two blokes repeating the same thing every week for three or more

months – sexy. To make it even better I would also add in a selection of nasty supporters from both sides who spend hours in their bedrooms in front of their laptops trolling anybody who deviates from what they consider a 'true' member. They really are members.

Is Jeremy Corbyn a naughty boy or is he the messiah? He has the beard and the initials but I can't imagine the original, when faced with Pontius Pilate, stating: 'Prefect, I have had thousands of my followers contact me and I have here a papyrus scroll from Bathsheba, who is a housewife from west Gallilee, asking about Roman taxation, she says....'

Thinking about the People's Judean Front or the People's Front of Judea, I wonder if Nathan Gill and Neil and Christine Hamilton will have made up by the time you read this. I think it really does show the immaturity of UKIP as a political party that two people can't work together because they cannot stand each other, when that is the modus operandi for all the other parties.

It's early days for the fifth Assembly term so other than the soap opera of personality we can't judge UKIP yet but as the pantomime villains they are adding a certain *frizzante* to proceedings in the Senedd chamber. Good.

I want First Minister's Questions (FMQs) to be a bit frisky. I love the loud, comedic, visceral, serious theatre of PMQs; why not in the Senedd? If the Boretrons want serious politics, they should bog off and sit through a committee for three hours: that's serious politics. At least let's have one bit of a spectacle, yeah?

I was worried when Kirsty Williams was subsumed into Government as I used to love her performances in the chamber. However, FMQs has improved nonetheless. A lot less 'will the First Minister agree with me' (nails down blackboard) but more proper questioning, especially from the leaders, serious stuff with a bit of humour and guile. Even Carwyn has joined in – by answering questions and standing up straight. Hamilton *sans* Christine has settled well into this role but with his crisp anglo-tones and slow

deliberate delivery I can't watch him without picturing him in a cloak with a high collar like a baddie in a sci-fi film.

Actually I am being a little middle-aged about all this. You are reading this a couple of weeks in the future and if 2016 keeps going the way it has anything could be happening. The settled will of the people is about as settled as what the media call Isis (Isil? Daesh? Islamic state? the terrorist group formerly known as Prince? Jeff?). We moaned about spin in the Blair years. If spin is a biased interpretation, what do we have now? Plain lies. Opinion as fact? What are we getting from some politicians? Declarations of how things are rather than policies for the future (i.e austerity is wrong rather than telling us how to achieve the alternative).

- £350 million pounds every week for the NHS – **fact**
- The immediate collapse of the UK after a Brexit vote – **fact**
- Also following a Brexit vote, the end of anybody a darker shade of Boris coming to Britain – **fact**
- Voting Remain will mean that Anton the Bulgarian and all his family will come over here and will steal my job and my woman, will live in my house, making the soap tray messy and leaving all the bloody lights on all the time – **fact**.

It's all very scary here not long ago in the past, there is a lot of confusion but there is hope in the future and as you, dear reader, sit down at your table or on the train and read this, I am sure that politics has settled down and President Trump is doing a fine job.

What a scary last word – Trump.

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**Mat Mathias** used to work in the Bay bubble but now stares longingly at it from afar on Senedd TV. He's just finished working in the charity sector but starts his new job soon... he hopes.

# We are Wales & West Utilities

Every day our skilled and dedicated colleagues do their very best to keep our 7.5 million customers safe and warm, with a gas supply they can rely on and a level of service they can trust.

We don't sell gas; instead we use our network to transport gas to homes and businesses throughout Wales and the south west of England. We invest £2 million a week across our network, connecting new properties, responding to gas emergencies and replacing old metal pipes with new long-lasting plastic ones, to make sure the communities we serve receive a safe and reliable gas supply for generations to come.

It is a vital service and one we are extremely proud to deliver.



**Colwyn Bay & Wrexham**  
£2.3m investment in new operational bases, demonstrating our commitment to north Wales



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Responded to more than 98% of public reported gas leaks within 1 hour



**Penyffordd**  
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Ground-breaking research into the future of gas – with customers at the heart of possible future energy solutions



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AND PIPELINE SERVICE**

 **WALES & WEST  
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The IWA Fellowship has been developed as a special category of membership as a mark of recognition for those who have made, or are making, a significant contribution to the life of Wales. To discuss becoming a fellow of the IWA please call Auriol Miller on **02920 484 387**.



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