9 781999 159514 2
£6.95

the welsh agenda

iwa

Spring/Summer 2020
Issue 64

Michael Sheen
talks to Dylan Moore

Susie Ventris-Field
on thinking globally

Darren Hughes
on the future of NHS

Mymuna Soleman
on the Privilege Cafe

#RethinkingWales

Rebecca Nelson on Banc Cambria | **Leighton Andrews** on devolution | **Poppy Stowell-Evans** on GCSEs

Organisational members

The Institute of Welsh Affairs gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Books Council of Wales, the Carnegie UK Trust, CREW, the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Friends Provident Foundation, the Jane Hodge Foundation, the Legal Education Foundation and the Waterloo Foundation. The following organisations are organisational members:

Aberystwyth University Library
Acorn Group
Acuity Legal Limited
Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales
Arup
Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
Awel Aman Tawe
Bangor University
BBC Cymru Wales
Blake Morgan LLP
BMA Cymru Wales
Brewin Dolphin
British Council - Wales
British Heart Foundation Cymru
Bron Afon Community Housing
BT Cymru Wales
Business in the Community Cymru
Cadwyn Housing Association
Capital Law Limited
Cardiff County Council
Cardiff Metropolitan University
Cardiff University
Carnegie UK Trust
Cartrefi Cymru
CECA Wales Ltd
Chwarae Teg
Citizens Advice Cymru
Coastal Housing Group Ltd
Colleges Wales/Colegau Cymru
Community Housing Cymru
Community - the Union for Life
Cymorth Cymru
Cynnal Cymru
Cynon Taf Community Housing Group
Deloitte LLP
Deryn Consulting
Disability Wales
Doopoll
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru
Estyn
Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP
EYST Wales
Family Housing Association (Wales) Ltd
Federation of Small Businesses Wales
Ffilm Cymru
Friends of the Earth Cymru
Geldards LLP
Grayling Wales
Harvard College Library
Hendre Housing Association Limited
Historix Editions
Hugh James
Institute Of Chartered Accountants Of England And Wales
ITV Cymru Wales
Jardine Norton
Julian Hodge Bank Ltd
Learning and Work Institute
Living Streets Cymru
Llamau
Macmillan Cancer Support
Merthyr Valleys Homes
Meyrick Estate Management Ltd
Morgan LaRoche
MS Society Cymru
National Dance Company Wales
National Theatre Wales
National Trust Wales
Natural Resources Wales
National Union of Students (NUS) Wales
Newport City Homes
Newsdirect Wales
North Wales Fire & Rescue Service
OFGEM
Orchard Media
Oxfam Cymru
Parker Plant Hire Ltd
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
People and Work
Perago
PLANED
Platfform
Pobl Group
Principality
Prospect Wales Cymru
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
PwC
Qualifications Wales
Ramblers Cymru
RenewableUK Cymru
Rondo Media
Royal College of Nursing in Wales
Royal Society of Architects in Wales
Royal Town Planning Institute Cymru
Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama
RSPB Cymru
RWE Innogy UK
S4C
Samaritans Cymru
Sero Homes
Shelter Cymru
Smart Energy GB
Snowdonia National Park Authority
Sustrans Cymru
Tenovus Cancer Care
The Cathedral School Llandaff
The Learned Society of Wales
The Means
The Open University in Wales
Tidal Power plc
United Purpose
Universities Wales
University Of South Wales
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Wales & West Utilities Ltd
Wales Co-operative Centre
Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)
Wales TUC Cymru
Waterloo Foundation
Watts Gregory
Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA)
Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
Welsh National Opera
Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales
Wrexham Glyndŵr University
WWF Cymru

To become an organisational member of the IWA, please call 029 2048 4387.

Editorial

Rethinking Wales

Auriol Miller

Since the last edition of *the welsh agenda* was published in autumn 2019, COVID-19 has changed our world and our way of life in ways we could not have imagined. I wrote then that it would be foolhardy to make any prediction as to what would happen in the coming months. That was about Brexit.

The total of deaths in the UK, thus far, stuns us because of the size of the numbers involved. In Wales, at the time of writing, over 1,200 people who tested positive for the virus have died in hospital or in a care home. It is such a great number that we cannot easily put names and faces to them all yet, or know their stories. And yet we should. So we start this edition of *the welsh agenda* with a sombre reflection, we mourn the lives lost, the families decimated, and the hopes of a brighter future dashed for so many who loved them.

The impact of COVID-19 on different parts of society is throwing long standing economic, gender, race and class divisions into even starker relief. We know our essential sectors are staffed disproportionately by women and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. Far from being a 'great leveller' the virus has instead further deepened long standing inequalities.

How we describe what's happening needs to recognise that each and every one of us is experiencing this crisis in very different ways, so that everyone's voices and experiences can shape what comes next. We need a clear direction of travel, yet there is no single or uniform narrative. Far less is this a battle with an enemy that can be planned for in a militaristic campaign. This is a global health crisis, not a terrorist attack or a war.

Wales' response must be intensely local, involving and including our communities, because we know they are so different from each other. Above all, we must communicate clearly, to cut through the noise and uncertainty.

There is a clear opportunity to shift to a new way of doing things – a greener, fairer, more equal future. The question is whether there is enough of an appetite to reach out and grasp it, a practical plan to make it real, and – being pragmatic – a credible idea of where the money might come from to pay for it.

Our #RethinkingWales sessions may have highlighted Wales' economic dependence on the Treasury, but they have also highlighted that we have considerable assets too, not least our people: the many thousands of 'key workers' for whom the economy has not been 'paused' at all. We are an old, proud nation with a young and increasingly confident democracy. We have strong and diverse communities, abundant natural resources, and a willingness to try new ways of doing things. We now need to get even better at quantifying and valuing what we have, and measuring the progress we want to make. In this edition, we've asked all sorts of people to share their thoughts too.

In a twist of fate, COVID-19 has also cut through the glazed curtain that falls across most people's faces when the word 'devolution' is mentioned. Media reporting of the availability or otherwise of PPE, ditto coronavirus testing facilities, and how best to come out of lockdown have enraged and confused even the most politics-shy of our citizens. Why? Because these things matter to each and every one of us and the people we care about.

Where and how decisions are made, and by whom, must be better understood if we are going to safeguard all our future generations. Our new study of inter-parliamentary relations and their impact on citizens' day to day lives is proving well-timed. When governments show they can't or won't work together in the common interest – whether on Brexit or coronavirus – our parliaments should be willing and able to scrutinise and hold them to account across nations and party lines. Of course we wish it hadn't happened like this, but it has. Shaping the next stage of our governance is already here.

Whatever your politics, shaping the next stage of Wales' future includes you too. Will you join us and help us to rethink Wales? AM

Meet the Team

Editor
Dylan Moore
@_DylanMoore

Editorial Manager
Andy Regan
@AndyReganCDF

Culture Editor
Merlin Gable
@merlingable

Design
Marc Jennings
marc@theundercard.co.uk

Cover photography:
Glenn Dene

Inside this issue

HIGHLIGHTS

ARTICLES

CULTURE

REVIEWS

To advertise,
tel: 029 2048 4387

The publisher acknowledges the financial support of the Books Council of Wales.

Institute of Welsh Affairs
56 James Street, Cardiff Bay,
Cardiff, CF10 5EZ
Tel: 02920 484 387

Charity number: 1078435

The IWA is an independent think tank and charity dedicated to promoting the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

To become a member and receive benefits such as copies of *the welsh agenda*, early-bird notice of events, regular newsletters and free publications, from £30 a year, please call Laura Knight on 029 2048 4387.

978-1-9995951-4-2

Lockdown
an essay in photographs

Glenn Edwards

1

1—Even the post has become an exciting time of day when you are waiting for important letters. Another frontline worker we take for granted. I hope not from now on.

2

3

2— 8pm applause for the NHS. When I took my first applause picture it was dark, now we are in daylight. Time moves on.

3— What would happen if these guys didn't work. Imagine.

4

4– A woman in a mask walks in the middle of a quiet road with her shopping, keeping her isolation.

5– One in one out at Tesco.

5

6

7

6– I wonder if the home painting would have been done if we didn't have the time we have now.

7– Thanks Brian for the call. Great to have a chat.

8– It's always brilliant to have a coffee with my daughter, but now it's all on FaceTime.

8

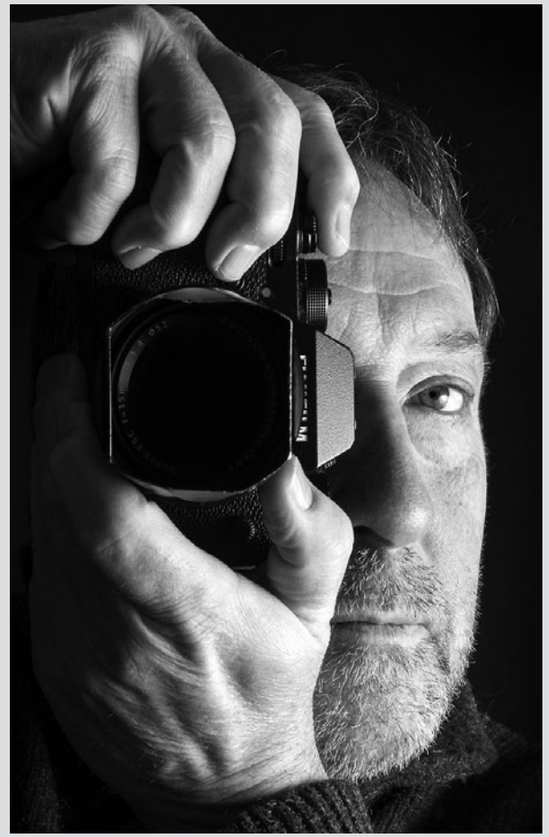
Glenn Edwards is a photojournalist based in Cardiff with clients throughout the UK and beyond, and is a former UK Press Photographer of the Year.

He has worked on over a hundred foreign commissions, more than eighty in eighteen African countries for clients including *The Independent*, Oxfam, Computer Aid, Concern Universal and the World Food Programme. Other countries worked in are Chile, Ecuador, India, Albania and Bosnia.

He continues to work as a freelance photographer for a wide range of clients including South Wales Police, the Millennium Centre, Fair Trade Wales, the Thomson Foundation, Linc Cymru, as well as continuing to work on foreign assignments.

He is a part-time lecturer in Photography at South Wales University and has led photography workshops for The Thomson Foundation in The Maldives, Nigeria, Malawi and Gambia.

He is founder and Director of The Eye International Photography Festival. @GlennEdwardsPJT



Radical Help
An Interview with Michael Sheen

Dylan Moore *zoomed* **Michael Sheen** *to talk through why our emerging priorities are ones for which the actor and activist has advocated for years*

Photographs: Glenn Dene

There's going to be a lot more people on Universal Credit coming out of the pandemic, and it was a f*ing disaster before**

Michael Sheen's CV reads like a how-to for going forward post pandemic. The charities and third sector organisations for whom he acts as patron, ambassador or vice-president together comprise a roadmap for concerted action.

Sheen advocates for the local, the environmental and the cooperative (as president of WCVA, ambassador for Keep Wales Tidy, patron of Social Enterprise UK). He speaks up for children (NSPCC), youth (Scene & Heard, Into Film), veterans (Healing the Wounds), and those affected by domestic violence (The Relationships Centre) and drug and alcohol abuse (WGCADA). Perhaps most pertinently, as his memorable speech in Tredegar five years ago attests, Sheen has long been a champion of the NHS; he is president of Treat Trust Wales, a rehabilitation centre at Swansea's Morriston Hospital, and since 2018 has served as ambassadorial vice president for the Royal Society for Public Health. Depending on the circles in which you move, it might be easy to forget that Michael Sheen is also an actor; in an exceptionally strong field, one of the best Wales has ever produced.

Sheen refers humbly to his immense efforts in the cause of social justice as 'the things I have been focusing on over the last few years'. But the causes, charities and third sector organisations represented and supported by Sheen are not 'just things I decided I would get involved with – it was from listening to people, and being in the community when I'm at home, and not just from people I don't know, but also from my own family members.'

He takes the example of the End High Cost Credit Alliance, which he founded in 2017. 'Exploitative business practices – rent to own, payday loans, doorstep lenders – are aimed at certain kinds of communities. You only have to walk down Bridgend High Street – or wherever.' Explaining how 2019's Homeless World Cup came about, he cites his work with End Youth Homelessness Cymru: 'You start to see where you can help'. On women's refuges, he quotes the figures: '4,000 spaces available and 19,000 referrals. When you hear about it, you can't help but get involved.'

'It's not a coincidence, therefore, that if these are the things that are most urgent to be looked at, then during a crisis – any crisis, but particularly a health crisis – those are the things that come to the surface.'

Sheen is completely unsurprised by the social and economic fallout of the pandemic because his activism is not based on personal choice but on social reality. 'This is what *around me* is saying,' he says in response to a question about whether he feels vindicated. 'It's not a matter of being vindicated. It's clear for all to see: this needs dealing with… there's going to be a lot more people on Universal Credit coming out of [the pandemic], and it was a fucking disaster before.'

Sheen's close attention to his surroundings make him a realist and a pragmatist. He freely admits a lack of easy answers, but a palpable sense of hope runs through

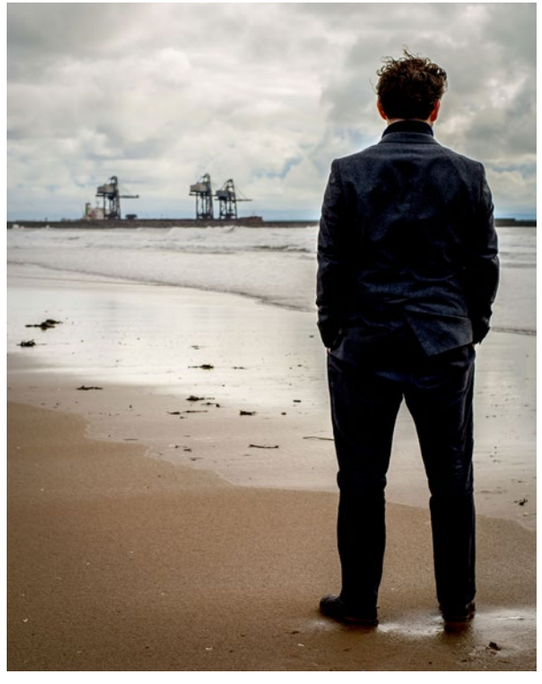
all of his responses. He sees in the fallout of COVID-19 a moment akin to 1945. 'The vision that came off the Second World War, from people finding themselves shoulder to shoulder with people they wouldn't normally… created a fertile ground for what happened politically and socially.' Sheen hopes a similar levelling will happen again, although he is clear that 'empty rhetoric of the kind we saw around the [December 2019] General Election' will not be enough. 'It needs a strong vision, not just money pumping into it.'

Sheen constantly returns to the word 'appetite', underscoring the idea that, like many, he can sense a shift in public attitudes. 'Last year we saw that Corbyn and Bernie Sanders – and Elizabeth Warren – were too radical for most people. Now we'll have to see how [the pandemic] will affect people's appetite for radical solutions.' He cites the creation of the NHS, the reinvention of the welfare state and the massive postwar investment in housing as examples of the kinds of interventions that are necessary once again.

I suggest that in response to the pandemic many politicians and pundits have been doubling down on their existing view of solutions. Sheen agrees. 'People will continue to see things through the prism of their ideology, but what's been made very clear to us is what we need to keep going day by day. Unless the bin men collect the bins, unless the nurses and doctors…' He trails off, pauses, realises that listing the contributions of essential workers is an unavailing task.

'The temptation will be for things to go back to how they were. But that will be difficult,' he contends.

Last year we saw that Corbyn and Bernie Sanders… were too radical for most people. Now we'll have to see how [the pandemic] will affect people's appetite for radical solutions.



'Once the curtain has been pulled back, it's very difficult to unsee what we have seen.' He anticipates a clamour for better pay for key workers, a desire to reorder society around 'the people who *we absolutely have to accept* keep this thing going… it's not the hedge fund managers!'

'Even the Tories, prior to the [2019] General Election, realised that their road had run out. People are already at the end of what they can deal with – financially and politically – in terms of the cuts.'

Sheen sees the political landscape being 'scrambled' by the pandemic to an even greater extent than had happened though the Brexit debate. 'It's very complicated for Keir Starmer,' he observes, in terms of where and how the new UK Labour leader is going to build a coalition. 'And who knows? Maybe Boris Johnson will have a Road to Damascus moment now he's had his life saved by the NHS!'

Although Sheen's politics clearly come from a particular place – leftist and 'indy-curious' – perhaps the popularity of his political interventions with large sections of the Welsh public result from his being unaligned to a particular party.

Sheen identifies multiple problems with and for Welsh Labour, which by extension dogs Welsh Government and hampers the relative success of devolution. 'The first is that they're complacent because they haven't been challenged,' he says, before swiftly moving on to a detailed expounding of what he also sees as 'stasis'.

He identifies in Westminster and Plaid Cymru the rock and hard place between which Welsh Labour's political space is severely limited. 'They want to blame Westminster, but they can't blame them too much because they'd turn into Plaid. If the Welsh people begin to believe that Westminster's the problem, they'll say *well why don't we have independence, then?*'

'Let's put it this way,' he says: 'there isn't a strong incentive for Welsh Government to want the people of Wales to be really clear about how things work… there's a kind of mist that hangs over everything.'

But despite this criticism of Welsh Government and Welsh Labour, Sheen stops well short of advocating for independence as silver bullet. 'The Welsh independence movement tried to get me to come on board,' he says, 'and it's not that I'm against it, but if I get involved in things I tend to get billed as the front man, and I'm not confident enough [in the idea of independence] to commit to that… I'm indy-curious, but it's too risky. I haven't seen a concrete plan.'

Who knows? Maybe Boris Johnson will have a Road to Damascus moment now he's had his life saved by the NHS!

Pushed on party politics, Sheen would like to see a situation following next year's Senedd elections where the maths mean Welsh Labour are forced into some kind of arrangement with Plaid Cymru. 'I'm not saying it would work,' he says, 'but I would like to see that.'

But for all Sheen's careful equivocation and nuanced political views, his 'answer' to the great many problems afflicting the country is disarmingly simple. 'Find out what's happening, what people are doing, and build your system around that.'

And as he explains his activist principles and methodology, Sheen suddenly stumbles across a series of phrases that would make him sound dangerously like a politician if only we didn't know better. 'Look for it. Listen to *them*. Support it better.'

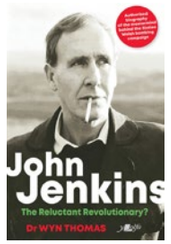
His involvement with philanthropic organisations has provided him with the understanding that: 'it's very hard not to get the impression that there's a whole ecosystem designed *not* to solve the problem. Everyone unconsciously understands that if any of these things were solved, then [they] wouldn't have jobs.'

Sheen cites Hilary Cottam's book *Radical Help*, which posits the idea that 'people are just being managed', rather than having problems solved. He works, in New York, with Roseanne Haggerty, who also subscribes to the idea – specifically in the context of homelessness – that 'certain things are kept going' to aid the support structure rather than those who become clients to it.

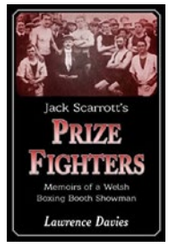
He is very keen to stress, however, that he does not blame charities, or philanthropists, or the third sector for these failings. For Sheen this imperfect ecosystem exists because of the failure of the state. 'The responsibility is with whatever government has not provided a safety net for people that actually works. We need to help people to solve their own problems rather than just manage their crisis.'

CURRENT READING

'My reading tends to be for projects. I've set up a production company so that here in Wales we can begin to tell our own stories.'



John Jenkins: The Reluctant Revolutionary?
Wyn Thomas



Jack Scarriot's Prize Fighters: Memoirs of a Welsh Boxing Booth Showman
Lawrence Davies

'Let's *reimagine* these institutions,' he says of welfare and the NHS. '*Let's love it a bit more* is not going to work.'

I ask if he's in favour of universal basic income, and again Sheen is equivocal. 'You have to go to the evidence,' he says. He makes a comparison with microfinance initiatives in the global south, saying that sometimes the answer is simply 'just give people money' – but that he also sees the counterargument, particularly around the dignity of work.

Sheen's experience as an activist has convinced him that 'any meaningful, sustainable change has to come from the bottom up. I get very nervous, and angry, when decisions are made by people who are unconnected from the ground. My hope comes from what people are actually *doing*.'

He emphasises the importance of community, and identifies 'concrete things going on' in response to the coronavirus outbreak. 'Aberavon Rugby Football Club are joining up with Age Concern to deliver meals and prescriptions – that's community. Even the setting up of WhatsApp groups amongst families; there's a different sense of what we need.'

In Wales, Sheen agrees that a huge missing piece of the picture is our weak media, the subject of his own wide ranging Raymond Williams lecture (2017). He is not surprised that viewing figures for Wales-based news and information sources have hugely increased during the pandemic: 'There's nothing that focuses the mind like your own chances of survival.'

there isn't a strong incentive for Welsh Government to want the people of Wales to be really clear about how things work... there's a kind of mist that hangs over everything

He cites Dr Rachel Howells' research into the emergence of the 'democratic deficit' – the gap in public understanding of which level of government is responsible for what – and the idea that the rot began not with the closure of local papers, but when they lost reporters based in the locality. 'In the case of the *Port Talbot Magnet*, it was when the news started being written by people sitting in Bristol or Swansea.'

But as with many of the most crucial issues facing us, Sheen also agrees that there are no easy answers to how we can create what Wales as a nation so clearly needs: 'a shared space – for us to talk about what matters to us.'

'On one hand, I'm going *can I pay for something?* But as much as I feel like my intentions are the best, the extreme version of that is Jeff Bezos running the *Washington Post*.'

As his baby daughter begins to whimper in the background, and our Zoom call draws to a close, I reflect on this strange new normal in which Sheen and I – and all of us – find ourselves. It's a far cry from the last time we crossed paths in person, during National Theatre Wales' *Passion of Port Talbot* in 2011, in which Sheen played a Christ-figure sent to redeem our contemporary world.

Clearly the real life Michael Sheen is neither prophet nor saviour, and it is abundantly clear that he doesn't claim to be. But of the years since that memorable weekend nine years ago, some things are worth stating: here is a Hollywood actor who has stayed true to his roots, who has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of others in his community and our nation, and who – while he may not have all of the solutions – certainly seems to be pointing in the right direction.

Dylan Moore is Editor of *the welsh agenda*

CURRENT LISTENING

Radio

BBC RADIO 6 music

BBC RADIO 2

Podcasts

CURRENT WATCHING

Quiz
'That was quite something. Event TV in the age of social media.'

Ozark
'With the baby, we only get about an hour, or an hour and a half maximum, to watch something in the evenings.'

#RethinkingWales

The crisis caused by coronavirus has triggered an unprecedented moment of introspection. Amid a growing consensus that we can never return to what we once thought of as normal, we asked some of Wales' leading thinkers to suggest a single idea we need to consider, address or implement once lockdown is lifted.

Moving forward

Alwen Williams
Programme Director, North Wales Economic Ambition Board

Image: Radar PR

"When a tadpole shakes off the jelly of its spawn or when butterfly wings break through the chrysalis, they have achieved true transformation – a new way of existing, a new purpose – and going back isn't an option. Lockdown has been a catalyst for change, a test of resilience, an absolute must to gain control and protect the most vulnerable in society.

Life beyond lockdown is an opportunity for Wales to rewrite the rulebook and navigate to success in this new world. All of our 'norms' have been challenged. We are stronger together. The very best in humanity and kindness is shining through. Our communities and people are incredible. There is a need for continued collaboration between communities, governments and businesses in order to survive, thrive and grow."

Don't go back to normal

Mike Corcoran
Advisor on engagement and impact

"It would be natural as we gradually leave lockdown, to see life 'going back to normal' as an indicator of our success. But to face up to the social, economic and environmental challenges our nation faces in the twenty-first century, we've needed widespread radical change for a long time. Through lockdown we have all proven we are capable of fundamentally changing our patterns of work and behaviour, in ways we never thought possible.

We now need open, honest, nationwide discussion about the new Wales we should aspire to return to, not the old one we left behind – we will never have a better chance."

We now need open, honest, nationwide discussion about the new Wales we should aspire to – Mike Corcoran

This crisis has revealed deep, entrenched inequality

Polly Winn
Chwarae Teg

"Our economy and health care system are being propped up by workers deemed 'low-skilled'; our dependence on women as carers has been revealed by the lack of formal care; and the most vulnerable groups – disabled people, migrants, those on low incomes and BAME communities – have been worst affected. It has revealed how precarious our systems are, and how they have failed to deliver for women and other groups.

We can no longer afford to ignore equality as a fundamental part of how we make decisions, create policy and organise society. Equality must be a central principle to how we rebuild after the crisis, rather than an afterthought. We cannot return to the status quo – we need to redesign our systems, guided by the experiences of diverse groups, so that everyone can expect equality of outcome."

We don't have just one 'economy' – we have economies, plural

Kelly Beirne
CCR Director

"The traditional tradeable economy, the family-run economy and the foundational economy. Home working has given more opportunities to hear about the latter: neighbours and friends who run locally based micro-businesses and traders on the local high street are trying to cope and adapt. Meanwhile in retail, shifting to e-commerce platforms, digital click and collect, cashless payments and reinventing packaging are just some of the changes.

There can be no doubt that demand for floor-space will quickly diminish and there will be inevitable casualties of this. But the scope for mixed retailing, collaboration, rethinking supply chains and the changing needs of digital customers is clearly growing.

Plural economies are not separate economies. The foundational and knowledge economies will need to meet if retailers are to address the challenges."

Innovative partnership working

Nesta Lloyd-Jones,
Assistant Director, Welsh NHS Confederation

"The COVID-19 pandemic has meant the health and care system in Wales has had to change. Joint-working and innovative new care models which would have conventionally taken months and even years to implement have sprouted up almost overnight, from providing increased services digitally to support people to stay at home, to working with the private sector and communities to manufacture vital personal protective equipment and increasing bed capacity across the system.

When this pandemic is over, we cannot let the relationships we have built with local government and wider public sector, the private and voluntary sectors suddenly evaporate. These new ways of working will be crucial, and not just to tackle the consequences of COVID-19 directly.

We will need to work closely with our partners to tackle the indirect cost to people's health and well-being which could happen as a result of societal changes and an almost unavoidable economic downturn."

Make 'virtual' healthcare the new normal

Dr Emily Warren,
Assistant Director (Transformation), Aneurin Bevan, UHB

"In less than a month the NHS and partners in social care have reframed how they provide safe care at home, in the community and in hospitals. Against a challenging background of shielding, social distancing and social isolating, seismic changes have been made using new and emerging technologies.

Technology is now the front line of defence against the pandemic, with tools such as 'Attend Anywhere' and 'Consultant Connect' rapidly rolled out. There is a new 'virtual norm' with high levels of patient satisfaction recorded. Whilst none of this has been easy, or without concerns around reliability, safety and accuracy, there is clear potential for the future.

The major challenge is to make this a reality in the post COVID world. Could a 'virtual' and interactive multi-disciplinary team approach in health and social care become our new normal?"

Retain positive changes to working practices

Sarah Day,
Chief Executive, Practice Solutions, @PS_Sarahday

"The pandemic has thrust public sector organisations into changes to working practices that may have normally taken years to achieve. Pre COVID-19, many employers hadn't sufficiently adapted their approach or were unaware of the true benefits that technology, such as remote working tools had to offer.

There is now an opportunity to change Wales for the better in the delivery of public services. Leaders and managers have a responsibility to create a positive dialogue with employees, at all levels, about what their experiences of remote working has taught them.

Whilst the circumstance to these changes have been devastating, we must recognise the positive changes that have had to happen. Integrating new technology into people's normal working practices must continue, in order to create a positive difference for all communities in Wales."

Keep tech an integral part of patient care

Jess Blair,
Director, ERS Cymru and former Policy and Projects Manager at IWA

"It's been five years since the IWA published 'Let's Talk Cancer', a research project that spoke to people experiencing cancer about how care could be improved. At the time people called for more information about their care, the chance for some consultations to take place via Skype and up to date information about any delays to appointments.

It's fair to say that in the half decade since, the words technology and NHS Wales have at times felt incompatible. Yet, all of that has been pushed to the side as the health service deals with the Coronavirus crisis. We're suddenly seeing patients finally access those Skype appointments in the new 'Attend Anywhere' scheme. Outpatients are able to access care remotely with clinicians now able to review notes online while in discussion with patients in the comfort of their own home.

What was once deemed too difficult to implement has been made up and running in weeks, giving patients what they asked for in our project all those years ago."

Could a 'virtual' and interactive multi-disciplinary team approach in health and social care become our new normal? Dr Emily Warren

Put the 'N' back in NHS

Huw Davies,
Cardiff University student

"The NHS is among the most sacred British institutions – yet it is no longer a truly 'national' service, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed deep problems with the current, devolved alternative. The Welsh Government's fixation on difference led to programmes for food deliveries and volunteering to be communicated badly and delivered late.

Worse, devolution's dogmatic insistence on 'Welsh solutions' ignores our geography, with ministers criticising North Walian councils for not using a drive-through testing facility in Cardiff, which is up to four hours' drive away, rather than making arrangements to let them access much closer facilities in nearby Merseyside.

The guiding principle of Mark Drakeford's administration appears to be that better it be done late, and done worse, so long as it is done differently – and there's mounting evidence that the Welsh public are growing tired of it. Post-crisis we need to challenge the nationalist assumptions underpinning the 'devolution settlement' and rebuild a bigger, better, British safety net – a truly *national* health service."

Break the cycle of deprivation

Catriona Williams OBE,
Chair of Voices From Care Cymru

"Dealing with the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people, especially those who are vulnerable, will be critical, not only for their individual health, well-being and educational outcomes, but also for the country as a whole. There needs to be a redistribution and re-prioritisation to ensure families with children are supported, because rectifying the disastrous aftermath of the pandemic will fall in large measure upon the young.

During the pandemic, children and young people are experiencing fear, loneliness, anxiety, increased family stress and poverty, disrupted education, childcare, health services, social services, youth services and charities.

Resilience amongst children varies and services need to ensure children can achieve their full potential. A rights-based, individualised, child centred approach is required."

Democratise culture

David Anderson,
Director General, Amgueddfa Cymru

"The long 20th century is over. COVID-19 has revealed, like a lightning flash across the landscape, the realities of inequality in Wales, in ways that cannot be concealed. To our shame, we see that the workforce on whom we rely for essential services in our communities are often also those who have been least valued and most impoverished by our market economy.

Cultural Rights are integral to the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, since 1945, arts and culture have had only a marginal role in the process of renewal and social change. Little was expected and, duly, little was delivered. Elitism, nurtured by the global arts market, has shown a resilience that equality can only envy.

This must change. As we reframe our public services after COVID, we will also rethink and democratise culture, to become an essential component of a renewed welfare state."

Connection, community and *cariad*

Elgan Rhys,
writer-director-performer

"I don't think that anyone has an answer to *how* things will change yet, but what is inevitable is that things *will* change in the arts in Wales, and beyond, post-lockdown.

I was supposed to be working as an Associate Director on a large-scale community theatre project over the coming months, a rare project of its kind in Wales – and one that supports my ethos of how theatre should function, with artists and local communities working hand in hand from a project's inception to create work that is timely, active and urgent. I think we will and should experience more of these types of hopeful projects in our bleak looking future.

Theatre for me offers space and time for reflection, and reframing how we make sense of our world. Thus when connection, community and cariad are more important than ever, the arts and theatre sector should and could be *ar flaen y gad yn arwain ar greu dyfodol newydd...*"

Balanced representation

Rocio Cifuentes,
Chief Executive, EYST Wales

"The Senedd must create a racial equality plan underpinned by concrete measurable goals. That plan must be co-produced by a wide variety of members of BAME communities. Much attention has been to gender equality and balanced gender representation in the Senedd. A report by an expert committee references the importance of diversity in racial representation, but makes short shrift of proposed tactics to achieve that.

There must be a real and serious commitment to including underrepresented groups, particularly people from ethnic minority groups and disabled people."

Ban all pesticides and inorganic fertilisers

Horatio Clare,
writer

Image: Sam Hardwick

"The pandemic has shown us how much we rely on nature, really and seriously, to give our lives richness, stability and perspective. We now know that we can enact change swiftly and radically.

One thing Wales could do, which would make us a world leader, would be to ban all pesticides and inorganic fertilisers. We would become an organic nation. Our wildlife would return to a bright fullness, unique in Europe. Our health, our environment and our nutrition would profit – and so, in the long-run, would our farming, which employs 4% of our workforce. Tourism, which employs 8%, would boom. Even more than it already is, Wales would become one of the best places on the planet to visit, live and work. We would show the world a better way to live."

We need a well-being economy

Jessica McQuade,
Head of Policy and Advocacy, WWF Cymru

"The coronavirus crisis has exposed a profound problem of resilience in modern societies and economies, ill-equipped to cope with major shocks. Many people, including the UN Secretary General, are calling for society to 'recover better'. The economy and society we rebuild must be more inclusive, environmentally sustainable and socially just to make it resilient to the threat of future global challenges, from pandemics to climate change.

We need a fiscal package for Wales that focuses on speeding up the transition to a zero carbon economy, which protects and restores nature whilst reducing our global footprint. The Well-being of Future Generations Act provides the perfect framework creating this better future. WWF Cymru hopes the COVID-19 recovery is the moment we move to a 'Welsh Well-being Economy' – one that prioritises human and economic well-being."

Can disruption lead us to an equitable and resilient food system?

Katie Palmer,
Food Sense Wales

"Our food system has been disrupted in a way not seen since the Second World War. The fragility of our food production and distribution infrastructure in Wales, and our reliance on imports and just in time global supply chains has been exposed. Those least able to bear the consequences are going hungry.

We urgently need to rethink the food system in Wales. Resilience and equity must be at the heart of policy making. Policy should connect supply and consumption and give equal consideration to the health and well-being of people and our planet."

Reconfigure our social contract

Noreen Blanluet,
Lead Consultant, Co-production Network Wales

> We should take the opportunity to reconfigure our social contract, and the interaction between citizens and government. Available evidence indicates that citizens' voice and involvement leads to more effective public services: shared decision-making includes the more vulnerable, empowers people and professionals, and brings about informed local action that generates positive outcomes for individuals and communities.
>
> Call it co-production, public involvement, collaboration, partnership working, human-centred approach, or relational practice… We need to recognise and value the energy that citizens bring, and enable them to navigate how they work with systems and organisations. We also need to create space in systems and organisations for new ways of working, that actively encourage co-developmental approaches and draw in a diversity of voices. Let's rethink our outdated systems, and put a new protocol in place: an easy way for citizens and government to collaborate effectively.

Technocratic policy nostrums, however well crafted or intentioned, will otherwise continue to flounder in the morass of public indifference occasioned by spavined governance – Dai Smith

A culture of civic engagement

Dai Smith,
historian

> The single most important vehicle for change would be for people to believe that elections to the Senedd can be made meaningful enough for them to want to vote. Technocratic policy nostrums, however well crafted or intentioned, will otherwise continue to flounder in the morass of public indifference occasioned by spavined governance. A collective voice with social purposefulness behind it comes from a deep culture of civic engagement.
>
> Rooted communities now long accustomed to being bereft of the self-empowerment they once possessed will not be moved by the empty sloganizing of Team Wales or, worse, Brand Wales. To ensure the vitality of the actually lived experience of the Welsh people being heard we need at every conceivable level and in every imaginable and creative way possible to equip individual lives with that aspiration for commonality which should be the bedrock of the society we wish to build. And, through a maturity of debate and necessary disagreement, an informed citizenry might then muster the will, as it once did, to bring about the dramatic redistribution of resource in the interest of the common good of our particular Commonwealth of Wales.
>
> Let's vote on it, all of us.

Turn swords into plowshares

Mererid Hopwood,
poet

> A better Wales, post-lockdown, will have an Arms Conversion Agency. Its purpose will be to enable the brilliant minds, the skilled hands, the knowledgeable imaginations, all currently working in Wales to create weapons of war, to be employed instead in jobs that create a peaceful society. Just as in the current crisis, they will be allowed to make machines designed to improve lives not take lives away.
>
> In the better Wales, they will not have to go to work suppressing thoughts about the link between their wages and the killing of fellow human beings called enemies. And on the way home they will know that all day they've been busy tackling poverty, climate change, fair food distribution, improved health. You can't shoot for peace… or a pandemic.

Foundational Renewal

Kevin Morgan,
Cardiff University

Image: Cardiff University

> The Foundational Economy focuses attention on the goods and services that loom large in terms of human need – such as health, education, dignified eldercare, food, affordable housing. Wales was the first country in the world to formally embrace the Foundational Economy as part of its official development strategy. The Well-being of Future Generations Act – the most innovative and significant piece of legislation in the past 20 years of Welsh devolution – provides a unique political framework in Wales for framing alternatives to neoliberalism because it is based on metrics and values that are informed by sustainable development in the most generous sense of the term, particularly the well-being of people and planet.
>
> The biggest challenge in Wales is therefore not to persuade politicians of the need to change public policy, but how to *implement* the policies that they have already decreed. Foundational renewal is the most important way to make Wales a better place after lockdown.

Pause curriculum reform

Gareth Evans,
Director of Education Policy, Yr Athrofa: Institute of Education, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

> Curriculum reform has been the only show in town for Welsh education. But while the promise of a radical, new and improved schools offer is something to look forward to, there is nothing that can't wait. Teachers across Wales will have enough on their plate adhering to social distancing measures, without worrying about principles of progression and signature pedagogies. A thorough evaluation of pupils' progress (or otherwise) during lockdown will be needed, and learning programmes tailored to individual need. The health and well-being of all concerned will need careful and sensitive assessment.
>
> All of a sudden, the march towards our new curriculum, and adherence to its ambitious timeline for delivery, looks desperately out of date. We must pause and consolidate, long enough to discuss properly the implications of the pandemic and its effect on the education system to which we will return. It's time to step back, catch our breath and reassess what really matters.

Universal Basic Income

Ben Gwalchmai,
founder Labour4IndyWales

Image: Matthew Webber

"The COVID-19 crisis has woken many more people up to one single reality: we are all closer to destitution than we think. From accountants through farmers to zoologists and whether we've had a furloughed wage, or we've been fired, or the price of our lamb has plummeted, it's clear: Wales needs a universal basic income.

To do this, we either need an #indyWales or the full devolution of welfare/social security and the funds that come with it. Smart parties should include it in their 2021 manifestos.

If we gave every working-age person in Wales £500 a month, it would be an annual cost of £11.4bn – but it would mean we no longer subsidise big retail employers through tax credits. It wouldn't be the only social security given but it would ensure that everyone, everywhere in Wales, is never so desperate as we are now. Not ever again."

Real Democracy

Paul Silk,
former Clerk to House of Commons and National Assembly for Wales

"We in Wales should be in the vanguard of doing democracy better. Participative democracy must be a fundamental part of that – asking people in their communities how they want their lives to change and empowering them to effect those changes. But representative democracy still has a role. Here we need a truly fair electoral system for a Senedd that has enough Members to do its scrutiny job effectively. Fewer, more powerful, local authorities and councillors will be vital, too. Most of all, we need to reverse the essentially oligarchic idea of devolution of power downwards from the centre (whether London or Cardiff), and think in terms of real democracy – power residing with individuals, localities and nations, but being willingly ceded upwards when it is efficient and rational to do so."

A societal malaise

Gareth Leaman,
writer

"If we take one meaning from this crisis, let it be a recognition that the coronavirus pandemic hasn't generated any new political problems, but rather has accelerated pre-existing ones. That they are at their most urgent right now should not lull us into thinking they are temporary and discrete.

To take a few examples: if zero-hour contracts are unjust now, they are unjust always; if second homes are a blight on local communities, they are a blight always; if our conception of work is outmoded during the crisis, then it is outmoded always.

That the consequences of the crisis are numerous, interconnected and widespread points to a societal malaise that lies far beyond the pandemic itself. This may not be a singular idea, but it should provide a contextual framework for the other demands being made in this series. We need fundamental, systemic change if they are to be actualised."

Wales needs those who debunk given orthodoxies, subvert lazy stereotypes, and ask embarrassing questions. We want dreamers, dissenters, and disturbers – Philip Dixon

Dreamers, dissenters, and disturbers

Philip Dixon,
Writer and education commentator

"Would that Wales had an education system that strained every sinew to open a myriad of different doors to an infinite number of new worlds. One that cherished those with restless minds and bold imaginations. Students we could characterise in the captivating language of Evelyn Waugh's *Helena* as 'the learned, the oblique, the delicate'. Those perhaps more prosaically referred to by the playwright, Tom Stoppard, as 'the awkward squad'.

Wales needs those who debunk given orthodoxies, subvert lazy stereotypes, and ask embarrassing questions. We want dreamers, dissenters, and disturbers. Every country and nation constantly needs those who wake it out of its slumber. The future can only be different to the past if we welcome those who probe, dissect, and critique the present – and lead us where we never dreamed of going. *How do we build that culture?* is the key question to ponder."

The meaning of imagination

R M Parry,
Chief Exec, Coleridge in Wales Ltd.

"It's sobering. To have all sorts of ideas in your head and yet discover when given the opportunity to articulate them in the public space (or, as politicians, the opportunity to try to deploy them) that one rapidly runs out of room. And time. And possibly money.

Such is the public space for deploying our re-imaginings.

Let us turn, not to the *content* of our re-imaginings, but to the subject of imagination. Let us adventure and find, in contemporary Welsh thought and culture, the meaning of imagination."

Croeso i'r Gymru newydd

(with apologies to R.S. Thomas)

We love a good meeting
The land of talk. Strategy
Reports in abundance, lining
All our pockets. Artist impressions
Decorate the floor.
I was going to propose
The creation of a new and radical
Cultural Strategy.
Two decades have we endowed
Our country with these polished
Memorials! Look up to the celestial hall
The government chamber of stars.
There
They forecast the pound's climate
Change benefit for all. Let's beg
A modest pot of gold, £100 million say
Shared amongst the brightest and best.
Over forties. Do not apply.
You've had your turn.
Unleash our diverse creative talent.
Reimagine, conjure up and deliver
Bold endeavour
Dirt cheap, a place where
It is lovely.

Roger Lewis

Act local, act global

Susie Ventris-Field *argues that even in the midst of a crisis thinking about and helping others should not stop at our national boundaries*

Our worlds have shrunk. For my privileged self, husband and daughter, my world is the size of a three-bedroomed terrace, a small garden and a couple of city streets during daily exercise. For many others in the UK, in Wales, it has shrunk much more. To a tiny bedsit with no space for the kids to play outside. To a small room shared with strangers for many asylum seekers. To a stuffy bedroom in a care home to shield the most vulnerable from infection.

Since the crisis began in the UK, demand on foodbanks has soared, calls to domestic abuse and mental health helplines are shooting up and unemployment rates keep rising. Charities and businesses have gone bust and many more are under threat.

Surely, even for the most ardent internationalists among us, asking people and governments to look up and out beyond our borders, and to remember to be globally responsible, is unreasonable. But even before this crisis, these were tough times for many. Years of austerity led to increased homelessness, high child poverty rates and inequality.

But even in challenging circumstances, caring for people inside and outside our borders and taking our national and international responsibilities seriously are not mutually exclusive; they are inextricable.

Like it or not, we are globally interconnected. To believe that even if we wanted to, we could 'solve' our own problems in splendid isolation without addressing the global context is to misunderstand the nature of the world. Economies, societies, environments, people are connected in complex and ever-changing ways. The food and materials we depend on every day are produced across the world. Wars are equipped by nations that don't feel the worst impacts. Extreme weather events are increasing because of the climate change we all contribute to. Many countries fail to tackle underpaid, ill-treated staff, keeping labour cheap so that multinational business can shop around.

Caring for people inside and outside our borders and taking our national and international responsibilities seriously are not mutually exclusive; they are inextricable

Viruses can originate anywhere and travel across the world, but so do the things we need to handle such a crisis

A global pandemic is a powerful manifestation of how interconnected we are. Viruses can originate anywhere and travel across the world, but so do the things we need to handle such a crisis. Those masks and gowns the NHS so desperately needs are not (for the most part) being made in Wales. Our key workers come from across the globe. The scientific collaborations developing tests, vaccines, and solutions involve multinational collaboration. We are taking ideas from other nations ahead of us on the curve to learn lessons for our own response.

But it mustn't be all about what we can get from the rest of the world. Coronavirus is not a great leveller within or between countries. While billionaires go into hiding and hedge funds profit from the crisis, an estimated three million people around the world are unable to wash their hands at home. One in eight of the world's population live in informal slums and settlements, including many of the more than seventy million refugees. Physical distancing, self-isolation, and regular handwashing may be challenging for us here in Wales, but they are just not possible in many of these contexts.

The current crisis exacerbates already untenable situations. East Africa has just faced the worst plague of locusts in seventy years, with another possible wave to come at a time of unprecedented threat for the region. Already 1.4 million refugees in Uganda have had their food rations cut as funding and supply chains are threatened. The first cases of the virus have appeared in war-torn Yemen, and Libya battles with the virus and conflict simultaneously. In Venezuela coronavirus comes on top of an already collapsed economy.

The differences in our experiences of coronavirus at national and global levels are, in large part, manifestations of pre-existing structural inequalities,

the uneven distribution or power and resources, that harm the majority for the benefit of a few. As a nation in the global north, we collectively benefit from those inequalities; the moral imperative to redress the balance is huge.

In Wales, many people can take pride in some of the international contributions we've made in recent history. We're a Fair Trade Nation, making improvements to livelihoods in our supply chains; we aspire to be a nation of sanctuary for refugees; many of our schools, universities, hospitals, villages, and towns have international partnerships rooted in solidarity; we have a strong history of peace campaigns; we care about climate change. And encapsulating this global mindset, our unique Well-being of Future Generations Act has within it the duty to be globally responsible. We need to keep this goal in mind more than ever.

We should be calling for our leaders to step up and show leadership and solidarity on an international level. Currently, there is a real sense of 'every nation for itself': the UN Security Council has met only once since the crisis began; the US President slings blame on anyone he can; the EU has failed to bring together a unified response. While the G20 have announced a debt relief agreement much more is needed. The situation is such that a group of former Presidents and Prime Ministers, current health and economic leaders have written to the G20 requesting a global task force so instead of competing for essential supplies, we work together.

At a national level, most have accepted that acting selfishly (stockpiling food, travelling to the countryside, leaving home unnecessarily) is irresponsible – the same applies globally. If we all compete for resources, it will drive prices up and harm us all; if we cooperate, we can look after each other.

So what can we do here in Wales at individual, organisational and government level? We can connect with any international partners we have around the world, from local links to institutional partners, and ask what simple and practical things we can do to help. We can join the UN Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire at least for the duration of the pandemic, and an extension of the debt relief programme for the poorest countries. We can support the massive fundraising efforts for the World Health Organisation, the World Food Programme and others key agencies who can help to get everyone through getting through the pandemic.

To believe that even if we wanted to, we could 'solve' our own problems in splendid isolation without addressing the global context is to misunderstand the nature of the world

Vitally, in cooperation with partners around the world, we should plan how to emerge from this crisis. Already there are those who say the global pandemic is a reason to cut ourselves off from the world – incidences of in racism and xenophobia since the virus emerged show a tendency to bring out the uglier aspects of national self-interest at times like these. But this and other large scale threats need us to work together even while we physically isolate.

Since lockdown in Wales and across the world, the air is cleaner, and carbon emissions are lower. Many have realised what 'essential' really means. Can we emerge better? At the least, we must ensure already firmly entrenched global inequalities are not deepened further.

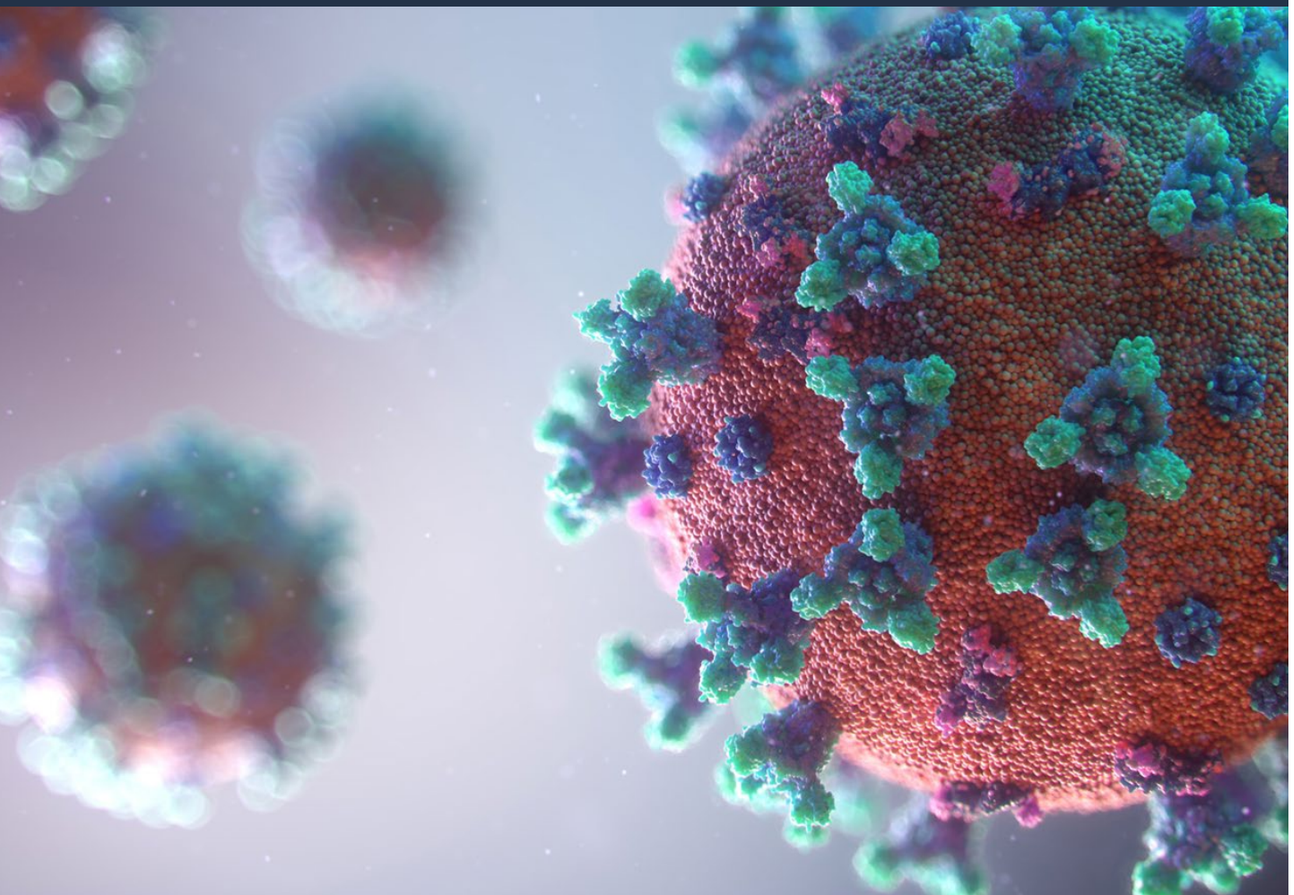
Many children in Wales post-lockdown will return to a new curriculum at school. Let's make sure it delivers on its promise of developing the skills they need for the future – global citizenship – awareness of the world, cooperation, empathy, respect – so the next time a global pandemic comes around, and as the climate crisis bites, we'll collectively have the skills we need.

It's true we face the same virus, but we are not in the same boat. Some have a multi-million pound yacht with a swimming pool, two months' of stockpiled food and plenty of money in the bank, while others have a leaky dinghy, a broken bucket and a stale loaf of bread. Yes, let's look after ourselves, our families and our neighbours, including the many in Wales who are facing seemingly insurmountable challenges. But if you are one of the lucky ones not to be sinking, act locally, act nationally and act globally so we can get through this together. ➤

Susie Ventris-Field is Chief Executive of the Welsh Centre for International Affairs

NHS Wales From COVID-19 to Senedd ’21

Darren Hughes charts a route from the pandemic to the next Senedd election and beyond



COVID-19 has pushed through transformational changes in our health and care system at a pace we have never seen before

The NHS in Wales is experiencing one of the most challenging times in its history. The outbreak of COVID-19 has tested our health, social care and society like nothing we’ve seen in generations

The impact extends far beyond the hospital admissions of patients that dominate the media headlines. Mental health support services have faced an increased demand from people across Wales who are concerned for their own wellbeing as well as that of their loved ones and family members. The service’s ability to diagnose and treat other urgent and life-threatening conditions has also been impacted.

Over the past few months, we have all had to make significant sacrifices in order to minimise the number of cases of COVID-19, to help NHS staff manage capacity, and provide for those in our communities who are most vulnerable and isolated.

Many will have suffered, not just as a direct result of the virus, but also indirectly as our normal interactions and activities have been scaled back, leading to increased loneliness and social isolation.

The NHS in Wales is incredibly grateful for the sacrifices the public has made, and continues to make, during this time. Without that support, our health service would have been under even more pressure and many more lives would have been put at risk.

These essential restrictions have given the NHS and the wider public sector crucial time to protect health and increase their capacity to deliver the highest standard of care.

Wales can take pride in those who have been at the heart of planning and managing this outbreak and supporting our communities. Pride in our health service and frontline staff, pride in our social care workers and key workers and pride in our family members and neighbours, the volunteers who kept those most vulnerable safe in their homes.

But even in the face of this extreme pressure, COVID-19 has pushed through transformational changes in our health and care system at a pace we’ve never seen before. The roll-out of the 111 service to every part of Wales at the very beginning of the outbreak, a development that was originally not scheduled for full roll-out until April 2021, has increased access to the appropriate services, pointing patients to the right place, at the right time.

GP surgeries began delivering virtual appointments to patients to deliver vital care and advice, not just for potential COVID-19 patients, but also to keep other important services running throughout, particularly for those living with long term conditions.

Developments such as these need to be looked at closely by those seeking power at the Senedd election in May 2021 to ensure these innovative initiatives continue.

In December 2019, we engaged closely with our members in NHS organisations across Wales to find out what they thought the direction for our health service should be.

The Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care in Wales, published in January 2018, highlighted that society has changed dramatically since the creation of the NHS over seventy years ago. The key recommendation from the *Review* was to have a clear and simple long-term vision of what one seamless system, with care being organised around the individual, as close to home as possible, could look like in the future.

The vision set out within the *Review* was implemented by the current Government through their long-term plan for health and social care, *A Healthier Wales*, in June 2018. Importantly, *A Healthier Wales* recognises that the NHS is only one small part of a much wider system that plays an active role in maintaining people’s physical and mental wellbeing. That’s why it’s so important to work across the public sector, to involve partners and patients in every decision that affects their care and treatment, and to make people feel they are supported in taking personal responsibility for their wellbeing.

The NHS in Wales is incredibly grateful for the sacrifices the public has made, and continues to make, during this time

Nearly 90% of leaders of every NHS organisation in Wales agree that the approach outlined in *A Healthier Wales* is the right one. This close engagement led to the publication of our calls for a health and care system for future generations which values, engages and delivers for people in Wales.

Whatever the Welsh Government looks like after the Senedd 2021 election, we need to build on the progress we've made in implementing the long-term vision and continue to transform the services we provide for the people of Wales.

In December 2019, we could not have predicted the impact COVID-19 would have on the way we manage and run health and social care services in Wales.

COVID-19 has led to traditional barriers to cross sector working being torn down, and we must not allow those barriers to be rebuilt in the future. Our members said they wanted to see a new government publish their plans to improve partnership working across all sectors, public sector, the voluntary and community sector, with compassionate leadership a key focus.

As this crisis has developed, we have seen public bodies come together to provide for their communities and keep them safe. It is vital we don't lose these vital newly built relationships. Change and effective collaboration can't happen without it.

This has been no clearer than in north Wales, where we are seeing two local councils and private enterprises collaborate to deliver personal protective equipment (PPE) to those working on the frontlines in the fight against COVID-19.

Community Connectors in Powys are reaching out to those most vulnerable and isolated in rural parts of Wales, led by the Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations and supported by Powys Teaching Health Board.

Services like these, often involving basic but essential tasks like picking up prescriptions, cannot be underestimated when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable and the most isolated to stay healthy, active and independent.

The recent showcasing of community resilience has been outstanding. People have come together to support NHS and care staff and our most vulnerable in recent weeks, which is a timely reminder that we can achieve great things when we commit to working in partnership. These ways of working will be fundamental to building on and improving the health and social care system in Wales.

Collaborations like these should help politicians to move the NHS increasingly from a service that treats people at the point they need care, to a wellness service which prevents ill health and takes a proactive approach to population health.

We need to dedicate more resources to preventative measures and more of a focus on public health in order to build resilience within our communities. This would give our world-leading public health experts in Wales the tools they need to become more effective at containing risks to health and reduce pressure on our health and social care system overall.

COVID-19 has shown us that the improvements required to revolutionise the health and social care system in Wales can happen.

One critical issue which a new Government will have to tackle post 2021 is the workforce. Our members highlighted that the future workforce remains the biggest single challenge facing the NHS. This doesn't always mean headline grabbing commitments for thousands more doctors and nurses. While we do need more people training, living and working in Wales, we also need to upskill the staff we currently have if we are to deliver the health and social care demanded by the population. This means creating an environment where NHS workers feel valued and appreciated such that a career in health and social care in Wales becomes an attractive proposition.

In Wales we have already seen some of the benefits of upskilling professionals within the service. Health Education & Improvement Wales (HEIW), who were only established just over 18 months ago, have trained over 400 community pharmacists to treat and test sore throats without the need for a GP appointment.

This reduces unnecessary appointments and is far more convenient for the public. As the National Survey for Wales this year highlighted, over 40% of people found it difficult to get an appointment with their GP at the right time for them.

In that time they have also worked jointly with Social Care Wales to develop a long-term workforce strategy, the first of its kind. This is essential work if we are to have a truly effective health and social care system that puts the person at the centre.

Traditional barriers to cross sector working [have been] torn down, and we must not allow those barriers to be rebuilt in the future

HEIW have also played a key role in supporting former NHS pharmacists, doctors, nurses and other health professionals to reenter the workforce and deliver key services to support the system during the pandemic.

To deliver these essential changes staff across the service need to have a stake in shaping the way the NHS delivers services, and strong processes which they can use to look after their own wellbeing.

Staff wellbeing and safety is paramount in Wales as we have seen health and care professionals, from doctors to nurses to people working in care homes and in our communities, raise anxieties over the personal protective equipment (PPE) they were given to deal with COVID-19. Strong guidance and clear communications to staff are vital in alleviating anxieties and concerns when carrying out the vital jobs they must perform.

This emphasises the need to tackle all the challenges facing the NHS and social care with an open and collaborative approach, not just amongst colleagues in Wales, but where possible making connections across the UK so that we are better able to respond to the next big health crisis, whenever that may be.

We should also enable our workforce to utilise new innovative technologies and digital platforms so they can do their jobs faster and deliver better quality health outcomes for patients.

Before this outbreak, we started to see those green shoots begin to appear. This year the Welsh Government announced £50m towards establishing a new NHS organisation, focussed on providing high quality digital health services. The key to realising the potential of digital technology comes in recognising that it is not a one-way street.

The future workforce remains the biggest single challenge facing the NHS [but this] doesn't always mean headline grabbing commitments for thousands more doctors and nurses

Increased capacity to conduct GP appointments via Skype or any other video sharing platform does not only benefit a patient who no longer has to leave their home to receive a service when they are feeling unwell; it also benefits countless other patients, perhaps with greater or more urgent health needs, who have a much better chance of seeing their GP or nurse thanks to the quick turnarounds between appointments.

Social Care

We also need to address the crisis facing social care, where once again the COVID-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus their unique challenges. We have heard promises from all political parties on how they are going to tackle this in the lead up to the Senedd 2021 election.

When we talk about social care, we assume this means elderly people in nursing homes, but it covers much more. Local authorities need the resources to adequately look after young people in their care and provide community support for those struggling with their mental health.

We know there will be significant economic and social consequences which come from this outbreak. Any future Government must have a comprehensive plan and commitment to address these challenges and provide significant investment.

The success of the NHS and the social care sector are intrinsically linked. We want to see political parties commit to developing social care services based around the needs of individuals. For a sustainable health and care system, the NHS has to work hand in glove with our colleagues in local authorities.

For the first time, we've started to see life expectancy fall in some parts of Wales which are more deprived. A new government needs to provide the environment and the opportunity for people to live healthy lifestyles. The scale of this challenge extends well beyond just having a successful NHS, it covers every aspect of our daily lives.

Public Health Wales have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Natural Resources Wales, committing to working closely to find ways the NHS can help tackle the climate emergency. This will help the NHS respond to those challenges in our own organisations, and it will facilitate a proactive approach to working with our stakeholders to make Wales a more sustainable country.

While COVID-19 has been our sole focus, when normal life finally resumes we cannot hold back on confronting challenges such as the climate emergency. Without taking on these equally large problems we will be looking at serious long-term impacts on our public health and our wider health and wellbeing.

These challenges cannot be met without empowering the public to take control of their own health. In the future, we need to make sure people in Wales know what matters to them, matters to us and do all we can to make sure our services are fit for their needs.

We need to provide more opportunities for people to get the care and support they need, not just at the right time, but in the right place.

The Senedd election in 2021 comes at a crucial time for the NHS in Wales, but also for all public sector partners and our communities. A new government will face challenges impacting us all. We look forward to engaging with all political parties to put forward solutions on behalf of our members to tackle them.

Darren Hughes is the Director at the Welsh NHS Confederation, the membership body representing all the organisations making up the NHS in Wales

How to lose a million pounds

Epidemiologist **Peter Elwood**, statistician **Janet Pickering**, Public Health Officer **Gareth Morgan**, consultant in sports and exercise medicine **Rhodri Martin** and epidemiologist **John Watkins** hold a conversation about the importance of weight loss

In 2008 Mick Cornett discovered two things. He found that he was 'obese' and that he lived in a city that was listed as one of the 'fattest' and most unhealthy cities in the USA. As mayor of Oklahoma, he felt a responsibility beyond his own person and so – as he puts it in a TED talk – he started a conversation on obesity, launched a website – thiscityisgoingonadiet.com – and set a target for the city to lose one million pounds in body weight.

By January 2012 Cornett himself had lost 28 pounds, 53,848 residents had registered with his website and together they had lost the one million pounds. Along the way Cornett's 'conversation' stimulated a new attitude to responsibilities for health across the community, together with numerous 'spin offs' relevant to the promotion of health and wellbeing: the development of new walkways and cycle paths, new parks, the opening of new 'wellbeing', 'fitness' and 'leisure' centres and other health related initiatives in schools, in churches and in the community, and Oklahoma moved into the top ten in the list of healthiest cities in the USA.

With an ageing population, with the sustainability of the National Health Service and other health and social provisions being questioned, and with the huge neglect of healthy living, it would seem to be prudent for our own population to be challenged individually on behaviour, starting with overeating, overweight and obesity.

Ischaemic heart disease, the most common disease in Wales, has decreased in the UK by about 45% during the past 25 years. Diabetes, the most rapidly growing disease in Wales, has more than doubled in the UK within the last twenty years. Dementia, undoubtedly the greatest of all health concerns in Wales, is expected to double in prevalence every five years.

Clinical treatment focuses on the individual rather than the community, and it is right and proper that facilities for the treatment and care of patients with these and other disabling diseases are increased as far as resources allow. Yet the distinguished epidemiologist Geoffrey Rose pointed out more than 40 years ago that the bulk of disease and disablement comes not from the sub-group of high-risk subjects who are selected in clinical practice for treatment, but from the general community, simply because the community is so numerous and the risk-factors for most diseases are multiple and are distributed throughout the whole population.

This, termed the issue the 'Prevention Paradox' by Rose, is a basic and most important issue in preventive

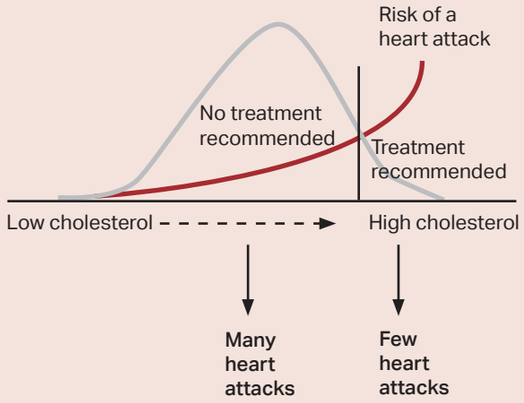
The consistent following of four or five behaviours is associated with reductions of about 70% in the development of diabetes, reductions of over 60% in heart disease and stroke, 25% less cancer

strategies for diseases which do not have a clear dichotomous diagnostic criterion, and it applies very widely to social, environmental and lifestyle factors involved in the causes and progression of the serious and often terminal diseases. It implies that attempts to increase the health of a community and reduce the burden of disease should best focus on the reduction of risk factors and the enhancing of beneficial factors across the whole population, rather than be concerned solely with improvements in treatment.

Numerous studies have identified a number of personal factors within our lifestyles that powerfully predict a number of serious conditions including diabetes, vascular disease, cancer and dementia. Tobacco smoking, physical activity, body weight, diet and alcohol intake individually predict the risks of these and other diseases, and do so very powerfully indeed when considered together as a lifestyle.

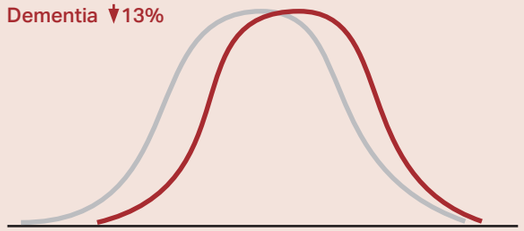
Compared with an unhealthy lifestyle (which is usually defined as the following of only one or none of the healthy behaviours) the consistent following of four or five behaviours is associated with reductions of about 70% in the development of diabetes, reductions of over 60% in heart disease and stroke, 25% less cancer, and

The Prevention Paradox



Reductions

Diabetes ▼12%
Vascular disease ▼6%
Cancer ▼9%
Dementia ▼13%



Effects upon diseases
…if every person in the Caerphilly Cohort has been urged to adopt one additional healthy behaviour and if only half of them had done so

reductions of 50-60% in overall cognitive impairment and in clinically diagnosed dementia.

In fact, overweight and obesity is a factor in the risk of many diseases. Even the risk of hospitalisation and critical illness with COVID-19 has been shown to increase markedly at high levels of BMI. If the NHS is to be saved, then obesity and diabetes are the major long-term threat.

A healthy lifestyle is also associated with increases in wellbeing. Furthermore, although some subjects who had followed a healthy lifestyle may still develop one of the diseases, the onset is likely to be delayed: vascular disease by thirteen years, dementia by about six years.

In attempts to improve health in Wales, the Rose paradox implies that an increase in healthy living throughout the community is likely to be much more effective in reducing disease in the community than any increase in treatment facilities for those already diseased.

Of the lifestyle factors relevant to disease risks, cigarette smoking, formerly the most important, has decreased enormously. The available evidence indicates that changes in physical activity, diets and alcohol intakes have changed little. However, sixty percent of adults in Wales are overweight and body weight is increasing steadily throughout the general population, at all ages and in both sexes.

Overweight 'explains' 70% of the new diabetes and 30% of new heart attacks and strokes, and if current trends continue, it has been estimated that overweight and obesity may well overtake smoking as the single biggest cause of cancer. Other studies have confirmed the findings in Caerphilly that overweight and obesity is associated later with an increased risk of cognitive impairment and dementia.

53,848 residents had registered with [Cornell's] website and together they had lost the one million pounds targeted

The increasing prevalence of overweight in Wales is likely to lead to the production of several million additional tonnes of CO_2 per year

Currently, arguments abound and can get heated over the responsibility and the causes for the increases in overweight and obesity in the community. Thus the food industry, supermarkets, retail practices, BOGOF, ready meals, unhealthy food items, are highlighted and stressed and the responsibility of individual subjects for their own lifestyle and their own body weight is marginalised, or excused. On the other hand, in a 'Citizens' Jury', set up in Cardiff to examine the issue – *My Health – whose responsibility?* – the jurors, selected to broadly represent the general population of Wales, accepted unanimously that the maintenance of health is the responsibility of subjects themselves, and they demanded a greater and more active involvement of the community in planning and in running initiatives relevant to health.

The annual cost of unhealthy behaviours has been estimated to be about 10% of the total costs of the NHS and it has been estimated that if the rates of overweight and obesity continue to rise, by 2050 the cost of overweight to the NHS in Wales will be £465m per year, with a cost to society and the economy of £2.4bn.

Another aspect of the burden of overweight and obesity is the extra food production and transport needs generated by overeating and overweight. Edwards & Roberts estimated the excess CO_2 production attributable to overweight in a population like that predicted for Wales in about 2030, compared with a population with a low prevalence of obesity. Making a number of assumptions, it seems likely that the increasing prevalence of overweight in Wales is likely to lead to the production of several million additional tonnes of CO_2 per year, or as much as an additional 5% of the present total CO_2 emissions from Wales.

Data collected in the 35-year Caerphilly cohort study of healthy behaviours enable the testing of possible health promotion strategies based on the concept of Rose and a small change across a community in the distribution of factors relevant to disease can clearly have a marked effect upon the burden of disease within the community. Suppose at the beginning of the work in the Caerphilly cohort study in 1980 the 2,500 subjects had each been urged to take up just one additional healthy behaviour and incorporate it into their lifestyle. Suppose that only half the cohort had done so, then over the following 35 years of the study there would have been 12% less diabetes, 6% fewer heart attacks and strokes, 9% less cancer and 13% fewer patients would have developed dementia.

In 2008 the conversation started by Mayor Cornett led to huge improvements in health in Oklahoma. A conversation on personal responsibility for health and for lifestyle would seem to be appropriate and highly opportune in Wales… starting with body weight and including the setting of an initial target for weight loss across the population. It worked in Oklahoma – why would it not work in Wales? ➤

Peter Elwood OBE, DSc, MD, FRCP, Hon DSC. is Honorary Professor in the Division of Population Medicine at Cardiff University

Closing the gender gap: treatment of heart patients in Wales

Emma Henwood *explains how recent research has highlighted how women are disadvantaged at every stage of heart attack experiences*

Inequalities in awareness, diagnosis and treatment of heart attacks are needlessly killing women every day in the UK. British Heart Foundation (BHF) funded research estimates that more than 8,200 women in England and Wales could have survived their heart attacks had they simply been given the same quality of treatment as men.

The study did not, however, include all hospital admissions which occurred over the ten-year study period, and researchers say that the actual number of lives lost to unequal care is therefore likely to be much higher.

In Wales, women are twice as likely to die of coronary heart disease, the main cause of heart attack, as they are of breast cancer. Yet it is still not always seen as a woman's problem.

We must put an end to the perception that heart attack is a male disease, and encourage women to better understand their risk of a heart attack and its symptoms. The false perception that heart attacks are only a male health issue often leads to inadequate care for women – both at the time of and after heart attacks – with fatal consequences.

Harriet Mulvaney was 44 years old in 2014 when she had a spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD). This is when a tear or bruise appears in the wall of a coronary artery, which supplies blood to the heart. In some cases, as in Harriet's, this can lead to a heart attack.

She explains: 'I was a busy professional and a mum of three at the time of my SCAD. I was working between sixty and seventy hours a week... and was always on the go. One lunchtime, in November 2014, I felt out of sorts, a little unwell and thought maybe I was coming down with something, but I dismissed it and carried on. Two days later after a busy day at work, I was at home and heading to bed when I [became] aware of a funny sensation at the top of the stairs before I went to brush my teeth. I felt unwell. I experienced central chest pain, crushing pain which was also in my left arm and spread into my neck and jaw.

'My husband called my mum who lives close by, and my parents came over. I was in the bedroom and I asked my husband to dial 999. I realised it was serious. My memories then are a bit of a blur, I remember the first responder arrived and asked me questions, ran his checks and gave me medication and an electrocardiogram test (ECG). He ran the ECG a number of times as the results weren't conclusive and sent the results through to hospital while we waited for an ambulance.

'Most importantly, the first responder didn't dismiss me. I was a woman in my forties with low blood pressure and no pre-existing conditions. He listened to

iwa New Voices

This article is the second in a series of three for *the welsh agenda*, promoting the work of the British Heart Foundation. BHF Cymru are working in partnership with the IWA to support a 'New Voices' fund, which allows freelance writers on low incomes and from marginalised backgrounds to contribute to public debate through *the welsh agenda*, both in print and online.

If your organisation is interested in working with the IWA to support this initiative, please contact dylan@iwa.org.uk

Signs and symptoms of a heart attack in women

Heart attack symptoms can vary but the most common signs of a heart attack are:

— chest pain or discomfort in your chest that suddenly occurs and doesn't go away. It may feel like pressure, tightness or squeezing

— the pain may spread to your left or right arm or may spread to your neck, jaw, back or stomach

— you may also feel sick, sweaty, light-headed or short of breath.

Other less common symptoms include:

— a sudden feeling of anxiety that can feel similar to a panic attack

— excessive coughing or wheezing

Chest pain should never be ignored. If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms dial 999 immediately.

The assumption that women are not at risk of heart attack is false

'I spent three days in isolation in the Coronary Care Unit and the care I received was phenomenal'

Harriet Mulvaney

me and kept running his tests. I was admitted to UHW in Cardiff and an angiogram confirmed that I'd had a heart attack as a result of a bruise or tear in my coronary artery. I spent three days in isolation in the Coronary Care Unit and the care I received was phenomenal. The staff took time to explain everything to me, but it was so surreal to learn I had a rare condition and would be on medication for the rest of my life.

'At 44, it was tough to hear and a big shock. When I got home from hospital I spent several weeks trying to process what had happened and what it meant for me. I was really worried about losing my career and how I would come to terms with life as I'd planned it that was now going to be very different.

'There are no clinical specialists in Wales with an expert knowledge of SCAD. After I was discharged, I had no follow up and no referral to a cardiologist. I took it upon myself to learn more about SCAD... it can be quite an isolating condition because it's quite rare. I found a research programme in Leicester, which had received funding from the British Heart Foundation and I attended a research day there in August 2015, which really helped me to understand my condition. Despite requesting a formal referral to Leicester through my GP, who was very supportive, my request was turned down by the Health Board, and even though I appealed against this decision, my appeal was not successful.

'It was a really disappointing experience: not being able to access clinics and a specialist doctor because I live out of the area feels very unfair. Being part of the research programme and able to speak with doctors who have lots of knowledge about my condition and can provide information and reassurance face to face is extremely beneficial to me as a patient.

'In 2018 I became a trustee of Beat SCAD, a charity which raises awareness of the condition in the medical community, offers patients support and the opportunity for us to help each other and share our experiences, and to fund more research into SCAD.

'I believe more can be done to improve outcomes for patients with SCAD. I think we need more education into the condition and its causes. There needs to be a new approach so that access to research and up to date knowledge is more available and accessible. There should be more awareness of this disease with the aim of more doctors recognising SCAD and being able to offer more specific treatments for SCAD patients like me.'

Each year around 1,700 women across Wales are admitted to hospital due to a heart attack. BHF Cymru estimates that at least 20,000 women alive in Wales today, like Harriet, have survived a heart attack.

Researchers from the University of Leeds used anonymised data from the UK's national heart attack registry to analyse the treatment and outcomes of 691,290 people who were hospitalised for heart attack in England and Wales between 2003 and 2013.

The national registry included detailed information about each patient's demographics, medical history and clinical characteristics such as heart rate when they entered hospital, and the investigations, treatments and procedures they received while in hospital.

In the study, women tended to be older when admitted to hospital, and were more likely to have other illnesses such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Even after adjusting for the fact that women with heart attack tended to be older and had more risk factors, the researchers found that women had more than double the rate of death in the 30 days following their heart attack than men. The researchers suggest that this may be, in part, explained by women being less likely to receive guideline recommended care.

Heart attacks have never been more treatable. Yet women are dying needlessly because heart attacks are often seen as a man's disease, and women don't receive the same standard of treatment as men.

The first steps to closing this gender gap include changing the public perception of women and heart attacks. The assumption that women are not at risk of heart attack is false. We need to continue to fund research to better prevent, diagnose and treat heart attacks. We also need to raise national awareness of gender based inequalities in heart attack care and identify and guard against unconscious biases that could contribute to them."

BHF Cymru wants to empower women to better understand their risk and to know the many symptoms of a heart attack. When someone has a heart attack – every second counts. The sooner people recognise their symptoms and call 999, the better their chance of recovery.

Emma Henwood is Policy and Public Affairs Manager at BHF Cymru

The idea of Britain

Simon Brooks *presents ideas about the island of Britain, a vital tradition in Welsh-language thought rarely discussed by English-speaking Wales*

Wales is not an overbearing theme in Welsh mythology, nor until recently in Welsh thought. Indeed at times it seems to be so unnoticed that one is tempted to ask whether the place exists at all. Perhaps this is why Welsh historiography and literature is wrought with existential titles, of which the most well-known is Gwyn Alf Williams' *When Was Wales?*. But the concern can be traced back to earlier nationalisms, such as in John Morris Jones' poem, 'Cymru Fu: Cymru Fydd' ('Wales has been: Wales will be').

This is not to say that the Welsh never had a homeland. They did, it is simply that it was not Wales. Their land had its sea border at Dover. Its capital was London. Its three great rivers were the Severn, the Thames and the Humber. Its extremities were at Cornwall and by the Clyde. This territory was often referred to as 'the Island'. It is rather suggestive.

Furthermore, the Welsh had an indicative name. They were known as 'Britons'. The island of which they spoke was the 'Island of Britain'. Their language was 'the British language'. This was their island before the Saxons came.

Nor was this merely myth, although it was that too. With the victory of the Tudors, that myth had been powerful enough to help entrench a new dynasty. Now it was conveyed into the early modern and modern world by popular histories. The idea was central in Welsh Enlightenment thought too, which is why Iolo Morganwg called his druidic court in London, an early if somewhat idiosyncratic form of Welsh psycho-democracy, the 'Gorsedd of the Island of Britain'. Such

The native link between the Welsh concept of 'Britain' as a pre-Saxon whole, and a post-Saxon world order based on 'Britain', was never displaced within Welsh-language culture

'Britonness' was the substratum of popular Victorian discourse, for example in Welsh nonconformism, which boomed in English cities as in Wales. And it informs the beginnings of Welsh socialism. We find in the Glamorgan coalfield in the 1890s a supporter of Keir Hardie appealing to the collier to create a labour movement, and hence end the oppression after two thousand years of the people of 'this Island'.

Historians have noted the imperial flavour. If the Welsh were an aboriginal people of the whole island, one could talk about an Ur-Britain which in turn legitimised a political entity of that name, and hence a 'British empire'. Afterwards the name gains a momentum – in England – of its own, constituting an act of cultural appropriation. Nevertheless, the native link between the Welsh concept of 'Britain' as a pre-Saxon whole, and a post-Saxon world order based on 'Britain', was never displaced within Welsh-language culture.

Some might today dismiss this as an antiquarian matter, a myth of origin about as relevant to modern Wales as the exceedingly popular idea that the Welsh were the descendants of Troy. However the Welsh had not in reality been the rulers of Troy. They had however ruled the roost in Britain, or so they thought. And so with each generation the idea of Britain retained its appeal.

This argument worried Welsh nationalist thinkers in twentieth-century 'Wales', now actually called Wales. The nationalist philosopher, J. R. Jones, wrote a book attacking it, *Prydeindod* (Britishness). He argued that Wales only existed where language and land might coincide. This was not just linguistic essentialism however, but also an attempt to dish the idea that the Welsh were 'of Britain'. If indigenous thought continued to be obsessed with regaining the Island, symbolically re-entering the lands of which the Welsh had been dispossessed, the idea of a Welsh state was on very thin ice indeed.

For the idea that the Welsh were the original Britons had reduced them to the status of an ethnic minority. J. R. Jones doubted that they were even a 'nation'. They could partake as individuals within wider society but as a group they had to take second best.

To put it crudely, the line that the 'Welsh were the first Britons' was scuppering hopes of Welsh statehood. It meant Britishness was not an alien concept. Britain had not been imposed on the Welsh by English overlords. Rather, it was the central idea of Welsh thought. For centuries, it had represented the only way in which the Welsh understood their 'real' history. What mattered was the wholeness of the Island of Britain, and all the better if it might be under Welsh rule, which explains a lot about the cult of David Lloyd George.

So Welsh nationalists went out to destroy the idea of Britain. For the best part of a century, a subterranean culture war was fought within Welsh-language culture between those who felt the 'First Nation' status of the Welsh in Britain was central to self-worth, and those who rejected this in favour of a closed civic state.

Thus Welsh nationalism was never 'anti-English'. However, it was exceedingly anti-England. Those most likely to be threatened by nationalism were not the English in Wales but the British Welsh, as well as Welsh communities in England. The almost total collapse of the Liverpool Welsh community, at one time one of the more significant ethnic minority communities in Britain, is a case in point. Another was the decision made by the Eisteddfod last year to re-name the 'Gorsedd of the Bards of the Island of Britain' the 'Gorsedd of Wales'.

But the reality is that a Welsh state cannot be made at variance with historical truth. The Welsh have always been inseparable from Britain. Wales is not Ireland. Wales is not Scotland. In Welsh mythology, it was questionable whether Scotland north of Strathclyde was part of the 'Island' anyway: the Island was primarily a cultural concept, the Romano-British realm.

Discussed extensively in Welsh, in particular by Dafydd Glyn Jones, this idea of a Welsh Britain has rarely

When we go to England, we are not going abroad. The shopping trip to Chester, the visit to Anfield or Goodison Park, the train to London, the aunt in Leamington Spa

impacted on discussions in English-speaking Wales. Yet it explains in part why Welsh nationalism is so touchy on the subject of Britishness. The idea of Britain is internal to Wales, because in the Welsh tradition, Britain is the imagined homeland. Britain is much more than an amalgamation of lands to be cast painlessly aside.

Today, the underlying mythology of Britishness is reinforced by social and economic reality, and popular culture. The border is open and porous. It is crazy to imagine that in a post-Brexit world links will recede. Welsh connections with England are extensive: English football teams, English pop stars, English universities, English relatives. When we go to England, we are not going abroad. The shopping trip to Chester, the visit to Anfield or Goodison Park, the train to London, the aunt in Leamington Spa. It is not the same as going to Barcelona. Welsh culture has never thought of England as a foreign country in that sense.

The Brexit referendum highlighted the misery of the vanquished. Europe was being taken away. If Wales were ever to become independent, some will feel deeply embittered about the loss of Britain. For they will regard British citizenship, as Remainers look on citizenship of Europe, as part of their inheritance.

But such feelings of ambiguity and loss are feelings which are not wholly alien to nationalist Wales. Wales is not in the same position as Scotland in its psychological approach to Britain. England was never part of Scotland. However, England is an integral part of what once was 'Wales'. In Welsh thought, Wales and Britain have at crucial times been one and the same.

Thus, Welsh nationalists should revisit the myth of the Island of Britain. Those feelings of loss for the Island can be used to understand unionist fear. Welsh nationalists should do this for they were once British too, and removing fear may make a difference in any plebiscite on autonomy.

Welsh independence is better accessed by accepting the reality of a shared island rather than in its rejection. Dual Anglo-Welsh citizenship should be a priority for an independent Wales. British citizenship might be retained, symbolically perhaps, even following the demise of that state. Of course, an independent England would have responsibilities as well: England has a Welsh diaspora, and an extensive Welsh heritage, and Welsh is a language of England too. Politically, we would need a British council: while we are Welsh Europeans we are also Welsh Britons. The loss of the Island of Britain should help nationalists to practice empathy, and by doing so they will make Welsh sovereignty more likely.

Simon Brooks is Associate Professor at the Morgan Academy, Swansea University

Helen Antoniazzi, *a special advisor*

In the first of a new series on special advisors, **Shazia Awan-Scully** *meets* **Helen Antoniazzi** *who was for several years chief of staff for Leanne Wood when she was leader of Plaid Cymru*

UK politics is changing at unprecedented speed and political parties are having to deal with a deeply split and volatile electorate. In these uncertain times, there is one group of people who are closer than anyone to the political leaders trying to find their way through the rush of events – the special advisors. Brought into government by Labour prime minister Harold Wilson in the 1960s to help manage the 'burden of modern government', special advisors or SPADs, have become an indispensable part of Welsh and UK politics. On any given day they can be providing advice on policy, dealing with media requests, managing social media feeds, and even politicians' appearance.

Working at a senior level in politics means working long hours and being available at all hours. So what is it like when you leave the compression chamber, and re-enter 'normal' life? Talking to Helen Antoniazzi, over lunch, what comes across is how fondly she talks about her time at Plaid Cymru, where she worked her way up to become chief of staff to then leader Leanne Wood.

Antoniazzi started her career, with a degree in Italian under her belt, at Grayling Public Affairs, before joining Plaid Cymru, where she would stay for fourteen years through many elections and by-elections. 'It was 2004 when I became a researcher for Plaid Cymru at the National Assembly. I [became] a press officer, a senior press officer and by the time Leanne became leader in 2012 I was established in the group. I went for the job of Head of News and Research, and then shortly after I became Chief of Staff in September 2012, which is what I did until I left in 2017, after Theresa May's snap election.'

Working so closely with anybody can be intense, but working for a party leader during several election campaigns is probably impossible if you don't get on as people. Talking to Antoniazzi, one thing that strikes you is the closeness of the bond she had – and evidently still has – with Leanne Wood. The two of them go back a long way: 'I have known Leanne since I was 13! I've always had respect for her, because she's a genuine person and I think that's why people warmed to her. She's far from a career politician!'

For all the adrenalin rushes and sense of achievement that working for a political party can deliver, it can also make huge demands on those people and their loved ones

An already strong personal bond grew even further after Helen became Chief of Staff to the new Plaid leader in 2012. The fact that both were new in their jobs meant, Helen believes, 'that [we were given] the opportunity to grow together and to develop into our respective roles, so that we could complement each other.' The pair became a very close team, even as they often had to face difficult times.

I recall observing them in the early hours of 24 June 2016, at the EU referendum count. As the sensational result gradually became clear, many other politicians were visibly shocked, and some could be seen having heated discussions with their staff. In this context, Antoniazzi and Wood stood out for their air of calm determination and togetherness.

In general elections, of which we have had plenty in recent years, televised debates between party leaders have come to be an expected part of the campaign. Yet of course it was only ten years ago that the first such debates happened – with Prime Minister Gordon Brown facing off against David Cameron and Nick Clegg. The SNP and Plaid Cymru were left out of these debates – and far from happy about it. The fight to make sure that things were different in 2015 is one of the key battles that Helen recalls.

'We had seen an overnight drop in our vote share in the opinion polls [in 2010] because of not being in the debates, so we knew that in 2015 it was essential to be included. I worked with our team to develop a strategy, working alongside the SNP, and we took that to all the broadcasters. We got laughed at, pretty much, at a UK level initially when we made that case... now it's a pretty standard thing that Plaid and the SNP are included in these debates. Once we had got into the debates, all that work around preparing us as a party and Leanne as a leader and bringing the team together and developing the Voice of Wales strategy was a big job!'

We got laughed at, pretty much, at a UK level initially when we made that case... now it's a pretty standard thing that Plaid and the SNP are included in these debates

The 2015 debates, which saw Leanne Wood acclaimed for her combative stance against Nigel Farage, and which substantially raised the Plaid leader's profile and popularity, were one significant achievement. Another was the following year's Assembly election. After a disastrous Plaid showing in 2011, the party fought back in 2016 to overtake the Conservatives in both votes and seats, while Wood herself won a famous victory in the Rhondda. Much of this success, Antoniazzi recalls, was a long time in the making.

'The work and planning and preparation that goes into an election campaign is huge. For the 2016 Assembly elections, we started planning back in 2012: looking at what our strategy was going to be and what policies we wanted to focus on. We wanted to make sure that by the time we got to that election period in 2016, we weren't telling people what our policies were – we were defending them from other people who knew what they were. We would push out policies and test them. The sugary drinks tax, for example: Leanne announced that as a Plaid policy in 2013. It was ridiculed at the time, and now it has been adopted at a UK level.'

But if 2016 brings back fond memories, Theresa May's snap election the following year was the end of the road for Helen Antoniazzi and working for Plaid. She admits that it had her close to tears, but she was exhausted after several years of fighting major elections, and the thought of doing another one felt all too much.

'When it came to the 2017 election, we had a month to prepare; we were driving the length and breadth of the country for the debates and interviews and doing a lot of media and constituency appearances. In Plaid all the teams pull together and we were a small team so everyone pitched in at every level. Nevertheless the toll it takes is substantial – forget having a social life of any kind! Most evenings and weekends I would work. I'd get up at 6am, looking at my phone, plan our lines for the day, and be on call anytime of the day. In a relationship it's really tough – I am not sure you can do that job and have a good work-life balance. I think parties need fresh thinking and it's not healthy for people doing that very senior role in a party to be doing it for too long.'

Antoniazzi tells me that she interviewed for her current role at Chwarae Teg, the women's equality organisation, during the 2017 election campaign. 'I didn't tell Leanne and my colleagues until the end of the campaign. It was such an emotional thing telling Leanne I was leaving; we had lunch a couple of weeks ago and we were talking about how it happened. I knew I needed to tell her and I kept thinking, I need to find the right time – but of course when is the right time? I kept talking to my husband, Jon, saying I have to tell her but I don't want to throw her off her game. We had a very close relationship and a very strong interdependency and she obviously had a lot of different debates and commitments so I was concerned about the timing. In the end we were on the train back into Cardiff from Birmingham and I knew I needed to tell her on this two hour journey, and I was thinking to myself you have to say it now, and it got to Newport and I hadn't been able to bring myself to do it! I blurted it out, 'Leanne I'm leaving!' She started crying, then I started crying. It was so emotional. She understood, it felt like breaking up with a partner! Obviously we are still really close friends.'

When thinking of leaving any job and moving onto something new it can be hard to think about what your own strengths are and how to present them to potential new employers. The best approach can be to ask someone else, and when Antoniazzi was thinking about leaving Plaid Cymru that's exactly what she did.

'I spoke to the late Steffan Lewis. When I was trying to think what have my strengths been in this role? he said to me, that *Helen, what you are really good at doing is taking two people with polar opposite views and making them see the other side of things.*'

On her decision to leave, she says, 'I miss elements of it: it was such a big part of my life for nearly fourteen years. The biggest thing has to be the camaraderie and I suppose in these kinds of roles you have huge highs and huge lows. Of course I don't miss the lows, but the very big highs, yes I miss them. It's a sense of instant gratification, the adrenalin you get from it; it's difficult to replicate that in another role. It's almost like being part of a family when you work in that kind of a role, and of course miss the people. I see Leanne regularly, whether it's Sunday lunch or a catch up down the Bay, and obviously I've got really good friendships with my former colleagues.'

Helen Antoniazzi was appointed as the strategic lead for communications at Chwarae Teg and went on to head up the communications, policy and research and marketing teams. Having worked in politics, she was making a difference every day and contributing to society and it's clear she knew she needed to work somewhere where she could still campaign for something she believes in and be driven by a cause. 'Working to further equality and women's equality in particular really appealed; we were largely an all-female senior leadership team at Plaid, and there were often situations where people's unconscious bias reared its head; there was an assumption that we need 'helpful advice' from men! Very often what would happen was, if we were having a meeting and if in the room there was me and Leanne and one of my colleagues who would report in to me that was a male colleague, the person coming into the meeting would always assume that the man was the more senior colleague and I was the person there to take notes and make tea. If Leanne said for example *have you met my Chief of Staff?*, people's gaze would automatically go to the man in the room.'

Would she ever go back into active politics? There are few signs of it at present. Antoniazzi is clear that she has no ambitions herself to become a high-level politician – 'I honestly can say nothing has ever been further from my mind! I have seen how tough it can be every day.' And she clearly appreciates the ability to have a slightly more balanced life. 'Three years on at Chwarae Teg, it still feels amazing to have time for self-reflection, career development and personal growth. I love being able to switch off in the evenings and weekends and certainly appreciate being able to do it!' One thing is clear: for all the adrenalin rushes and sense of achievement that working for a political party can deliver, it can also make huge demands on those people and their loved ones.

Shazia Awan-Scully is Global Head of PR at CreditSafe, and a member of *the welsh agenda's* editorial group

The forward march of devolution halted?

Leighton Andrews sees in the COVID-19 pandemic yet another opportunity for the UK Government to undermine its devolved counterparts

COVID-19 doesn't respect borders. And nor does UK Government messaging. On 10 April, the 'UK Government in Wales' tweeted that the first drive-in testing centre in Wales had been opened, at the Cardiff City Stadium. We had known this was happening for some time, of course, as it had featured in Welsh Government press briefings, and it was obvious to anyone cycling past. But for those of us who thought that health was devolved, this was a signal that we are in new territory: a UK government stepping on the Welsh Government's toes.

I was told subsequently that Deloitte's had landed a contract across the UK for fifty drive-in test centres, though Public Health Wales is now operating the one at Cardiff City and it was the Welsh Government which was blamed when the centre was shut on Easter Monday. It makes sense of course for the Welsh Government to join in on UK-wide procurements, not least to avoid price-gouging as has been seen in respect of PPE.

But the subsequent propaganda from the department formerly known as the Wales Office suggests a deeper agenda. The COVID-19 crisis is intensifying a process already visible in the period following the December UK General Election: a post-Brexit activist unionism, intended to redraw the evolving constitutional settlement of the previous twenty years.

May 2020 marks the point at which Wales has been living with what the French call *cohabitation* for a decade: one party in power in Cardiff Bay, another at Westminster. The next period is likely to test the resilience of devolution. We could be heading towards what I call 'Devolution In Name Only' – or DINO for short. And the DINO-saurs have a strategy.

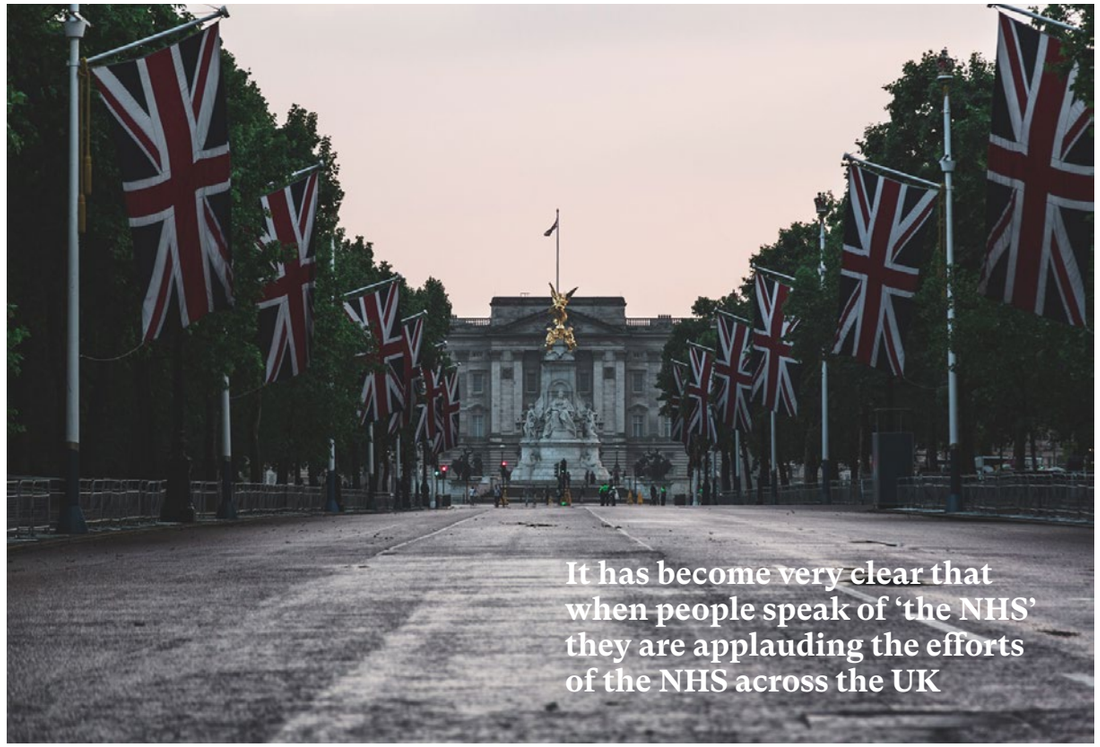
This strategy is based on proposals that the Policy Exchange think tank has been developing for a radical constitutional re-ordering: re-branding the Supreme Court as an Upper Court of Appeal, essentially nullifying its role as a constitutional court, strengthening ministerial oversight of judicial appointments and limiting judicial review, the reestablishment of Parliamentary sovereignty but with the executive's powers reinforced, limits on the Human Rights Act and on the application of the European Convention on Human Rights. Welsh appointments to bodies under the control of the UK government have already been politicised.

The agenda isn't limited to constitutional matters: there is an emphasis on UK government investment, particularly in infrastructure. Central government funded initiatives such as the City Deal have been used to build stronger relationships directly between the UK Government and Welsh institutions including local authorities. A 'Western powerhouse' model, bringing together Cardiff, Newport and Bristol, was launched to undermine Welsh Government economic plans.

During the 2019 General Election campaign, the Conservatives promised to deliver the M4 Relief Road, without the power to do so. The stage is set for a new War on Wales, but perhaps through a more subtle approach than the Cameron years. Michael Gove recently penned an article in the *Western Mail* stressing what he said was the UK Government's additional £2 billion investment in Wales to help address the COVID-19 threat, the role played by the army in coordination, cooperation between the UK and Welsh governments, and reiterating the five UK Government tests rather than the seven questions outlined by the First Minister, Mark Drakeford.

This is an activist infrastructure-driven and clientelism-based Unionism designed to undermine and minimise the role of the devolved governments. COVID-19 offers further opportunities effectively to dilute the already inadequate intergovernmental arrangements. The devolved administrations may attend COBR meetings but are observers only on SAGE, while the PM's chief of staff, Dominic Cummings, is a participant. England's chief medical officer has, apparently, the role of chief medical adviser to the UK government.

This agenda is aided of course by Wales's fragmented public sphere. Paradoxically, Welsh journalists have been doing a better job of holding the Welsh Government



It has become very clear that when people speak of 'the NHS' they are applauding the efforts of the NHS across the UK

The stage is set for a new War on Wales, but perhaps through a more subtle approach than the Cameron years

COVID-19 offers... opportunities effectively to dilute the already inadequate intergovernmental arrangements

to account than UK journalists have been doing with the UK Government. The dominant UK narrative has become neither the excess and preventable deaths nor the failures in planning and logistics but the Boris Johnson personal soap opera. It is possible to be pleased that the Prime Minister recovered from a dangerous virus and has a newborn son without succumbing to journalistic sycophancy. Meanwhile far more people in Wales read the *Daily Mail* than the *Western Mail*, and the *Daily Mail's* own gung-ho story of flying in PPE to aid the NHS sets the 'we can beat this' tone.

The wider UK narrative – first Brexit, now COVID-19 – has drowned our national public sphere in Wales for the last four years. Welsh Government initiatives will get UK media attention when they differ from or are seen to pre-empt decisions of the UK government, such as announcements on closing schools, ruling out an early exit from the lockdown, or setting out the key questions governing the decision on whether the lock-down should be eased. Occasionally stories will surface on programmes like *You and Yours* about how Wales is being more generous in investing in support for homeless people than is England. But the narrative of difference cuts both ways: so if England is testing more care-home residents or staff, then that becomes a stick to beat the Welsh Government, whatever its efficacy.

The lockdown has seen the emergence of popular responses such as the weekly 'clap for the carers', originally for NHS workers but intended now to capture all those in caring roles. It has become very clear that when people speak of 'the NHS' they are applauding the efforts of the NHS across the UK, no matter that academics write these days about four NHSs with different operating structures.

This 'natural patriotism' is a UK phenomenon, an expression of solidarity. In the period of Brexit I once wondered if unionism was capable of producing an emotional response in its support. We have seen that emotional response in the backing for the NHS as a symbol of the best of us – and that doesn't stop at the Welsh border. Though emotion for the BBC may be a long time coming, its necessity as a public service has become ever more evident, with record television audiences for the Prime Minister and the Queen. The attacks on it from the Tory right, have largely been confined to occasional outbursts focused on specific programmes like the *Panorama* exposé on PPE.

The UK narrative has of course dominated our news coverage of the COVID-19 crisis, with the statements from the UK Government press conferences, however inane many of those have been, providing the broadcast news lead. Facilitated by a centralised media, bolstered by a slavishly loyal tabloid press, this renewed activist unionism and its possible endurance after the lockdown should not be underestimated. Unless, of course, the inevitable public inquiry, potentially so different with evidence from the devolved administrations certain to be heard, actually cuts through with direct and sharp criticisms of the failures in planning and delivery and the UK's excess death exceptionalism.

Leighton Andrews is Professor of Public Leadership and Innovation at Cardiff Business School and a former Welsh Government Minister

After GCSEs: *my new reality*

Poppy Stowell-Evans *gives a first hand account of the effect of GCSE cancellations on Year 11 pupils*

Being in self-isolation – my younger sister having suspected coronavirus symptoms – I already felt extremely anxious, trapped and scared because of this uncertain version of my new reality. Then came the announcement that GCSE and A level exams were being cancelled in the summer of 2020 and that schools across the country would be shut until further notice. An announcement made initially with no plan or insight into how pupils would be awarded grades.

As a Year 11 pupil, this meant that I would no longer be sitting the majority of my GCSE exams. It is almost impossible to articulate how many thoughts and emotions were rushing through my body. I sat – frozen – concerned about what this would mean for my future.

Similarly to many of my peers, initially, I felt a massive sense of relief. The announcement confirmed that I would no longer have to face the trepidation of exam season during the peak of Welsh summer. Gone were the late nights and early morning revision sessions. My coloured pens would be able to finally retire to the bottom of my pencil case.

I would no longer have to listen to the anxious reminders from my teachers that we only had *three, two, one week left* until our first exam, and best of all, I could finally turn the French subtitles off Netflix. I would enjoy RuPaul's Drag Race without the reminder of key auxiliary verbs.

Unfortunately, the blissful relief that came with this interpretation of my new reality didn't last forever. Very soon a dark cloud began to hang over me and so many of my peers. Almost collectively, we realised that our time in school had essentially ended. Not just our school year – our whole high school life had essentially ended. And it ended so abruptly.

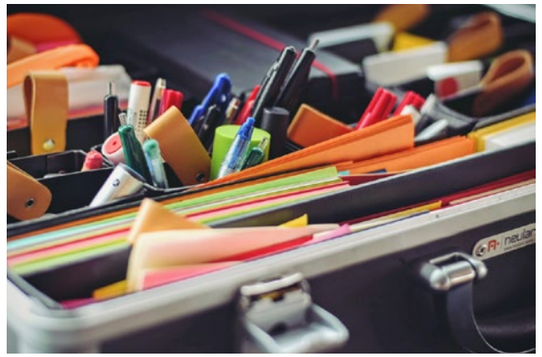
Unknowingly, shielded by naivety and our version of 'normality', we had had our last English lesson; our last giggle over teenage gossip in the drama classroom at lunch; our last assembly; our last time seeing our closest friends every day.

This acknowledgement opened the floodgates to a tsunami of more realisations and new losses.

I consider myself to be a hardworking and conscientious pupil. I would constantly ask my teachers how to improve. I would revise on family holidays, at running competitions and even on Christmas Day. This often resulted in my Mum growing concerned and worried that I was 'doing too much', but nevertheless I persisted.

Whilst this trait was not always regarded very highly by my fellow pupils, my determination pushed me. I was eager to

It has taught me that kindness and selflessness are tools to make the world a brighter place



prove my ability to myself and to everyone else, driven to break stereotypes and misconceptions wrongfully formed about my school and my postcode.

So, while this all may seem trivial to a bystander, the cancellation of exams stole this opportunity from me and a multitude of other young people. In my school, we want to break stereotypes and prove our capability.

It has stolen the opportunity for many of us to feel as though we have truly achieved our grades. It has stolen the opportunity for us to prove to our teachers that their hard work and dedication was worth it, that we could make them proud.

It was almost a month before I began to accept this new version reality. The situation is completely out of my control – it's out of anyone's control.

We finally received an announcement about how our grades would be fairly reached; I could begin to move on.

On Easter Sunday, through tears and lots of support from my mum (and far too many chocolate eggs), I finally packed away my mass of revision resources and school books. While this felt surreal, it provided a liberation that allowed me to step into a new part of my life.

Now my determination is now being channelled into A Level study and supporting the people and community around me in any way I can.

I know though that my loss is miniscule compared to the loss of many others in my city, country and the world. While I cried at the cancellation of Leavers' Day, others were crying at the loss of a loved one. While I felt anxious about my future in education, others felt anxious for their future in employment and ability to provide for their family. While I was scared and anxious about how my GCSEs would be graded, NHS staff and those in the social work sector, like my Nan, were scared for their lives, working on the front line – saving lives through risking theirs: a result of years of below par funding and insufficient PPE stocks.

Whilst COVID-19 has guaranteed uncertainty and change, it has taught me – as a young person – important lessons.

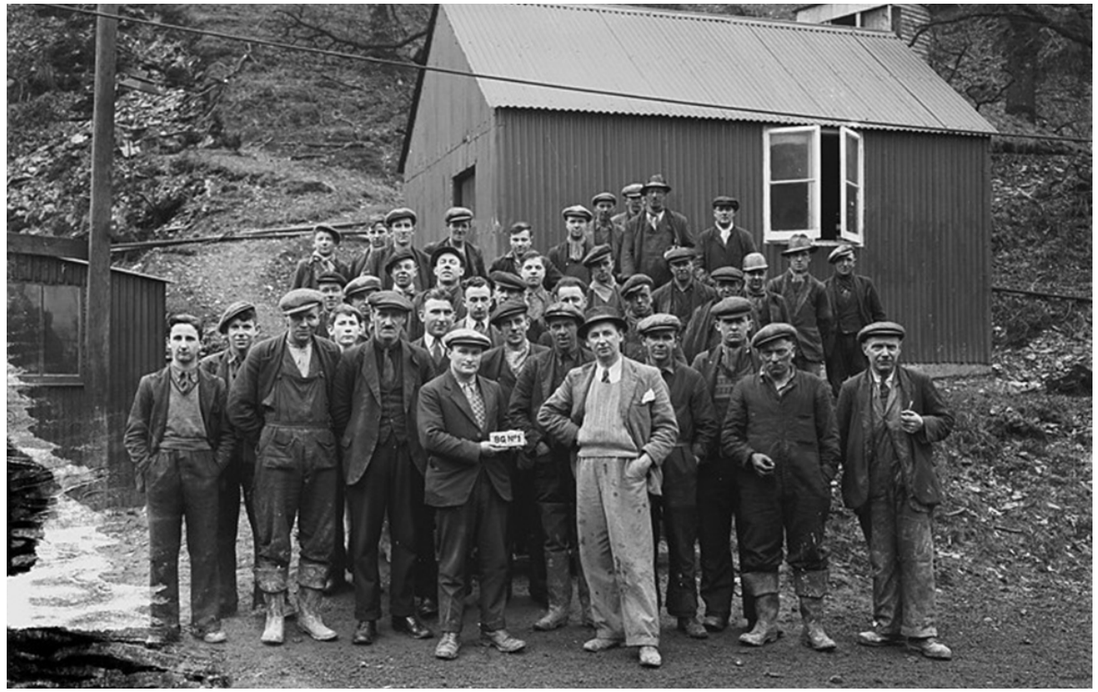
I have learnt to value my privilege. To value that I am lucky enough to have a garden and to live in a house where I feel safe and loved. I have learnt that everyone's emotions are valid and that occasionally pain must be felt, that it can not be avoided.

It has taught me that kindness and selflessness are tools to make the world a brighter place. But, most significantly, it has taught me to appreciate the beauty in ordinary things and the people around me.

COVID-19 is an indiscriminate disease. Anyone can be affected by its ruthless presence regardless of race, religion, gender, wealth. At this time, we need to appreciate our equality through similarity and praise those who have been forgotten for far too long.

As the American playwright John Guare once said: 'It's amazing how a little tomorrow can make up for a whole lot of yesterday.' ➤

Poppy Stowell-Evans is a pupil at Llanwern High School, Newport. She's an ardent feminist and is a strong advocate for equality, social justice and human rights. She is also a passionate climate change activist and considers herself as an internationalist, believing countries should work together where beneficial



Curriculum for Wales: history, citizenship, inequality

Martin Johnes *argues that embedding inequality is a greater threat for Curriculum for Wales than arguments about Welsh history and citizenship*

Welsh education is heading towards its biggest shake up for two generations. The new Curriculum for Wales is intended to place responsibility for what pupils are taught with their teachers. It does not specify any required content but instead sets out 'the essence of learning' that should underpin the topics taught and learning activities employed. At secondary school, many traditional subjects will be merged into new broad areas of learning. The curriculum is intended to produce 'ambitious and capable learners' who are 'enterprising and creative', 'ethical and informed citizens', and 'healthy and confident'.

Given how radical this change potentially is, there has been very little public debate about it. This is partly rooted in the curriculum documentation, which is dominated by technical language and abstract ideas. There is very little that is concrete to debate.

There also seems to be a belief that in science and maths very little will change because of how those subjects are based on unavoidable core knowledges. Instead, most of the public discussion that has occurred has centred on the position of Welsh history.

The focus on history is rooted in how obsessed much of the Welsh public sphere (including myself) is by questions of identity. History is central to why Wales is a nation and thus has long been promoted by those seeking to develop a Welsh sense of nationhood. Concerns that children are not taught enough Welsh history are longstanding and date back to at least the 1880s. The debates around the teaching of Welsh history are also inherently political. Those who believe in independence often feel their political cause is hamstrung by people being unaware of their own history.

Concerns that children are not taught enough Welsh history are longstanding and date back to at least the 1880s

The new curriculum is consciously intended to be 'Welsh' in outlook and it requires the Welsh context to be central to whatever subject matter is delivered. This matters most in the humanities where the Welsh context is intended to be delivered through activities and topics that join together the local, national and global. The intention is that this will instil in pupils 'passion and pride in themselves, their communities and their country'.

That this comes from a guidance document for schools might alarm those who fear a government attempt at Welsh nation building. Other documents are less celebratory but still clearly Welsh in outlook. Thus the goal stated in the main documentation is that learners should 'develop a strong sense of their own identity and well-being', 'an understanding of others' identities and make connections with people, places and histories elsewhere in Wales and across the world.'

A nearby slate quarry could thus be used to teach about local Welsh-speaking culture, the Welsh and British industrial revolution, and the connections between the profits of the slave trade and the historical local economy. This could bring in not just history, but literature, art, geography and economics too. There is real potential for exciting programmes of study that break down subject boundaries and engage pupils with where they live and make them think and understand their community's connections with Wales and the wider world.

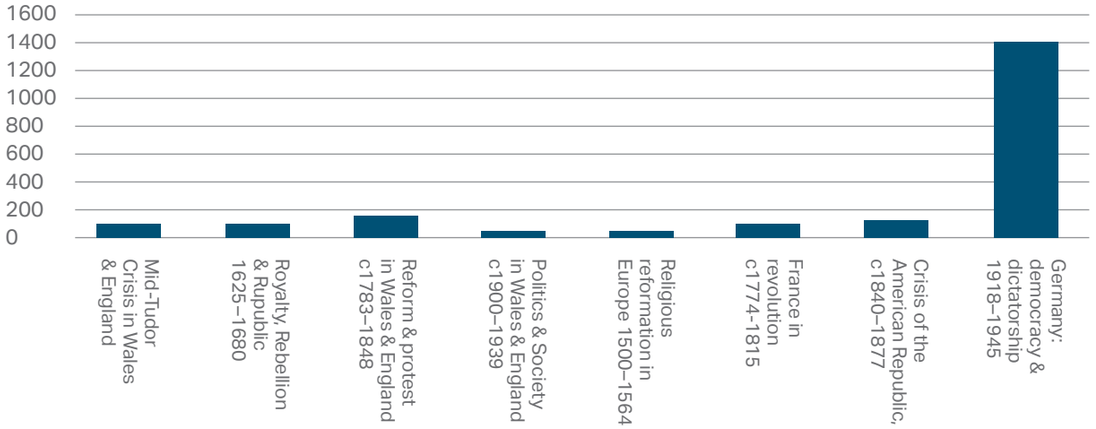
This is all sensible but there remains a vagueness around the underlying concepts. The Humanities section of the curriculum speaks of the need for 'consistent exposure to the story of learners' locality and the story of Wales'. Schools are asked to 'Explore Welsh businesses, cultures, history, geography, politics, religions and societies'. But this leaves considerable freedom over the balance of focus and what exactly 'consistent exposure' means in practice.

If schools want to minimise the Welsh angle in favour of the British or the global, they will be able to do so as long as the Welsh context is there. It is not difficult to imagine some schools treating 'the story of Wales' as a secondary concern because that is what already sometimes happens.

The existing national curriculum requires local and Welsh history to be 'a focus of the study' but like its forthcoming replacement, it never defines very closely what that means in terms of actual practice. In some schools, it seems that the Welsh perspective is reduced to a tick box exercise where Welsh examples are occasionally employed but never made the heart of the history programme. I say 'seems' because there is no data on the proportion of existing pre-GCSE history teaching that is devoted to Welsh history.

But all the anecdotal evidence points to Wales often

WJEC A Level 2018: Depth Study Unit 4



not being at the heart of what history is taught, at least in secondary schools. At Key Stage 3 (ages 11 to 14) in particular, the Welsh element can feel rather nominal as many children learn about the Battle of Hastings, Henry VIII and the Nazis. GCSEs were reformed in 2017 to ensure Welsh history is not marginalised, but at A Level the options schools choose reveal a stark preference in some units away from not just Wales but Britain too.

Why schools chose not to teach more Welsh history is a complex issue. Within a curriculum that is very flexible, teachers deliver what they are confident in, what they have resources for, what interests them and what they think pupils will be interested in. Not all history teachers have been taught Welsh history at school or university and they thus perhaps prefer to lean towards those topics they are familiar with. Resources are probably an issue too. While there are plenty of Welsh history resources out there, they can be scattered around and locating them is not always easy. Some of the best date back to the 1980s and 1990s and are not online. There is also amongst both pupils and teachers the not-unreasonable idea that Welsh history is simply not as interesting as themes such as Nazi Germany. This matters because, after Key Stage 3, 'option' subjects are competing for pupils.

The new curriculum does nothing to address any of these issues and it is probable that it will not do much to enhance the volume of Welsh history taught. No change is always the easiest policy outcome to follow. Those schools that already teach a lot of Welsh history will continue to do so. Many of those that do not will also probably carry on in that vein.

It is unlikely that any school history department would choose not to teach what Hitler inflicted upon the world, but they will be perfectly at liberty to do so

Of course, a system designed to allow different curricula is also designed to produce different outcomes. The whole point of the reform is for schools to be different to one another but there may be unintended consequences to this. Particularly in areas where schools are essentially in competition with each other for pupils, some might choose to develop a strong sense of Welshness across all subject areas because they feel it will appeal to local parents and local authority funders. Others might go the opposite way for the same reasons, especially in border areas where attracting staff from England is important. Welsh medium schools are probably more likely to be in the former group and English medium schools in the latter.

In 2019, 28.4% of pupils eligible for free school meals achieved five A*–C grade GCSEs, compared with 60.5% of those not eligible. In 2018, 75.3% of pupils in Ceredigion hit this level, whereas in Blaenau Gwent only 56.7% did.

Moreover, the concerns around variability do not just extend to issues of Welsh identity and history. By telling schools they can teach what they feel matters, the Welsh Government is telling them they do not have to teach, say, the histories of racism or the Holocaust. It is unlikely that any school history department would choose not to teach what Hitler inflicted upon the world, but they will be perfectly at liberty to do so and by enshrining their right to do this the Welsh Government is saying it would be happy for any school to follow such a line. Quite how that fits with the government's endorsement of Holocaust Memorial Day and Mark Drakeford's reminder of the importance of remembering such genocides is unclear.

There are other policy disconnects. The right to vote in Senedd elections has been granted to sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds. Yet the government has decided against requiring them to be taught anything specific about that institution, its history and how Welsh democracy works. Instead, faith is placed in a vague requirement for pupils to be made into informed and ethical citizens. What that actually means in terms of knowledge is up to schools and teachers. Some pupils will be taught lots about devolved politics, others very little. The government is giving young people the responsibility of voting but avoiding its own responsibility to ensure they are taught in any depth what that means in a Welsh context.

The new curriculum will thus not educate everyone in the same elements of political citizenship or history because it is explicitly designed to not do so. Just as they do now, pupils will continue to leave schools with very different understandings of what Wales is, what the Senedd does and how both fit into British, European and global contexts. Perhaps that does not matter if we want pupils to make up their own minds about how they should be governed. But, at the very least, if we are going to give young people the vote, surely it is not too much to want them to be told where it came from, what it means, and what it can do.

But this is not the biggest missed opportunity of the curriculum. Wales already has an educational system that produces very different outcomes for those who go through it. In 2019, 28.4% of pupils eligible for free school meals achieved five A*–C grade GCSEs, compared with 60.5% of those not eligible. In 2018, 75.3% of pupils in Ceredigion hit this level, whereas in Blaenau Gwent only 56.7% did. These are staggering differences that have nothing to do with the curriculum and everything to do with the how poverty impacts on pupils' lives. There is nothing in the new curriculum that looks to eradicate such differences.

Teachers in areas with the highest levels of deprivation face a daily struggle to deal with its consequences. This will also impact on what the new curriculum can achieve in their schools. It will be easier to develop innovative programmes that take advantage of what the new curriculum can enable in schools where teachers are not dealing with the extra demands of pupils who have missed breakfast or who have difficult home lives. Field trips are easiest in schools where parents can afford them. Home learning is most effective in homes with books, computers and internet access. The very real danger of the new curriculum is not what it will or will not do for Welsh citizenship and history but that it will exacerbate the already significant difference between schools in affluent areas and schools that are not. Wales needs less difference between its schools, not more.

Professor Martin Johnes teaches and researches history at Swansea University

Banc Cambria: *a new bank for a new world*

Rebecca Nelson *explains how the coronavirus crisis makes the launch of a national cooperative bank even more vital*

Banc Cambria is being created by a diverse group of people with a longstanding interest in the finance needs of people and businesses in Wales. We want to find better ways to support, rather than exploit. We have a range of knowledge and experience, including co-operatives, social business, the voluntary sector, social and commercial investment, mutual finance and commercial banking.

Before coronavirus, it felt quite different. The Welsh financial landscape was clear: the big banks were continuing their retreat from our towns, villages and city suburbs; the same banks were being criticised for corporate failings in this, shortcomings in that. We knew that many people had little choice but to stick with the bank they had, as frankly all the major institutions were simply more of the same.

The market, we were told, was being disrupted by the 'Challenger Banks', but our conversations told us they were failing to challenge the things people really cared about: greed, reduced service provision and a complete disregard for the smallest of businesses. None of them really get the Welsh language; the right for customers to bank in the language they choose, not the one chosen for them.

We felt our model had an edge – a straightforward offering, delivering for its members in Wales, not shareholders. The Senedd's Enterprise, Infrastructure and Skills Committee had written an excellent report into 'Access to Banking' that brought the issues clearly into a Welsh focus. They crunched the figures and honed the problem – they called on Welsh Government to act.

We had data. Lots of data. Data on Wales' smallest businesses, information about spending patterns. We even had usage figures on cash. We had a big map installed, with stickers telling us where the banks were and more showing where they used to be. We had even started placing pins in towns where we wanted to be; we even visited some. Bigger towns like Buckley in the north east, which used to have a bank on every corner but now has none. Smaller towns like Knighton, where locals told us they had to travel forty minutes each way to get to the nearest bank.

We attracted some experienced ex-big bank executives to our board and project teams, and organisations offered practical solutions to help us to market quicker. The support package provided by the Community Savings Bank Association (CSBA) would help us reduce time, reduce risks and reduce the costs associated with a banking application, but it wouldn't stop the process being lengthy, risky and expensive.

We knew this was going to be tough, but we were up for the challenge. We felt we had a solution, like others who were embarking on such similar journeys from elsewhere in the UK (there were eleven groups in various stages of development, two on the other side of the Severn Bridge, who had actually begun their journey to regulation). Think tanks were calling for cooperatively owned community banks to be included in party manifestos for the General Election in December 2019. We felt we had some momentum behind us all. But we were wary of using the term 'movement', at least outwardly.

Then we, like everyone else, were confronted by a health pandemic and the ensuing economic shock that threw a great big spanner in the works (or more accurately our forecasted spreadsheets). What a calamity! Or so we thought.

Once we'd got over the initial shock we were able to take stock, and taking advantage of the lockdown, took some time to recalibrate Banc Cambria to a world post COVID-19.

First positive: we've not launched. Our reality isn't the reality of the others – we were fortunate in this regard. If the Office for Budgetary Responsibility impact assessment proves in any way to be accurate, the effect on the UK's existing financial services sector will be dramatic. Even if there was a V-shaped recovery, there won't be a direct correlation between those going down the downward slope and those who emerge the other side – those losses will be taken by the existing providers.

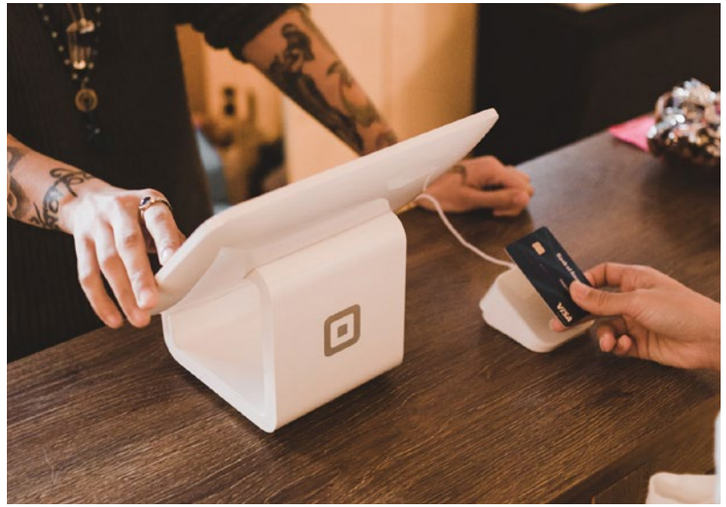
Second positive: whatever the landscape looks like at the end of this, one certainty is that we'll all need bank accounts. The concerns people had about big banks still exist; in fact, those concerns could be further exacerbated by the way they handle things over the coming months – none of which will be easy. Will they deal compassionately with loan defaults, mortgage distress and incomplete business plans? Will they take the opportunity to further consolidate their branch network, reduce the availability of ATMs, or withdraw popular products from their portfolio that provide insufficient (comparative) returns? The banks haven't started well.

If we assume there are two and a half million active personal current accounts in Wales that means around £1bn per annum leaves the Welsh economy into the arms of the shareholders of the big banks

The big banks make a lot of money from our collective financial lives. One figure (that one of the big banks use internally) suggests they make an average of £400 per annum per active current account. That's not jiggery-pokery, it's the margin they make on your loan, the fees from your ISA, or the interest charges on your overdraft *plus* the uses they put your cash to when you're not needing it (lending to whoever they choose, for whatever purpose they think will make them money). If we assume there are two and a half million active personal current accounts in Wales that means around £1bn per annum leaves the Welsh economy into the arms of the shareholders of the big banks. A post COVID-19 Wales will need to find ways to keep its money for as long as possible – the circulation of cash being vital to the economic well-being of our communities.

From the outset, a key difference in Banc Cambria's business model related to the provision of a Wales-wide branch network. Initial evidence seems to suggest the COVID-19 crisis is likely to hit high streets disproportionately hard. Wales' retailers were suffering before the pandemic and things are harder still now. The emergence of a new bank onto high streets across Wales will act as a stimulus to the wider retail offering, portraying confidence, community by community.

We know that it takes life events for people to choose a new current account provider... going to university, getting married, getting your first mortgage, getting divorced... The post COVID-19 world could be one of those life events



One of the key opportunities the lockdown affords us is the time and space to see how banking operations have worked (or not) in a locked down world. We will benefit from looking, listening and learning, particularly over the first few months and ensuring our retail offer can cope with uncertainties and fast-moving legislative changes. We could be the first COVID-responsive retail banking operation – one that has been designed to deal effectively with lockdowns, social-distancing and changes in the relative importance of cash in the everyday mix, and to cope with rebuilding a different, more sustainable economy in Wales.

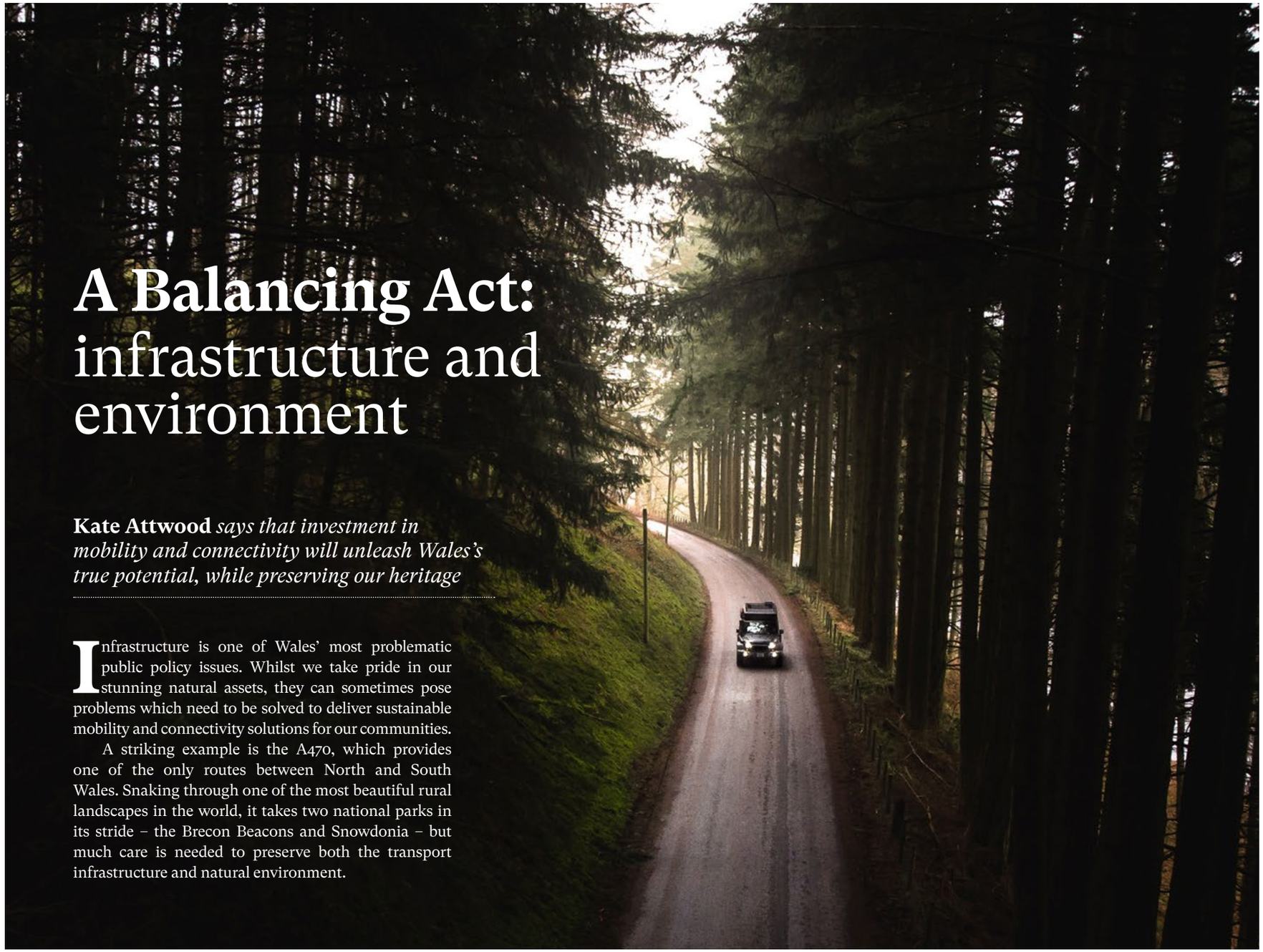
We know that it takes life events for people to choose a new current account provider. Ordinarily that tends to be going to university, getting married, getting your first mortgage, getting divorced, then remarried, perhaps.

Buckley in the north east... used to have a bank on every corner but now has none... [In] Knighton, locals told us they had to travel forty minutes each way to get to the nearest bank

The post COVID-19 world could be one of those life events, but for all of us. Banking is a vital part of everyday life that we can control – other countries have a strong cooperative banking cohort; there is no reason we can't have the same.

Finally, the issue that seems even more critical in a post COVID-19 world relates to the timeliness of the launch of Banc Cambria. We want to be able to launch into the start of the recovery, to catch the first wave and encourage others to join us. Whilst recognising that establishing a bank takes time, rest assured being alongside Welsh people and Welsh businesses when they need that help to reemerge is our number one priority. We are on the case.

Rebecca Nelson is a founding member and Director of Cambria Cydfuddiannol Limited, the mutual working towards delivering a cooperatively-owned Welsh Community Bank, Banc Cambria. She is also a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and its current Welsh President, and Finance Director of the Arts Council of Wales



A Balancing Act: infrastructure and environment

Kate Attwood *says that investment in mobility and connectivity will unleash Wales's true potential, while preserving our heritage*

Infrastructure is one of Wales' most problematic public policy issues. Whilst we take pride in our stunning natural assets, they can sometimes pose problems which need to be solved to deliver sustainable mobility and connectivity solutions for our communities.

A striking example is the A470, which provides one of the only routes between North and South Wales. Snaking through one of the most beautiful rural landscapes in the world, it takes two national parks in its stride – the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia – but much care is needed to preserve both the transport infrastructure and natural environment.

In February's Budget, Welsh Government announced its intention to create a National Forest running the length of Wales. The millions of pounds allocated to the project are emblematic of the ethos of Wales' flagship Well-being of Future Generations Act, a trailblazing piece of legislation.

It is positive that many infrastructure schemes currently underway across Wales, or due to begin shortly, are designed to mitigate the effects of greater population density, the changing nature of mobility and the realities of climate change, while supporting the preservation of our unique heritage. Of course, a National Forest is fantastic news for Wales' natural environment and communities. But on a pragmatic level it will require careful consideration from those tasked with improving Wales' connectivity.

Roads

Before the stark realities of COVID-19 became clear, the Welsh Government promised major cash injections for infrastructure and transport schemes. Capital investment into transport received a significant uplift, with hundreds of millions of pounds worth of additional spending directed towards developing future-ready schemes, as well as updating existing ageing infrastructure.

These financial commitments boosted existing pledges unveiled last year by Mark Drakeford, alongside the publication of the updated Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan (WIIP) pipeline, which set out plans for £33bn investment on infrastructure projects.

Investment in metro schemes, the electrification of rail lines and active travel are vital to the decarbonisation of transport, but we must also outline the contribution of investment in roads to this agenda. The future of Wales' roads is laid out in the National Transport Finance Plan, a five-year programme which states that 'decarbonisation is at the heart of decision making for infrastructure developments'.

Roads due for upgrades and extensions in Wales within the planned infrastructure pipeline include the new £42m A487 Dyfi Bridge which will deliver a resilient trunk road scheme in a flood prone area, the £135m A487 Caernarfon and Bontnewydd bypass and the vast investment in the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road, which is set to have huge benefits for communities in the area.

Multi-modal Transport

In addition to upgrading and building roads, investment in Wales' transport infrastructure is going to focus on broader modes of transport. Decarbonising the way we travel is going to be crucial in helping Wales meet the recommendations by the Committee on Climate Change to deliver a 95% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. In this context, the expansion of rail services is very important.

The South Wales Metro is the cornerstone of Cardiff's £1.2bn City Deal, intended to boost prosperity in the region. It will play a vital role in servicing the needs of a population set to grow significantly over coming decades.

Similarly, in north Wales, progress is being made around the North Wales Metro – a major transport scheme for the region with a clear ambition: to make travel easier and faster within the northeast region, from the coast to Wrexham, Deeside and Merseyside beyond. It's a vital part of the Welsh Government's vision to develop the economy of the region and ensure links with the bordering Northern Powerhouse.

Active travel

In 2013, the Active Travel Act became law in Wales – a world first for this kind of policy – meaning that walking and cycling have become a vital component of urban planning.

Active transportation planning and design can reduce demand for road infrastructure, improve multi-modal network performance, enhance safety and reduce construction and maintenance costs of traditional vehicle-oriented roads.

Given this, it is little wonder that the Welsh Government is leaning heavily towards promoting active travel methods and supporting it with tens of millions of pounds to improve the necessary infrastructure, as well as offering financial support for private sector schemes like NextBike. The bike-sharing provider's Cardiff scheme has been its most successful UK launch since it began in 2014, a positive indicator for the future of Wales' active travel ambitions.

Walking and cycling have become a vital component of urban planning

Flooding resilience

Outside of transport, investment in urban resilience infrastructure is also required. The devastating flooding experienced by communities in Wales at the beginning of 2020 underlined the progress we still need to make to be adaptable to the realities of climate change. The WIIP, which was last updated in December 2019 and so doesn't consider the floods, allocated £234m in expenditure on flood and coastal assets.

Over a year ago, it was agreed that 25 schemes would progress through to construction within the next two years, although how the most recent floods (alongside budgetary constraints imposed by COVID-19) will affect the amount of funding, and where it is to be spent, remain to be seen.

Snaking through one of the most beautiful rural landscapes in the world, [the A470] takes two national parks in its stride – the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia – but much care is needed to preserve both the transport infrastructure and natural environment

5G and new technologies

Of course, technology is key wherever we live in Wales. Investment in Wales' digital infrastructure has become a core policy for Welsh Government, with the ongoing £65m roll out of Next Generation Access Broadband across Wales one of the principal digital infrastructure projects in the WIIP.

This investment builds on the successful Superfast Cymru (SFC) project by continued deployment of superfast and ultrafast broadband infrastructure to premises that do not receive a minimum of 30MBps. across Wales. Moreover, the transition from 4G to 5G will result in a huge increase in the capacity of networks, increasing the speed and stability of mobile connections.

But what could the real impact of 5G on Wales' digital connectivity look like? First and foremost, the priority for Welsh Government is for this new technology to be utilised to unlock the potential of rural Wales. In February it was announced that CoCore, a 5G testbed in south east Wales, will receive £5m in UK Government funding to connect rural communities across Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent – demonstrating the benefits of 5G technology and thereby open new opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses, and local people.

As important as it will be, 5G is about more than just a speedier internet connection. The true magic of 5G lies in its potential to transform the way we interact with critical services, due to the tech involved being so much more advanced than current mobile networks.

The impact of 5G on transport infrastructure and logistics is exciting, be it public services or private logistics fleets, and will positively affect the way we travel around Wales. Due to a greater awareness of how people and vehicles will be moving around our urban and rural spaces through data, 5G will enable well-informed transport management decisions to be made in the short term, as well as advising longer term infrastructure spending decisions based on analysing transport patterns and volumes. This data is simply not available in a pre-5G world.

Without doubt, the advent of 5G will enable the creation of truly smart cities across Wales and the UK and allow our communities to become 'smart' too, seeing the benefits of technology in many parts of their daily lives.

The true magic of 5G lies in its potential to transform the way we interact with critical services

Balancing progress with preservation

At WSP, we believe that future ready and resilient infrastructure networks are a key driver of economic prosperity. If developed thoughtfully, they can have far-reaching positive effects on society and be a catalyst for the transformation of communities.

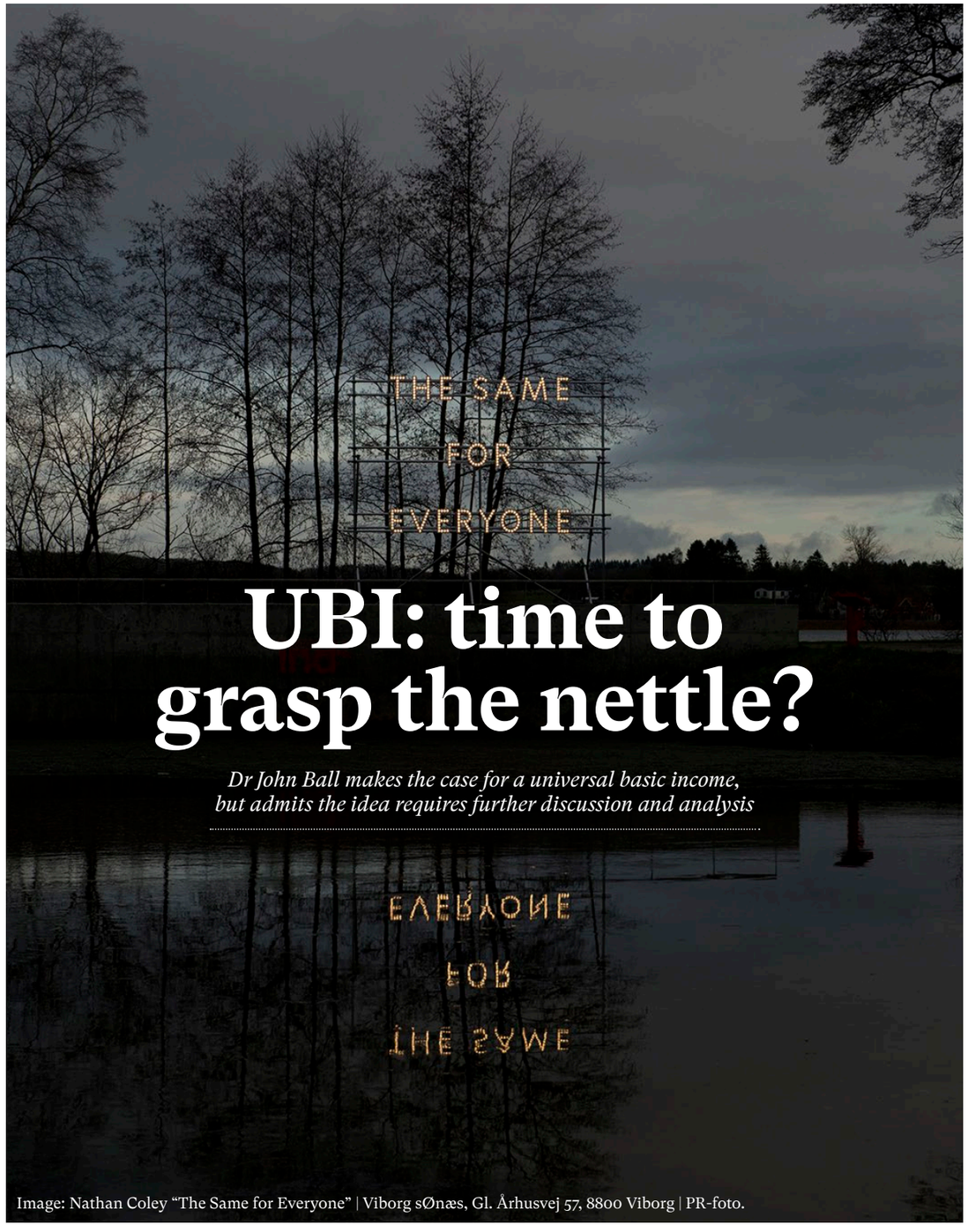
However, there is a delicate balance to maintain around developing our infrastructure to service the needs of an ever-growing population with evolving requirements and managing the fragility of our natural environment and heritage.

In Wales, we have a government that rightfully places the safeguarding of our natural environment and preservation and promotion of heritage, culture and sustainability at the core of policy making and public spending. This is a commitment which is in line with the values of WSP, as developing future ready and sustainable strategies which improve the lives of local communities is core to our guiding principles, and biodiversity and environmental net gain are at the heart of our project delivery ethos.

For every decision made about our transport and infrastructure needs, it's important that decision makers ask themselves: Is this fit for our future generations? What are the alternatives?

Progress can certainly be balanced with the preservation of the natural environment and our heritage, but it requires thoughtful planning and collaboration between government, local authorities and technical experts.

Kate Attwood is Group Director, Highways at WSP, the engineering professional services consultancy



UBI: time to grasp the nettle?

Dr John Ball makes the case for a universal basic income, but admits the idea requires further discussion and analysis

Image: Nathan Coley "The Same for Everyone" | Viborg sØnæs, Gl. Århusvej 57, 8800 Viborg | PR-foto.

Strange times. As a student in Cardiff during the eighties I was introduced to Professor James Meade's idea of a 'Social Dividend', a single, unconditional payment to all. Of interest only to those enamoured by the wonders of microeconomics; it'll never happen. Then, all these years later, COVID-19 strikes, the Treasury purse opens, unconditional payments.

As with many ideas, more fiction than fact surrounds it, and so the first task is to establish exactly what UBI is, and what it isn't. The clue is in the description: it is a *universal* payment available unconditionally to all; it is *not* a replacement for benefit. Its great strength is simplicity.

There are two fundamental objectives for a universal basic income. From the view of an economist, the first is perhaps the most important: enhanced disposable income and the consequent additional financial stability this would provide throughout the economy. This aspect is too often overlooked. In Wales, the fundamental weakness of our economy is that low wages mean low spending power. You don't have to know anything about economics to understand that, ultimately, a successful economy relies on the spending power of the individual. As a consequence of low pay, many Welsh workers rely on additional benefits, and although simplifying the benefits system is not an explicit aim of UBI, it would be an additional welcome outcome.

The second great strength is the removal of complex form filling for those in receipt of benefits. Universal Credit was supposed to be a fairer – and by combining six separate schemes – simpler welfare scheme. In practice it remains complex. Payments vary by the month depending on earned income and although – unlike earlier schemes – claimants are allowed to work, the means tested element often results in people working for nothing. A simple UBI payment removes the complexity, distortions between schemes (Universal Credit is not the only scheme), worry over non-compliance with the bureaucracy, encourages work and – most important of all – the indignity of claiming.

Interestingly, some supporters of UBI do not see it in terms of the economy or welfare, but as a response to artificial intelligence replacing human endeavour and the consequent need for some form of financial cushion. In reality, significant changes in technology have always resulted in new employment opportunities;

The fundamental weakness of our economy is that low wages mean low spending power

research in Germany in 2018 found that the use of manufacturing robots had, counter intuitively, led to new and expanded employment.

A fundamental understanding is needed of both the philosophy and the practice of UBI. It is not a re-worked welfare system, but a payment as of right. A number of countries have experimented with different forms of support. In all there are 22 different active or experimental support schemes in the world. The Finnish pilot involved a full grant aimed at a small group; Ontario (following an earlier scheme in Manitoba) similarly trialled a full grant; Alaska pays a universal payment based on oil prices. Various schemes are active in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland; in Brazil, India, Iran and seven American cities. The largest and longest running scheme is in Kenya, with 20,000 participants each receiving an unconditional, admittedly small, cash payment.

With a few exceptions, almost all have been piecemeal, providing cash grants aimed at existing welfare recipients. However, a genuine UBI scheme must work alongside the existing tax system and not the existing benefit system. If the latter became the case, the whole philosophy of UBI would be so compromised as to become irrelevant.

There are four essential issues to be addressed. The first and most obvious is the freeloader problem. Opponents of UBI see it as a disincentive to work – the age old argument used to question any welfare scheme. Evidence from Alaska, Canada, and Finland (the three most complete trials) report no such problems, not least because receiving welfare militates against finding employment and working was seen as a monetary gain. An interesting and unexpected effect is that in almost all cases where there has been research follow up, personal pride and happiness has increased and health improved. In addition, the Kenyan experiment has resulted in notably improved economic growth, albeit from a low base.

The second question is to ask who exactly qualifies. Some suggestions have been made that payment should be to all adults, only those in work (thus doing nothing to improve the welfare system), or as noted above, those on welfare. A comprehensive scheme would apply to all adults of working age; which approximates to 1.9million in Wales, taking into account those from 16 to 64. The scheme would not apply to pensioners.

The third issue is how much is to be paid monthly to the individual. To some extent any suggested sum is arbitrary and a matter for further discussion, however it must be an amount sufficient to provide basic financial stability, especially but not exclusively, those currently in receipt of benefit. The Scottish Government, for example, has suggested an annual payment of £2,500, rising eventually to £4,800 with a payment of £1,500 for children. (This latter payment is at odds with the idea that UBI is, in theory and practice, a payment to adults.) The experiment in Finland paid the equivalent of £450 a month, in Ontario single adults the equivalent of £10,000 a year, families £15,000 and payments in Alaska can vary from $2,000 to $900 (or less) for each person per year, depending on oil prices. Assuming that a payment similar to that paid in Finland applied in Wales, £450 per month (£5,400 per annum) would equate to approximately £9.5bn in total.

Finally, the cost and recovery rate is the tricky issue. There are three ways in which a scheme might be financed. The first of course is the current benefits system; although disaggregation is difficult, funds currently used to finance benefits would be diverted, together with the concomitant staff and administrative cost saving. Increases in VAT and non VAT products and services and potentially other forms of sales tax (UBI would potentially lead to greater spending) would be needed and perhaps additional sources of taxation revenue. In addition, the increase in spending power as a result of increased income would contribute substantially to the overall cost.

In Wales, £450 per month would equate to approximately £9.5bn in total

The threshold at which tax would be payable is again somewhat arbitrary and a matter for much further discussion. The scheme in Ontario provides an example; tax at 50% was paid after the equivalent of £20,000 for a single adult and £27,000 for a family. A similar threshold in Wales might be in the region of £22,000 per adult, including of course, the UBI payment after which tax in the region of 40% would be paid, although both these amounts might change.

The elephant in the room is the overall health of the Welsh economy. Extra spending as a result of a UBI injection should in theory boost the economy and consequent tax take. The major problem, and one which can only be resolved over time and with the correct policies, is the structure of the Welsh economy.

Although in many ways sections of the economy are relatively healthy, with for example active and profitable small firms, the fact remains that too many businesses are not owned locally. This applies especially in sectors where UBI additional funds would undoubtedly be spent – on final demand consumer goods. Many of these consumer goods are produced outside Wales and sold through supermarkets – which have in the main their own (non Welsh) suppliers. If recipients spend the extra money on goods and services produced outside Wales it would largely defeat one of the main objectives of UBI; increased economic growth.

Let me be clear. I am in favour of UBI, but I am presenting here ideas for further discussion and analysis. What the current COVID-19 crisis has shown is two things: poverty and financial security needs addressing, and that – given the right incentive – government can find the money.

A fundamental understanding is needed of both the philosophy and the practice of UBI. It is not a re-worked welfare system, but a payment as of right

Dr John Ball is a former lecturer in economics at Swansea University

Mountains to Climb

Wales' international strategy

Geraint Talfan Davies runs the rule over Welsh Government's new international strategy, and predicts a whole range of mountains to climb

Until the arrival of COVID-19 it was Brexit that was destined to end up as 'the great disruption'. Now it has a much bigger rival for that accolade. The coronavirus has changed the world context utterly. Whereas six months ago one could, arguably, have a debate as to whether other world markets offered us a realistic alternative to the European market that we are due to exit, now we face exiting the EU into a world that is facing the biggest depression in a century. Big new lifeboats are nowhere to be seen.

This has massive consequences for the whole of the UK but especially for its poorer parts, in which we must, sadly but predictably, include Wales. You cannot rip up four decades of ever-increasing intertwining of our economy with those of our erstwhile European partners without a degree of pain, but it will be even harder to try to knit together compensating new relationships in a howling global gale.

One must feel for Baroness Eluned Morgan, scarcely more than a year into her newly created post of the Welsh Government's Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language. Only a month before the epidemic began she published her international strategy, an embryonic Welsh foreign policy. And then the world changed.

The task she now faces is suddenly immeasurably more difficult, and the UK government's inexcusable, mule-like refusal to extend the transition timetable will, if it persists, only add to that difficulty. But, on the assumption that even the worst of depressions come to an end, it is not a task we should abandon. After all, we have much ground to make up.

A little history is necessary. We had to wait twenty years for the creation of Eluned Morgan's post, a delay that has always been difficult to explain, especially since the Scottish Government had a Minister for External Affairs within a year of the inception of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

It may have been that our previous First Ministers, Rhodri Morgan and Carwyn Jones, relished the role of international ambassador, the latter perhaps even more so than the former. After all, Carwyn Jones had been instrumental in pushing for the abolition of the Welsh Development Agency, penning a 'Gregynog Paper' on the issue in 2003 for the IWA. But neither can be said to have published a detailed international strategy, although a 2015 document during Jones' tenure claimed to provide 'a framework'.

Mark Drakeford, as well as facing the prospect of Brexit, also had to find a role for Eluned Morgan, whose credentials must have seemed tailor-made for an international brief: two years at the international Atlantic College at St. Donats, a degree in European Studies and fifteen years as a Member of the European Parliament where she was the Labour Party's spokesperson on energy, industry and science.

Comparisons with the equivalent Scottish post are instructive. There, for the most part, the international brief (designated External Affairs) has been paired with responsibility for culture, one of the lighter ministerial briefs. The same pattern has been followed here in Wales – combining international relations with responsibility for the Welsh Language, culture, tourism and sport. In both countries the load has been shared with Deputy Ministers.

But there is a difference. In Scotland's Cabinet, Michael Russell has responsibility not only for external affairs but also for the constitution and for Europe.

We had to wait twenty years for the creation of Eluned Morgan's post, a delay that has always been difficult to explain, especially since the Scottish Government had a Minister for External Affairs within a year

His deputy is designated Minister for Europe and International Development, creating a strong European focus in the two posts. In Wales, the Deputy Minister, Lord Elis-Thomas, leads on tourism, culture and sport.

Although the list of Eluned Morgan's responsibilities includes 'Wales in Europe' the person who leads on this issue for the Welsh Government is the Counsel General, Jeremy Miles, the designated Brexit Minister, a role that takes in issues relating to the EU structural funds as well as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (remember that?) that is scheduled to replace them. He also chairs the Cabinet Sub-committee on European Transition.

The difference between the external briefs in both countries may be accounted for by the fact that Wales' Counsel General cannot exercise powers conferred on Welsh ministers. According to a public note, Jeremy Miles' role involves policy advice and coordination, but 'any matter requiring a formal decision of Welsh Ministers under a statutory power will be exercised by the First Minister or a nominated portfolio Minister.'

That said, there is no doubt that the task of shaping an international strategy has lain squarely with Eluned Morgan. It would be easy at any time to dismiss an international strategy for Wales as a cork on an ocean wave, but this one has been launched in a truly forbidding climate. To change the metaphor, it is not that Wales has a mountain to climb, rather a whole range of mountains, all made steeper by coronavirus.

First, there are the hard facts of the scale of change. We have been inside a big tent – competing with our EU partners, yes, but also sharing values and common rules. We have operated within a secure framework, part of a continental entity that has massive commercial clout in the world.

UK Government Ministers, especially those of more ideological bent – and there is no shortage – will tell us not to worry. After all, the UK is the sixth largest economy

in the world. But numbers matter and however you look at it, whether from beneath Dominic Cummings' dome or through our Prime Minister's imperial nostalgia, 60 million is a lot less than 500 million – in fact, about one eighth. That's not a difference businesses will ignore, however much ideologues would like to wish it away. Proximity also tells.

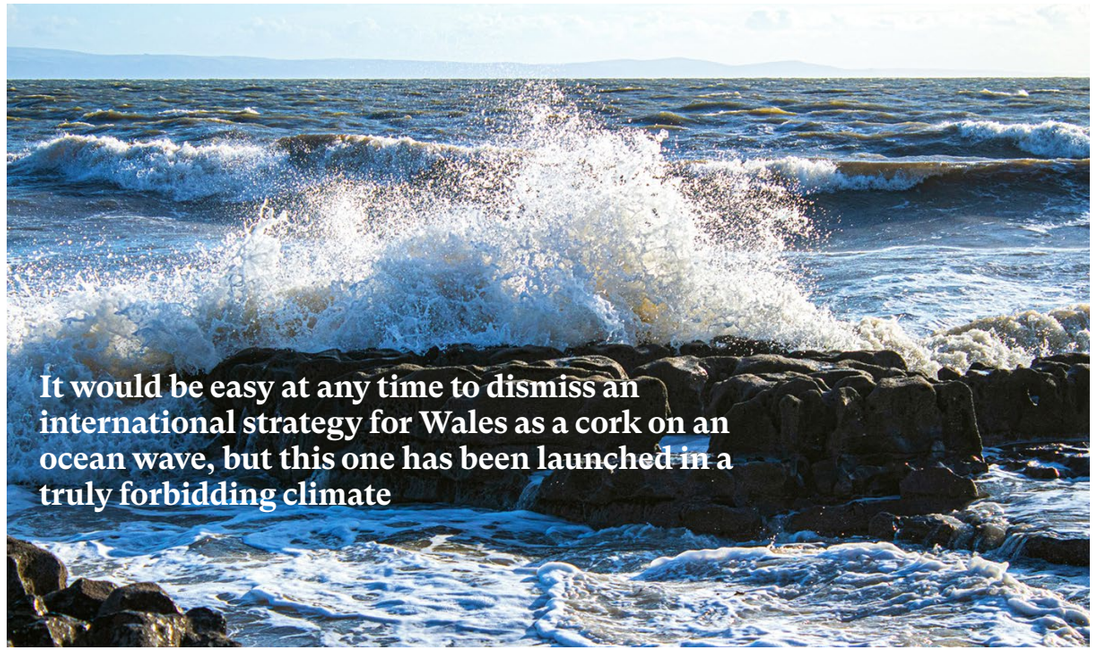
Second, this is a very competitive environment. The Scots and the Irish have always had more clout than Wales in the international field because of relative size, history and budgetary headroom. In 2019–20 the Welsh Government's budget for international relations and international development was £7m, set against the equivalent Scottish budget of £24m. Similarly, the tourism budget in Wales was £16m, against Scotland's £45m.

In 2020–21, despite a very significant increase of £3m (40%) for international relations and development, the gap will close only slightly, with the Scottish figure also rising by £2m. Strangely, none of the £3m increase in the Welsh spend will be devoted to more boots on the ground, as the Welsh Government has been operating a freeze on staff numbers. It is not clear whether there has been any redeployment of staff. Even so, the disparity in overseas staff numbers between the two countries is likely to be as stark as their respective budgets.

Comparisons with Scotland – that can be made in many fields – are usually dismissed by Welsh Government ministers who can justifiably point to Scotland's greater size and to the more generous treatment given to it under the Barnett formula. A parallel generosity has been shown to Northern Ireland in the interest of peace. Nevertheless, such examples of *force majeure* convey an undoubted advantage for those two countries in the international marketplace.

A third Brexit-related challenge will come from Ireland, a country that will now be a more effective competitor, enjoying continued protection from the EU over and above the continued benefits of single market membership as well as the benefits of a controversial lower corporation tax. The Irish Government spends close to €800m on Foreign Affairs and was scheduled to add another €54m to that budget this year. The UK Government's decision to shape a new border down the Irish sea will surely mean that Northern Ireland will enjoy further spin-off from its southern neighbour's spend.

Add to these the UK Government's new concentration



It would be easy at any time to dismiss an international strategy for Wales as a cork on an ocean wave, but this one has been launched in a truly forbidding climate

Welsh Exports 2013-2018

	EU		Non-EU		Total	
	£m	%	£m	%	£m	%
2013	9,836		6,774		16,610	
2014	8,314	-15.5	5,821	-14.1	14,135	-14.9
2015	7,997	-3.8	5,256	-9.7	13,253	-6.2
2016	8,852	10.7	5,778	9.9	14,630	10.4
2017	9,963	12.5	6,516	12.8	16,479	12.6
2018	10,534	5.8	6,656	2.1	17,190	4.3

Source: Stats Wales

on helping the north of England, as well as that region's increasing efforts to shape its own destiny, and one can see that Wales has an awful lot to do to be an effective competitor even with its UK and Irish rivals.

So, putting aside the budgetary constraints (which will almost certainly have to be revisited given the effects of the epidemic on the public finances) how does Wales' new international strategy stand up to these challenges?

The first plus must be the fact that we have a strategy at all, and a minister to go with it. But that would be to damn it with faint praise. Apart from the 40 per cent increase in budget, the strategy has a strong values base – centred on Welsh creativity, technology and commitment to sustainability – set in the context of Wales's pioneering Well-being of Future Generations Act. The document's main focus is, of course, economic but, thankfully, it does not ignore the role of culture and sport in flying the flag for Wales internationally.

Its three overall aims are to raise the profile of Wales, to grow the economy through increased exports and inward investment and to establish Wales as a globally responsible nation. On the business and research front it wants to focus on three areas in particular: cyber security, compound semi-conductors and the creative industries. Some business people would have liked that list to be longer, but those who in the past have criticised the government for failing to prioritise can hardly complain.

Where the document shares a common failing with other Welsh Government strategy documents is the relative absence of numbers and, I would argue, an excessively rhetorical style – as if we first have to convince ourselves.

Although there is a fair amount of data about current performance in its 40 pages, I could find only two numeric future targets: an aim, over the next five years, to increase exports by 5% from the current level of £17.2 billion, (implying an increase of £860m) and to increase contacts amongst the worldwide Welsh diaspora to 500,000 (although it does not state the current level of contacts).

In the days before coronavirus the targeted 5% increase in exports over the next five years would surely have seemed low given that, over the last three years, there had been a 29.7% increase in exports from Wales: 2016 +10.4%, 2017 +12.8%; 2018 +4.3%. These three years did follow two years of decline – 2014 -14.9% and 2015 -6.2% – so that taking the five years together the overall increase was only 3.5%.

But, given the scale of increase in more recent years, targeting a 5% increase over the next five seems unduly modest unless it assumes either a massive hit from Brexit, continuing volatility in export performance or, now, a

The notion of a global Wales network of active connections and influence is one that has long needed more systematic organisation

new global depression. Interestingly, the export data does not suggest any different trends in export performance in EU and non-EU markets, nor any shift from the former to the latter.

If one compares 2013 with 2018 there has been a 7.1% increase in Welsh exports to the EU and a 1.7% decline in our exports to non-EU countries. Interestingly, the biggest percentage increase over that five years has been in exports to West European countries outside the EU (48%), reinforcing the argument for the importance of proximity. Another striking feature is that when you combine exports to the EU with those to other European countries outside the EU, the European share of total exports has risen marginally but consistently in each of the last four years. In 2013 it stood at 62.5% of the total, rising to 65.2% in 2018.

Where the document could have been bolder on exports, it promises a new approach to the diaspora – a concept that too often invokes heady unrealism. Much depends on how the diaspora is defined.

If we are talking about the descendants of people who emigrated from Wales in the 19th and 20th centuries, Wales cannot claim a diaspora on anything like the scale of Ireland or Scotland. When, in the 19th century, the Irish fled their famine and the Scots their highland clearances, Welsh people congregated instead at home in the coal mining valleys. It is the resulting disparity in emigration numbers that meant that, in the USA, the Welsh never developed the powerful and coherent political lobby that the Irish, and to a lesser extent the Scots, can mount even today.

On the other hand, the notion of a global Wales network of active connections and influence is one that has long needed more systematic organisation. It can build not only on past migration but also on the experience of post-war decades of foreign direct investment in Wales, existing trade, international academic research, and cultural connections. The Welsh Government has commissioned the Alacrity Foundation – an offshoot of Sir Terry Matthews' empire – to find a method of harnessing the diaspora. In a field often dripping with sentiment, a hard-headed approach will be welcome.

This is only to pick out two issues in a document that is wide-ranging and thoughtful, although, as I have suggested, could do with more hard numerical targets.

The effects of the COVID-19 epidemic will no doubt require fresh policy assessments to be made as we emerge from it, not least if that takes a year or more rather than a few months. That is yet another reason why we desperately need a longer transition period. With key ministers and civil servants on both sides of the channel in self-isolation, it would be criminal to pile folly on folly.

Eluned Morgan and her team will need all that time to assess what changes may be needed in a strategy that already had more than enough challenges of its own.

Geraint Talfan Davies is Chair of Wales for Europe

Collaboration, communities and number crunching

Elinor Shepley *reflects on the Understanding Welsh Places project*

Understanding Welsh Places launched a website in October 2019, and it is now two years since the stakeholder group tasked with shaping this initiative met for the first time. Now seems a good time to reflect on the process of developing the website and to share information about what's coming next.

Colleagues have commented that Understanding Welsh Places is an unusual project for a think tank like the Institute of Welsh Affairs. Its main output is a bilingual website that presents and analyses open data about towns, larger villages and cities in Wales. The project hasn't resulted in a new piece of research, there is no report lobbying government for a change in policy, and the site's primary audiences are based in towns across the country, in many cases far from the usual suspects in the Cardiff Bay bubble. However, Understanding Welsh Places intersects with various themes in contemporary public policy and is highly relevant to the IWA's current focus.

The development of Understanding Welsh Places reflects a growing interest in policy relating to towns and town-type communities. Helping to create 'flourishing towns' has been a priority for the project's funders Carnegie UK Trust over the past five years. In 2016, the Trust conducted its international *Turnaround Towns* research to understand how towns such as Duluth, Minnesota and Oamaru in New Zealand have managed to transform their fortunes over relatively long periods

Focus on grassroots planning and action is in keeping both with the IWA's own commitment to supporting a strong, confident democracy in Wales and Carnegie UK Trust's work on the 'enabling state'

of time. A review of policy and funding in the UK and consultation with Welsh stakeholders followed and, in 2017, Carnegie published recommendations relating to towns for government, the voluntary sector and communities in Wales. These recommendations prompted the Welsh Government to support Carnegie and contribute by funding the Understanding Welsh Places website itself.

Given the creation by the UK government in late 2019 of a towns fund for England, the current rhetoric regarding 'levelling up' coming from Westminster, and the Welsh Government's recent commitment to locating the Welsh public sector in town centres, it is easy to argue that Carnegie has been ahead of the curve in its focus. Moreover, the Trust has been involved in similar work in Scotland, where towns have moved up the political agenda in the last decade to the extent that Holyrood now has a minister for towns. Understanding Welsh Places is, in fact, inspired by the successful Understanding Scottish Places website, which launched in 2015.

In addition to responding to the growing profile of towns in policy circles, Understanding Welsh Places has its foundations in a commitment to fostering positive change within towns and villages, to supporting local communities to shape the places where they live and work. By presenting data and analysis at the level of towns rather than that of local authorities, the site is designed to provide town and community councils, charities, social enterprises, community groups, planners and place makers with the information they need to identify opportunities in their areas, bolster funding applications, develop community plans and place plans and undertake many other activities besides.

This focus on grassroots planning and action is in keeping both with the IWA's own commitment to supporting a strong, confident democracy in Wales and with Carnegie UK Trust's work on the 'enabling state', which examines 'the paradigm shift that is transforming the UK welfare state to an enabling state', advocates for a move from 'top down to bottom up' and places an emphasis on co-production. This concern is also aligned with the practice of other partners who have contributed to the development of Understanding Welsh Places. For example, the project has benefitted from the knowledge and local networks of experienced regeneration consultants and organisations such as One Voice Wales (the umbrella body for Welsh town and community councils), the Federation of Small Businesses and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, who have given time freely to what has always been a collaborative undertaking. Moreover, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) was contracted to develop the site's inter-relationship assessments, which indicate the extent to which places rely upon neighbouring towns for public, commercial and social assets. The method used to create these assessments is informed by CLES' experience in the field of community resilience: the Centre is heavily involved in the community wealth building movement (also known as the foundational economy) and was part of the creation of the 'Preston model', probably the most high-profile example of this new approach to local economic development.

Relatedly, the IWA has recently begun its own foundational economy project. While it is early days, there are already synergies between this initiative and Understanding Welsh Places, both in the suitability of the website's data to work that considers community resilience from a holistic perspective and in the focus on the specificity of individual places and communities that has concerned us since the beginning of UWP. To test ideas and gather information about the data needed by the website's target users, we have run focus groups and workshops across the country: from Barry to Blaenau Ffestiniog, Narberth to Newtown and Cardiff to Colwyn Bay. Not only have people from these places contributed to scoping and testing Understanding Welsh Places, we have been able to supplement the statistics on the website with narrative descriptions of the places it features. These qualitative descriptions have been provided, in the main, by town and community councils.

Further, the ethos of collaboration and information sharing is reflected in the features and functions of the Understanding Welsh Places website. The main contractor tasked with building the website has been the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) at Cardiff University. As part of its work on the site, the WISERD team has created an informative typology that puts every Welsh place with more than 2,000 residents into one of seven categories based on its demographic, social and economic characteristics. When presented on a map, these categorisations foreground some surprising similarities between places: for example, the typology shows Nelson to be more similar to Pembroke, Amlwch and Blaenau Ffestiniog than it is to Abercynon and Bargoed.

The website's features include the ability to compare statistics for different places and the site encourages users to investigate synergies highlighted by WISERD's typology. Thus, in its very functionality, Understanding Welsh Places has the potential to challenge stereotypes and to encourage productive conversations and the sharing of best practice between communities, towns and villages that may never have thought of themselves as similar.

The typology shows Nelson to be more similar to Pembroke, Amlwch and Blaenau Ffestianiog than it is to Abercynon and Bargoed

Although a lot of hard work has already gone into Understanding Welsh Places, the project still has further to go. Several new datasets will be added to the website before the end of 2020, including information on levels of cultural participation in each place and on access to assets such as libraries, leisure centres and greenspace. The commuter mapping tool will be improved by the addition of more recent and detailed data, changes within places over time will be analysed, and more qualitative descriptions of towns and villages will be sourced. Finally, we want to enable communities to share their own plans and research on Understanding Welsh Places and will be actively seeking contributions.

Understanding Welsh Places has the potential to challenge stereotypes and to encourage productive conversations and the sharing of best practice between communities, towns and villages

Elinor Shepley was the IWA's Project Lead on Understanding Welsh Places until February 2020

Visit understandingwelshplaces.wales *or* deallleoeddcymru.cymru

If your community has information to share, contact the IWA's new Project Lead, Ellen Jones: ellen.jones@iwa.org.uk

Cardigan: a town making the most of its assets

Hannah Ormston *explains how the west Wales town has built on its advantages*

Cardigan – a small town with a modest population of around 4,000 people – is a place continuing to create a unique story for itself. This is a story of history, of community, and of the environment. It's a narrative that blends the town's cultural heritage and rich history with new ventures and opportunities. Cardigan has utilised its assets – its location, resilience and strong charitable sector – to create a place that is responsive to the community's needs.

Since the 1990s, not unlike other market towns in the UK, Cardigan faced challenges as the local retail market changed. The 'traditional' market town model was no longer fit for purpose and, located in a remote area of Wales with limited public transport, the town struggled to inspire local people or to attract attention from those living elsewhere. The Understanding Welsh Places (UWP) project revealed Cardigan's challenging demography: with a higher proportion of residents over the age of 65 and fewer young adults, there was increased pressure on local public services.

Today, Cardigan is an example of a town making the most of its assets: its physical landscape, its history, its local resources and its people. Over the past decade, it has become a place leading the way with environmental sustainability. A committed and resilient local community has built on the town's cultural heritage and remote location, using these as unique strengths to build on and create an attractive and vibrant place for people to live, work and visit.

Chesca Ross, of the Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations, characterises the town as 'home to a number of entrepreneurs and community-led organisations... addressing the challenges towns face head on, grasping the best of what the area has to offer and building businesses and ventures that make the most of local, sustainable resources: the food, the environment and the culture.'

According to data gathered by UWP, Cardigan is home to several community-owned spaces and has a strong third and voluntary sector, with 27 registered charities – equal to 23 residents per charitable organisation. Along with small local enterprises, they have been pivotal in building and shaping the town's progress.

Cardigan Castle has returned to the centre of town life

Turning Cardigan around: using its unique historical narrative

Cardigan Castle, thought to be home of the first Eisteddfod, in the twelfth century – is a key part of the town's story. Sitting on the banks of the River Teifi propped up by stanchions, the castle was described as 'a source of local embarrassment' for those who lived and worked there.

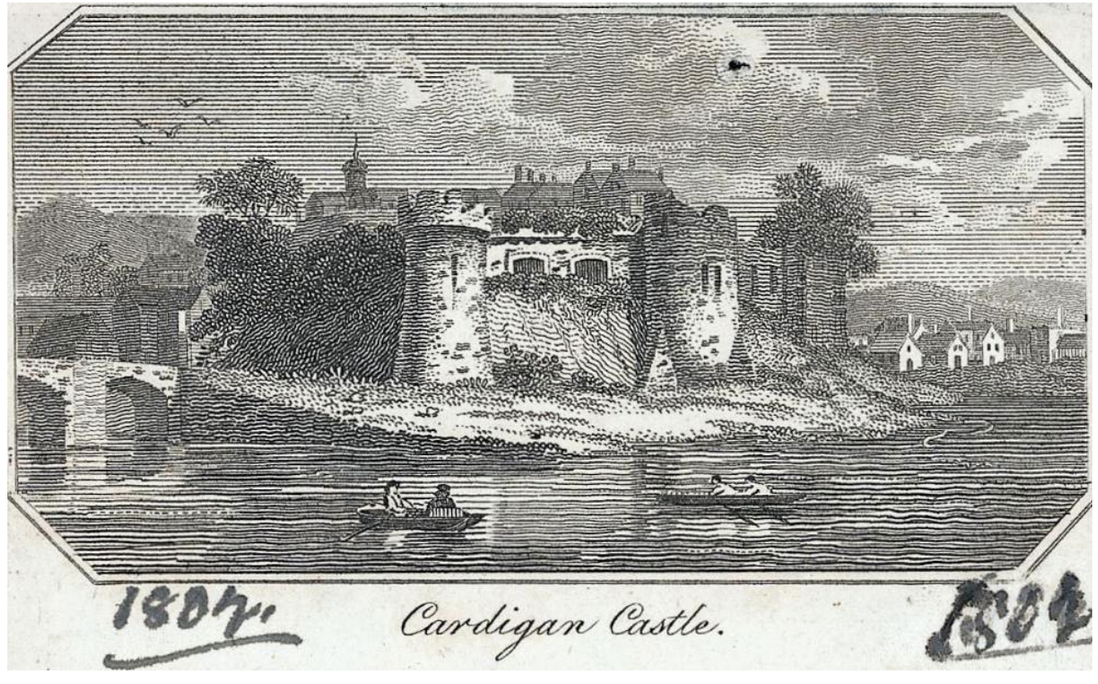
Following a 15-year campaign led by local volunteers, its restoration in 2015 is key in the development of Cardigan's new story. The campaign focussed on a clear, simple message: to 'safeguard 900 years of history', which the castle symbolised. Championed by a local couple who were the driving force behind the campaign, the council received investment to undertake its restoration and the renovation won awards.

Cardigan Castle has returned to the centre of town life, hosting a variety of events that both respect its traditional history and offer a modern purpose for the venue. With live music concerts, a museum and the much-loved Giant Knitted Cardigan, it attracts visitors throughout the year and has created a new night-time economy for the town.

Turning Cardigan around: a truly local approach

In recent years, local enterprises that build on the town's green landscape have flourished and have been integral to Cardigan's progress. Small businesses, such as the local forager Wild Pickings, clothes upcycler

Cardigan is an example of a town making the most of its assets: its physical landscape, its history, its local resources and its people



The local forager Wild Pickings, clothes upcyacler Wench and Wear, Fforest Holidays and Ecoshop, have all created a unique and positive image of Cardigan as an environmentally conscious place

Wench and Wear, Fforest Holidays and Ecoshop, have all created a unique and positive image of Cardigan as an environmentally conscious place, committed to developing sustainable methods of business and tourism. Building on the remoteness of the town, ventures that aim to embrace the natural environment, such as Heritage Canoes, offer canoe trips down the River Teifi, offering new opportunities for visitors to experience the local landscape.

Many businesses support local suppliers and make the most of seasonable, high quality ingredients. The community of Cardigan has worked together to ensure that the strong calendar of events made possible by the restoration of the castle and the community-owned Theatr Mwldan are complemented by the use of local food stalls that enable the town to celebrate its remoteness and provide further opportunities for visitors to learn more about what the town has to offer and what makes it unique.

Cardigan has recently won Street Food Provider of the Year, Rural Enterprise of the Year and Baker of the Year – testament to its success.

Turning Cardigan around: building community cohesion

There is a clear ambition amongst the community to build local engagement, participation and cohesion, with many voluntary and third sector led initiatives focusing on empowering people to have an active role in the place in which they live.

Organisations in Cardigan have given local people the opportunity to have their say: they were asked and have been listened to. In 1996, Menter Aberteifi was set up by Cardigan Town Council as a community regeneration company 'to promote and implement the successful regeneration of Cardigan Town for the benefit of the community'. The organisation undertook a community audit of ideas to reimagine Cardigan's purpose, many of which have now come to fruition. Menter Aberteifi has continued to grow as an active grassroots organisation in and for the town, encouraging residents to pursue the changes they wish to see within it.

Reimagining a market town

With a vibrant artist community that has put Cardigan on the creative map, the town has attracted new resident artists who have chosen to make it their home. From Theatr Mwldan – a community-owned venue for theatre, cinema, music and dance that attracts 90,000 admissions a year – to Cardigan Guildhall, a hub of art gallery and community rooms for hire, the town is working hard to rediscover its purpose, and to meet the needs of the twenty-first century, whilst remaining true to its history as a market town.

Cardigan is an example of a town continuing to create a unique story for itself, one that builds on its cultural heritage whilst discovering new ways to attract and engage visitors from across the region and beyond. The town has utilised its assets – its location, resilience and strong charitable sector – to create a place that is responsive to the community's needs.

Hannah Ormston is Policy and Development Officer at the Carnegie UK Trust

Through its Flourishing Towns programme, the Carnegie UK Trust seeks to play a leading role in supporting the development of towns' policy and practice. This case study is taken from Turnaround Towns UK, a recent report that brings together nine case studies of towns in the United Kingdom that are working together to bring about transformational change within their communities. These case studies include examples of places that are utilising assets and the collective powers of the town – their spaces and people – to create transformational change.

A day in the life of Meltem Arikan *at* Elan Valley

Filiz Celik *stays with writer* **Meltem Arikan** *at a remote cottage in the Elan Valley*

Today I have been staying at a cottage near one of the idyllic hilltops of the Elan Valley, as a guest of Meltem Arikan. The Wales-based Turkish writer has won a fellowship to stay here, and as part of her project a woman is invited to spend a week with her. Don't assume it is a holiday; there are conditions attached to being a guest here, one of which is to take a long walk with her into the area's natural beauty. Arikan is an avid hiker and encourages if not pushes her guests into the hills. Upon arrival, a guest is gifted with a notebook and asked to reflect on the day's journey with her. So here are my notes.

The cottage was built to accommodate workers on the dams that created five separate reservoirs on the river Elan that provide water for Birmingham. An example of Victorian engineering, building on the dams began at the end of the 1800s, and the pipe was turned on by King Edward VII in 1904. The cottage is around four miles from the Elan Valley visitor centre, the nearest place where you can receive a mobile phone signal and access the internet. Excepting an idle landline telephone, Meltem and I are cut off from the world.

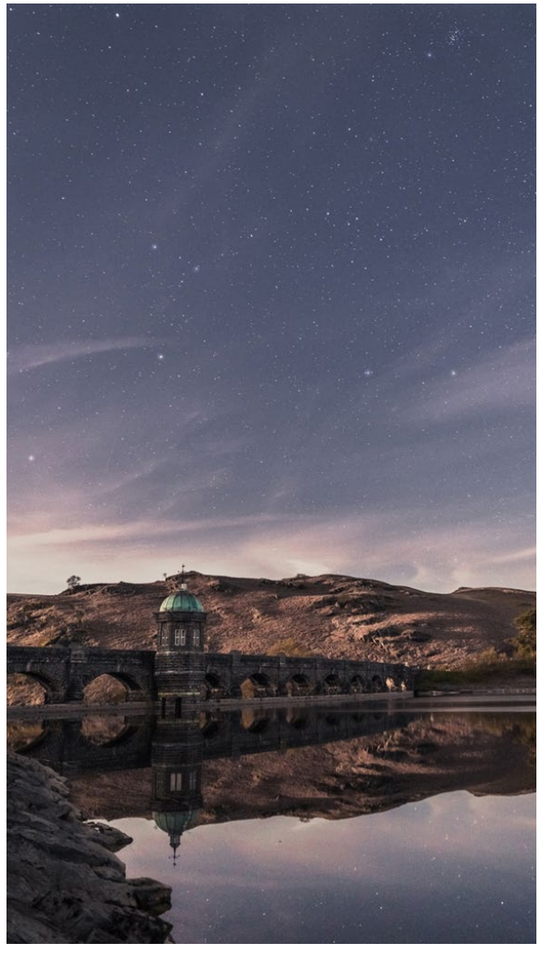
Meltem Arikan seems at home in this habitat, and it is interesting to watch her managing life here in February. She gets up around 7:30 and starts the day by turning on the generator. The cottage does not have mains electricity, and the generator can only be operational for about half of the day. Then she lets the light in, starts emptying the ashes from the wood burner in the living room and from the rayburn in the kitchen, collects the wood left to her by the rangers a day before and starts the fire. She then cleans the entire ground floor. She has made the place look and feel like home with pictures on the wall, tables dressed, sofa decorated with cushions and throws. Chores complete, she returns upstairs to wake her guest, in this case myself, happy to be snuggled in bed, watching the slim branches of barren trees from my bedroom window.

Morning ritual continues with a hearty breakfast: olives, honey, cheese, boiled eggs, avocado and tomato salad are spread across the table with a nice cup of tea. She talks about how a good breakfast will help with the hike! Today's routine is a bit different, however, as we are expecting visitors from the Elan Valley Cultural Heritage Project, the providers of Meltem's fellowship and residency here. Meltem bakes *borek*, a Turkish delicacy made with filo pastry and feta-like cheese, and prepares a bowl of dried fruits and nuts, toasts hot cross buns.

Around 11am we greet four lovely women from the project: Bonna Williams, volunteer coordinator, Project Officer Beth Rees, Scheme Manager Eluned Lewis and Stephanie Kruse, the Cultural Heritage Officer. This is the first time that the Elan Valley Fellowship has been awarded for as long a stretch as six months, and everyone is excited about Meltem's stay and impressed with her easy adaptation to life at the cottage.

After our guests leave, we leave for a shorter walk around 2pm. We walk down the path from the cottage to the main road around the reservoir. From there, she easily accesses the walking path and Meltem is not happy as she wants to walk into the hills. We don't have much time until it gets dark so luckily for me, we walk around a simple trail. Returning to the cottage by half past five, Meltem then prepares a dinner of beans and pilav rice. She tells me it is her paternal grandmother's recipe, from Ohrid, a city in present-day North Macedonia, from which Meltem's family migrated to Turkey when it was part of Yugoslavia.

Over dinner, we talk about her fellowship. She tells me how everything started one night when checking her Facebook page. 'One of my friends shared a post about the Elan Valley fellowship. I usually don't pay much attention to applications these days but when I saw the picture of the Elan Valley my heart leapt! I started



The cottage is... four miles from the Elan Valley visitor centre, the nearest place where you can receive a mobile phone signal and access the internet. Excepting an idle landline telephone, Meltem and I are cut off from the world.

reading about it... living in the Elan Valley, being in a cradle of nature, no TV, no internet, being away from all the trappings of a modern world. My love for Wales, particularly for mid and north Wales is well known now. I had to apply!'

'My excitement was churned up with anxiety. I had to complete an application form and if I were to be shortlisted I would need to go through an interview process. These processes are nightmares for me! I am often chalked down as being peculiar or anxious, although at least now I have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).'

'Eventually I managed to fill out the application form, detailing what I envisioned. My project would involve inviting a different woman to Elan Valley to stay with me every week. They would arrive on Sunday and we would start walking on Monday. We would walk in nature for four or five hours every day regardless of the weather conditions. An hour of each walk would be spent in absolute silence, doing nothing and the rest of the time would be open to communication. My guests could also spend time working on their individual projects at CARAD, Rhayader's Community Arts Centre. They would be invited to write reflections in a journal, and to share thoughts over joint activities such as cooking and eating like we do now.'

I ask Meltem about being a woman writer and she gently reminds me about the difficulty she experiences

‘It was difficult to be a writer in Turkey… my books were banned. Because of a play I wrote I am being prosecuted with heavy life imprisonment without parole’
Meltem Arikan

in question and answer situations. We eventually go back to our chat where she opens up easily and obviously has much to say: ‘It was difficult to be a writer in Turkey; I was branded as controversial because I wrote about incest and other sexual issues. My books were banned. Because of a play I wrote I am being prosecuted with heavy life imprisonment without parole in Turkey, I am soon to be sentenced.

‘My experiences of being a writer have been different here; the content that I referred to in my novels and plays were well received in Wales and beyond. After settling in Wales, I wrote a play called *Enough is Enough* about sexual abuse and violence. It was funded by Arts Council Wales. I then went on to write *Y Brain/Kargalar*, a first Welsh-Turkish theatre play, this too funded by the Arts Council and received really well by critics and the audience. I am listed among 100 female playwrights in the UK. That is of course wonderful but also tells us how male dominated the whole field still is, that we need these kinds of lists to draw attention.’

I ask her about what she has been working on during her fellowship. She gets excited, having so much in the pipeline. ‘I started a blog with three sections: Elan Valley, Suddenly Autistic and Wandering. The section about the Elan Valley is about my journey here. I will reflect on my journey and ask people to join me through this interactive blog. I also take pictures; I have developed a special technique where I edit the photos and create abstract images. There will be an exhibition at the end of my fellowship. I am also planning to write stories referring to the journeys of each of my guests. And another plan is to write a children’s book! So much to do, so much… another cup of tea?’

I say yes, and can’t help but smile. Meltem’s energy is contagious and having come to know her, I know that she will produce everything she mentions. Her productive energy is now fed by nature in the place she loves the most, Wales. I am excited to watch all that she will be producing.

Filiz Celik is a member of Wales PEN Cymru’s Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee. She worked for the Modern Languages and Translation Department at Swansea University on a research project looking at minority languages in Wales and currently works as a tutor at the university’s Department for Psychology and as a Systemic and Family Psychotherapist for a health board

Meltem Arikan’s Elan valley blog can be accessed at meltemarikan.blogspot.com

Time *and* Tide

Angela V. John *marks the centenary of a significant periodical*

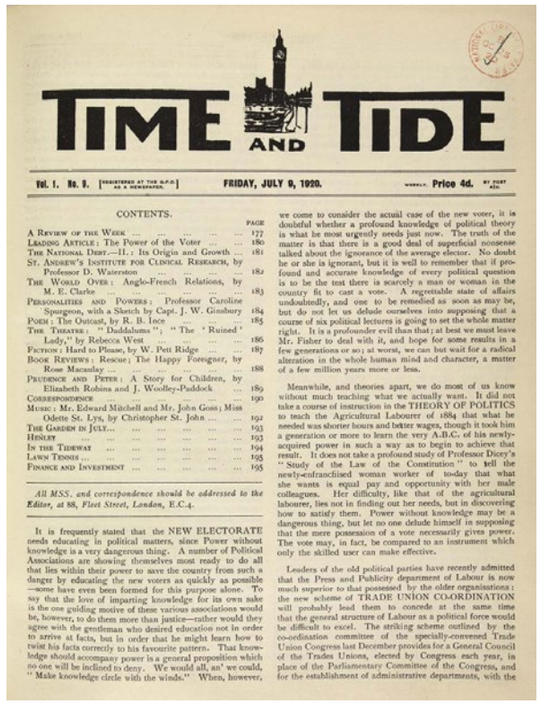
On 14 May 1920 a remarkable weekly publication made its debut. *Time and Tide*, the brainchild of Lady Rhondda, the former Margaret Haig Thomas (then Mackworth) of Llanwern, was based at the heart of the newspaper trade in Fleet Street.

It had a pioneering all-female board and proudly declared itself independent of any political party. It sought to give a voice to women who had gained the vote in 1918. Yet it was unlike women's magazines and suffrage papers. Although espousing an equal rights feminism and showcasing the lives of professional women, it deliberately appealed to male as well as female readers, describing itself as 'the paper which is trying not merely to talk but to think'.

The first number (24 pages) included messages of goodwill from eminent figures, including David Lloyd George, Lady Baden-Powell and Dame Clara Butt. There was an editorial on 'When will the authorities seriously turn their attention to Housing?', an article on the Bastardy Bill, a feature entitled 'The World Over', theatre and music reviews, discussion of the letters of Henry James and of a Fanny Burney novel.

At the helm from its inception until her death almost four decades later, was Lady Rhondda. It was she who founded, funded and, from 1926, edited the paper. It was soon selling between 12–15,000 copies weekly. *The New Statesman* had a circulation of about 10,000 and only the oldest weekly review, the *Spectator*, sold more than 16,000. By the 1940s *Time and Tide* sales had reached 40,000 copies.

Time and Tide gained a reputation for giving space to writers with very different views from its editor



TIME AND TIDE

Vol. 1. No. 9. [REGISTERED AT THE G.P.O. AS A NEWSPAPER.] FRIDAY, JULY 9, 1920. WEEKLY. Price 4d. BY POST 6D.

CONTENTS.

All MSS. and correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, at 88, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

It is frequently stated that the NEW ELECTORATE needs educating in political matters, since Power without knowledge is a very dangerous thing. A number of Political Associations are showing themselves most ready to do all that lies within their power to save the country from such a danger by educating the new voters as quickly as possible—some have even been formed for this purpose alone. To say that the love of imparting knowledge for its own sake is the one guiding motive of these various associations would be, however, to do them more than justice—rather would they agree with the gentleman who desired education not in order to arrive at facts, but in order that he might learn how to twist his facts correctly to his favourite pattern. That knowledge should accompany power is a general proposition which no one will be inclined to deny. We would all, an' we could, "Make knowledge circle with the winds." When, however, we come to consider the actual case of the new voter, it is doubtful whether a profound knowledge of political theory is what he most urgently needs just now. The truth of the matter is that there is a good deal of superficial nonsense talked about the ignorance of the average elector. No doubt he or she is ignorant, but it is well to remember that if profound and accurate knowledge of every political question is to be the test there is scarcely a man or woman in the country fit to cast a vote. A regrettable state of affairs undoubtedly, and one to be remedied as soon as may be, but do not let us delude ourselves into supposing that a course of six political lectures is going to set the whole matter right. It is a profounder evil than that; at best we must leave Mr. Fisher to deal with it, and hope for some results in a few generations or so; at worst, we can but wait for a radical alteration in the whole human mind and character, a matter of a few million years more or less.

Meanwhile, and theories apart, we do most of us know without much teaching what we actually want. It did not take a course of instruction in the THEORY OF POLITICS to teach the Agricultural Labourer of 1884 that what he needed was shorter hours and better wages, though it took him a generation or more to learn the very A.B.C. of his newly-acquired power in such a way as to begin to achieve that result. It does not take a profound study of Professor Dicey's "Study of the Law of the Constitution" to tell the newly-enfranchised woman worker of to-day that what she wants is equal pay and opportunity with her male colleagues. Her difficulty, like that of the agricultural labourer, lies not in finding out her needs, but in discovering how to satisfy them. Power without knowledge may be a dangerous thing, but let no one delude himself in supposing that the mere possession of a vote necessarily gives power. The vote may, in fact, be compared to an instrument which only the skilled user can make effective.

Leaders of the old political parties have recently admitted that the Press and Publicity department of Labour is now much superior to that possessed by the older organisations: the new scheme of TRADE UNION CO-ORDINATION will probably lead them to concede at the same time that the general structure of Labour as a political force would be difficult to excel. The striking scheme outlined by the co-ordination committee of the specially-convened Trade Union Congress last December provides for a General Council of the Trades Unions, elected by Congress each year, in place of the Parliamentary Committee of the Congress, and for the establishment of administrative departments, with the

Yet although newer forms of media would in time compete with the weeklies, somehow this paper survived.

After the 1928 Equal Franchise Act, it reinvented itself as a cutting edge literary journal, now based in Bloomsbury. It published the coming and leading writers of the day, from Rebecca West to D. H. Lawrence. Winifred Holtby and John Betjeman were employees. E. M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady* in *Time and Tide* was serialised there. In 1929 an issue including a sketch entitled 'The King and his Doctors' by Rhondda's good friend George Bernard Shaw, sold out within an hour. After the publication of *The Years*, Virginia Woolf recorded with relief that *Time and Tide* had described her as 'a first rate novelist and a great lyrical poet'.

It retained its readers before, during and after the Second World War when it became a leading political review, paying considerable attention to international politics. In 1943 some of its articles were published as a *Time and Tide* sixpenny pamphlet. Entitled *The Four Empires*, this compared the roots, motivations and consequences of American, Russian, Chinese and British expansion.

Time and Tide gained a reputation for giving space to writers with very different views from its editor. Post-war its independent non-party tag became less tenable as Lady Rhondda shed many of her earlier progressive beliefs. She increasingly took issue with the concept of the Planned State and Labour Party domestic policy. Yet despite such a shift in the tone of the paper, it retained readers.

So how was it that this woman from southeast Wales, with no experience as a professional journalist, managed to run a paper that was adaptable enough to last for decades despite challenges from newer media?

She was privileged as the daughter of the fabulously wealthy Welsh industrialist and Liberal politician D. A. Thomas (D.A.) and her parents stood by their married suffragette daughter. Her mother Sybil Thomas suggested that she become D.A.'s right hand businesswoman at Cambrian Buildings in Cardiff's docks, earning one of the highest salaries of any woman in Britain.

The future Lady Rhondda soon assumed some responsibility for the newspapers, journals and printing firms owned or partially controlled by her father. This

provided vital experience. She inherited D.A.'s industrial empire on his premature death in 1918, holding more directorships than any other woman in the UK.

So a background in business and a handy fortune help to explain the creation of the Time and Tide Publishing Company Limited with £20,000 capital. Lady Rhondda described her board of directors as 'A New Combine', evoking her father's mighty Cambrian Combine.

Literature and journalism appealed to her. From childhood she was an avid reader, with 'the literary digestion of a shark'. She also wrote stories. Aged fifteen she produced and edited a magazine called *Spring Tide*, charging sixpence per printed issue though contributors – chiefly her many Haig cousins – got free copies. A somewhat priggish teenage editor, she criticised the 'pure laziness' of those who did not submit copy on time.

She was excited by the launch of the *New Statesman* in 1913. She penned articles on women's rights and suffrage for the *Western Mail*, *Monmouthshire Weekly Post* and *Suffragette*. From 1920 she was a director of the *Western Mail*.

There was an editorial on 'When will the authorities seriously turn their attention to Housing?', an article on the Bastardy Bill, a feature entitled 'The World Over', theatre and music reviews

From childhood Lady Rhondda was an avid reader, with 'the literary digestion of a shark'

Lady Rhondda cherished *Time and Tide*. Its finances were always precarious and she poured much of her dwindling fortune into the paper. It became, in many ways, synonymous with her and her death in 1958 signalled its gradual demise. Although always astute enough to recognise that changing times, markets and media necessitated adjusting its emphasis and tone, as Catherine Clay has demonstrated in her recent literary analysis of the paper, feminist principles remained central, if less overtly stated.

In 1921 she had launched her Six Point Group in the paper. Like the earlier Chartists, it was a political pressure group. Designed to extend legal rights to accompany women's hard-won voting rights, its prescient six points demanded legislation on issues such as child assault and equal pay for teachers. Her paper advertised its activities and purpose.

Lady Rhondda was a hands-on editor, penning Leaders and editorials, responding to letters and writing book reviews. In the early days she wrote reviews of plays using a pseudonym. She wrote long articles on how Bernard Shaw and her bête-noir H.G. Wells treated women in their writings and, until 1956, wrote weekly for the paper's informal section called Notes on the Way.

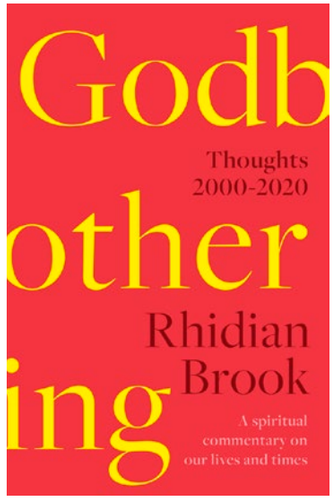
From the 1940s she spent as much time as possible at Pen Ithon, in Powys. It had been her mother's family home and was where she had spent childhood holidays with her cousins. These years also saw *Time and Tide* pay increased attention to contemporary debates about the self-determination of nations. In 1949 alone there were nine substantial articles on Wales. *Time and Tide* had long paid more attention to Welsh affairs than other London-based paper and now there appeared articles on subjects such as 'Wales for the Welsh', the need for a Secretary of State for Wales, the teaching of Welsh in village schools and the National Eisteddfod.

Lady Rhondda will soon be immortalised by a statue in Newport. She is chiefly remembered in Wales as our highest profile suffragette and Welsh National Opera's wonderful, exuberant 'Rhondda Rips It Up!' helped to seal this image in 2018. Yet she also deserves to be remembered for her resilient and influential *Time and Tide*.

Fittingly, a Festival of Women Writers and Journalists will celebrate later this year the centenary of *Time and Tide* at the St Bride Foundation off Fleet Street, and there is to be a centenary edition of the paper, reproducing articles from the interwar years with an introduction by Polly Toynbee.

Here in Wales *Time and Tide* can still be used as an invaluable source for historical debates about Wales and Welshness, as well as being a highly significant cultural phenomenon in its own right that helped to reflect and shape twentieth century public opinion.

Angela V. John was, for many years, Professor of History at the University of Greenwich, London and is currently an honorary professor at Swansea University. She is the author/editor of a dozen books, including *Turning the Tide: The Life of Lady Rhondda* (Parthian, 2013)



Godbothering: Thoughts 2000–2020
SPCK, 2020

Dylan Moore

The Testimony of Rhidian Brook

'I hate celebrities, *Harry Potter*, musicals, tables on pavements outside restaurants, carol singers and *Thought for the Day*. Unless Rhidian Brook is on.' So said the author Philip Kerr. Personally I'd blame the weather rather than the tables for the poor quality of al fresco dining in the British Isles, I think carol singing promotes much missing communal good cheer and should make a comeback – and at least *Harry Potter* got kids reading! But on (most) celebrities, (most) musicals and (most) *Thought(s) for the Day*, I see where Kerr is coming from.

Rhidian Brook is of that cohort of great and good Welsh people (see also comedian Paul Whitehouse, actor Keith Allen and fashion designer Jeff Banks among many others) who has somehow managed to forge a London-based career, internationally noted but very little remarked on within Wales. Born in Tenby in 1964, Brook was schooled in Hampshire and has lived in London for most of his adult life. Although perhaps this potted biography offers an explanation for his relative sidelining in his homeland, it is certainly not a reason. Brook's work deserves to be much more widely known – and celebrated – in Wales.

Rhidian Brook first took up writing fiction while suffering from a post-viral condition in his mid twenties. His debut novel *The Testimony of Taliesin Jones* was published to acclaim in 1996, winning prizes including the following year's Somerset Maugham Award, after which it was made into a feature film starring Jonathan Pryce. As its title suggests, the book was a coming-of-age story: a boy on the cusp of adolescence finds faith in God amid the emotional fallout of his parents' divorce. Drawing on aspects of Brook's own spiritual awakening much later in life, that book and the writer's second novel *Jesus and the Adman* (1999) grapple with deep questions: the existence of God, the meaning of life, how to live by faith in a secular world.

These themes find full expression in his virtuoso latest, *The Killing of Butterfly Joe* (2018). Joe Bosco is a charismatic butterfly salesman who captivates the narrator, a disillusioned Welshman called Llew Jones (like Taliesin, yet another Rhidian avatar?) who is travelling across the United States in search of inspiration and experience. Jones is captivated not only by the wild and brazen salesmanship of Joe, but also by the beauty and brains of his two very different sisters. Hay Festival director Peter Florence described the book as 'the bastard lovechild of *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*', which gives a good idea of its bold, brilliant energy as well as its touching portrayal of male friendship.

Between these offerings, Brook has worked largely as a scriptwriter on BBC drama – *Silent Witness* and *Atlantis* – as well as feature films like the heartwarming *Africa United*. His 2013 novel *The Aftermath* was also turned into a film. Drawing on the real life story of his grandfather, Walter Brook, who on being allocated a requisitioned house in post-war Hamburg took the highly unusual step of sharing it with the original German owners, the novel follows the complicated fallout when the Morgan family from Narberth move in with a widowed architect and his teenage daughter. Starring Keira Knightley as grieving mother Rachael, the film version obliterates the Welsh background of the protagonists (which was already pretty nominal in the novel) as well as much of the grime and grit of a desolate post-war city that makes it a gripping read.

But despite the success of his novels and the uneven reception for their movie adaptations, it is Brook's regular role on the *Today* programme – as one of the voices that offer a *Thought for the Day* – that should, by now, have secured his place in the front rank of the Welsh imagination. True, there is a quintessential Englishness about BBC Radio 4, perhaps even especially on the station's flagship news programme that was for 32 years presented by a man from Splott, but given that – in the words of Mona Siddiqui, Professor of Islamic and Inter-religious Studies at the University of Edinburgh – 'Rhidian's thoughts are elegantly crafted with imaginative storytelling and real depth… he is one of my favourites', there should if not outright pride then at least widespread awareness among the Welsh populace that – whatever our feelings about *Thought for the Day* in general – one of our own is offering a regular dose of wisdom to seven million listeners, a tenth of the UK population, and simultaneously holding up the slot's reputation.

His latest book is the bravely titled *Godbothering* (it concerns a God who is bothered rather than those humans who might bother you about God). The volume collects twenty years' worth of Rhidian Brook's *Thoughts*, and as such forms a kind of alternative history of Britain in the twentyfirst century – a search for divine wisdom in everything from David Beckham's broken metatarsal to the murder of Damilola Taylor, from *Big Brother* to the moral panic about hoodies in shopping centres. With an unplanned neatness of timescale that takes us from the turn of the millennium to the turn of this year, some of the entries seem like items plucked from a time capsule – America's presidential choice between Kerry and Bush, the break-up of Brangelina – while other stories never seem to go away, rumbling on like the proverbial radio left on in the background: war in Syria; the Hillsborough families' ongoing fight for justice; dinner party conversations about schools.

The twenty-first century's opening double-decade has given us virtue signalling, 'snowflakes' and WhatsApp. The challenge of *Thought for the Day*, Brook acknowledges is 'to put some glory / in the morning's story… to see the spiritual in all this material', and his small triumph is in a consistent ability to find something deep and genuinely thought-provoking in all manner of events, from the tragic to the trivial. And although the nature of writing for a daily radio show creates a high degree of risk that the thoughts of today will become the fish-and-chip paper of tomorrow, a retrospective like this allows the benefit of hindsight.

As someone who in 2006 took his wife and two young children on a research trip for the Salvation Army, travelling through some of the places worst affected by the AIDS pandemic in Africa – resulting in the book *More Than Eyes Can See* – the author notes a turning point in 2012 when Save the Children launched its first appeal for UK children. Reading over these last two decades' worth of thoughts, there is no denying the impact of austerity on those of Christianity's chief concern: society's poorest. Rhidian Brook's regular musings on inequality peak in a moving piece juxtaposing two London towers, each iconic in its own way: the Shard and Grenfell.

Most impressive though is that amid two decades worth of bad news and increasing rancour, Brook's still, small voice has been insistent in championing hope, embodied in a Jesus who is neither left nor right but 'way more radical than any politician in history'. In the choice of 2020 as a cut off point for these *Thoughts*, Brook appears to have performed a miracle. It's his kind of thinking that we'll need as we emerge from this current crisis, transformative and open to radical change. If you're Welsh (or even if you're not) and you've never heard of Brook, then work backwards. *Godbothering* is a brilliant place to start your lockdown reading. ➤

Dylan Moore is Editor of *the welsh agenda*

Rhidian Brook will be in conversation with Dylan Moore at Hay Festival Digital, Sat 30 May at 11:30am

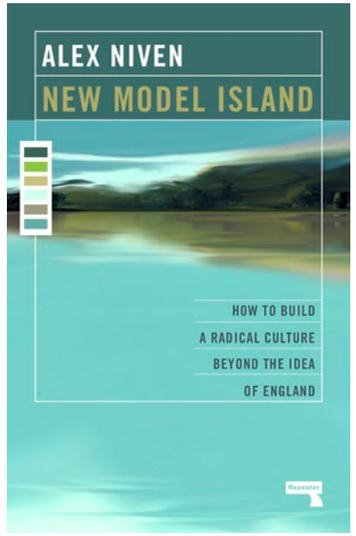
New Model England and other 'verbal smudges'

Alex Niven, New Model Island: How to Build a Radical Culture Beyond the Idea of England, Repeater, 2019

Kieron D Smith

In the new order of the North Atlantic Archipelago – or whatever these islands will be called in the decades to come – when the historians are choosing chapter headings for their books about the 2010s, what will be the go-to phrase for sections on the December 2019 General Election? 'For the many, not the few'? 'For the few, not the many'? 'Get Brexit Done'? 'Oven-ready Brexit'? I wager it'll be 'let me be clear'. This was the dire yet universal patter that prefaced the soundbites and stump speeches of every candidate in the months leading up to that vote. 'Let me be clear' is, of course, pure doublespeak, a phrase calibrated to disguise the terrifying unknowability haunting all political and social life in these last days of the British consensus. That every one of us could see through such blatant mystification is, of course, irrelevant. 'Let me be clear' is a phrase plainly designed to postpone lucid statement, decision, or analysis, indefinitely.

In this context, Alex Niven's *New Model Island: How to Build a Radical Culture Beyond the Idea of England* (Repeater, 2019) appears to offer an alternative. Rather than obfuscate via the bogus claim to lucidity, this book foregrounds the difficulty of finding clear-cut answers to questions of social and political identity. Indeed, his title alone contains at least two outrageous misnomers, and virtues are made of this throughout. In an appended 'note on terminology' , Niven disarmingly concedes that 'the title of this book should really have been in the plural rather than the singular', yet confesses that he thought it 'sounded better without an "s" on the end', and asks for forgiveness for this and 'other verbal smudges'. The strange allure of this book thus lies in the way it appears to perform the inverse gesture of the pre-Brexit politician, veiling a remarkably functionalist blueprint for a post-Brexit Britain – an attempt to 'envisage a wholly new architecture for the islands', no less – in the language of a kind of post-structuralist-liberal-humanist-impressionism.



Without this conceptual smudginess, this smearing of the analytical lens, *New Model Island* would be forced to look directly at its object – that is, clearly, the problem of national identity in twenty-first century England – and this is something that its author simply will not countenance. Nations, for Niven, are intrinsically outmoded, retrograde forms of social, political and cultural organisation: 'narrow', 'isolationis[t]', 'anachronistic', its British variants mere 'hallucinated national Camelots'. English national identity, to the extent that it does exist, belongs to 'working-class subjects', not progressive intellectuals. To support this view, the book paints a picture of an emptily functionalist Englishness, a discursive construct built as a kind of ideological scaffolding to support the nation's imperial exploits. The end of empire spelled the internal collapse of this flimsy structure which, in the intervening years, was 'meticulously de-essentialised and distorted' before more recently being repainted in the garish hues of neoliberal capitalist simulacra. The result is that, today, 'in a very real as well as an affective sense, England is sheer geopolitical void. Put yet more boldly: England doesn't exist'.

There is undoubtedly some truth to this. As Niven here and elsewhere cogently argues, Tory-Anglo-Britishness is about as egregious an identity and set of sensibilities as it is possible to possess in the Western world. However, using this as the bathwater to chuck out every other aspect of the national experience, the book jettisons a real opportunity to examine honestly the lived contradictions and complex structures of feeling of English subjectivity. This move is itself something of a contradiction, as in places *New Model Island* is an earnest, sophisticated evocation of these matters. Longer chapters are interspersed with lyrical digressions, and though these occasionally border on a cloying chumminess ('I got to know Mark…', 'Joe and I met at the start of 2012…', 'as Robin and I walked through the empty, light-filled lanes of the Dorset countryside…'), there are moving passages that finely articulate the acute stresses of geographical mobility and dislocation, the importance of friendship, and the forms of creativity and political consciousness that can only come from felt, lived experience in particular places. Yet the melancholic tone pervading the book downplays the real power and privilege of living and working as a creative person in one of the richest and most powerful nation states on the planet, with access to its elite universities, its cultural networks, its publishing, press, and readerships. Indeed, large portions of the book are given over to not-so-humblebrags about being a member of 'the only really cogent literary avant-garde to have emerged on the islands since the millennium'. Such proud declarations of cultural vitality make the book's central thesis of English spiritual emptiness ring somewhat hollow.

The book paints a picture of an emptily functionalist Englishness, a discursive construct built as a kind of ideological scaffolding to support the nation's imperial exploits

This would almost be forgivable were it not for the curious expansionism that characterises Niven's vision of an alternative or post-Englishness: a smudgy 'islandness' that is remarkably close to a form of cultural Britishness in the way it impressionistically assimilates England's national others. This is abundantly exemplified in one of the book's 'lyric island' digressions. Following a chapter that eviscerates the chronic hollowness and 'confinement' of 'the English void', Niven neatly segues into a subchapter on, of all people, Dylan Thomas. Despite this poet being from – last time I checked – Swansea, and writing the bulk of his work in – yes – south and west Wales, Niven confidently enumerates the ways in which Thomas bespeaks 'the negative deadness of England and Englishness'. This is a preposterously claustrophobic reading of Thomas, of whom I once thought that even the most cursory reading would reveal a poetry that defies generic, formal, and lyrical boundaries. Of the vast body of critical work on Thomas over the years – which ranges from crudely moralistic interpretations of his drinking habits to complex psychoanalytical readings of his use of language and form – one of the few things that critics do tend to agree upon is his innate excess. Yet Niven, with a sort of blithe imperiousness, totally overlooks this extensive critical legacy, and instead constructs a small, airless box in which to bury Thomas. 'Fern Hill' is allegedly an expression of the 'inevitable and banal realisation of a bleary-eyed middle-aged alcoholic' (Dylan Thomas wrote 'Fern Hill' when he was thirty.) It is a work that articulates a 'deeply embedded feeling of entrapment and enclosure'. It 'proclaims its oldness, its *limitedness* [Niven's italics] at every turn'. 'Mining […] folk cliché', it is 'route-one nostalgia'. Where the poem is acknowledged to be a product of Thomas hailing from a particular time and place, this is treated in internal colonial terms as part of a 'peripheral sub-tradition', classically 'British' in its being unable to resist being 'dragged back into the past and its ancient strictures'. Despite the radical ambivalence of its final lines, Niven informs us with the portentousness of a prison warden that the poem is proof that 'no one born on these islands can escape the feeling of subjugation and historical limit that penetrates into every aspect of our cultural being.'

To be fair, I'm struggling to escape the sense of the Arnoldian levels of cultural overlordliness on display here. As Daniel G. Williams

has argued, Matthew Arnold, for all his talk of 'sweetness and light', was at heart a deliberating political thinker who fully understood the blunt administrative power of culture. In his lectures *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, Arnold expounded a profoundly instrumentalist approach to culture, positing it as a tool of national cohesion in the service of the true rulers of 'Britain': the English. His solution to emergent national antagonisms – 'a moment when the ice is breaking up in England, and we are all beginning at last to see how much real confusion and insufficiency it covered' (sound familiar?) – was to blend together a sense of the best of Britain's 'races': to infuse the 'steady-going' and 'phlegmatic' yet occasionally staid and overbearing English with a dash of the Celtic 'genius': a temperament defined by a safe poetic vitality and sentimentality, destined to sing and dance but not to rule.

Niven, of course, does not evoke the language of race. But echoes of Arnold's thinking unfortunately haunt this book. Post-structuralist readings of England's 'de-essentialised' spiritual emptiness are contrasted with lyrical digressions that find sustenance in the wholesome fruits of Celtic culture. Despite Dylan Thomas's sense of English 'confinement', he is for Niven a poet whose 'melodic cadences' were 'determined by the ingrained musicality of Welsh culture'. Elsewhere Niven lauds the 'pan-islands' Britpop tendency, which, he reminds us, brought together 'Scottish novelist Irvine Welsh, the Manchester-Irish Gallagher brothers (who emerged from the rather Scottish-oriented Creation Records stable), and Welsh hedonists Howard Marks, Rhys Ifans and Cerys Matthews'. He recalls his teenage obsession with Mogwai and Super Furry Animals, Scottish and Welsh bands to whom, in curiously sentimental terms, he 'gave [his] whole self without reservation', as well as a night in his twenties he spent watching Brendan O'Carroll's *Mrs Brown's Boys*, 'the funniest, strangest, most life-affirming thing we'd ever seen'. On his tour of English cultural lassitude, Niven does not pause to consider the fact that each of these other nations has its own internal differences – not to mention languages – as well as its own complex relationship with itself and its others. Perhaps most telling is his assessment that the British 'periphery' developed 'reductive nationalisms as a sort of oppositional defence mechanism'. England is consistently placed at the centre of the story and afforded a history to which its national others are mere homogenised, reactive appendages.

Let me be clear: nations and national identities are confusing, conditional, and often downright contradictory social constructs. They certainly can be reactionary and exclusionary. Anglo-Britishness is a formation that has ensured, among other things, the predominance of Conservative governments in Britain over the past hundred years (as well as the next four) despite three of its nations voting emphatically otherwise. With this in mind, there is plenty to agree with in this book. Niven is right to call attention to the 'deep structural inequalities that arise from the London-centric design of the islands', and it is clear that British society is 'rotten at its roots, and simply can't continue in its present form'. In this sense, *New Model Island* can be read as a timely and welcome sign that some on the English left are beginning to look more seriously at the issue of national identity and experience, and their profound impact on the social and political realities of these islands. This is an urgent necessity at a time when these matters are being vigorously co-opted by dangerous charlatans on the alt- and far-right.

However, the constant impressionistic blurring of Britain and England, the mistaken equation of English regionalism with Celtic nationalism, the Arnoldian assumptions about the homogeneity and cultural vitality of the Celtic nations, and the ludicrously disingenuous claim that 'England no longer exists', all suggest a worrying lack of reflexivity. As Michael Billig argued back in the mid-1990s, England has historically had the privilege not to worry about its own national identity because it has been too busy enjoying its own dominant, 'banal' universalism, haughtily defining nations and nationalism as passé, as something that happens 'over there', while shoving its culture, its language, its customs and assumptions down others' throats. It is for this reason that many Scottish and Welsh nationalists may bark a mirthless laugh at Niven's reproach that their campaigns can 'be guilty of an inward focus that neglects to consider what might happen to England without them'.

Despite Dylan Thomas's sense of English 'confinement', he is for Niven a poet whose 'melodic cadences' were 'determined by the ingrained musicality of Welsh culture'

Other national formations are possible. Speaking from an 'inwardly-focused' Wales, the cultural and political institutions and tendencies built here in the decades leading up to and after devolution were hard won

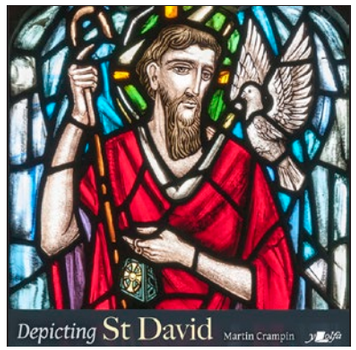
Other national formations are possible. Speaking from an 'inwardly-focused' Wales, the cultural and political institutions and tendencies built here in the decades leading up to and after devolution were hard won. They are still in process, and are struggling to manage and make sense of complex tensions and contradictions. At present, they have their problems. Devolution could still provide the basis for a radical redefinition of Wales's relationship with England, but this must come from within, responding to its own needs, and on its own terms. The 'post-national' left would do well to think more lucidly about their own situation, their own banal power, rather than smudging Ireland, Scotland and Wales into an emptily rhetorical islandness out of England's palette.

Kieron D Smith is a writer and researcher from south Wales

Depicting St David

Martin Crampin
Y Lolfa, 2019

RM Parry



Throughout junior school a Welsh leek was pinned to my shirt on March 1st. I remember the girls wore pinnies and black hats. In this way we celebrated St David's Day and felt part of Wales. It remains a big annual marker in the calendar today, and for a few hours each year flowering daffodils and stories about David remind us of the strength of affection in Wales for the Patron Saint.

You might imagine a history of images representing our Patron Saint would stretch back many centuries, revealing details and insights into the life of the actual person of David, but Martin Crampin's new book, Depicting St David, packed with good photographs and lavished with detail, helps us to learn that although the man we know as David led an extraordinary life and left his mark in stories and the names of Christian communities, the actual historical facts about David's dates and how he conducted his remarkably influential life are uncertain. There are no references to David in the preserved fifth and sixth century manuscripts, the period in which he is said to have lived, and among the surviving literature of later centuries only a few fleeting references emerge before Ceredigion-born Rhygyfarch writes his *Life of David* around 1090, following the Norman invasion of Britain. You might hunger for history, but the first biography of David appears some 600 years after his ministry.

If we are disappointed in our hope of written records, we will also find the medieval visual and artistic representation of David similarly lacking. There is a small fragment of medieval glass incorporated into a late nineteenth century stained glass window of St David in the church at Nercwys, Flintshire but here, as across Wales, medieval painted carved figures and church windows depicting saints were destroyed by Reformation, Civil War and the quiet neglect of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There's nothing to see today.

The visual story of David in Wales begins in the nineteenth century and Martin Crampin carefully takes us through the early days of renewed interest in depicting

This beautiful image made me regret for a moment that the book confines itself only to Welsh depictions, necessarily losing sight of the St David made by Ifor Davies for Westminster Cathedral in 2010. One of the great modern Davids.

saints in windows. The first David appeared on Stow Hill, Newport in the newly erected Catholic Church of St Mary in 1840, built for the growing number of worshippers after the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829 gave greater freedom to Roman Catholics in public life. From here the story grows hand in hand with the nineteenth century Gothic Revival as churches across Wales undertook restoration with a galvanising enthusiasm for the medieval past. David emerges in these windows as a robed and mitred bishop, reflecting the established church hierarchy structures of both the 19th century and the earlier Gothic period, and this approach continued into the twentieth century, up to the 1950s. The main exceptions to this first episcopal style of depiction stand out with interest and poignancy. They are the windows in which David, as a boy, is shown being taught by Illtyd; the 1916 statue of David in Cardiff City Hall by William Goscombe John which, as Crampin writes, 'evokes an ascetic and visionary figure, at variance with some of the impassive bishops of churches found at the time', and a touching painting by John Coates Carter in the tiny hamlet of Walwyn's Castle in Pembrokeshire.

It is not until the 1960s, with growing awareness of scholarship, that David in Welsh church imagery puts down his fine robes, bishop's hat and staff. Suddenly, the symbol of David as powerful church administrator is abandoned and the man is now revealed as travelling

Our renewed interest today makes us fellow travellers, in some curious way, with the Normans of a thousand years ago who, having established rapid military and political influence over large parts of Britain, developed a hunger for the ancient stories and culture of Wales

holy person and teacher, and it is in this simpler way he comes to us, today, in the examples of late twentieth century and recent commissions.

On the restored shrine of St David in St David's Cathedral, Sara Crisp's captivating painting presents us with an intimate portrait of a man caught up on a bold, sympathetic spiritual mission, his clothes reflecting the connections between the Celtic churches and the North African desert Christian communities. This beautiful image made me regret for a moment that the book confines itself only to Welsh depictions, necessarily losing sight of the St David made by Ifor Davies for Westminster Cathedral in 2010. One of the great modern Davids.

We are in safe hands with Martin Crampin. He is an experienced professional photographer and academic of considerable standing, having recently led the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies' *Seintiau* project. His many excellent photographs throughout this work are presented carefully with good detail, and the accompanying text lists both the artists who made the work and the changing contexts in which the work was commissioned.

This book is also a taste of things to come, because it heralds Martin Crampin's larger survey of the depiction of saints in church art in Wales currently under preparation. There are so many images of David that this generously illustrated slim volume is necessary as a stand alone catalogue. Not only will this first offering be of value to historians, architects and artists with professional interests in ecclesiastical architecture and art, but 170 church communities will have the delight of seeing their windows and carvings of St. David described in this scholarly book, and many other readers with a general interest in Wales will take pleasure in dipping and discovering that small out-of-the-way buildings in hamlets, heard of but never yet stopped at, hold beautifully coloured and valued insights into the memory and continuing witness of David.

Appetite for connecting in some way to figures from the misty historical period in which Celtic churches were established and flourished seems to be an odd constant. Our renewed interest today makes us fellow travellers, in some curious way, with the Normans of a thousand years ago who, having established rapid military and political influence over large parts of Britain, developed a hunger for the ancient stories and culture of Wales. They discovered, as we rediscover today, that the first three hundred years of Christianity cracked and broke Roman religion and then, in the west, the personal mission of early witnesses and later figures like David went on to embrace, adapt and transform Celtic paganism into enduring Christian culture and society. Some names are historical, like Illtyd, and others, like David, are lost to formal inspection, but something of their call persists. You only need travel a few miles from wherever you are in Wales to find them celebrated and cherished in the landscape.

RM Parry is chief executive of Coleridge in Wales Ltd and leads the current Landscapes of Faith project

Q&A

Mymuna Soleman talks to **Merlin Gable** about the Privilege Cafe

Could you explain the concept for the Privilege Cafe, and what you're trying to achieve?

The Privilege Cafe was created on the back of anger and frustration, exclusion and marginalisation. I was frustrated of being invited into #whitezooms where I felt that the room was filled with power and privilege and no space for myself as a woman of colour to express herself openly and freely. I'm very passionate about increasing BAME representation in various sectors and particularly how little space there was and still is for these discussions to be tackled.

Since launching, I have convened, organised and facilitated three insightful discussions which drew together senior individuals from equalities and cultural organisations, the creative sector and even two elected members from different political parties, where we discussed ways to tackle privilege and institutional bias. The cafe is a space where I want to create an inclusive environment, for people to come and ask those 'difficult' questions, to connect with people they may have not connected with before and to discuss actions – how they can use their privilege for good.

I don't want this cafe to become a token where people come and tick off a box and put the Privilege Cafe on their CV. I want it to be a space where real action takes place – where those with power and privilege are willing to share their privilege with those with less than them. In my last session at the cafe I got attendees to each pledge an action they would take away back to their workplace and complete, and then to share it with the group the next time they visit the cafe. This is the type of determination and enthusiasm I want to become the DNA of the Cafe.

People in Welsh public life can often talk about the need for 'diversity' of viewpoint or experience. Is diversity enough as a concept, or do you think these conversations need to go elsewhere too? Do you think conversations around privilege need to also focus on structures as well as individuals?

I think the word diversity is thrown about and misused so much nowadays that I genuinely don't know what people mean when they say it and I usually ask for further clarification. When I bring race into the 'diversity' discussion, it's even more confusing for me as it is uncomfortable and it is at this point where I invite them to the cafe where they can be open and free; there's no room for fear in my cafe and it's one of the big barriers I'm trying to break down and reinforce in every session.

Privilege and power for me underpin, and are the main underlying factors, when it comes to institutional racism. Although structures are there and are set in place, we need to remember that these structures were built and programmed by individuals from a certain background and so it is these individuals that need to be in spaces such the Privilege Cafe as they have the power of decision making in relation to processes and procedures of organisational structure for example. What we also need to remember is that when it comes to privilege is that it's not an individual 'finger pointing' issue but rather it's the underpinning systemic structures that come out of this that impact people's lives, be it in work or on a wider societal level. This issue is very complex and deep rooted, and I feel that fear and ignorance may stand as a barrier stopping from people having a meaningful discussion to offer positive impactful solutions. The Cafe is informal and relaxed, but at the same time it's a space to discuss and unpick serious issues around privilege and how it's used for good, or not.

How have your ideas for this project changed with the COVID-19 pandemic? Do conversations around privilege, and the spaces in which they are held, need to change as a result?

My idea of the Cafe came about during this crisis. I wouldn't say because of COVID-19, but the lockdown has enabled me to use my frustration for good – and to hopefully shift mindsets where it comes to privilege: who is aware they have it and how they can open space at the decision making table for those that don't. Feedback I've had from various attendees so far has been that they felt a strong sense of compassion and guilt after discussions at the cafe, and also that lockdown has made them think differently when it came to their privilege.

I think spaces such as the Privilege Cafe will become the norm after lockdown, hopefully, because people are now feeling that 'we can't go back to how things were' – a direct quote from one of my attendees. Another expressed that the cafe had been a catalyst for her to use her privilege more and that this way of thinking is now at the forefront of her consciousness in everything she does. This sense of determination has also been a recurring theme and is something that will be a huge driving force for where I want to continue my message of fighting inequality.

Mymuna Soleman is a resident of Butetown, Cardiff, a thriving multicultural community, and the creator of the Privilege Cafe @privilegecafe_ @bintmohamood askamuslimwales@gmail.com

Fellowship

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 029 2048 4387.

Prof Jane Aaron
Nigel Annett
Ali Anwar
Tony Bagnall
Mary Barnett
Mark Barry
Simon Baynes
Prof Gary Beauchamp
Prof Deirdre Beddoe
Frances Beecher
Alex Bird
Sioned Bowen
Dafydd Bowen Lewis
Nigel Bowen-Morris
Cllr Frank Bradfield
John Bryant
Prof Antony Chapman
Prof Nickie Charles
Rocio Cifuentes
Professor Elan Closs Stephens
Dr Carl Iwan Clowes
David Clubb
Philip Cooper
George Crabb
Dr Daniel Cunliffe
Greg Dash
Rhys David
Carole-Anne Davies
Huw Davies
Lynda Davies
Paul Cornelius Davies
David Dixon
Ceri Doyle
Rev Aled Edwards
Huw Edwards
Richard Eley
Henry Engelhardt
David M Evans
Felicity Evans
Jonathan Evans
Robin Evans

Christine Eynon
Alan Francis
Kevin Gardiner
Lord Brian Griffiths of Fforestfach
Nigel Griffiths
Peter L Griffiths
Eurfyl ap Gwilym
Prof Ian Hargreaves
Rebecca Heaton
Daran Hill
Gerald Holtham
Owen Gareth Hughes
Rob Humphreys
Judy Hutchings
Gareth Ioan
Dafydd Iwan
Dyfrig James
Jeffrey James
Keith James
Milwyn Jarman
D Huw John
Granville John
Robert John
Clare Johnson
Prof. Calvin Jones
Chris Jones
Dr Elin Jones
Dr Geraint Stanley Jones
Helen Jones
Hywel Ceri Jones
Prof Phillip John Jones
Ron Jones
Tom Jones
Prof Steven Kelly
Huw M Lewis
Roger Lewis
Dr Dai Lloyd
Sir Richard Lloyd Jones
Dr David Lloyd Owen
Prof David Marquand
Prof Judith Marquand

Prof Laura McAllister
David Melding
Helen Molyneux
Meirion Morgan
Steve O'Dea
Cynthia Ogbonna
John Osmond
Alan Peterson
Jonathon Poyner
Dr Eurwen Price
Jenny Rathbone
Prof Richard Rawlings
Gruff Rhys
Menna Richards
Huw Roberts
Lord Rowe-Beddoe
Chris Rowlands
Owen Sheers
Paul Silk
Nicola Simons
Wiard Sterk
David Stevens
Geraint Talfan Davies
Rhodri Talfan Davies
Andris Taurins
Rt Hon Lord John Thomas of Cwmgiedd
Ned Thomas
Prof Nigel Thomas
Roger Geraint Thomas
Dr Neil Thompson
Delith Thorpe
Martin Tinney
W Tudor John
Paul Twamley
Lee Waters
Rt Hon Lord Dafydd Wigley
Hywel Wiliam
Beti Williams
Eilian S Williams
Dr Ruth Williams