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# the welsh agenda



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Issue 62.

## Crossing Continents

Eric Ngalle Charles  
talks to Lleucu Siencyn

## Cool Cymru

Rhian E. Jones on  
Wales in the 1990s

## Progressive Patriots

Adam Johannes on  
Scotland, Catalonia  
& Quebec



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**+** Halima Begum on Curriculum Reform | Robert Jobson on The Prince of Wales | Cerys Furlong on Labour and Women

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## Editorial

# A vision for the future

### *Auriol Miller*



**L**ike many organisations, over recent months we have been reflecting on the ever-changing external context in which we operate. At the time of writing in March 2019, this is particularly highly charged as negotiations on the Brexit withdrawal deal continue. Together with the Board of the IWA, we've been thinking hard about how we can best shape our contribution to Wales' future given the shifting sands of uncertainty on a number of fronts, politically and economically. Someone has to take the long view and we think that should be us.

Our vision is for a Wales that is optimistic, engaged, ambitious, prosperous (not just materially, but yes, also in financial terms), strategic, fair, confident, transparent and that celebrates itself. This means that we're going to focus our work over the coming three to five years.

We want to explore and promote what a vibrant, modern democracy could look and feel like in Wales, one that enables and encourages people – women and men, young and old – to participate in public life, including across party lines, and one that engages with their views in ways that includes not excludes. Our project Understanding Welsh Places is part of this – we want to enable people to get to grips with shaping the future of the places where they live and work, wherever that is in Wales. Of course we want to look at the actual systems of governance too – in fact we'll be starting a new piece of research on inter-parliamentary relations post Brexit in April. And media policy is part of this mix too, for how do we all engage effectively with what's going on around us if we don't know what that reality is in the first place?

We will also focus on how to develop a successful clean, green and fair economy for Wales, and public services that are continually informed by citizens' lived experiences as a matter of routine. We'd like to see Wales

specialising in the technologies of the future, with an easy confidence in its international strategy, stronger cabinet government and ambitious, shared priorities that are implemented across policy portfolios. Effective accountability is clearly key. Our flagship project *Re-energising Wales* plays into this theme, and so does our proposed new piece of work on land use.

We will also look at our diverse and shared interests. Our nation still needs building. Party politics aside, what are the shared narratives that our future generations will recognise? How can we celebrate the successes of today and of the future, as well as those of the past? Are we clear on where we can actually be world-leading – in marine renewables for instance – and are we helping each other to contribute to bringing that to life, with the benefits accruing to people here in Wales, not extracted for someone else's profit elsewhere?

*The welsh agenda* provides a platform for a range of voices to collide. Our cover this issue features Eric Ngalle Charles, a writer making a unique and important contribution to the narrative of Wales; his own life story – arriving as an asylum seeker from Cameroon via Russia – is a reminder of the interconnectedness of our world, and the fact that our democracy, economy and shared interests are inextricable from the state of freedom and justice elsewhere. İlhan Şiş, now over one hundred days into his hunger strike for Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan, received the backing of a recent motion in the National Assembly.

Elsewhere, we feature lessons from Scotland on curriculum reform, from Caerphilly on healthy lifestyles, and from all over Wales on language, food prosperity and innovation.

Across the spectrum of issues facing the country, our aim, essentially, is to challenge Wales to be better.

AM

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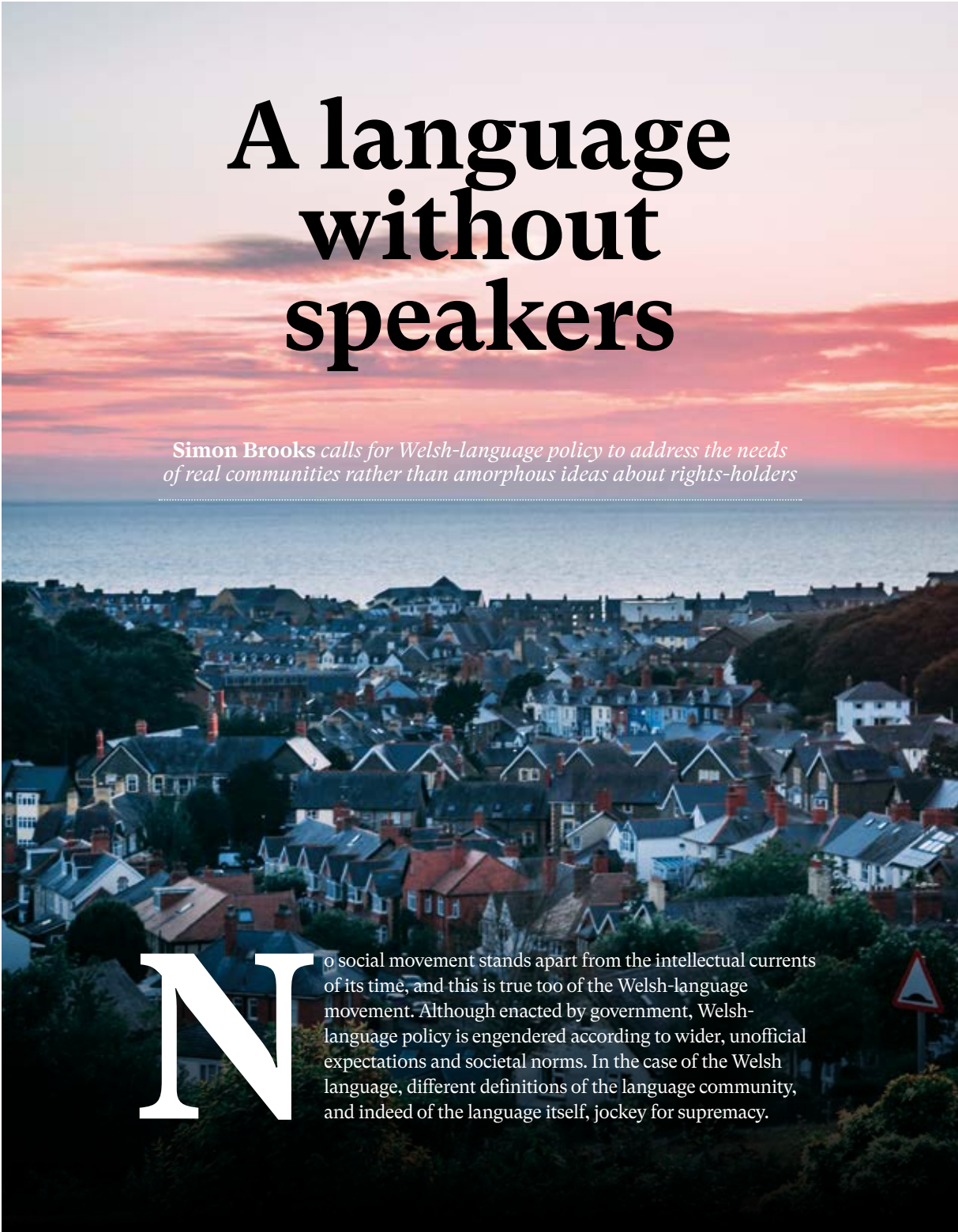
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Through the *welsh agenda* and the IWA websites, the IWA provides a platform for debate, discussion and the exploration of ideas. The ideas contained in the independently produced articles and papers we publish are those of the writers and contributors and do not, therefore, necessarily reflect the views of the IWA, its members and Board.

# A language without speakers

*Simon Brooks calls for Welsh-language policy to address the needs of real communities rather than amorphous ideas about rights-holders*

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in Wales, taken during sunset. The town is densely packed with houses featuring dark roofs and red brick chimneys. The sea is visible in the background under a sky with soft, pinkish-orange clouds. A road sign is visible on the right side of the image.

**N**o social movement stands apart from the intellectual currents of its time, and this is true too of the Welsh-language movement. Although enacted by government, Welsh-language policy is engendered according to wider, unofficial expectations and societal norms. In the case of the Welsh language, different definitions of the language community, and indeed of the language itself, jockey for supremacy.

Firstly, we have the Welsh language as the social glue of community, largely in the north and west but in other places too, populated there on the whole by first language Welsh speakers, disadvantaged by distance from the metropolis, often deprived. Here, the language is reified. Its speakers constitute a social group. Language politics concern the group rather than individuals within it. Language 'rights' play second fiddle to the politics of social need and group sustainability: houses, jobs, second homes, land-use planning. This is language-as-community.

Then we have the language called 'Welsh' that belongs to 'everyone in Wales'. It exists more as aspiration than in practice: it is desired but not habitually used. Theoretically, its bureaucratic world of translated forms, corporate websites and language 'Standards' could exist without any Welsh speakers at all. The language of regulation and red tape is not the language of social use. Less than 1% of the population outside Welsh-speaking communities use Welsh-language services.

Increasingly the former definition is being displaced by the latter because of an obsession with a 'rights' agenda within language policy-making. 'Welsh' is regarded as a social good to which the people of Wales have a 'right'. The nature of the good is defined by the keywords of civic Wales: inclusivity and diversity in particular. The language is to be made accessible to all the citizens of Wales. But this is not without consequences, for in order to become a marker of citizenship, Welsh is cut loose from its speaker group and becomes free-floating.

This in turn encourages the redefinition of the Welsh speaker. If all in Wales have the 'right' to Welsh, it follows that as many as possible should be able to self-identify as Welsh speakers. Increasingly, Wales is encouraged to be not-Welsh-speaking; which is not the same as non-Welsh-speaking. Rather it is to possess capacity to produce a form of Welsh, with the 'right' but not the expectation of doing so.

It is this redefinition of the Welsh speaker, as well as separating the language from its speaker group, which explains why there is so little actual use of Welsh.

Here the influence of 'identity politics' is crucial and damaging. It is the dominant discourse of the twenty-first century Left. Under normal conditions, the Left would reject the rarefication of a minority-language community as a form of neoliberalism. However, the detachment of Welsh from its speaker group means that the language now plays a role in the field of identity politics as a



Language-as-community

signifier of all things Welsh, language-related or not.

This form of identity politics can be seen most clearly in the angry riposte on Twitter to some perceived slight to the language, posted in English. (Language-as-community on the other hand goes on Facebook to talk about football or last night on the town, but in Welsh.)

Oddly then, in the case of Welsh, identity politics do not advance the interests of the group we presume it speaks on its behalf. Rather, by defining all Wales as Welsh-speaking and every citizen as a potential Welsh speaker, the interests of those parts of Wales which are

## **Increasingly, Wales is encouraged to be not-Welsh-speaking; which is not the same as non-Welsh-speaking**

Welsh-speaking, and those citizens who do speak Welsh, are inevitably downplayed.

This ideology was not conceived in the first instance by the Welsh Government. It is the progeny of the Welsh Language Society as part of a wider nationalist agenda. These language campaigners deny that Welsh speakers form a social group, for they believe that to do so would divide the Welsh nation and undermine a push for Welsh statehood.

But language is not an attribute of the atomised subject. It is a form of social practice used between individuals within society. That is done most easily in a community where it is ascribed into existing social use by first-language speakers. Yet this is the very social group whose existence must be denied.

Furthermore, as use of a particular language is a social rather than innate attribute of the human condition, it cannot be taken for granted that it will be reproduced inter-generationally without public policy intervention. Ignoring Welsh-speaking communities in this regard is not merely a matter of injustice. It also prompts language shift in these communities to English, and thus to the eventual disappearance of Welsh as a widely-used spoken language.

Theoretical misjudgements by the Welsh Language Society and others have undermined the Welsh-language

community. Aiming for ‘one million Welsh speakers’ was initially their slogan. Although in many ways an admirable policy goal, it encourages proselytising rather than getting existing speakers to actually use the language.

In schools, both the Language Society and the Welsh Government advocate proposals to introduce a ‘language continuum’ to teach Welsh as one subject to all. This will bolster in the education system a new norm of a semi-fluent speaker with the ‘right’, but not the inclination, to use Welsh. It will sideline Welsh-medium education and calls into doubt the development of the cognitive skills of children from a first language background.

The Government’s decision in February 2019 not to proceed with its proposed Welsh Language Bill to foreground language planning promoting the use of Welsh was also the result of a sustained Welsh Language Society campaign. The Society wished to retain a Welsh Language Commissioner to promote ‘rights’ instead. In the real world this means that while millions of pounds are to be spent translating documents no-one will ever read, communities going through irreversible language shift from Welsh to English receive not a penny.

This sidelining of Welsh as a lived language takes place at a time when Brexit is due to recalibrate the socio-economic, and thus linguistic, foundations of Welsh-speaking communities forever. In rural Wales, Brexit will lead to fewer farms, a smaller public sector, more holiday homes, fewer young people and more retirees. But on this too, Welsh-language policy has little to say.

It is undoubtedly the case that the newly-appointed Welsh Language Commissioner, Aled Roberts, will be more effective than his predecessor, Meri Huws. It is to be hoped that he will be more creative, more willing to engage in language planning, more understanding of the challenges that face Welsh-speaking communities, less enamoured of regulation. The Government itself needs to put language planning at the heart of its Welsh-language strategy. And all of us who engage with language policy need to remember that we are here to address the needs of a language community, not the whims of well-meaning but ultimately ineffective and misjudged forms of identity politics. ►

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# How cool is now?

*Two decades on, **Rhian E. Jones** revisits 'Cool Cymru' to consider the role of cultural production in shaping the Welsh political agenda*

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**2**019 will see some significant anniversaries for Welsh institutions both pop and political. Among those turning fifty this year are Manic Street Preachers' Nicky Wire and James Dean Bradfield, as well as actor and activist Michael Sheen, singer songwriter Cerys Matthews, and Super Furry Animals' Dafydd Ieuan. Two decades on from the Welsh Assembly's establishment, meanwhile, pop and politics came together again for February's 'Yes is More' gig, at which artists from SFA's Cian Ciarán to Charlotte Church raised the prospect of Wales' full independence from the UK.

It's been a strange and surprising two decades in many ways. In 1998, twelve-year-old prodigy Charlotte Church had just released her debut *Voice of an Angel*. By 2017, she had become a pop diva and left-wing firebrand calling

for Jeremy Corbyn's election as prime minister. For the Manic Street Preachers, the same twenty years stretch has taken their music from incendiary beginnings to settled maturity. Not quite twenty years ago, the band's 'Manic Millennium' gig on New Year's Eve 1999 seemed also to mark the peak of 'Cool Cymru'. As the country emerged from the socially and economically destructive shadow of Tory rule, the advent of a New Labour government and a newly-devolved Assembly seemed to have imbued Wales with a new cultural confidence and political potential, seemingly offering a brand new future as well as the familiar backward-looking, directionless angst.

What's happened since? Given the current political chaos that swirls in and beyond the UK, Wales' internal politics can look contrastingly placid – but perhaps it's more accurate to call it stagnant. Despite arguments for the Assembly's effectiveness in cutting unemployment

## In cultural terms the 90s and Wales were relatively good to each other, with Welsh musicians and actors achieving national and international acclaim, especially when compared to the desultory and dilapidated 80s

and infant mortality, plus the subsequent introduction of free prescriptions, free travel for pensioners and the carrier bag charge, its legislative tinkering has failed to live up to devolution's sweeping promises. Public dissatisfaction with the Assembly as the 'Bay bubble', Cardiff-centric, remote and powerless, is frequently expressed, and the official rhetoric of inclusivity and engagement contrasts markedly with low levels of political enthusiasm and participation. Early Assembly elections threatened to shake things up, indicating that Plaid Cymru had successfully found a platform that could challenge Labour's dominance in south Wales – but it's debatable how much of this was a protest vote at the stagnancy and complacency of Labour in office, rather than representing any more positive desire for or faith in Welsh independence. Late last year, changes of leadership for both Labour and Plaid Cymru elicited almost no attention from the British press, but also seemed to barely make a splash in Wales itself.

Art often plays a bigger role than politics does in cultural expression – not least in Wales, where music in particular has been a significant channel for the preservation of language and expression of identity. It is arguable that as a stateless and impoverished nation, with few options for asserting itself politically or economically, Wales has historically been inclined to place greater emphasis on culture, both civic and creative. This would explain the emotional investment placed in sporting victories – from triumphs over England on the 1890s rugby pitch to the giant-killing exploits of Merthyr FC – where shades of David vs Goliath indicate the cultural tendency to characterise Welsh identity as one of immense spirit outweighing small stature.

Cool Cymru was a similar instance of the Welsh intertwining of culture and national identity, but it occurred at a historical juncture – New Labour's 'Cool Britannia' and devolution – which allowed it to gain greater traction outside Wales than previous examples.

## Cool Cymru turns 50



**Nicky Wire**  
born 20 January 1969



**Michael Sheen**  
born 5 February 1969



**James Dean Bradfield**  
born 21 February 1969



**Dafydd Ieuan**  
born 1 March 1969



**Cerys Matthews**  
born 11 April 1969

But cultural buoyancy, if supported by nothing more substantial than hot air, can only give so much before its inevitable deflating and sinking. Since the Assembly opened, there has been little to assuage the structural social and economic damage of the 1980s, with grimly predictable results: the closure of factories and steelworks, uneven development of regeneration, depopulation of rural and post-industrial areas, high youth unemployment and limited prospects. We are a long way from the shiny late 90s.

The vacuous boosterism often attached to Cool Cymru by Welsh politicians and the tourist industry, and the varying quality of the movement's bands, need not detract from the earnest enthusiasm and entertainment it provided. In cultural terms the 90s and Wales were relatively good to each other, with Welsh musicians and actors achieving national and international acclaim,

## 1998–9 in Welsh Albums



### International Velvet

Catatonia (*Blanco y Negro*)

**Release:** 2 February 1998

**UK Chart:** Number 1

**Key tracks:** I Am The Mob;  
Mulder and Scully; Road Rage



### This is My Truth, Tell Me Yours

Manic Street Preachers (*Epic*)

**Release:** 14 September 1998

**UK Chart:** Number 1

**Key Tracks:** If You Tolerate This, Your  
Children Will Be Next; You Stole the  
Sun From My Heart; Tsunami



### Voice of an Angel

Charlotte Church (*Sony Classical*)

**Release:** 9 November 1998

**UK Chart:** Number 4

**Key Tracks:** Pie Jesu; Amazing Grace;  
Mae Hiraeth Yn Y Môr

## Cool Cymru ... presented a broad, if shallow, national identity to which varying constituencies could subscribe

especially when compared to the desultory and dilapidated 80s when the figureheads of Cool Cymru had mostly come of age – a fact perhaps accounting for much of their political outlook. Cool Cymru could occasionally look like an attempt to wipe the 1980s from the cultural and political map: the Stereophonics' 1998 gig at Cardiff Castle, to a live audience of 10,000 people, was the first rock concert held there since Queen's performance in 1976. The following year, Max Boyce and Tom Jones performed at the pre-match show before Wales's Five Nations victory against England – the event seeming to herald a return to not only erstwhile rugby glory-days but also the pop-cultural success of 70s Welsh artists, particularly given the phenomenal success of Jones's retro-kitsch album *Reload* which also featured Cerys Matthews, James Dean Bradfield and the Stereophonics (the only usual suspects missing were Shirley Bassey and the Morriston Orpheus Choir).

But perhaps more significantly, 90s cultural producers also successfully asserted non-traditional ways of being Welsh. Films like 1997's *Twin Town*, the pseudo-geezer cult of Howard Marks, or the bucolic psychedelia of Super Furry Animals and Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, all offered alternatives to clichéd choirs-and-coalmines representations of Wales. The Manics, despite their initial dismissal of all nationalisms, went on in the later 90s to evince a particular Welsh identity that transcended Labourist Wales's traditional prioritising of class over region, but which also complicated the kind of Welsh nationalism that had always rejected places like the Valleys as 'not Welsh enough'. Cool Cymru, fuelled though it was by commercial concerns, seemed to reflect a willingness to consider inclusive and accessible ideas of Welsh identity which neither rested solely on language, nor excluded it in favour of class.

These nuances illuminate Welsh identity as a combination of disparate elements, usually in tension with each other. Wales is far more heterogeneous culturally than is often assumed, and individuals find themselves dealing with dual or overlapping identities – Welsh as well as British, but also other identities both

international and intersectional, based on degrees of language, class, ethnicity and race. Problematising Welsh identity is an ongoing and necessary process: contrary to many popular impressions, 'Welsh' is large and can contain multitudes. Cool Cymru both asserted this and presented a broad, if shallow, national identity to which varying constituencies could subscribe.

Given the overt and implicit politicisation of the Welsh language since the days of the 'Welsh Not', Cool Cymru's linguistic component was particularly significant. The upsurge of nationalist feeling in Wales from the 1960s onward occurred against a wider backdrop of general social unrest and indeed anti-colonial liberation struggles. While it may have concentrated on the lack of political influence signified by horrors like the drowning of Tryweryn, a decision taken by Westminster against the votes of Welsh MPs of all parties, it was accompanied by and intertwined with a cultural upsurge in Welsh-language music, from protest-folk singers like Huw Jones to early-80s post-punk icons Datblygu. These campaigns promoted the language as the carrier of a unique cultural complex, with its decline in the country's agrarian 'heartlands' carrying an associated risk of cultural decline and disappearance. Such high stakes generated accordingly deep investment by activists; the establishment of a Welsh-language television station came about after a concerted campaign that included a hunger strike by Plaid MP Gwynfor Evans. In 1998, the Manics' refusal to perform at the Senedd's opening due to the presence of the Queen was a residual reminder of the sharper controversy around the 1969 investiture of Prince Charles, nationalist opposition to which culminated in an attempted bombing by Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru.

The post-devolution growth in Welsh language learning, the extended offering of Welsh at GCSE, and public-sector requirements for bilingual skills, provided a marked contrast to historical trajectories tending toward official abandoning of the language. While none of this legislation did much to give the Welsh language an appeal beyond Wales or diminish the social prestige-value of English, Cool Cymru's crossover success of bands who had formed in previous Welsh-language scenes managed to do more. The title track of Catatonia's 1998 album *International Velvet* – a bullish breakthrough record light-years away from the understated indie offerings of their debut – was entirely in Welsh aside from the unsteadily euphoric chorus 'Every day when I wake up I thank the Lord I'm Welsh'. Performed as part of the 1999 Rugby World Cup opening ceremony, the song seemed briefly to be adopted as an unofficial national anthem, although – as with the chorus of the Manics' 'Design For Life' – the line could be sung with as much irony as earnestness. The spectacular success of Catatonia and Super Furry Animals, plus the Manics' born-again flag-waving, meant that both Welsh language and Welsh identity

## 1998–9 in Welsh Albums



### Performance and Cocktails Stereophonics (V2)

**Release:** 8 March 1999

**UK Chart:** Number 1

**Key Tracks:** The Bartender and the Thief; Just Looking; I Wouldn't Believe Your Radio



### Guerilla Super Furry Animals (*Creation*)

**Release:** 14 June 1999

**UK Chart:** Number 10

**Key Tracks:** Northern Lights; Fire In My Heart; Do or Die



### Reload Tom Jones (V2)

**Release:** 16 September 1999

**UK Chart:** Number 1

**Key Tracks:** Sex Bomb; Mama Told Me Not to Come; Baby, It's Cold Outside

were less dismissed or derided in the UK media than had been the case even a few years earlier with the Manics' initial music-press outings.

We might have looked about to take flight in the 90s, but the dragon's wings have remained clipped, with an accompanying sense of social and political stifling and frustration. In cultural terms, Welsh people may have seemed more visible, but in regrettably stereotypical or exploitative ways, notably MTV's predictably execrable *The Valleys*. Even cosy shows like *Gavin and Stacey* or *Stella*, despite their success in establishing non-traditional images of Welshness on a British stage and beyond, have also been critiqued for their sentimental or one-dimensional portrayal of Welsh life, demonstrating that identities well-received outside the country are often viewed from within as stereotypical or simplistic. This situation is hardly helped by Wales' lack of an independent national broadcaster. Cultural developments, meanwhile, are often directed by top-down quangocracies rather than grassroots projects, and viable conditions for vibrant cultural production are increasingly few: even in cash-rich Cardiff, the independent venues which provided a launchpad for Cool Cymru are now threatened by gentrification and rising rents, while the Valleys continue to contend with a ravaged economy and lack of civic and cultural amenities, and austerity forces councils across Wales to cut spending on essential services. Cultural representation, however heartwarming, is no salve for a material lack of economic prospects and financial security, and no substitute for effective democratic representation.

**Cultural representation, however heartwarming, is no salve for [a lack of] financial security, and no substitute for effective democratic representation**



At Cool Cymru's height Super Furry Animals, despite their artistic and linguistic militancy, resisted the Welsh establishment's attempts to co-opt their success, deriding the concept of their records being released with a Welsh flag on the cover. But as Cian Ciarán's comments ahead of this year's Yes is More gig demonstrate, SFA nonetheless gave solid support to a deeper and distinctly Welsh identity, one which draws on a history of radical politics and grassroots activism from the Merthyr Rising to Chelsea Manning. This radicalism was not always apparent within Cool Cymru, which often partook of the same complacent hedonism that characterised Cool Britannia as a whole. The volatile shifting sands of contemporary politics provide a very different backdrop, as the prospect of Brexit has triggered more urgent calls for Wales to reshape, or at least defend itself from Brexit's worst possibilities, through greater self-determination. Welsh cultural players, as ever, can be as useful and influential in these debates as politicians – usually more so. But any potential future for an independent Wales will require political input and commitment to social and economic investment; it cannot live on cultural cool alone. ▶

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**Rhian E Jones** is the author of *Clampdown: Pop-Cultural Wars on Class and Gender* and *Petticoat Heroes: Gender, Culture and Popular Protest in the Rebecca Riots*. Her blog is Velvet Coalmine and she tweets @RhianEJones

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*Requiem Reflections performed by WNO Community Chorus with WNO Soloists, St Asaph Cathedral, September 2018*

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**David Pountney WNO Artistic Director** talking at **Powering Regional Prosperity... The Art of Business**, July 2018 Wrexham Business Professionals conference.

## **Looking ahead to 2019**

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**To get involved or find out more about our work in North Wales:** Emma Flatley, WNO Director of Engagements & Partnerships  
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**To discuss how you can support this programme of work:** Alison Dunnett, WNO Director of Development, Communications & Strategy  
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# Progressive Patriots

**Adam Johannes** *reflects on the injection of socialism into the nationalisms of Scotland, Catalonia and Quebec, and considers what it all means for Wales*

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**‘W**e have now reached the point of no return. This is the beginning of the end of the regime of 1978 and the Kingdom of Spain.’

It's October 2017 and I am speaking at a protest in Wales called to condemn Spain's use of rubber bullets and repression against Catalans seeking to vote in a peaceful ballot on independence.

Over that month Catalonia witnessed scenes of mass civil disobedience not seen in a Western European country in the last forty years. Our protest does not demand people take a position on Catalan independence, but rather calls on people to support Catalans' democratic right to decide. After all, Canadian and British governments, despite opposing independence movements, were able to come to arrangements with the parliaments of Quebec and Scotland to facilitate independence referenda. Spain uniquely argues such a referendum would be unconstitutional.

In a globalised world, where only a few years ago some argued the nation state was receding in importance,



and amid the advance of transnational corporations and bodies like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and NATO, the continued growth of independence movements in places such as Quebec, Scotland and Catalonia that are part of advanced Western states might seem like an anomaly.

In retrospect, 2008 was a watershed moment. The years after the banks crashed saw central governments imposing unprecedented austerity on their populations. Flashpoints such as Catalonia in 2017 or Scotland in 2014 – where the pro-independence vote proved much higher than initially expected – are part of the same implosion of politics-as-usual that happened across the world.

While right-wing populism is now much on people's minds, it is wise to remember that much of the energy has been on the left, in social movements like the Arab Spring reacting against decades of dictatorship in the Middle East and North Africa, Occupy Wall Street protesting global inequality or the *Indignados* (The Indignant) occupying public squares across Spain raising slogans like 'They don't represent us', 'We are not objects in the hands of bankers and politicians' and 'Real Democracy Now'.

## **For a brief moment, with the rise of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, it looked like radical left wing governments might sweep across Southern Europe**

For a brief moment, with the rise of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, it looked like radical left-wing governments might sweep across Southern Europe. Tragically Syriza's capitulation to EU and IMF demands for further austerity killed that moment; though Portugal, bucking the current European trend, now has a government increasing public spending rather than cutting it.

Across the Atlantic, the election of Donald Trump detonated the biggest protest movements in America since the 1960s while the rise of Bernie Sanders has been followed by the election of new young radical left-wing politicians. The most well known, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, is currently putting forward a solution to both the economic and the climate crisis: a 'Green New Deal', based on public spending to build green infrastructure in

order to create millions of green jobs, funded by a massive wealth tax on corporations and the rich.

In this climate, large centralised states on the neoliberal model like Canada, Spain and Britain appear increasingly dysfunctional and bloated. The idea of secession is appealing to new audiences: smaller-scale nations offer the possibility that democracy might be closer to the people and cultural diversity celebrated.

In Scotland, it was noteworthy that independence won widespread support from ethnic minorities and recent arrivals, with Scottish nationalism offering a more inclusive model of citizenship than British nationalism. Most commentators also argue it was in poor and working class communities where support for independence surged in the final weeks of the referendum as Scotland's inequalities were repeatedly highlighted. A land where a million live in inadequate housing, a quarter of a million go hungry and in-work poverty is widespread, responded positively to the message summed up in a popular slogan: 'Britain is for the rich, Scotland can be for everyone.'

As Cat Boyd, a leading figure in the Radical Independence Campaign, later reflected: 'If the working class were the only ones to vote in the independence referendum, there would have been a Yes vote. In Scotland's poorest areas, all of which are traditional Labour heartlands, the argument for independence to create a socially just Scotland was won. A Yes vote became a revolt against the alienation of the British state and the British economy. All analyses of the referendum result have agreed that there is a linear relationship between unemployment, poverty and a higher Yes vote...'

Another phenomenon, little commented on, has been the recent rise of hard-left currents in independence movements; these eschew more traditional concerns around national identity and national oppression. In Scotland, former members of the Socialist Workers Party played a central role in the popular Radical Independence Campaign; in Catalonia, an anti-capitalist party, CUP, with several elected politicians, were central to the strategy of popular confrontation with Spain. And this year saw the launch of Undod in Wales, an explicitly radical socialist independence campaign.

Last autumn I caught up with an old friend from Quebec who updated me on developments there in provincial elections. The two traditional parties who traded power for decades were hammered. A new right-wing populist party won the elections, while a radical left-wing

party, Quebec Solidaire, had a breakthrough, displacing the traditional independence party, Parti Québécois.

Quebec Solidaire's election campaign centred on the issue of ecology with the party offering to create thousands of climate jobs, and to slash bus and tube fares as the first step towards free public transport and the creation a fossil fuel free Quebec.

Living in Wales, for a long time I felt antipathy towards Welsh independence. I found Welsh nationalism parochial and provincial. Politics based on national identity has always made me uncomfortable and the romantic rhetoric of Welsh freedom left me cold. Where is the 'freedom' in leaving Britain to form a smaller version run by middle-of-the-road politicians? What virtue in abandoning comrades on the English left to form a separate struggle when our Britain-wide movement once achieved for people on this island one of the best welfare states on the face of the earth? Occasional comparisons made by some Welsh nationalists between our situation and Palestine or Kurdistan still strike me as ridiculous.



When the referendum on Scottish independence was announced I secretly hoped initially that David Cameron would smash the Scottish nationalists and I repeated the cliché that a worker in Glasgow had more in common with a worker in Bradford, Leicester or Cardiff than a Scottish boss. But I was also surprised seeing many old Scottish friends from far left backgrounds, who had always been antipathetic towards the SNP, supporting independence. Had they drunk the nationalist Kool-Aid? Oddly many of them had written erudite articles deconstructing stock tropes of Scottish nationalism and criticising the SNP.

A few weeks before the referendum, at a socialist conference in London I heard Pete Ramand and Chris Bamberg from the Radical Independence Campaign gave a presentation. I recall afterwards feeling strangely hopeful and energised. Reflecting on this unexpected positive reaction, I suddenly realised it was the first time I had heard anyone argue a 'non-nationalist' case for independence.

Neither speaker made any reference to being oppressed by the English or Scottish identity. Instead they located their movement politically in the wave of anti-austerity struggle across Europe. People were fed up of Westminster's two-party system and saw no future in a Britain where the entire political spectrum was wedded to neoliberalism, endless wars, and austerity. The idea of a new state was firing imaginations. There were endless debates and discussion. People asking how could a new Scotland do everything completely differently to the UK? Could Scotland break with 'anglo-globalisation' and become more like a Nordic welfare state?

They also mentioned that when the referendum was first announced the official Yes campaign was so boring and uninspiring: grey men in grey suits. The SNP did not want to scare people, so had emphasised that independence would merely be a gentle evolution emphasising continuity with the UK. An independent Scotland would retain the Queen as head of state, the pound, NATO membership and so on.

Contrastingly, the Radical Independence Campaign took the opposite tack, arguing that independence could be a moment of rupture with everything that had gone before and everything could change. They organised mass canvasses of working class and deprived areas. The idea of a rupture with neoliberalism electrified Scottish public opinion.

Addressing a common left wing argument about a united struggle of the entire British working class, Chris Bambery quipped that if your wing of the prison had an opportunity to escape, you wouldn't say no we must wait till the whole prison rises up, you would get out and maybe smuggle in the key in a cake to those who remained. An independent Scotland would not be about walking away from the rest of the UK, but rather taking the argument back into the rest of the UK. If Scotland could do things better it would inspire people in England that there was an alternative.

The speakers also argued that British nationalism – from invading other people's countries to Gordon Brown's rhetoric of 'British jobs for British workers' and Tory and Labour racist scapegoating of migrants and Muslims – was a bigger threat than Scottish nationalism. The British state was a flawed political project based upon ultra-centralisation, hollowing out of democracy, and a bloated economy of banks and tanks.

After the talk I began following on social media many groups, figures and websites from the independence movement: Radical Independence Campaign; Women for Independence; National Collective – a collective of artists and creatives arguing for a better Scotland; CommonWeal – a left wing think tank taking inspiration from the Nordic model of welfare state. Vibrant campaigns were emerging: the Living Rent campaign arguing for rent controls and secure tenancies, and Better than Zero, that used a mixture of traditional trade unionism, community organising and direct action to fight for the rights of people in casualised and precarious employment and zero hour contracts.

With the mainstream alternative on offer to Tory austerity in the rest of Britain being Labour's austerity-lite, the movement in Scotland seemed a bright ray of sunshine amid the grey. The social movement around Scottish independence, with a strong social-democratic character arguing for an end to austerity and nuclear disarmament, ultimately helped revive an anti-austerity movement on the streets of England and Wales. The SNP's membership surge was followed by a Green Party surge and then the Corbyn surge, as the desire for an alternative surging through British society sought a vessel in mainstream politics.

So where do I stand on Welsh independence today? Power and control are central to my politics. As a socialist, I support the distribution of power across different state



and international forms with each level having the fullest possible control from below.

But there is a danger that if there is no strong international socialist movement across borders that we simply end up constrained by the state that exists and arguments develop within those constraints. Small nationalist and secessionist movements too often end up being a compromise between forces from both left and right.

Nevertheless, if a powerful left wing movement rejecting neoliberalism crystallised around independence as a means to break with the politics of austerity and war, I would support it. At present I am agnostic. ▼

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**Adam Johannes** is Co-Convener of Cardiff People's Assembly

# Crossing Continents

**Eric Ngalle Charles** *talks to Lleucu Siencyn about writing, his return to Cameroon and how, thanks to Wales, his mother no longer cries at night*

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**Eric Ngalle Charles** is a writer, poet, playwright and workshop leader. He sits on the Board of Directors of Literature Wales, has taken part in the Hay Festival's Writers at Work programme, and was awarded a Creative Wales Award from the Arts Council of Wales for research into migration, memory and trauma. His latest publication is *Hiraeth ErzolirZoli Wales-Cameroon Anthology* (Hafan Books, 2018) and the first part of his memoir trilogy – *I, Eric Ngalle: one man's journey crossing continents from Africa to Europe* – is due to be published by Parthian in June 2019. Eric first came to Wales in 1999 on a Zimbabwean passport after fleeing persecution in Cameroon and being illegally trafficked into Russia.



**I might be an example  
– but I shouldn't be  
the only one**

**Lleucu:** *Eric, you have had a very busy and productive year and you've won some prestigious awards and accolades. The highlight I'm sure was your return visit to Cameroon last autumn with the National Poet of Wales, Ifor ap Glyn and Mike Jenkins.*

**Eric:** A lot has happened and I'm still at such a high. Where I am now, I've come from a very dark place and there have been many moments in my life when I've thought to myself, I should just give up and resign to fate.

But the one thing that kept me going was my mother. When I was in Russia all those years ago, being tortured almost to the point of death, I could hear her voice saying: 'if you die and get buried in a shallow grave, I'm going to kill you and bury you again!'

Thanks to funding from Wales Arts International, we went to launch the *Hiraeth* anthology in Cameroon, and my mother practically brought along the whole village! As soon as she walked in Ifor said, 'that's your mother isn't it?', and I said 'Yes!'

The strange thing was that none of my father's family was there, because they don't know how to deal with me any more. For them, it would have been better if I had died. But by now I've completed my metamorphosis. Wales has given me a platform to tell my story – and thanks to Wales my mother no longer cries at night.

*Your play The Last Ritual was performed at the Hay Festival and Cardiff Book Festival last year. It's a powerful mix of hard-hitting memoir and humour.*

Since living in Wales I've found that the best way for me to talk about traumatic experiences is to bring humour into it, because it can get very dark otherwise. I never thought I could write a political and social satire. However, there was huge political upheaval happening

in Cameroon just when we were there.

When I came back I wrote a play about the ErzolirZoli, the smallest of the songbird family. In it I weave in elements of the Mabinogi, because the fate of ErzolirZoli is tied in with that of Brân, Branwen's brother, where he asked to be decapitated after his death.

*Eric reads the story:*

Angered by the fact that the elephant was spreading rumours regarding the size of his penis, Ezruli (the smallest member of the sunbird family) dressed himself in the village regalia consisting of a white shirt, a 'Zranja', a black cap with seven feathers from the 'Kwai', a pair of 'chang' shoes with white socks and marched up the hill crossing the 'streams of Mosreh' to the chief's palace. He made his anger known to the chief and all those gathered, he was not at all happy about the rumours the elephant was spreading with regards to the size of his penis. The chief could not help himself but laughed and demanded for Ezruli to display the evidence for all gathered to see and determine for themselves whether the rumours were true. Ezruli chose to ignore the chief's demands. It was cold and the evidence had shrunken. Eventually Ezruli was dismissed.

In all the local drinking holes, bars, pubs and clubs as the animals gathered the gossip was about the size of Ezruli's penis.

As the moon crossed the night skies and Sunday turned into Monday, Ezruli went home and got himself one of the biggest drums in Sub Saharan Africa. He got the Djembe, he dragged it from lower Bokova village to the top of the top of Weli (one of the many hills that combines to form Mount Fako). From dawn till dusk he played the drum louder and louder, and as he played he issued a warning to the entire village saying:

'Those who have ears, let them hear,' he said,

'Take this message to the elephant,' he said.

**We went to launch the  
*Hiraeth* anthology in  
Cameroon, and my mother  
practically brought along  
the whole village!**

## 'Under the Gallows' from *Testimony*



'Tell him'.

'Please tell him'.

'I the son of 'Motimbeli, Mokuwa Moja, Mosre Mo Ngwa, Maija ma Ngowa, Evasra Mote, Yomadene, Nyango na Nwana as far as my ancestors remember my name, I am going to kill the elephant this Sunday'.

So, he went down to the village to borrow a drum and dragged it to the top of the mountain to play. He says, 'listen, go and tell the elephant, that I, ErzolirZoli, son of Motimbeli, Mokuwa Moja, Mosre Mo Ngwa, Maija ma Ngowa, Evasra Mote, Yomadene, Nyango na Nwana as far as my ancestors remember my name, I am going to kill the elephant this Sunday.'

People were still laughing. Then on midnight on Saturday he stops playing. By Sunday morning they went to the village and saw the elephant lay dead with blood oozing from everywhere. The King and all his men arrive and they see the carcass of the elephant. And at exactly midday, the smallest bird of the animal kingdom, the ErzolirZoli, comes out of the elephant's trunk with a bow and arrow and an axe, and said, 'I told you. Whoever spreads rumours about the size of my penis, I'm going to kill them the next Sunday.'

After that, the ErzolirZoli finds himself an asylum-seeker in Ely, Cardiff. The *heddlu* hear strange music coming from his parked car. They pick up the ErzolirZoli and take him to the station. After doing the DNA samples they found out that an international arrest warrant had been issued because the ErzolirZoli killed the elephant.

There's more – but I don't want to spoil the ending! This story is the result of being in Cameroon during the political turmoil, and the fact that Cameroonian people have voted in an old new president who has been in power for more than thirty-six years. This made me think: this is my moment. Let me remove myself from writing non-fiction and write instead a social satire.

*Your writing is part of a wider global tradition of satirical magic realism, blending myths and humour into a very dark narrative. You mentioned that you found a connection here in Wales through literature and poetry. What did you find that chimed with you?*

**By the time I had come to Wales as an asylum seeker, I had been completely stripped of my identity. I had no name, no face, no age, and no nationality**

You'll be surprised. I was introduced to the ninth-century poem 'Claf yn Abercuawg' by the poet Grahame Davies and one of the stanzas says, 'my spirit craves to sit on top of a hill'. A couple of days later, in complete coincidence, my friend Tom Cheesman quoted the same poem to me. At the time I was travelling from the Academi conference in Llandudno back to Abertawe and the hills, the sounds, the sights – they all reminded me of home. I had an epiphany – that maybe, just maybe, I've found a new home. Everything I saw around me reminded me of what I saw as a child growing up in Cameroon. The combination of that poem, the sights around and these feelings led me to write my very first poem, 'Between the Mountain and the Sea':

Where voices echoed  
Across the town's horizon  
and conversation on common things.  
Wake me from my slumber  
then this poem  
Will be over.

That for my home-coming  
Between a mountain and a sea.

You should remember that by the time I had come to Wales as an asylum seeker, I had been completely stripped of my identity. I had no name, no face, no age, and no nationality. In fact, I was a sixty-two-year-old Zimbabwean. It took the combination of that ninth-century poem and what I'd seen travelling through Wales to start a process of reconciliation. The landscape that I've known as a child is broken, my dreams have been broken, but here I am. I can start again.

In order to restart you need to have the right people in your life. And gradually I brought the right people into my life, from Grahame Davies to Jon Gower to Ifor ap Glyn – as well as working for Literature Wales as a board member. All these things have helped me to be where I am today.



Words: *Eric Ngalle Charles*  
Illustration: *Nicky Arscott*  
Translation: *Casia Wiliam*  
Publisher: *PostiveNegatives*



*When we met first at the old Academi office, there weren't many opportunities for new and unknown writers.*

*However, your role as a board member for Literature Wales has helped us to shift our focus to support the kind of writer you were back then. Established writers like Grahame Davies and Jon Gower have been very generous in championing new voices like yourself, making way for a new generation of writers. Although you're still a young writer, you've achieved so much. The first part of your memoir trilogy is out soon.*

Yes, but I'm also very proud of the Wales–Cameroon anthology, which is my own tribute to Wales and what it's done to me.

*It's incredible how many great poets have contributed to the anthology. Do you think this book, as well as the memoir, could be used to help people in similar situations to the ones you were in?*

I run a lot of workshops with vulnerable people and refugees. It's empowering to help give voice to the voiceless – they are the only ones who can tell their own stories. But one must be careful. It's taken me sixteen years to come to this position and some people are still very, very vulnerable, and there are some things that memories can trigger. People have lived through dark times.

*Looking to the future, what are your hopes in these dark times ahead?*

I'm not in despair. With the kind of help I've had, and through the Wales–Cameroon anthology, maybe in a few years' time we can see a Cymru–Turkey anthology, a Cymru–Syria anthology. This is a starting point for a broader conversation. If Wales has given me all these opportunities then it can give this to many more writers. I might be an example – but I shouldn't be the only one. I am doing great collaborative work with people across different art forms, doing poetry comics with Nicky Arscott supported by PEN Cymru, also working with Greg Lewis on a short film called *This is Not a Poem* about identity and race with support from the Arts Council of Wales. This will be shown across Wales starting in the Dylan Thomas Centre in September 2019.

*Your words about Wales reaching out and being a welcoming nation are words we should be taking far and wide, particularly to the next generation.*

And can you imagine – we should boast about this – for the first time the poetry of the National Poet of Wales has been translated into an African language. My mother has taken Ifor's poem to her choir group, and she takes it everywhere! If we can take over Cameroon, we can take over other places. This is global! ▼

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**Lleucu Siencyn** is CEO of Llenyddiaeth Cymru/Literature Wales



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# Speaking for himself

Carwyn Jones talks to Shazia Awan-Scully

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One of the first things that strikes you about Carwyn Jones when you meet him, just three months after he stood down as First Minister, is how relaxed and happy he appears. He looks like someone who has literally had a huge burden lifted from his shoulders. As I also found out when speaking to him, something else that also appears to have gone is some reserve in being open about his views; as followers of his Twitter account will already have noticed, he is now speaking for no-one but himself, and visibly enjoying the freedom that this gives him. And among the views he now appears more willing to voice are ones that will make various people in Wales uncomfortable – including some in his own Labour party.

A few months into post-First Ministerial life, he is clear that ‘nine years is a long time; too long looking back on it’. There appear to be no regrets about having sought and occupied the top office in devolved Welsh politics. ‘When I arrived in the Assembly, I suppose you always want to get as far as you can in any career... it was the job I always wanted to do. If you asked me what my dream job was it would have been First Minister of Wales.’

Yet the scale of the commitment required by such a job is something that he very clearly does *not* miss. ‘You don’t realise how much commitment you have to give something until you leave it. If someone said to me now you can go back to it, I’d say no... It is nice not to have to think *It’s Tuesday, so I’ve got cabinet, briefing, briefing, Labour group, First Minister’s Questions, and four meetings afterwards*. The first Tuesday I came back as a backbencher it hit me, all of a sudden, I didn’t have to do all of these things! I did 324 First Minister’s Questions... Great to have done the job, now time to move on.’

If there are regrets they seem to be primarily about aspects of the last year or so of his time in office. For all that Carwyn is able to claim, realistically, that *I’ve been able to leave at a time of my own choosing, which is rare in politics*, the context of that going was clearly not what he would have chosen.

When asked about whether he regrets leaving it until his last year in office before stating his ambition to lead a ‘feminist government’, his answer is revealing: ‘Well, there are lots of things I think that you wish you had done earlier and that’s one. But it was particularly important because we had a year of pretty vile abuse against women, particularly in Wales, and everyone has been quiet about it. No-one has spoken up about it. We have had women who have come forward with complaints who have been vilified, attempts made to name them. Wales is not a safe place for women to come forward with complaints at the moment. It just isn’t, and we kid ourselves if we think that it is. So the timing in terms of pushing the agenda of a feminist government was, I think, right because it came off the back of the worst misogynistic abuse I have seen, and it was happening in Wales. And attempts are still being made to do it.’

Without naming names, the context of his comments is obvious: ‘There were complaints that came forward about the behaviour of politicians, plural, and the people who brought forward those complaints have been vilified, attempts made to out them, attempts made to intimidate them. It’s disgraceful. We are not in a position where we can say that there is a way for women to come and make complaints which will be investigated.’ Elaborating on his own experiences, he talks of ‘a random list of women given to the media to be harassed... and the result has

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**Carwyn Jones**

been I *know* there are women will not come forward with their complaints, because they know what awaits them. I have spoken to some of them.'

Warming to his theme, Carwyn pulls no punches: '[I]t's basically a kickback by people who think women should put up and shut up. I think that's where we are. I think we've gone back 30 years on these issues at the moment in Wales – which is why it's so important to continue pushing ahead with the idea of a feminist government.'

And what would a feminist government look like? What would it actually do? 'The first thing you do is make sure that more women are in positions of seniority. The Assembly compared to the rest of society is balanced... But our civil service really is not, there's a huge amount of work to do there and the private sector is not either and that's where the work has to be done... Many women I have spoken to who are ambitious feel that if they have children that avenue will be denied to them. Your choice is a high-flying career or kids. Men don't have to make this choice. We need to make sure we do away with barriers when it comes to career choices.'

It is not only on gender where he sees problems in today's Britain that he also identifies as being present within the National Assembly. 'Yes we are going backwards on race too, society has gone backwards on race. Brexit has driven that. I think we are less tolerant as a society. I think we need to be more intolerant of intolerance. That's what we have to learn: if we are going to have a tolerant society then we have to face down intolerance.'

We are meeting just a few days after the Christchurch terrorist massacre in New Zealand. Linking this event to



**Top to bottom:**

Carwyn Jones with Nicola Sturgeon  
Credit: First Minister of Scotland

Carwyn Jones in relaxed mode,  
with The Blims, Grand Slam celebrations, 2012  
Credit: National Assembly for Wales

Trilateral meeting: Carwyn Jones,  
Nicola Sturgeon, Alex Salmond,  
Peter Robinson, Martin McGuinness.  
Credit: Scottish Government

## [It's] a kickback by people who think women should put up and shut up. I think that's where we are. I think we've gone back 30 years on these issues at the moment in Wales

Welsh politics, Carwyn says pointedly: 'Let's see what his [Gareth Bennett's] reaction is to the shootings. When you've got someone like Tommy Robinson in your party, it'll be a curious response I'm sure.'

When looking back more broadly across his period in office as First Minister, and asked to identify his major achievements, Carwyn points immediately to the 2011 referendum result. The greater law-making powers this gave the Assembly allowed for further changes – of which he highlights the human transplantation act: 'people are literally alive because of that.' Overall, he appears content to be judged on his record: 'I am happy with what we managed to do for nine years, and the stuff we managed to get through.'

Carwyn retains a degree of interest in constitutional matters that is unusual for a politician. Few would show quite the passion he does when stating that: 'We need to be our own legal jurisdiction eventually. This is a big thing – you can't do it overnight. It has to be built up to. But this is the only legal jurisdiction in the world where there are two parliaments. It doesn't make any sense at all from a legal perspective. That cannot last in the future. So just like Scotland, just like Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, Jersey or Guernsey, you get to a point where the people of Wales have control over it, and that has to include policing.'

In the meantime, he has no intention of forcing a Bridgend by-election, but he repeats that he has no intention of continuing in the institution beyond the next election in May 2021. He will see out his elected term, but after that 'I'll go as I think you have to. I've never seen politics as a career – it's something you do for a period in your life. I started full time when I was 32, I'll be 54 when I finish, and it's time to move onto other things... Hanging around once you've been First Minister is not an option. You don't want to be like Ted Heath sitting

there brooding on the back benches.' Although he is evidently interested in a seat in the House of Lords, he is clear that 'I will keep my hand in. But I can't see myself doing it as a full-time occupation in the future. I think the days of standing for election are gone. Other people deserve a chance. It's important to have that churn in politics where new people come in.'

And what are those 'other things' he expects to be doing? 'I'm looking at things in the world of broadcasting, non-execs, some consultancy work, some after-dinner speaking.' He once more returns to the greater freedom his life has now that he is no longer bound by ministerial responsibilities: 'I can choose to do things now rather than do things because I have to because it's part of the job.' At the same time, he is clear that there are limits: 'There's a sort of line, which is not easy to see, between doing something to show that you don't take yourself too seriously, and the other side of it is making yourself look ridiculous – so Big Brother is an example; I don't fancy munching on kangaroo's eyes in the jungle either.'

There is a marked lack of animosity to Carwyn Jones in general and he speaks warmly of many of those he worked with during his time as First Minister – even those from other parties. Jeremy Corbyn, Peter Robinson, Martin McGuinness and Nicola Sturgeon all receive positive mentions, as does Ireland's Enda Kenny. Among the current UK government, David Lidington and Greg Clark also receive praise for their pragmatism and understanding of devolution. For the current Welsh Secretary, however, plaudits are in shorter supply. 'The job is to champion Wales' cause in Westminster, not to explain to Wales why Westminster won't do things. Like on air passenger duty, Alun should be there hammering hard the door, especially as the airport is in his constituency. He seems to be in a position of acting as a spokesperson for what the UK government is doing.'

The political career of Carwyn Jones might be heading towards its end, but do not expect him to go quietly into that good night. ▼

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# Plenty of fine words: good luck, bad luck and a lack of action

**Laura McAllister** revisits the nine-year tenure of Carwyn Jones as First Minister of Wales, and finds a competent leader lacking the courage to effect real change

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Carwyn Jones spent nine years at the helm. By his own admission, Mark Drakeford, who became just our fourth First Minister, will serve a far shorter term. Context is everything in politics and few would dispute that Carwyn Jones was dealt a mixed hand of cards. His period as leader was characterised by a sense of sidelines and shadows, despite being Labour's most senior elected politician across the UK for much of the time. Even his final appearance at the perspex stand – the Senedd's equivalent of the despatch box – was completely overshadowed by more significant Brexit events in the House of Commons. The two savage and unprecedented contextual curveballs Jones faced were first austerity, with brutal budget cuts unimaginable by his two predecessors who had sailed through altogether more benign financial waters, and then of course, the big one: Brexit. Then, in his final year at the helm, the tragedy that coloured every moment and movement – the 'darkest times' as Jones himself described them – following the death of his ministerial colleague and friend, Carl Sargeant. Despite two inquiries completed, there is little respite, especially given the coroner's inquest is due to resume

and the independent QC-led inquiry still to commence. *Wales Online's* Martin Shipton rightly pointed out that such an inquiry into an elected head of government is unprecedented.

But, in sporting parlance, Carwyn Jones has also had a relatively easy, England-style draw too. He inherited an enfeebled Welsh politics, with the two opposition parties floundering on direction, focus and strategy. This meant there was little meaningful threat to the good old-fashioned, one party state that is modern Wales. Labour's electoral hegemony has been virtually untouched by a succession of opposition leaders over many elections, conjuring up images of King Kong swatting navy planes from the top of the Empire State Building. Still, in another football analogy, too long at the top is not always a good thing. Complacency, inertia and staleness can set in and, if and when opponents do sort themselves out, look out.

Clearly, Carwyn Jones can't be blamed for inheriting a successful electoral machine alongside a disengaged, disenchanted voting public with little discernible interest in Cardiff Bay politics, meaning elections are largely shaped by the fortunes of the UK parties. When he shocked the Welsh Labour conference in Llandudno in April 2018 with his announcement that he would stand down as Labour leader, Jones boasted an enviable electoral record. In the 2011 election, coming straight out of coalition with Plaid Cymru, Labour won half of the Assembly seats. In 2016, the party lost just one, despite a dramatic fall in its vote. In the 2017 UK General Election, Labour had rightly expected to lose seats in Wales but ended up gaining three, with its best vote share since the Blair landslide in 1997. Elections have a fair element of luck about them, and this one began with Jeremy Corbyn as public enemy number one and ended with fandom and celebrity style crowds, so the extent to which Carwyn Jones influenced the outcome is questionable, but he did at least stamp his authority on a drifting campaign.

Carwyn's status as an electorally successful politician is indisputable and, as I wagered, the handful of tributes to him from UK commentators were all more fulsomely positive than from those closer to home. The bigger question is how Jones's career will be judged politically over time. His deputy, Carolyn Harris MP, described him as 'a towering figure'. Unless she meant physical stature, that's a heck of a claim for a politician who, even after nine years as First Minister, a quarter of the public didn't recognise and of whom only just over

four in ten thought positively. According to Professor Roger Awan-Scully, Carwyn is no better known in Wales than are Vince Cable, Neil Hamilton and Leanne Wood. With so few distinctive and popular Welsh media platforms, Carwyn always faced an uphill challenge to elevate himself and Welsh politics above the UK level's noisy dominance. But at the same time, he made little discernible effort to change that damaging reality either.

Ultimately, the facts don't lie: despite uninterrupted Labour government for nearly twenty years, Wales remains the poorest part of the UK, with a GVA of 71% of the UK average and with education and health scarcely in fine fettle and the government ambition to eliminate child poverty by 2020 abandoned. In a BBC interview, and acknowledging that his record was 'for others to judge', Jones said his proudest achievements were 'saving jobs at Port Talbot steelworks and attracting Aston Martin to St Athan'. No mention of the government's buy-out of Cardiff Wales Airport in 2013, interestingly? He also rather strangely claimed that he had no unfinished business. What about the small matter of influencing a likely future for Wales outside the European Union and a Conservative Government highly unlikely to adopt the powerful redistributive policies of the EU?

As commentator Daran Hill bitinglly put it: 'From the moment Wales voted with England in 2016, we automatically ended up in a pecking order below

Northern Ireland, Scotland, and even Gibraltar.' The referendum result and all it meant was a pretty dreadful hand to be dealt. Not just that, but the vote to leave the EU was a massive snub to Jones as well as his fellow political classes. It underlined how detached people were from the wise counsel of their leaders and how trained the public was on a UK media rather than the emaciated Welsh outlets. All of this meant that Jones was charged with representing a nation who had just given him a large collective knee in the groin. In doing so, people had voted to turn off the tap that gave Wales £245 million more than we pay in. Along with Plaid Cymru, Jones pushed a White Paper which argued for a future inside the single market and customs union to protect frictionless trade. In fairness, the First Minister was proactive over Brexit at least, playing to his strengths – his legal background and genuine interest in all things constitutional – but, in all that has followed, Carwyn Jones has largely been ignored. This is understandable to some extent, as even Nicola Sturgeon has been overshadowed by the Northern Ireland backstop issue.

Then there's the M4 and Jones's departure before taking a decision on the relief road at Newport. For me, these two issues sum up Carwyn Jones's period at the helm. Plenty of fine words and lots of consultations, with insufficient action and delivery.

Carwyn Jones is a clever, articulate, dignified, decent man. But being capable rather than charismatic

**Carwyn Jones is a clever, articulate, dignified, decent man. But being capable rather than charismatic meant he received only a fraction of the public warmth bestowed on his predecessor, Rhodri Morgan**



## Ultimately, the facts don't lie: despite uninterrupted Labour government for nearly twenty years, Wales remains the poorest part of the UK, with a GVA of 71% of the UK average

meant he received only a fraction of the public warmth bestowed on his predecessor, Rhodri Morgan. Jones revelled in glitzy VIP events like the NATO Summit, the Champions League final, rugby Six Nations etcetera. Such occasions suited him: Carwyn was at his best in these formal environments, as I witnessed first hand. He could look and, more importantly, sound the part, his own background making him at ease displaying Welsh pride and historical knowledge. Throw in a few sporting anecdotes and Bob's your uncle. The problem is this was never quite enough. Carwyn Jones rarely showed anger, but he also displayed insufficient emotion and animation. His languid style annoyed and frustrated some, and as time went on, it became hard to decipher a clear ambition for himself or a decisive aspiration for the nation.

There is an irony that, until the final year of his

tenure as First Minister, Carwyn had never shown any real emotion, so we'd had precious little proper glimpse of him as a person. When it did happen, it was in the most tragic and desperate of circumstances with the death of Carl Sargeant. Jones's inability or reluctance to display emotion sooner ultimately served him poorly and meant he conveyed little genuine conviction in his ability to effect change. That has probably shaped his legacy. His leadership was partially successful at a time when Wales was crying out for an energetic and confident leader, who not only led but showed he cared, someone who had the belief to make change happen. Carwyn will no doubt enjoy a few years on the Senedd 'backbenches' or in the Lords, however history will recall a leader who made few mistakes but lacked the drive and courage to effect real change for Wales. ▼

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## Does the Labour party have a problem with women?

**Cerys Furlong** argues that both culture and process need to change within political parties if we are to create a level playing field and a more equal society

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**A**t Chwarae Teg we talk to businesses and organisations every day about why diversity and inclusion matters. In our experience most organisations recognise and accept the evidence which shows the benefits to their organisations and customers, and are (at least in principle) committed to doing something about it.

Of course the challenge comes when confronted with the hard work of addressing poor organisational culture and practices which have sustained the status quo of inequality, whereby white middle class men run most of our organisations, and hold most of the power and wealth in our country. This irks me somewhat, as you might imagine.

So working with organisations to make them better places to attract, retain and progress a more diverse group of talented employees will remain a core part of the day job, as does working with women directly, supporting them and giving them the confidence and skills to really progress in their careers.

However there is a missing part of the picture. We can support hundreds or thousands of individuals and organisations, but unless we also address the power inequality that is stubbornly embedded in our political structures, we will fail to create the conditions for real equality to be achieved. Unless the people who make the decisions about our laws, about tax and spend and about our public services reflect those who they serve, then history shows us we will continue to tread broadly the same path, reinforcing and entrenching inequality.

There remain only a few countries in the world where women have no right to vote, yet across the globe women remain hugely underrepresented in all political structures. For me this is where the political gets personal. I ended up putting myself forward as a Labour candidate for Council elections after venting my frustration about being represented by all male councillors in my area. My view then was clear: to make a difference you have to step forward, or 'lean in' as Sheryl Sandberg has famously advocated.

Now a critique of the 'lean in' approach could fill an entire article; suffice to say I'm with those who express unease, particularly having followed it myself. The most obvious flaw is that it firmly puts the responsibility for reducing inequality onto women, and we just have to stop thinking, believing or behaving as if equality is a 'women's issue' and one that can or should be solved by those most adversely affected.

So when it comes to solutions, what have we got? In the establishment of the National Assembly of Wales there was a real and earnest attempt to create a parliament, a political environment and even a building that could deliver equality. This can be seen in the design of the Senedd (an attempt to move away from the adversarial jeering that is so infuriating in Westminster) and in the embedding of equality mainstreaming in legislation, as well as in the actions and commitments of political parties in Wales to improve our representation.

There has been much lauding of Wales' achievement in becoming the first legislature to achieve 50:50 gender balance in the 2003 elections, and rightly so. This was

## **We just have to stop thinking, believing or behaving as if equality is a 'women's issue'**

hard fought, and many politicians, political activists and party staff will bear the scars. But either political parties got complacent, or people got afraid of sustaining the type of positive action that enabled Wales to show the world that equal gender representation is possible. Because since then we've gone backwards, and few who have been around Welsh politics over recent years will be unfamiliar with the arguments around all women shortlists and other positive action towards equality. It's been most vocal and divisive in the Labour party, perhaps unsurprising given that Labour has done more than any party to try and increase the number of women elected. So have these attempts, particularly the introduction of all-women shortlists failed? Yes and no.

All women shortlists (AWS) have consistently been shown to be the most effective way of getting an increase in women selected, and subsequently elected. Yet there is a lack of understanding amongst Labour party members and the electorate about why they are needed, and seemingly a lack of transparency around how decisions are made to select some seats for AWS, and others not. In short, the Labour party has tried to achieve its stated ambitions (here gender equality) by creating a process or mechanism, but it has not successfully addressed the *culture* within the party – or the hearts and minds of its membership.

This is not easy stuff. Part of my job is to try and persuade people of the need for greater equality, and the benefits it can bring. The usual arguments against positive action like AWS centre around the so-called meritocracy – the idea that talent, effort and achievement will result in success (election), regardless of gender. But this fails to address the way that advancement in a meritocracy is based on performance, and in this case performance is 'measured' and 'assessed' by party members and officers

## **All women shortlists have consistently been shown to be the most effective way of getting [women] elected. Yet there is a lack of understanding amongst Labour party members and the electorate about why they are needed**

through traditional selections meetings, through creating and maintaining the 'right' networks, through affiliating or not to different internal party groups or factions, and sometimes down to whether you live in the right postcode or part of constituency. At a very obvious level, the fact that for generations we have continued to elect politicians who are so unrepresentative of the people suggests that this process, and the meritocracy, has failed.

If we look at the recent leadership election in Wales, should we really be surprised that a woman struggled to get onto the ballot, and that we looked primarily to other women to get her there? Depressing as it is, I'm not surprised at all. In the same way as we see a backlash against AWS in some constituencies when it's applied, the failure to 'see' women as leaders in the Labour Party suggests that the cultural or perception shift required when it comes to women in politics hasn't quite happened yet.

Reflecting the general population, there would seem to be many members of all political parties who don't understand why unequal representation is an issue and are opposed to positive action to change things. Underlying this for many would seem to be the perception that it's unfair to men, and that candidates selected via AWS are somehow less able, or less deserving (I dare you to have that argument with Julie James AM, Carolyn Harris MP or any of the politicians selected by AWS in Wales). There are many examples of individuals and constituencies feeling that the 'imposition' of all women shortlists has left them unable to choose their preferred candidate – most often a man who has wanted to fill the role for some time. This is understandable, but it also points to a failure to communicate the need for positive action convincingly.

In terms of the recent Welsh Labour leadership

election, Eluned Morgan seems to have been further hindered by the unnecessarily factional binary that seems to accompany anything related to the Labour party. As a result Mark Drakeford was characterised as the pro-Corbyn candidate, Vaughan Gething as the anti-Corbyn/Blairite candidate and Eluned the 'other' or 'woman' candidate. This does all three a huge disservice, and dumbs down our political discourse.

There is also the question about why only one woman wanted to run for the position of leader of Welsh Labour and likely First Minister. This is not because there are not enough elected women in Welsh Labour. So perhaps either individuals feel that they won't get support for their candidacy, or there is a view that women do not make the best leaders. Some will argue that this particular campaign was unique, with Mark Drakeford the clear favourite from the outset. However, as it stands, I can't see the next Welsh leader being a woman either, and so the party needs to think seriously within the party about the pipeline of female talent, the female Assembly Members who can be the Cabinet Members and leaders of the future.

But it's not just a problem for the Assembly group, and the Labour Party is not alone in having an issue when it comes to women in leadership positions. Chwarae Teg recently published a 'State of the Nation' when it comes to gender equality, which shows that women are underrepresented when it comes to positions of power and influence across the board (for example only 6 of the top 100 companies in Wales are run by women). However, there are things we can do to address inequality as a whole, and Labour should do to develop women in leadership positions, starting with representation in Council groups, Constituency Labour Party chairs and secretaries, and other roles where individuals can develop their leadership skills.

## The fact that for generations we have continued to elect politicians who are so unrepresentative of the people suggests that... meritocracy has failed

It's always difficult to change the culture of organisations. It takes time, effort and absolute commitment from the leadership of organisations down to the grassroots. Mark Drakeford has made clear statements about his intention to ensure 'Equalities and human rights must remain the underpinning principles at the heart of our policy making ambitions'. This will require serious hard work to follow through, to ensure we don't default to the same failing meritocracy that props

up inequality. This responsibility must be borne by us all; we cannot think that it is women's responsibility to deliver equality, and we cannot deliver it only for white middle class women like me. We need much more radical and committed action to change this within all parties, to challenge existing or conventional ways of doing things.

When we achieve equality, only then will we be able to take for granted a gender balanced ballot, or a ballot with more women candidates on it, and we can just vote for candidates as people and for their politics, as has always been the case for male candidates. It's not just women's responsibility to make sure female candidates get on the ballot: it's all of our responsibility, and that means men creating space for women too and supporting them to get there, because after all, we women have done so for hundreds of years. ▼

**Cerys Furlong** is Chief Executive of Chwarae Teg



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# The Unintended Consequences of John Redwood

**Leon Gooberman** asks if John Redwood's period as Secretary of State for Wales might echo within Brexit

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**I**deology is a necessary component of politics, but the Brexit convulsions in Westminster prompt the question: what can happen when ideology obscures practicality? Many readers will remember that John Redwood, a leading Eurosceptic and supporter of Jacob Rees-Mogg's European Research Group faction of Conservative MPs, was once known for other political activity. This earlier activity offers one answer to the above question.

From 1993 to 1995 Redwood was an unlikely Secretary of State for Wales. In those pre-Assembly years, the Secretary of State governed a Welsh Office that possessed the responsibilities now discharged by the Welsh Government. Redwood's appointment was unexpected given his Thatcherite past, symbolised by his leadership of the Downing Street Policy Unit during the miners' strike. While previous Conservative Secretaries of State recognised that their party's minority status in Wales meant that it was politically sensible to adopt a relatively conciliatory approach, Redwood was different. He planned to promote his political views and fulfil his personal ambitions by imposing an uncompromising Thatcherite agenda.

One part of Redwood's agenda was administrative. He attacked the quangos, powerful and often controversial arms-length delivery bodies, launching multiple reorganisations and cutbacks such as halving public funding to the Welsh Development Agency. He planned to reduce Welsh Office staffing by one-sixth, before completing a local government reorganisation that created 22 unitary authorities. Controversially, Redwood claimed later that his efficiency drives enabled the Welsh Office to return part of its block grant to HM Treasury. He also prioritised moral issues, visiting St Mellons in Cardiff to condemn absent fathers and the trend towards single parent families, the first of

many poorly received proclamations. Finally, his arch-Euroscepticism prompted quixotic actions including preventing the Welsh Office from seconding staff to the UK's Representative Office in Brussels. The Secretary of State could not be restrained, with Welsh Office Minister Wyn Roberts recalling in his autobiography that he decided to 'watch over John as carefully as I could and infuse some common sense into his decision making, given the chance. Alas, the chance occurred infrequently'.

Redwood's impact was enhanced by his distinctive personality, captured by his 'Vulcan' nickname. He showed little interest in Wales, mentioning it only once in an hour-long television interview. He refused to sign Welsh language documents and was reluctant to overnight in Wales, preferring to be driven back to his Wokingham constituency. The most damaging incident occurred, however, at a Welsh Conservative Conference. He was on stage as attendees sang the national anthem but had not learnt the lyrics and instead mimed awkwardly in what became an infamous and symbolic performance.

Electoral support for the Conservatives promptly collapsed, reaching a nadir in the 1995 local elections when they won only 42 of the 1,273 council seats being contested. Nevertheless, Redwood resigned shortly afterwards to challenge John Major for the premiership, but his disastrous image accompanied

**While previous Conservative Secretaries of State recognised that their party's minority status in Wales meant that it was politically sensible to adopt a relatively conciliatory approach, Redwood was different**

him and what the media called his 'barmy army' of supporters – the *Sun* newspaper printed Vulcan ears for his supporters to cut out and wear – and his bid failed. He never held government office again and his party lost all their parliamentary seats in Wales at the 1997 general election.

While Redwood might have been little more than a colourful footnote in Welsh political history, his behaviour had far-reaching consequences. Political majorities are often coalitions requiring a unifying force, as was the narrow majority supporting devolution at the 1997 referendum. The underlying themes that enabled devolution, including reaction against Margaret Thatcher's Governments and the growth of Welsh institutions, already existed but four factors meant that Redwood was a crucial unifying force within a largely indifferent electorate.

First, Redwood's ability to impose his will without a Wales-based democratic mandate exemplified constitutional inequity to his opponents, to whom his behaviour meant that the constitutional settlement was not only discredited but visibly laughable to the point of implausibility. Second, Redwood profoundly alienated administrative and governing elites, prompting some to support constitutional

## The underlying themes that enabled devolution, including reaction against Margaret Thatcher's Governments and the growth of Welsh institutions, already existed but four factors meant that Redwood was a crucial unifying force within a largely indifferent electorate

change to avoid any repeat of their discomfort. Third, his local government reform removed opponents of devolution by abolishing county councils, who had often feared becoming a disposable tier of government under an Assembly. Finally, he unwittingly damaged the only mainstream political force wholly opposed to devolution, the Conservatives, who were perceived as reluctant to define or defend Welsh interests. Redwood's successor, William Hague, was more emollient but could do little to overturn such views. All this meant that the constitutional settlement was increasingly seen as untenable, enraging and energising supporters of devolution before demoralising and discrediting their opponents. Elevated levels of discontent were exploited by pro-devolution campaigners to secure a narrow referendum victory over a weakened opposing campaign in September 1997, a few months after Labour's general election landslide.

Redwood had grand plans for Wales, where he was to impose an inflexible and morally charged Thatcherite agenda before becoming Prime Minister. Instead, his ideological and self-centred actions stymied his political career, harmed his party and helped facilitate devolution, outcomes that were the exact opposite of his intentions. Mark Twain is reputed to have said that 'history doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes'. Nobody knows how the Brexit saga and its aftermath will unfold, but we should not be surprised if the unintended consequences of John Redwood make another appearance. ▸




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**Dr Leon Gooberman** lectures at Cardiff Business School. His recent publications include *From Depression to Devolution: economy and government in Wales, 1934 to 2006*, published by the University of Wales Press

# Pomp, pageantry, propaganda... and affinity?

**The Prince of Wales:**  
50 years since Caernarfon



*Ahead of the fiftieth anniversary of the Investiture of Prince Charles in July 1969, **Robert Jobson** looks at the relationship between a prince and a country*

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When Peter Beck, headmaster of the preparatory school Cheam, summoned a group of boys to his sitting room on 26 July 1958, pupil Prince Charles was amongst them. The Commonwealth Games in Cardiff was being broadcast on the BBC and the boys were invited to watch the closing ceremony on Beck's television set. It was announced that, while the Queen was unable to attend, Her Majesty would instead address both the packed stadium and the television audience in a recorded message.

The prince's mother then appeared on the screen and read out a simple, but, for Charles, life-changing message: 'The British Empire and Commonwealth Games in the capital ... have made this a memorable year for the principality. I have therefore decided to mark it further by an act that will, I hope, give much pleasure to all Welshmen as it does to me. I intend to create my son Charles Prince of Wales today. When he is grown up, I will present him to you at Caernarfon.' His friends turned to the embarrassed young prince and offered their congratulations on his elevation in status, much to his discomfort. It was the first he had heard of it.

He later recalled the announcement at a Caerphilly Castle dinner in July 2008 to celebrate his half-century as the Prince of Wales. 'I remember with horror and embarrassment how I was summoned with all the other boys at my school to the headmaster's sitting room, where we all had to sit on the floor and watch television. To my total embarrassment I heard my mama's voice – she wasn't very well at the time and could not go. My father went instead and a recording of the message was played in the stadium saying that I was to be made the Prince of Wales. All the other boys turned around and looked at me and I remember thinking, "What on earth have I been let in for?" That is my overriding memory.'

The prince said later it was one of the greatest privileges possible to be the twenty-first Prince of Wales. 'I have tried my best... to live up to the motto of my predecessors, *Ich Dien – I Serve*,' he said. Eleven years later at Caernarfon Castle, the Prince's investiture was

modelled on that for his great-uncle David (later Edward VIII and after his abdication Duke of Windsor) in 1911. On the eve of the initiation Prince Charles boarded the royal train with his parents bound for north Wales. They knew that the pageant had to be perfect and hoped for a positive response. They had no choice but to trust in the security already in place. Nationalist fanatics had formed what they called the 'Free Wales Army' and had finally won the attention of the police and security services who were now taking the threat seriously after an RAF warrant officer was seriously injured in an incident. Then the gang planted a bomb at Temple of Peace in Cardiff. Another was found in the lost-luggage department of the railway station. Anonymously, too, it was announced that the Prince of Wales was on their target list. Charles was understandably a little uneasy.

After four terms at Trinity College, Cambridge, the prince was sent to the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth in order to learn Welsh before his formal investiture as the Prince of Wales. This was a political decision rather than a cultural one, amid a revival of nationalism in Scotland and Wales. Just before his departure to the Welsh college, Charles recorded his first radio interview and, not surprisingly, he was asked about his attitude towards the hostility in the principality. 'It would be unnatural, I think, if one didn't feel any apprehension about it. One always wonders what's going to happen... As long as I don't get covered in too much egg and tomato, I'll be alright. But I don't blame people demonstrating like that. They've never seen me before. They don't know what I'm like. I've hardly been to Wales, and you can't really expect people to be overzealous about the fact of having a so-called English prince to come amongst them,' he said.

To cancel the university term in Wales would have been a public-relations disaster for the government and indeed for Charles himself. It was decided it would be a weakness to bow to extremist threats. So they went ahead regardless. Upon his arrival at Pantycelyn Hall, where he would share accommodation with 250 other students, Charles was met by a 500-strong cheering crowd. He was deeply touched. In the end the prince enjoyed his time there and was treated kindly in Aberystwyth. His period of study there passed without incident.

He wrote to a friend: 'If I have learned anything during the last eight weeks, it's been about Wales ... they feel so strongly about Wales as a nation, and it means



Parade before Prince Charles' investiture, Caernarfon, 1969

something to them, and they are depressed by what might happen to it if they don't try and preserve the language and the culture, which is unique and special to Wales, and if something is unique and special, I see it as well worth preserving.'

Years later he said the time he spent studying there were among his fondest memories of times he has spent in Wales. He recalled with pleasure the 'memorable times spent exploring mid Wales during my term at Aberystwyth University and learning something about the principality and its ancient language, folklore, myths and history.'

More bombs were threatened, promised by Welsh militants for Caernarfon on the actual day of his installment as the Prince of Wales on 1 July 1969. And despite the deaths of Alwyn Jones, 22, and George Taylor, 37, dubbed the 'Abergele Martyrs' after they died handling a bomb on the eve of the investiture, the event itself passed off without incident. Charles was driven through the town in an open carriage on his way to the castle past cheering crowds. As the guests and choir sang 'God Bless the Prince of Wales', he was conducted to the dais and knelt before his mother on a set designed by the Queen's brother-in-law Lord Snowdon. He would later write that he found it profoundly moving when he placed his hands between his mother's and spoke the oath of allegiance.

The Queen then presented the prince to the crowd at Eagle Gate and at the lower ward to the sound of

magnificent fanfares. After that he was again paraded through the streets before retiring aboard the Royal Yacht at Holyhead for a well-deserved dinner, an emotionally exhausted but very happy prince. Buoyed by the experience, the prince noted, 'As long as I do not take myself too seriously I should not be too badly off.'

The next day Charles set off without the rest of the family to undertake a week of solo engagements around the country. He recalled being 'utterly amazed' by the positive reaction he received. As the tour progressed south, the crowds grew even bigger. At the end of it, Charles arrived exhausted but elated at Windsor Castle. He retired to write up his diary, noting the silence after

### **There is no doubt that the Windsors used Charles's investiture as a propaganda tool, a way of introducing their new hope to the world with pomp and pageantry**

the day's cheers and applause, reflecting that he had much to live up to and expressing the hope that he could provide constructive help for Wales.

There is no doubt that the Windsors used Charles' investiture as a propaganda tool, a way of introducing their new hope to the world with pomp and pageantry. It was designed to bolster popularity for the monarchy's image in Wales at the time the dynasty was suffering from an identity crisis and needed a PR boost. Years later in 2009, one of the driving forces of the spectacular event, Lord Snowdon, in an interview on the BBC, alluding to some of the more arcane aspects of the Caernarfon Castle ceremony said it was 'all as bogus as hell.' And as for the uniform Lord Snowdon had to wear in his role as Constable of Caernarfon Castle, he says that he designed it himself and reckons it made him look like a 'cinema usherette from the 1950s or the panto character Buttons.'

It is unclear whether on ascension to the throne, King Charles will authorise another expensive investiture ceremony for his son and heir Prince William, Duke of Cambridge. But what is apparent is that since his investiture this Prince of Wales has developed a deep affinity with the people of the country.

Unlike previous bearers of the title, Charles has

chosen to cultivate close contacts in Wales. He is by no means obliged to do so, and indeed none of his immediate predecessors did nearly as much. He purchased a 192-acre estate near the village of Myddfai, Llandovery, Carmarthenshire, through his Duchy of Cornwall trust, called Llwynywermod, also known as Llwynywormwood, just outside the Brecon Beacons National Park. Adapted from a former model farm in Carmarthenshire, it bears witness to his philosophy of sustainable building with a structure traditionally made from existing and locally sourced materials, an ecologically sound heating system and elegant interiors that harmonise perfectly with the architecture.

He uses it for meetings, receptions and concerts, and as the base for his several yearly visits to Wales, including the annual week of summer engagements, known in his annual schedule as 'Wales Week'. He says he wants it to be a 'showcase for traditional Welsh craftsmanship, textiles and woodwork, so as to draw attention to the high-quality small enterprises, woollen mills, quilt-makers, joiners, stonemasons and metalworkers situated in rural parts of Wales'. It enables him, he says, to feel part of the local community. To him, he says, preserving this sense of community 'is timeless'.

When asked how important it was for him to have a retreat in Wales, Charles said: 'Very important! Having been as Prince of Wales for fifty-five years [at the time of the interview], it enables me, on various occasions, to be part of the local community around Llandovery and to have a base for entertaining and meeting people from throughout the principality.'

He went on, 'Wales has still preserved its wonderful sense of community, particularly in the rural areas, and Llandovery, an old sheep drovers' town, somehow maintains those priceless assets of its own community hospital, family GPs, a rugby club [of which I am proud to be patron], a railway station and a strong connection with the family farming communities in the surrounding countryside. Some may say this is old-fashioned, but to me it is timeless; the bedrock of our humanity in a profound relationship with nature and the very heart of Wales's cultural, social and spiritual heritage.' ▽

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**Robert Jobson** is Royal Editor at the *Evening Standard*, and author of the bestselling biography, *Charles at Seventy: Thought, Hopes and Dreams* (John Blake, £20)



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# ‘Whether or not he believes he has an affinity to Wales is neither here nor there’

**Bethan Sayed** *offers a critique of the monarchy based on our different values and beliefs*

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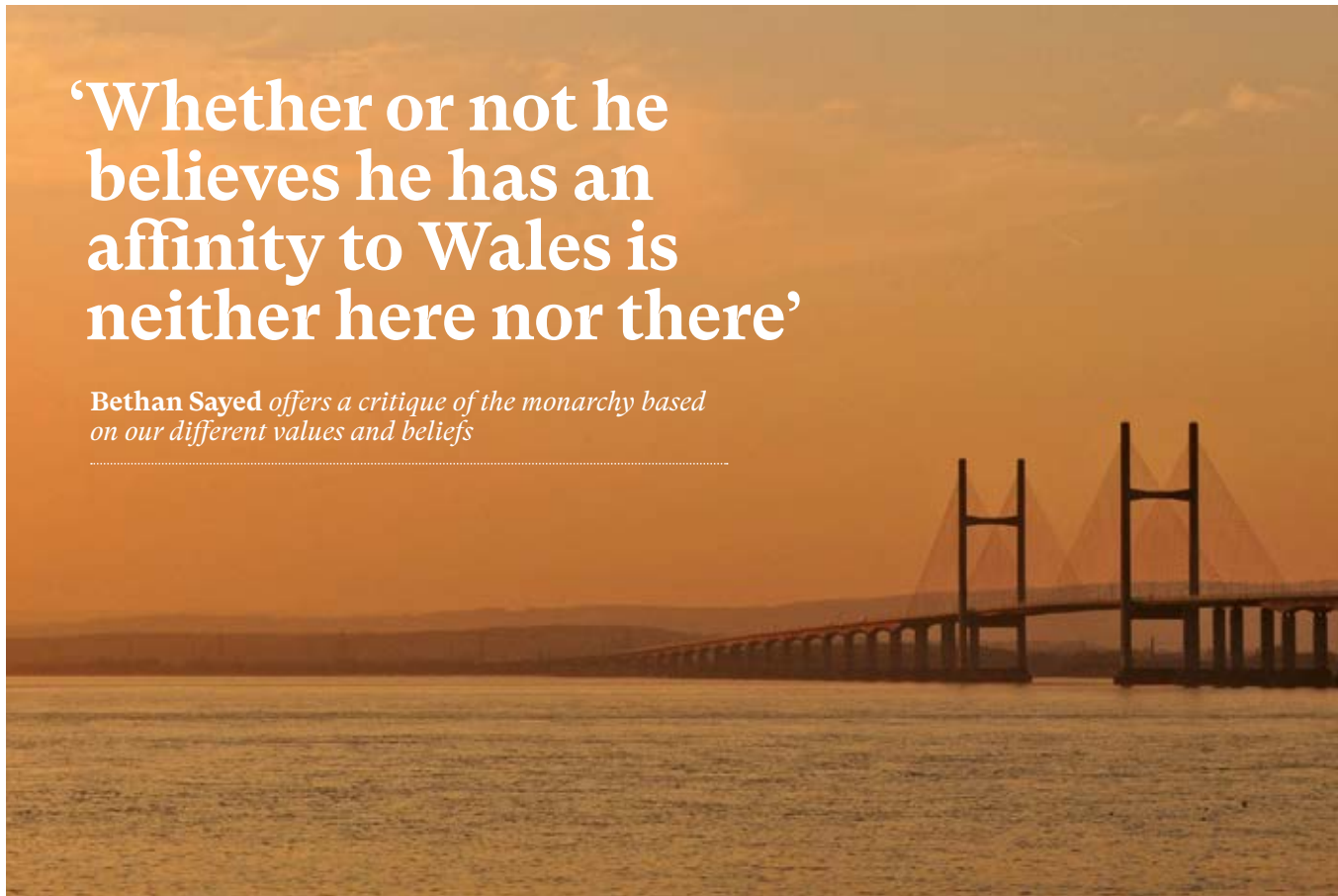
Every time there is a national event of significance to Wales, the Royal Family spin machine rolls into action, and individual members are shuffled out to congratulate the nation's rugby or football team. They parade around, have nice pictures taken with key figures, and return home to their English palaces.

Prince Charles is no exception. The Conservative Secretary of State for Wales recently re-named the Severn Bridge after him, causing more uproar from Welsh people than many a Royalist PR operative would have expected. People didn't want his name associated with the bridge. Not because of hatred of the individual in question, but because of what it symbolised. Here we had, once again, the powers that be imposing the permeation of the Royal Family on our nation and our society. There came to the surface a simmering anger, that had not appeared for quite some time, toward a

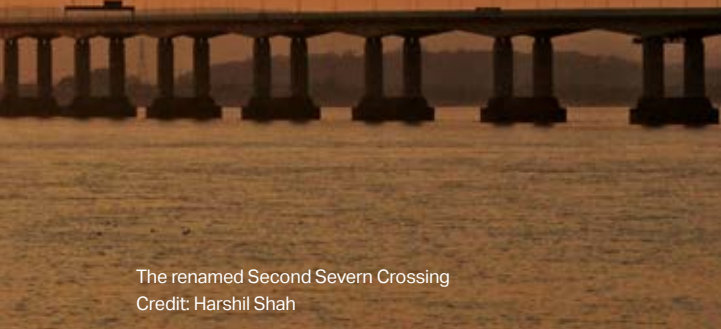
member of an institution so far removed from the real lives of Welsh people, being put on a pedestal that he did not earn or deserve (unlike our rugby and football team players, I should add!).

Prince Charles has not known it any other way. He has been born into this role, and presides over an outdated, imperial system, which belongs in the past. Whether or not he believes he has an affinity to Wales is neither here nor there, but one thing I know for certain is that a growing number of Welsh people do not have an affinity to the monarchy, and resist another investiture in Wales.

For me, this has never been about the individual. Many in the media try and push this narrative to suit their clickbait populism, but we fall into that trap at our peril. Let's be frank. We all know that there are more popular Royals than others, but if we get caught up in the cult of the celebrity, then chances are we will never



Many of us wish to create and see republicanism rooted in the policies that are introduced here, swear an oath of allegiance to... our citizens instead of to the Queen



The renamed Second Severn Crossing  
Credit: Harshil Shah

Prince Charles has not known it any other way. He has been born into this role, and presides over an outdated, imperial system, which belongs in the past



Bethan Sayed  
Credit: Plaid Cymru - The Party of Wales

see the end of the Royal Family as is in Wales.

But if we frame the debate around what the monarchy means to a modern Wales, how we are building new institutions such as the National Assembly for Wales, whose core values clash with the very concept of a hereditary system of privilege, how many of us wish to create and see republicanism rooted in the policies that are introduced here, swear an oath of allegiance to our voters, our citizens instead of to the Queen, then I am ready for the challenge ahead.

It seems ironic to me that some of the same people who voted for Brexit because they wanted to 'bring back control' or 'take the power away from the elites', seem to stay quiet when it comes to discussing the power and elitism that is enshrined in monarchical structures.

We need to win the debate on republicanism by challenging the myths, and formulating robust arguments about the positive alternatives to the monarchy, so that when they smile to the TV screens and say how much they have an affinity to Wales, we know that not to be the case. Not because they have a residence here or they visit the Royal Welsh Show every year, but because our values and our beliefs differ, and a modern Wales can offer a new, alternative vision that is inclusive, equal and free of the chains of the monarchy. ▼

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**Bethan Sayed** is Plaid Cymru Assembly Member for South Wales West

# A healthy lifestyle – *better than any pill!*

**Peter Elwood** describes a 40-year medical research study based on 2,500 middle aged subjects in Caerphilly. The research has been reported in well over 400 papers, and the 'gold dust' of the findings are summarised here

**T**he Caerphilly Collaborative Cohort Study is a broad ranging research study, set up in 1979 and still reporting findings. Extensive social and medical data were collected at baseline and every five years from 2,500 men aged 45-59 years at baseline, resident in Caerphilly and the surrounding villages. Extensive collaboration with clinical and laboratory colleagues in the UK and beyond was maintained throughout and together with these colleagues well over 400 research reports have been published.

A major initial aim was the detailed examination of risk factors for heart and vascular disease, and unique evidence on the role of blood platelets and on the beneficial effects of low-dose aspirin were identified early in the study. Opportunity was also taken, in collaboration with clinical and laboratory colleagues, to collect data of possible relevance to diseases other than heart disease and stroke.

At baseline and at each five year examination blood samples were taken with the men in a fasting state. This required the organising of early morning visits to a special clinic, with breakfast provided after venesection! These

clinics were delightful, sometimes rather like a school reunion, and they enabled members of the research team to make friends with the men. Another item that encouraged sustained collaboration, and the forging of friendships within the research, was the informing of each man of the results of his tests, and the regular issue of chatty newsletters about the study, in addition to reports published, talks and lectures given.

The most important findings in the 40 years of the study focus on the effects of a healthy lifestyle – non-smoking, low alcohol intake, regular physical exercise, low body weight and a 'healthy' diet – on the risk of major diseases, including diabetes, vascular disease, cancer, cognitive decline and dementia.

In fact, the overall findings of the study are well expressed in the title to this article. Healthy living has larger, more extensive and longer lasting benefits than almost any clinical intervention or any therapeutic pill.

Over the 40 years of the study, in comparison with the 40% of men who followed none or only a single healthy behaviour, the 5% of men who followed four or all five of the behaviours experienced:

## Healthy living has larger, more extensive and longer lasting benefits than almost any clinical intervention or any therapeutic pill

- a **70% reduction** in new type 2 diabetes
- a **65% reduction** in heart attacks and stroke
- a **35 % reduction** in cancer
- a **50% reduction** in cognitive decline
- a **60% reduction** in dementia

And these results can be expressed in other ways. Despite following a healthy lifestyle, some people will still get one of these diseases. The onset of disease is, however, delayed in those who follow healthy living: heart disease and stroke by about 13 years; dementia by an average of six years. Even death is delayed by about six years.

We all like the prospect of a disease-free retirement. Twenty-three percent of the men who followed a healthy lifestyle retired disease-free, compared with only 10% of those who had neglected healthy living.

Considering the community as a whole and the burden of healthcare to the community, an estimate was made of the effect of a change in behaviour throughout the community. We chose a change which we feel is reasonable and achievable. If each subject in the Caerphilly cohort had been advised at the start of the study to take up and follow just one additional healthy behaviour, and (to be realistic) suppose that only half the subjects had done so, the disease burden in the community forty years later would be 12% less diabetes, 6% less heart disease and strokes and 13% less dementia.

Extensive collaborative work was done with clinical and laboratory collaborators on the individual healthy behaviours. The findings included:

On **smoking**, we identified multiple harmful effects of smoking on haematological, immunological and other biological systems, and by following ex-smokers we found that it took up to 20 years for these effects to disappear in ex-smokers. However I will never forget the

man who answered the question I asked to determine whether or not he was an ex-smoker: 'Are you a current smoker?' He answered: 'No doctor, I smoke tobacco'.

On **alcohol** we worked closely with Serge Renaud, a brilliant Frenchman, who lent us a caravan, well-equipped as a research laboratory. The authorities in Caerphilly Miners' Hospital kindly provided hard standing, plus water and fuel for the caravan for more than ten years. Serge confirmed the rather over-publicised reduction in heart attacks associated with a low alcohol intake, showing that it is explained by a reduction in platelet activity, but we also showed that the overall effects of alcohol are deleterious – 'with no lower limit'! Despite this, Serge returned to France and much to the surprise of the director of the work in Caerphilly, a life-long abstainer, Serge set up the Renaud Society: 'A society for medical professionals with an interest in better health and a passion for wine'.

On **body weight**, we were among the first to quantify the association between BMI and the development of diabetes, finding that about 70% of the new diabetes in the cohort could be attributed to body weight alone.

Work on the **dietary intakes** of the men was perhaps the most disappointing of all the investigations in Caerphilly. Great credit is due to Dr Anne Fehily et al., who, together with others in the research team and with dietetic students from the University of Ulster, collected extensive dietary data at three five-year examinations of the men, including 7-day weighed intake records. A dominant hypothesis at that time was that saturated fat intake determined cardiovascular risk. Our results were among the first to refute that hypothesis.

Undoubtedly the most depressing finding relevant to our work in Caerphilly on healthy behaviours was an almost total absence of any evidence of an increase in the uptake of a healthy lifestyle throughout Wales over the 40 years of the study. Smoking decreased, but deleterious changes in other behaviours meant that only about 5% of adults in Wales follow a healthy lifestyle as we had defined it.

**'Are you a current smoker?'  
'No doctor, I smoke tobacco'**

All these, and other results, are of value only if we can be confident that they can be extrapolated with confidence to the general population of Wales. We can give considerable reassurance on that. Caerphilly was chosen for the study because the age and social structure of the town was closely similar to the total population of the UK. Furthermore, our sampling procedures ensured that the subjects followed were 90% of all the men within the age range and the area of residence selected for the work, and every five years over 90%, and usually over 95%, of the men in the cohort were seen, questioned and examined. Granted the cohort was of men, but other research has shown that gender differences in the risk of most diseases are very small compared to the reductions we described.

The Caerphilly study has however been followed by: 'Doeth am Iechyd Cymru', 'HealthWise Wales', an all-Wales research study. This new initiative aims to get as many people as possible in Wales to take part in research that will help improve the health of future generations and inform how the NHS and other healthcare services

can best be provided. Participants will receive updates on new research findings and opportunities to help shape the research that is conducted. ▼

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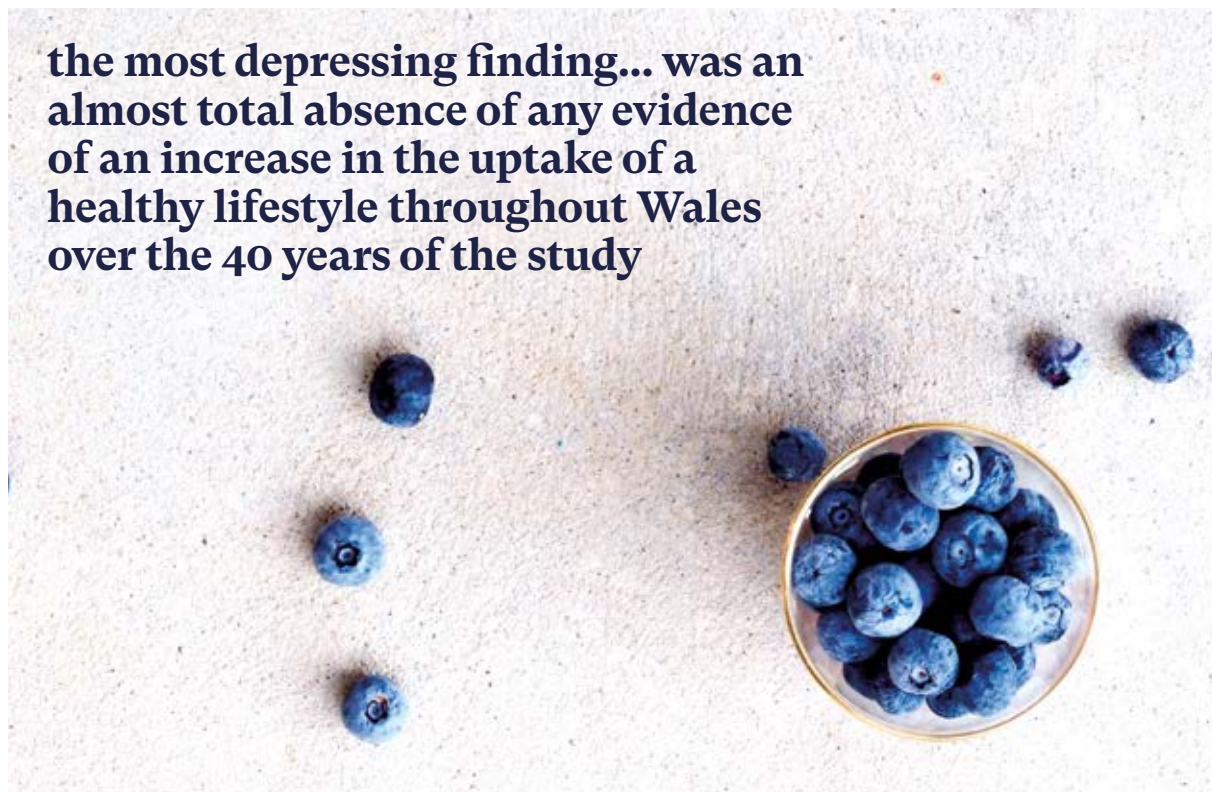
**Peter Elwood** OBE, DSc, MD, FRCP, Hon DSc. is Honorary Professor in the Division of Population Medicine at Cardiff University

*Lifestyle Medicine: Science and Art of Healthy Longevity* takes place 21 to 22 June 2019 at the Mercure Holland House Hotel in Cardiff. The British Society of Lifestyle Medicine (BSLM) aims to establish Lifestyle Medicine as central to health and well-being by promoting the prevention of avoidable lifestyle-related diseases.

To learn more about the Caerphilly study, visit [HealthyLivingWales.co.uk](http://HealthyLivingWales.co.uk)

To register with HealthWise Wales, visit [healthwisewales.gov.uk/ID](http://healthwisewales.gov.uk/ID)

**the most depressing finding... was an almost total absence of any evidence of an increase in the uptake of a healthy lifestyle throughout Wales over the 40 years of the study**





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# Common Purposes: *the implications of curriculum reform*

**Halima Begum** outlines an IWA project that took the conversation about curriculum reform outside schools, to FE, HE, skills and business communities in Wales and Scotland

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**W**ales' education system is currently undergoing its biggest reform since devolution. In March 2014 Welsh Government asked Professor Graham Donaldson to review the curriculum and assessment arrangements in schools in Wales. Professor Donaldson published *Successful Futures*, designed to put literacy, numeracy and digital competence at the heart of the education system. In *Successful Futures*, Professor Donaldson made a number of recommendations, including that a new Curriculum for Wales be based on four purposes and structured around six Areas of Learning and Experience. All of Professor Donaldson's recommendations were accepted by the Welsh Government.

To date, work has largely been undertaken by the education community, including Pioneer Schools, and in the Areas of Learning and Experience by working groups established by Welsh Government. Given that the new curriculum has the potential to impact on all areas of life in Wales, we wanted to explore the relationship between the reforms and communities beyond the school gates.

**Given that the new curriculum has the potential to impact on all areas of life in Wales, we wanted to explore the relationship between the reforms and communities beyond the school gates**



We set out to identify steps that would help ensure the roll-out of the new curriculum is well integrated with other areas of policy, and to encourage a seamless pathway for learners as they progress from compulsory education. Specifically, our project *Common Purposes* aimed to identify practical steps to ensure the implementation of curriculum reform in Wales is integrated with and supported by the further education, higher education, skills and business communities.

We undertook a perception audit between October 2018 and January 2019 with representatives from the further education, higher education, skills and business communities in Wales to understand their engagement with the new curriculum to date, as well as their hopes and fears for the future. We also undertook a programme of engagement in Scotland to learn from their recent experience of introducing *Curriculum for Excellence*, which Professor Graham Donaldson also played a crucial role in developing.

During our visit to Scotland, we interviewed individuals who were involved in either the design or implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* and took away some key messages.

The first was that curriculum reform is a hugely complex undertaking, and some individuals felt that the core purposes of *Curriculum for Excellence* were lost during implementation. For example, people told us that they felt the skills element of their new curriculum was pushed aside with the introduction of the new qualifications. We also heard that the original reasons the qualifications were introduced, and the role they were intended to play within the bigger picture of the new curriculum, was forgotten.

Professor Keir Bloomer, Chair of the Royal Society

of Edinburgh's Education Committee, who was involved in the original design of the new curriculum in Scotland reflected during our launch event that in Scotland: 'Little attention has been paid to the *process* of change. This is perhaps a characteristic of politically managed systems. Politicians are interested in what should be done; what changes should be made. They are less interested in *how* the change should be brought about. Yet in a complex system such as the education service, that is of crucial importance. Exhortation or instruction will not work.'

We were surprised to also hear that despite the 'national conversation' that took place in 2002 and which engaged a wide cross-section of society in the idea of curriculum reform, implementation of Scotland's new curriculum only began in 2010. The scale of this type of change, the complexity and time involved should not be underestimated and, critically, we argue that it should be clearly articulated to all involved.

Individuals we spoke to in Scotland also reflected on gaps they felt were present during the design and implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*. Through these conversations the importance of having a focused, unifying long-term plan that both includes and reaches beyond the compulsory education community was very clear. For example, we heard that some areas of the business community felt that they were not given the opportunity to co-develop the new curriculum, whilst others felt that the new curriculum missed the opportunity to embed skills into the curriculum.

Many individuals in Scotland spoke positively about the work happening in Wales, particularly Pioneer Schools and Continuing Professional Development, both of which were reported to be missing during the development of Scotland's new curriculum.



*Politicians are interested in what should be done; what changes should be made. They are less interested in how the change should be brought about*

Professor Keir Bloomer

In Wales, to form an assessment of how curriculum reform is perceived amongst the four communities in Wales (FE, HE, business, skills), we interviewed individuals to understand their current involvement with curriculum development and also their hopes and fears for the future. Almost all people we spoke to in Wales talked positively about what the new curriculum was trying to achieve, and recognised the potential it could have for learners. The most popular hope we heard was that the new curriculum will bring equal opportunities for all learners through its commitment to 'flexibility'.

Although some people felt informed and engaged about curriculum development, this was not the case for everyone. We observed significant variance of knowledge even within sectors, illustrating that communication and space for engagement remains a key challenge. For example, within the further education sector, only those who sat on the Areas of Learning and Experience groups tended to report they felt engaged and informed; the rest of the further education sector reported feeling less so.

Everyone we spoke to felt that they had knowledge, experiences and contacts that could benefit the development and delivery of the new curriculum but did not always feel they had the opportunity to contribute. They did, however, point out that capacity is a real issue and that any ask has to be both clearly articulated and realistic.

People we spoke with were also aware of some of the big challenges that could arise during this reform, the most common being around the introduction of any new qualifications and the implications it could have on young people in Wales. We observed a particular concern that *Successful Futures* should not face similar issues to

those encountered during the introduction of the Welsh Baccalaureate. Other concerns included the progression to skills-based learning and the impact future PISA results could have on political and public support for the new curriculum.

Reflecting on the conversations in Scotland and Wales, we have made eight recommendations to help ensure the further education, higher education, skills and business communities are involved during the design and implementation of Wales' new curriculum. These recommendations were on practice, communication, accountability, resource and engagement.

We were delighted to be joined at the launch of our report by Kirsty Williams AM, Minister for Education, who updated the audience on progress to date, reflected on our findings and took part in a robust question and answer session. The Minister agreed with the importance of communicating a clear narrative and building a collective spirit; she also recognised our assessment that there is more to do with wider engagement and information beyond classrooms and staff rooms across the country. We were pleased she responded to our concerns and used the event to announce her plans for engaging with stakeholders beyond schools: A National Roadshow.

I'd like to end on a personal note, as the last six months have been quite a journey. I joined the IWA in September 2018 on a secondment from the Civil Service Fast Stream, and moved to Cardiff – only the second time I had visited Wales.

I grew up and went to school in east London, and it's been a steep learning curve to understand the Welsh education system and the reforms underway. But if anything, my time at the IWA delivering our *Common Purposes* project has shown me the value of looking beyond boundaries and inviting fresh perspectives into established conversations.

*Common Purposes* has already catalysed a much wider conversation during my short stay in Wales, and I very much hope that this is just the start. I'll be watching with interest and support from afar. ▼

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**Halima Begum** was the IWA's Policy and Communications Officer, September 2018 to February 2019. She was seconded from the Civil Service Fast Stream to coordinate the *Common Purposes* project

# Plenty of lessons to learn

**Keir Bloomer** *reflects on what Wales can learn from Scotland's implementation of their curriculum*

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Scotland's long-running programme of educational reform goes under the title, *Curriculum for Excellence*. This is something of a misnomer. Much more is involved than curriculum, especially if curriculum is conceived as referring primarily to content. There have been changes in pedagogy, assessment, qualifications and much else besides. Change on this scale is enormously complex. It calls for extensive preparation, skilled management of processes and careful coordination at a strategic level. It is important that Wales should learn lessons from Scotland's shortcomings in all these vital areas.

Inevitably in a talk concerned with what can be learned from the experience of others, I will focus on where things might have been done differently and better. It is unfortunately also necessary to acknowledge the many shortcomings of the change process. Like other Scottish reform programmes before it, *Curriculum for Excellence* has fallen well short of its potential.

It is, therefore, important that I should state at the outset that there have nevertheless been significant successes. Scottish school education has benefitted greatly from *Curriculum for Excellence*. Some of these successes, such as an increased emphasis on the continuity of young people's experience across the full period of schooling, were intended from the outset and built into the structure of the reforms. Others, such as a greater attention to pupil voice and the involvement of young people in managing their learning, have emerged as the programme has progressed.

*Curriculum for Excellence* had its origins in the National Debate on Education, a wide-ranging consultation that took place in 2002. At its conclusion,

a curriculum review group, of which I was pleased to be a member, was set up to identify the principles that should underpin future curriculum change. In November 2004 we published a brief paper – a dozen pages or so – setting out four objectives for school education and seven curriculum principles. These were received with almost universal acclaim and, indeed, cross-party support in the Scottish Parliament.

Perhaps it was the near-unanimity of the approval that led to the first serious error. No attempt was made to explain the proposed reforms to the broader community or to engage the teaching profession in any serious exploration of the big ideas and how they might be put into practice. In short, too much was taken for granted. As a result, *Curriculum for Excellence* has always been subject to a myriad of conflicting interpretations.

Some variation interpretation, however, was always anticipated and, indeed, intended. *Curriculum for Excellence* was supposed to empower teachers. However, no significant steps were taken to build capacity in the system. Some teachers, of course, welcomed the new liberty and used it imaginatively and to great effect. Many more felt insecure and threatened.

This lack of professional self-confidence resulted in numerous calls for guidance. The original aim had been to develop a limited amount of high-level advice. Soon, however, a large-scale industry had been created, producing guidance by the ton. When the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development looked at aspects of *Curriculum for Excellence* implementation in 2015, it found that, in addition to the original four objectives and seven principles, the guidance now

**No attempt was made to explain the proposed reforms to the broader community or to engage the teaching profession in any serious exploration of the big ideas and how they might be put into practice. In short, too much was taken for granted**

embraced 12 attributes and 24 capabilities, 5 levels, 6 entitlements, 10 aims, 8 curriculum areas, 3 interdisciplinary areas, 4 contexts for learning and no less than 1,820 experiences and outcomes. I have often summarised this grand array in a Powerpoint slide and been astonished by the number of people who do not immediately see the self-evident madness of it all.

OECD suggested a return to the original narrative and a radical simplification of the guidance. This process, in my opinion, has not yet gone remotely far enough.

There were problems too in the planned strategic guidance. In particular, it was not planned or, if it was, the planning was seriously deficient. A series of five quite extended policy papers was produced. The 'Building the Curriculum' series should have covered the main topics that schools and individual teachers needed to consider.

In the event, BtC1 dealt with subject teaching, with which every teacher was already familiar, but there was no paper dealing with interdisciplinary learning, always seen as a key feature of the new arrangements and new territory so far as many teachers were concerned. The second publication was entitled 'Active learning in the early years'. In many ways, this is a good document, outlining the principles of 'active learning', the Scottish term for constructivist pedagogy. The decision to focus entirely on the early years was, however, a mistake. I suspect few secondary teachers ever opened it, secure in the belief that active learning referred to wee kids running around and had nothing to do with them. The idea that the activity was cognitive rather than physical never became firmly embedded. The paper on skills was simply weak and incoherent, leaving two rather staid but





generally sound pieces of advice on curriculum structure and assessment.

Another source of difficulty has been the insistence on lock-step change. One pace fits all. The well-prepared and the unready, the enthusiastic and the reluctant, the highly-skilled and the barely competent, all marched in step. I suspect no other approach was ever considered. As a result, the benefits that might have been gained from the experience of early adopters was never taken up. I was pleased to learn of the idea of Pioneer Schools in Wales and assume that this is a lesson that has already been learned.

Yet another set of problems arose from the decision, at a relatively early stage of implementation, to introduce new examinations and qualifications, beginning with the replacement of Standard Grade, the examination aimed mainly at sixteen-year-olds. No doubt, there would have come a stage at which new teaching practices called for changes in terminal assessments but it had certainly not been reached when examination reform began.

The result was that the attention of secondary teachers – very understandably – was focused entirely on ensuring that they were ready for the new exams. All effort was poured into the final three years of schooling. The early stages of secondary schooling that virtually everyone had agreed in 2002-04 were the weakest part of the whole educational process, were largely ignored.

In primary schools change went ahead but the public heard little about it. All the media attention was on the new qualifications. Indeed, if you were to ask the public in the streets of Edinburgh or Glasgow even today, 'What was *Curriculum for Excellence* about?', you would probably be told it was about changing the exams. Thus,

a single subordinate aspect of the programme came to dominate. It is ironic that changes designed, among other things, to reduce the influence of examinations ended up giving them greater prominence than ever.

There were a lot of technical problems with the new exams and a number of changes of direction resulting in the late issue of guidance. These shortcomings were the subject of vociferous complaint by secondary teachers. However, a much more important matter, closely tied to examination change, was a failure to manage teacher workload. Teachers – secondary teachers in particular – felt seriously stressed by *Curriculum for Excellence* implementation. Morale suffered. It is likely that the legacy of that workload crisis has been a crucial contributory factor in the deterioration in industrial relations that might well result in strike action over pay.

However, to my mind, a more important issue still is the way in which a limited and finite human resource has been used. *Curriculum for Excellence* started with a great reservoir of goodwill. Even so, the amount of teacher time available to bring it from original concept to full implementation was limited. In the secondary sector, most of that resource was lavished on a programme of examination change that was premature and, at best, resulted in relatively marginal improvements. It is difficult to believe that this use of a scarce human resource was the result of intelligent conscious choice on anyone's part.

Two fundamental systemic problems have underpinned all of the shortcomings to which I have referred.

Firstly, little attention has been paid to the *process* of change. This is perhaps a characteristic of politically managed systems. Politicians are interested in what should be done; what changes should be made. They are less interested in *how* the change should be brought about. Yet, in a complex system such as the education service,

**Teachers – secondary teachers in particular – felt seriously stressed by Curriculum for Excellence implementation. Morale suffered**

## One consequence of this was a mismatch between the way in which the period of ‘broad general education’, the stages up to roughly age 15, was organised and the expectations laid down for the examination courses pupils would follow in the subsequent year

that is of crucial importance. Exhortation or instruction will not work. Teachers have to be brought on side and encouraged. The incentives to progress have to be greater than the incentives to stay with the status quo. I will have more to say about the change process in my conclusion.

Secondly, until quite recently, there was no effective coordination of the reform programme. A variety of ad hoc boards have existed at various stages. Curiously, the first implementation group contained only one member of the group who wrote the original policy paper. It was almost as if the government of the time had decided to ditch the ideas people and call in those viewed – mistakenly as it turned out – as safe pairs of hands. For the most part, however, the various educational agencies responsible for curriculum, examinations and so forth pursued their own courses of action.

One consequence of this was a mismatch between the way in which the period of ‘broad general education’, the stages up to roughly age 15, was organised and the expectations laid down for the examination courses pupils would follow in the subsequent year. The consequence has been that, in most schools, the number of examination subjects a young person can study has been reduced. This is not the outcome of any government policy. None of the 20,000 web pages of guidance suggested it should happen. It is pure unintended consequence. And unintended consequence is the hallmark of bad management.

It is impossible to view the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* as anything other than seriously flawed. Good practice has emerged but not as a result of the way in which the programme has been managed. It is perhaps, therefore, worth concluding with some thoughts on how a large-scale complex process of change might be better led. I suggest there are six essential features.

Firstly, there is a need for strategic clarity at a national level. Objectives need to be kept constantly in mind.

However, the strategy relates principally to how they are to be achieved. So far as policy makers are concerned, this means concentrated attention to processes of change. From the perspective of teachers, it means having access to limited, high-level, coherent guidance.

The counterpart of clear strategic direction from the centre is extensive operational discretion at the level of the school and, indeed, the individual classroom. This, in turn, depends on building professional capacity and self-confidence.

Thirdly, implementation has to be carefully monitored. Good data and reputable research are essential. However, so too is a commitment to look at evidence honestly and make changes as difficulties arise.

Trialling and the effective use of early adopters are indispensable. One pace does not fit all. There is nothing wrong with harnessing the energies of the enthusiasts. Equally, accepting variations in speed is not the same thing as tolerating the dilatoriness of laggards.

Fifthly, resources of teacher time and commitment must be husbanded carefully and sympathetically. Workload must not get out of control. Teachers and others in the service should feel valued. They need to believe that their opinions are welcomed and that their concerns are acted upon.

Finally, there are no substitutes for ambition and courage. Without these great human qualities, all other qualities are wasted. ▼

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**Keir Bloomer** is the chair of the Education Committee of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and is a member of the review group that wrote *A Curriculum for Excellence*

*This article is the text of a speech given at the IWA's Common Purposes event on 7 February 2019; it was published online the following day at [www.iwa.wales/click](http://www.iwa.wales/click)*



## Welsh renewable energy targets – can we deliver?

**Rhea Stevens** reports from a recent IWA Roundtable sponsored by Innogy, and concludes that meeting ambitious targets requires sharing both the story and the load

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I have a healthy scepticism of ambitious government policy targets. In particular, targets projected far into the future introduced by politicians who are unlikely to be held directly accountable for whether they are met or not

During five of the six years I spent working on vulnerable children's policy, the Welsh Government's 2005 ambition to end child poverty by 2020, introduced in support of Tony Blair's commitment in 1999, was a key policy driver. The policy commitment in the then Welsh Assembly Government's strategy *A fair future for our children* reads: 'The Assembly Government confirms its commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020, and is ready to be held accountable for the actions it takes alongside its partners'.

Fast-forward eleven years to 2016: the target was quietly dropped with the minimum of uproar from politicians – only a few stand out for me – the public and the media. The figures then were that 30% of children in Wales lived in relative income poverty (the most up-to-date estimate is 28%).

In my mind, there's a whole series of questions still to be answered on the child poverty target. Were the actions taken in Wales the right ones and did we do enough with what we had? Was it ever realistic to commit to a target so far in the future and exposed to forces beyond the Welsh Government's control?

Similar questions, and many others, were the focus of a recent IWA roundtable discussion, sponsored by Innogy, who operate about a third of Wales' renewable generation. The purpose of the roundtable was to explore what the new Welsh Government renewable energy targets mean in practice; whether they are realistic or ambitious enough; and the short- to medium-term actions which will enable us to reach them.

In fairness, public policy in Wales has moved on in many ways since the 2005 commitment, and the Welsh Government's renewable energy targets reflect some of the positives of the journey. In September 2017, Lesley Griffiths, then the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs, announced new renewable energy targets for Wales:

- Wales to be generating 70% of its electricity consumption from renewable energy by 2030
- One Gigawatt of renewable electricity capacity in Wales to be locally owned by 2030
- By 2020, new renewable energy projects in Wales will have at least an element of local ownership

There are some real positives to be noted here: many of the levers to take action are within the gift of the current devolution settlement; the progress required builds on existing projects and capacity in Wales; and at least one of the targets will be measurable in this Welsh Government term.

Better. Much better. But good intentions do not a renewable Wales make.

The fundamental challenge inherent in mapping a course to meeting the targets is that there's so much about demand for electricity in 2030 that we just don't know yet. Society and its expectations are changing rapidly and we don't yet know the impact things like electric vehicles, decarbonisation of heating, or more energy efficient homes will have on overall demand.

However, participants in the roundtable discussion were unanimous: don't get lost in the fog. To make a difference, we simply have to use our best estimate and translate it to required projects, increased capacity and most importantly take action wherever we are able to meet the likely requirements of a future electricity supply system which is decentralised and demand-led.



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So, what tools do we have and how can we deploy them?

Increased political support for renewables from the new First Minister, Mark Drakeford AM, was seen as a game-changing opportunity to press the importance of a strong renewables supply chain in Wales, to ensure Wales can seize on the opportunities of new and existing technologies and that communities benefit more from the associated economic benefits.

One contributor pointed to the experience of Scotland, where renewable energy is seen as ‘a part of Scottish national identity’, supported by consistent political leadership, and where it has turned former industrial areas into hotbeds of renewable activity. Marine energy was viewed as a source of significant potential for Wales, presenting the opportunity to develop a niche sector including supply chains and intellectual property. It was noted, however, that to date demonstration zones have largely been driven by European money which will not be available after Brexit. This is going to mean tough spending choices from the Welsh Government.

Resource, unsurprisingly, was a recurrent theme, with contributors pointing to squeezed local authority budgets and the environment brief overall which has curtailed action. The public sector was seen as a substantive enabler of a renewable future for Wales,



with new models of delivery suggested such as allocated sites for small scale community developments on the Welsh Government estate; larger scale development on Natural Resources Wales land in which Welsh Government has a stake; or shared ownership schemes between developers, community groups and the public sector. It was felt by some that Natural Resources Wales in particular could do more to facilitate deployment on their land. UK Government subsidies for renewables are soon likely to be a thing of the past, and are unlikely to be reinstated, but all agreed that limited practical progress could be made without some mechanism to allocate resource from government.

The grid remains a central challenge, particularly in rural mid-Wales. It takes substantial time to build new grid infrastructure, and, meanwhile the market and regulatory environment change quickly. Participants proposed the Welsh Government could help to provide certainty through upfront, proactive investment for strategic sites, helping to give Distribution Network Operators the confidence to invest in preparation for schemes likely to go ahead. It was also suggested that the newly established National Infrastructure Commission for Wales could undertake a strategic review of the Welsh grid to help Wales get ready for the decentralised and decarbonised energy system of the future.

Whilst many present agreed there is a warm, general public buy-in to renewables, this does not always translate locally to public support for specific planning applications. In short, we need to ramp it up. Participants agreed that we need to do much more to articulate the ecological, economic and social benefits of renewable energy to Wales and local communities in real-life terms such as lower energy bills and more and better jobs.

## Roundtable Attendees

Alex Meredith, *innogy*

Andrew Regan, *Ofgem*

Andrew RT Davies, *Welsh Conservatives, AM*

Auriol Miller, *IWA (Chair)*

Dan MacCallum, *Awel Aman Tawe*

Derek Stephen, *Natural Resources Wales*

Emma Pinchbeck, *RenewableUK*

Jeremy Smith, *innogy*

John Lloyd Jones, *National Infrastructure Commission for Wales*

Nigel Turvey, *Western Power Distribution*

Patrick Robinson, *Burges Salmon*

Rhea Stevens, *IWA*

Ron Loveland, *Welsh Government*

Shea Buckland-Jones, *IWA*

Sioned James, *Plaid Cymru*

If increased public acceptance can be secured, government will need to enable and create the conditions for the private sector and communities to act on this opportunity. It was noted that such an outcome would require effective engagement, not solely education. It means meeting consumers where they are – not where we want them to be – and that the decentralised energy system of the future would require far more democratic features. A substantial challenge and opportunity that needs far greater consideration.

Heat and transport remain big nuts to crack, but everyone present agreed Wales can make significant progress if we act now. In principle, by virtue of being smaller and not split into departments in the same way as the UK Government, the Welsh Government has an opportunity to act more nimbly across policy silos to seize opportunities. But government can't and shouldn't be expected to do it all: a partnership or sector deal between government (at all scales), industry, communities and grid companies would be required to lead to a substantive increase in the scale of renewables.

In short, the message from the day was that Wales needs to act now – with the tools we have now – to pave

the way for the future energy system to be possible. 2030 may feel a long way off but it's the actions we take now that matter most. Making significant progress will require a collection of many small things that contribute towards a bigger story.

And therein lies the crux of the issue for me: a shared story. Had the child poverty target catalysed – then developed and maintained – a shared belief that such a seismic change was within our grasps, might we have made better progress? At the very least, we might have collectively created holy hell over missing it.

The Welsh Government renewable energy targets are a point on a timeline: getting Wales there needs to start now and is going to take action, ambition and courage from each and every one of us. ▼

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**Rhea Stevens** is Policy, Projects and External Affairs Manager for the IWA

*The IWA/Innogy Roundtable discussion took place at the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay on 31 January 2019*



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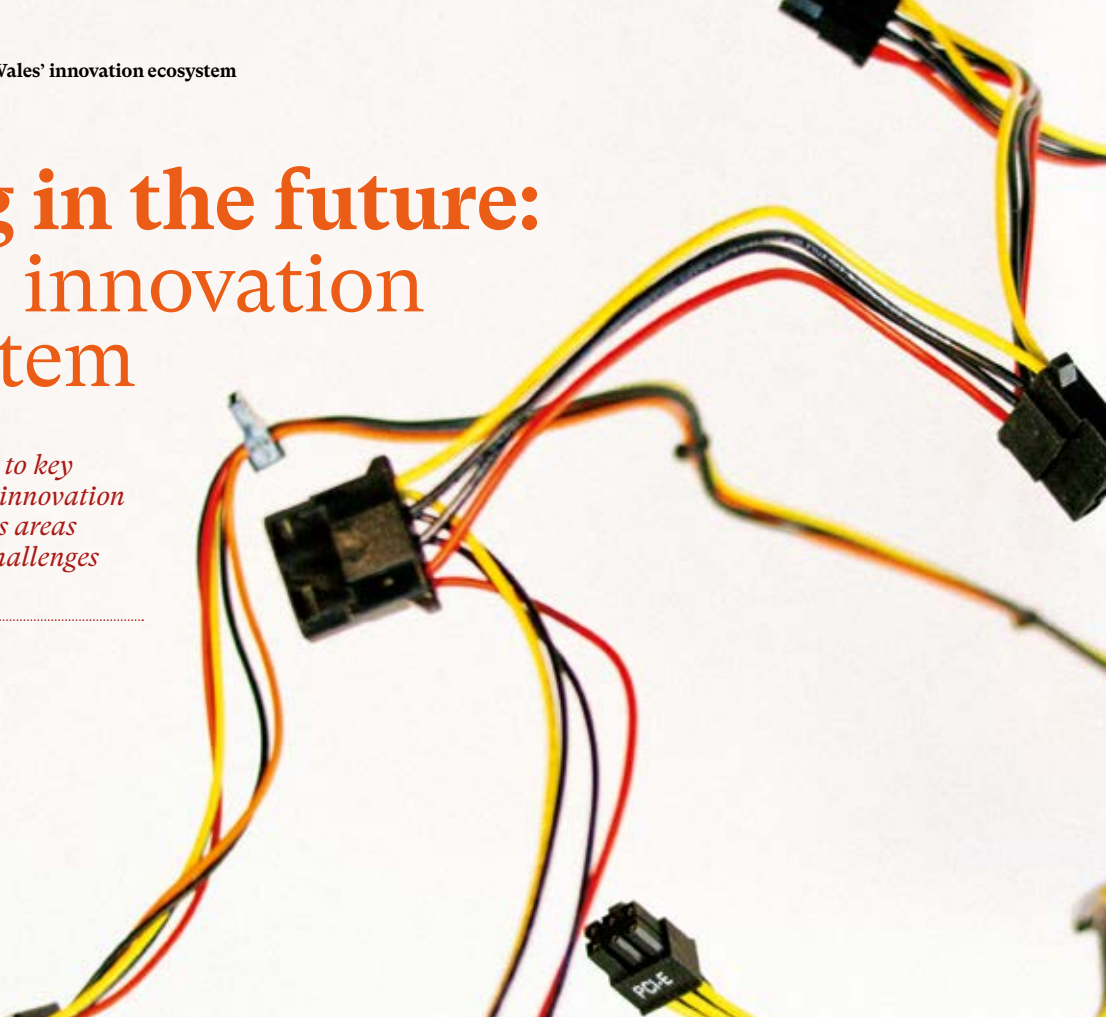
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# Living in the future: Wales' innovation ecosystem

**Marc Thomas** *talks to key actors within Wales' innovation ecosystem to assess its areas of strength and the challenges it faces*

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**A**t an event in Cardiff Bay late last year, the term 'innovation ecosystem' was used in relation to Wales. A person representing a notable organisation within that 'ecosystem' retorted, 'When words like ecosystem are used to describe Wales, what is meant exactly?'

It's a good question. What is an innovation ecosystem? And can you really use that to describe what is happening in Wales?

Broadly speaking, an ecosystem denotes actors of different kinds supporting each other in some way. A healthy innovation ecosystem involves universities, government, business large and small, as well as capital that supports the open collaboration between these. The theory is that the easier it is to work across institutional boundaries, the healthier the ecosystem becomes.

Wales has a great and largely unappreciated history

of invention. Robert Recorde, born in Pembrokeshire, was the man who invented the equals sign in the 16th century. Also from Pembrokeshire, William Frost filed a patent for a powered flying machine in 1894 – a decade before the first powered flight by the Wright Brothers. Professor William Mapleson, who died last year, was credited with a number of notable inventions in the area of anaesthesia and pain medicine – work he did in Cardiff.

Our time has its own series of examples of innovation across a range of industries and sectors. In south east Wales, the technology startup community is booming. According to the Tech Nation report – one of the more notable examples of research into startup regions – digital businesses in Cardiff alone had a turnover of £400m in 2016. In 2017, significant growth added a further £240m to the figure, although admittedly that number becomes significantly less impressive when you compare it to

## The difference is marked: in the east of England, 3.5% of of UK Regional GDP is spent on R&D while in Wales that figure is only around 1.2%

Bristol's figure (£7.9bn) in the same period.

Interestingly, a report published in June 2017 by the National Centre for Universities and Business identified a significant discrepancy relation to innovation and Wales: 'While there is evidence that Welsh firms are on average at least as innovation active as their counterparts in other parts of the UK, Wales is in a relatively weak position with regard to the traditional metrics of research and innovation performance such as the percentage of GDP expended on R&D investments by firms,' the report by Professor Kevin Morgan, Dr Adrian Healy, Professor Robert Huggins and Meirion Thomas says.

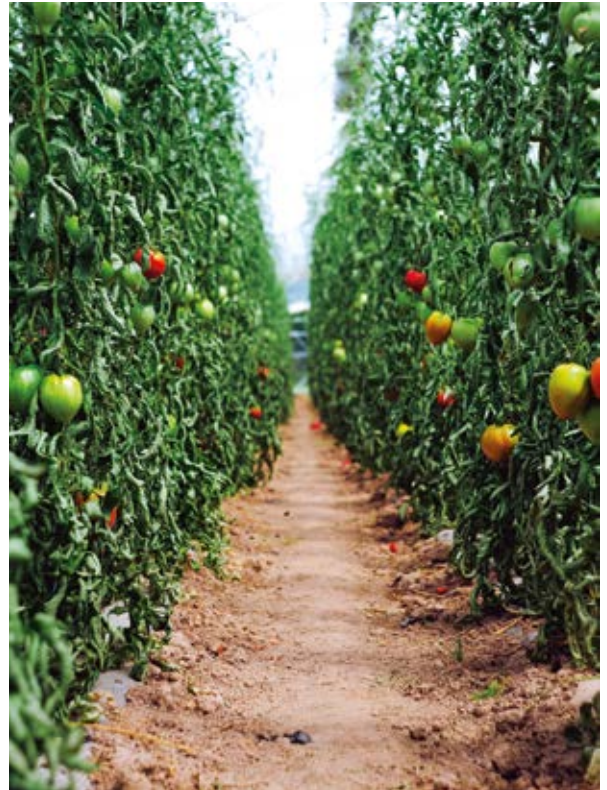
The difference is marked: in the east of England, 3.5% of UK Regional GDP is spent on R&D while in Wales that figure is only around 1.2%.

However, there is a large amount of activity in innovation in the private sector in particular. One exciting phenomenon to have appeared in Wales recently is the move towards exploring how areas that the country has been very strong in historically can be brought into the 21st century. For example, in farming and agricultural technology, an area of the economy which is particularly important to the nation, Wales has seen some really exciting developments.

Most impressive is Phytoponics, a startup based in Aberystwyth which has innovated on hydroponic technology creating a system that increases crop yields by providing a 'warm bag' for crops.

'We're developing for a big commercial project due to be installed December 2019,' says Adam Dixon, CEO of Phytoponics, who studied at Cardiff University. 'It's a big tomato glasshouse near Hull. They're a grower and they've contracted us to do a commercial trial on half an acre. They're aiming to improve their yield.'

Phytoponics technology focuses on the root zone of



produce, enabling growers to control and optimise the root environment. 'It's hard to anticipate yield increase but we aim for 10-20%. Our system can be adapted for lots of different crops and allows more versatility in the marketplace,' he says.

Phytoponics is currently focused on the UK market where they are currently solidifying relationships with customers before developing their relationships abroad. 'We designed our tech to work well in hot, arid countries because it can control the temperature of the root zone,' says Dixon. 'We're talking to growers in Morocco.'

Additionally, in the field of medicine and electronic goods, Sure Chill provides a truly innovative system for storage of medicine in a 'fridge' that doesn't require mains electricity to function.

'We're in 49 countries now – Africa and Asia. We could probably access additional support if we were

better known locally,' says Nigel Saunders CEO of Sure Chill when asked how it is to run a business from Wales. 'People want to be associated with the high quality products Britain is known for. We fly the flag for Wales and we're proud of that.'

Two of Sure Chill's co-founders are from Wales and the company started here too, but the company has its sights firmly fixed upon foreign markets and talent pools. 'We sometimes have to go wider to do recruitment and we need to sell Wales. When people get here, they love it! We built the business on that but that's one of the biggest challenges,' he explains.

The company's innovative system is actually manufactured by third parties while the R&D is conducted in Wales. 'What we've looked at is building all our R&D capability in Wales and then building sales forces closer to the market [in Africa, India etc]. This is what Dyson do just north of Bath,' Saunders explains. 'As a country, we have to start embracing this. Failure is part of the journey and as a nation we have to learn from others and recognise that failure is a learning experience. We need to be more ambitious.'

One of the main difficulties that most entrepreneurs in Wales will speak of is that of running a business when the economy in our country is so small. Worryingly, this barrier is not just measurable by the metric of household wealth, which is a frighteningly low figure for anyone who deals with business-to-customer sales, or the metric of company size which is equally challenging for business-to-business trading, but also by a host of other factors.

'Around 60-70% of food is imported to Wales, especially fresh produce. Brexit is probably going to be a shock. If Wales finds the opportunity, we need to innovate and recreate some of the industry, creating hubs of expertise and industrial excellence. Perhaps we could look at industrial waste energy for use in horticulture around Cardiff,' says Adam Dixon. 'I hope the Welsh Government follow the Dutch example in supporting horticulture. They're one of the biggest exporters of fresh produce in the world.'

Innovative companies rely on markets significant enough to take risks on innovative business models, products and services. When sufficient market opportunity is not available, companies use investment to bolster their efforts to grow businesses.

The Development Bank of Wales is very active in equity investment for innovative companies and their

## In 2014-15, Wales was the only 'region' in the UK to register negative income growth from knowledge exchange activity

stated aim is to have a billion pound impact on the Welsh economy over the next five years by supporting 1,400 businesses helping to safeguard 20,000 jobs.

However, in terms of an ecosystem, it is still a challenge. Aimee Bateman, CEO of Careercake.com – an online training business which has recently struck deals with LinkedIn, the global business social networking platform, talks about her experience of raising investment in Wales: 'Knowing where to look for investment was a challenge for me. I knew I didn't want to go down the Venture Capital funding route and would have preferred private angel investors, but finding those people was a challenge. A challenge that can be overcome with a bit of determination and resilience, but a challenge nonetheless,' she says.

Another common problem in establishing an innovation ecosystem is making sure that it is a true ecosystem rather than just different actors sporadically interacting with each other. In 2014-15, Wales was the only 'region' in the UK to register negative income growth from knowledge exchange activity. Another sobering insight from the *Growing the value of University-Business Interactions in Wales* report mentioned above: 'The loss of innovation and enterprise funding has three debilitating implications for Wales. Firstly, career opportunities for specialised business engagement and commercialisation teams in Welsh higher education institutions (HEIs) have diminished and recruitment and retention made more difficult; secondly, it makes it much more difficult for Welsh HEIs to build sustainable partnerships with

businesses; and thirdly, the zero budget for [innovation and enterprise funding] sends a very strong signal to businesses and to academics and researchers that university-business interaction is not valued in Wales and is a poor relation to teaching and research.'

In stark contrast to this report, Caroline Thompson, CEO of Be The Spark, an independent organisation which aims to stimulate and engage differing actors in the Welsh innovation ecosystem to inspire innovation driven entrepreneurship across the whole country, says: 'A key strength in Wales is that we (the ecosystem) are largely well known to one another. However when you overplay a strength, it can become a weakness, so are we leveraging our connectivity in the right way?'

Thompson argues: 'Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) research has shown that a collaborative and communicative ecosystem has the most positive impact on a country's entrepreneurial and economic success. We need to come together as a community, across the stakeholder boundaries of government, corporate business, academia and risk capital to offer a

more holistic support network to entrepreneurs.'

The opportunities for Wales to continue building on its existing strengths in innovation are good and the basic foundations of an innovation ecosystem really are visible if you scratch beneath the surface of business news and shouting social media posts. But the difficulty will be in cultivating the opportunities that are vitally important to a true ecosystem: how will we create a knowledge pipeline from universities to private businesses in the face of harsh cuts? How will we ensure that venture capital is sufficient for entrepreneurs to stand up to difficult market conditions that are present in Wales? How, at a time when Britain is becoming a hermit kingdom, can we think about meaningful ways to build global businesses?

It looks cold out there, and I can say that as an entrepreneur myself. ▶

**Marc Thomas** is CEO of Doopoll, a member of the IWA Board and *the welsh agenda* Editorial Group

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# Can our food system deliver prosperity for all in Wales?

**Katie Palmer** argues that now is the time to build a food system unique to Wales and good for all

**I**t seems there is not a day that goes by without another food-related report, consultation or piece of research hitting the news or social media. Reports highlight the discourse within the food system as experts argue, contest and challenge only to confuse the public further. Fundamentally the challenge is that food itself cannot be considered in isolation. There must be coherent integration between key arenas: education and employment, health, the environment, housing, transport, planning, social security, manufacture and trade. Policies need to be aligned to influence how we produce and consume food in Wales and, with limited public sector resources, targeted holistically to ensure all citizens have access to sustainable and healthy diets.

As things stand in Wales, we are failing our current and future generations in this endeavour and prosperity is certainly not experienced by all.

Over half our population is obese or overweight and diabetes sucks up 10% of the NHS Wales budget, yet we witness children rummaging in bins of fast food outlets whilst charities and community groups scramble around for what resources they can to compensate for a social security system which is failing people. Value within the food chain is not evenly distributed, with farmers at one end fighting for a fair return for their endeavours and retail staff at the other resorting to the very food banks that their places of work supply because they are not being paid a fair wage.

Production needs to change in line with dietary guidance. Even in a child's first 1,000 days, parents are exposed to unhelpful advertising promoting 'baby foods' that bear no resemblance to the food the child is eating. Then we wonder why 95% of our teenagers aren't eating enough veg. Britain is the largest consumer of ultra-processed foods in Europe. Brand loyalty is built at a young age, one example being fast food companies sponsoring grassroots sport: with these mixed messages it's no wonder we're losing a grip on our food reality and heritage. Meanwhile our insect population is declining at an alarming rate (we can't produce food without them) and climate change is impacting our harvests (this year's potato harvest is our smallest since 1960). Our food system may be delivering prosperity for some but it's certainly not delivering it for all.

Food Sense Wales is attempting to unpack and support the integration of the policies affecting the food system in Wales, to create a more democratic and accountable approach to food by listening to voices

and making connections. So whilst Brexit sucks the collective resources, energy and will from the system, we have brought together a group of authors to share their experiences of working with the people and stakeholders involved in and affected by the food system in Wales and asked them what they think is the wise approach to reimagining our food system.

Wales has a tremendous opportunity to be ambitious and to do things differently. Now feels like the time to stop, listen and make a holistic, pragmatic plan of action. Brexit serves as a disrupter and the framework of the Future Generations Act can act as a foundation to build a unique food system that could be enshrined in our very right to good food that leads to prosperity for everyone.

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**Katie Palmer** is Programme Manager for Food Sense Wales. She is mentor to the Wales Food Poverty Alliance and a member of the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board





**A**lmost 90% of Wales is farmed. How this land is managed has a huge impact on biodiversity and the essential public goods nature provides society, such as drinking water and carbon sequestration, as well as our ongoing capacity to produce food. Unfortunately, all is not well with our green and pleasant land, and there is an increasing body of evidence that shows we need to do a better job of looking after nature for current and future generations.

We should all be very concerned by Wales' first State of Natural Resources Report, which concludes that none of Wales' natural ecosystems, the life support system on which we all depend, are resilient. The ongoing decline in biodiversity, the building blocks of ecosystems, and associated environmental degradation is a clear signal, as highlighted in *The State of Nature 2016 Report*, with one in fourteen species in Wales threatened with extinction, including 57% of wild plants, 60% of butterflies and 40% of birds in decline. Because of this Wales is now considered one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.

So how has this happened? Both reports cite agricultural change as a key factor: change that has largely been driven by production-based policies with unintended consequences for nature and which are inadequate in helping farmers meet mounting environmental challenges, including climate change. Ironically, these policies haven't worked out that well for most farmers either with the majority of Welsh farming dependent on income support.

**One in fourteen species in Wales threatened with extinction, including 57% of wild plants, 60% of butterflies and 40% of birds in decline**

In 2014, 7,000 obsolete farms were removed from the record, indicating that family farms, communities and culture should also be added to the list of casualties of the current agricultural support system.

If we are to have a resilient agriculture and land management sector in Wales, it's obvious we need to change how and why we manage land. Exiting the EU provides an unique opportunity to develop a new sustainable land management programme targeting taxpayers' money to help Welsh food producers become more efficient and pay them for looking after nature and the wider environment for all of us. Whilst reversing past decline won't be easy, there are many examples of responsible farming in Wales that already produce high quality food and look after nature, showing it can be done. The challenge now is to develop an approach to land use and management where these exemplars become the norm.

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**Arfon Williams** is Land Use Manager for RSPB Cymru; he is responsible for the society's land management and agriculture policies for Wales



# A New Food Diplomacy

**I**n terms of a policy foundation, we are well set in Wales to facilitate positive change for health, society and the environment. The question is, how do we deliver to achieve our potential? This is a complex and challenging area with multiple stakeholders; many people are working hard to find ways of translating policy into practice. One thing that's clear is that positive change does not happen by itself – it requires active facilitation.

Peas Please is an initiative aimed at getting people to eat more vegetables, and action research with organisations working on a systemic approach to increasing vegetable consumption provides some insight into what it might take to deliver change. Peas Please has succeeded in securing commitments and action to increase vegetable availability from participants across the food system – government, producers, wholesalers, retailers and caterers. Time will tell if these pledges translate into measurable increases in consumption; either way, there are lessons to be learnt.

Critical reflection on practice highlights that a new food diplomacy is being deployed. The complexities of the food system and the divergences between its stakeholders mean that in order to facilitate positive change – not just economic, but also in terms of public health, society and the environment – a great deal of mediation and diplomacy is required.

This new food diplomacy involves many elements

of practice in three main areas – pragmatism, social skills, and effective communication. Pragmatism is a key element; particularly having a clear focus on vision, with flexibility on how to get there. This is aided by persistence and continually reflecting upon and adapting practice. Good social skills are also vital; particularly using empathy, being inclusive, and carefully navigating power dynamics. Critically, this requires humility, listening carefully, and admitting that you don't have all the answers. Finally, endeavouring to communicate research simply and effectively, and concentrating on the art of the possible and the power of the positive are also important elements of food diplomacy practice.

Peas Please's project board – the Food Foundation, Nourish Scotland, WWF Food Cardiff and now Food Sense Wales – are all engaging in this new type of food diplomacy. They are highlighting a way to translate policy into action for positive change in Wales and the UK. The practice of this new food diplomacy is a key tool to facilitate the change we need, and this should be recognised, taught and promoted widely.

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**Amber Wheeler** is a member of the Peas Please project board and has recently completed a PhD thesis at the University of South Wales reflecting on the practice of implementing a food system approach to public health nutrition



## And we know that what children eat has lasting consequences for their health and development

as their own individual well-being. This stigma plays out in school, can be inadvertently exacerbated by teachers and is a critical consideration in what might be done to prevent food poverty. Children from Prestatyn School have developed a film about this where they explore one another's perceptions of food poverty. And these same children have joined forces with more than 300 other children from across the UK to develop their own contribution to the Inquiry: a report entitled *What Young People Say About Food*.

**T**he Children's Future Food Inquiry puts children's lived experiences at its heart. There is a lot of discussion within the media and community groups about food poverty, often prompted by the periodic publication of food bank data, but children's voices are generally absent. Yet we know from evidence elsewhere that the combination of food insecurity in the household (and the impact this has on eating habits and mental well being) and a food environment which is heavily skewed in favour of unhealthy food is likely to be very damaging for children. And we know that what children eat has lasting consequences for their health and development.

Children's lived experience of food can't be known by food policy experts and yet listening to this experience will bring a critical perspective on potential solutions. Professor Corinna Hawkes says, 'Lived experience is not "right" or "wrong," "correct" or "incorrect" but reflects how people experience their lives. It provides evidence not available from other sources, and a starting point for exploring systemic issues that lie beneath people's perspective on their own realities'.

The children we have involved in the Children's Future Food Inquiry have spoken to us extensively about the stigma surrounding food poverty and what this means for their relationships with one another, as well

These perspectives from children form a critical component of the Inquiry but not the only one. These experiences will be added to with expert testimony from adults working with children across the UK, and secondary analysis of national data on the affordability of a healthy diet (which shows that 160,000 children in Wales live in families who earn less than £15,860 a year and would therefore have to spend 26% of their after housing budget on food to eat the Government's recommended diet), academic literature review and policy analysis. The challenge, as we compile the Inquiry report, which will be launched at the end of April, will be to use children's perspectives to provide a critical framing of the issues, to ground their ideas and perspectives in an understanding of policy and practice to ensure the final recommendations are actionable, and drive systemic change.

Making 'wise' policy decisions is never easy, and many fail in their implementation, but discussing policy options with those who should ultimately benefit has to be a part of the process of decision making.

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**Anna Taylor** is the Executive Director for the Food Foundation which works to secure systemic change to help everyone eat healthier and more sustainable diets



## A business perspective

**A**s a company that operates as an intermediary and manufacturer, Castell Howell is well placed to see developments both upstream and downstream of the Welsh food supply chain. At the time of writing we are no clearer on what the implications of Brexit will be, and like many food businesses, we are concerned.

Official Government data shows that in 2017 we were 50% self-sufficient, with 30% of food imported from the EU and the balance globally (Defra, 2017). Will the post-Brexit landscape bring opportunities for Welsh suppliers to fill the void and take us towards self-sufficiency, or present a threat if products are devalued dramatically due to new barriers to export? New trade deals may bring cheaper food to the UK and render our indigenous farmers uncompetitive without the safety blanket of EU protection. Wales will need to reposition itself in order to provide the diversity of food that the consumer has become accustomed to.

The food sector within Wales employs 18% of the workforce. Median wages in Welsh growth sectors show that this sector (2015 figures) is one of the worst in terms of hourly earnings. It is not difficult to appreciate the financial impact nationally of such an important sector having historically low wages.

With total annual public sector spend of £6bn every

year, this sector can influence its suppliers to adopt practices to promote prosperity and well-being. The Code of Practice, Ethical Employment in Supply Chains, if enforced, should ensure that all suppliers to the public sector adhere to twelve commitments, including work to combat modern slavery and agreeing to pay the Living Wage. But requirements should be mandatory, and not voluntary, for *all* suppliers and supply chains to ensure equity. Meanwhile businesses have a responsibility to support initiatives which drive positive environmental change like Courtauld 2025, or support health and wellbeing like Peas Please, which aims to drive up vegetable consumption.

We recognise the importance of both attracting and maintaining staff, acutely aware that Brexit immigration policies will have a key role to play, and a lack of workers will no doubt inflate the hourly rate offered, and increase competition for skilled workers. The challenge is to make our industry an attractive proposition. This has been recognised by Welsh Government through identifying the food industry as a priority sector. Funds have been allocated to accelerate training and apprenticeships that are sub-sector specific and there are numerous initiatives to attract new, indigenous entrants to both primary and secondary manufacturing.

The Waste Resource Action Plan (WRAP), launched the Food Waste Roadmap in 2018, with the aim of reducing food waste by 50% by 2030. It is estimated that the UK wastes in excess of £20bn of food annually, with the average family throwing away £810 worth of food every year. Companies such as Castell Howell dedicate time and effort to procure, sell and deliver food. It is disheartening to consider that an unacceptable proportion of the 1,000 or so pallets we delivery daily will go to the bin.

The Welsh food sector does have the opportunity to deliver prosperity for all, but especially post-Brexit business and government will need to work ever more collaboratively to ensure the appropriate policy, legislation and business incentives are integrated and deployed equitably to ensure a safe and resilient food system for Wales. ▶

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**Edward Morgan** is Group CSR and Training Manager at Castell Howell and sits on the BitC (Business in the Community) Wales advisory board

# The whoosh effect: a letter to Lee Waters

**Derek Walker**, *of the Wales Co-Operative Centre, writes an open letter to the Welsh Government's new Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport*

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## Dear Lee Waters

Congratulations on your ministerial appointment. This must be a dream job for you, taking on responsibility for areas which you are passionate about. There will be a queue of people making their way to your door. Like them I want to make the case for you to give priority to a particular subject. I am hoping this open letter will get your attention. We don't need more money but we do need your help.

The subject is employee ownership. We want to work with you to put more Welsh businesses in the hands of their employees. 10% of the wealthiest people in the UK own almost 70% of its financial wealth. Let's do our bit to change that in Wales and create a more equal economy.

Greater levels of employee ownership would help Welsh Government to deliver on many of its policy objectives. It is a proven route to improving the productivity of businesses – described as a 'whoosh effect' by our clients. What is more, employee-owned businesses are far less likely to move outside Wales or be sold to large corporations.

Employee ownership is also a tried, tested but often overlooked succession route for business owners who want to retire. It is rarely an option that is presented to them when they are looking to exit the business. The Welsh economy is dependent on small businesses. In Wales we have a higher proportion of older business owners and therefore the issue of business transition

failures (note – not business failures) is greater. Our research has shown that three out of four business owners in Wales have not made plans for the future transfer of their business. We have a problem here – and an opportunity.

While employee ownership is not a panacea, it is a compelling solution. As the Employee Ownership Association puts it in an excellent report they published last year: 'Employee Ownership provides a clear and attractive dividend with particular relevance to succession and growth planning for SMEs and family businesses'.

The employee-owned sector outperforms businesses with other ownership structures in terms of productivity, financial returns and business resilience. These businesses make a considerable contribution to economic growth. It is common sense. If you have a stake in the business you are more likely to go the extra mile.

This is not obvious to everyone, however, and where we need your help is with raising awareness of the employee ownership option. We need to reach business owners themselves, but crucially we also need to get to those that advise them – accountants, lawyers and bankers. At the moment business owners are not made aware that they could pass the business on to their employees. And when they are, it is not done at an early enough stage to give staff the time to raise the money to buy out the business. There is not a quick fix to this, but

**‘A surge of ambition swept across the firm when staff realised they didn’t have to just do what the founders’ mission was – they can run with it now... when that happens, you get a whoosh effect’**

**Top:** Guy Watson, Riverford Organic Farmers

**Bottom:** Ownership Effect Inquiry July 2017, Arup offices, Cardiff Bay (left to right) Derek Walker, Wales Co-operative Centre; Deborah Oxley, Employee Ownership Association; Baroness Sharon Bowles of Berkhamstead; Arup employee



with your help a sustained campaign to raise awareness about employee ownership amongst the business community could be make a big difference.

The other area where we need your assistance is in persuading the banks that they could and should lend to businesses where employees want to take a substantial stake and have a meaningful voice in the business. At the moment access to finance is acting as a block on more deals. Too often banks and other financial institutions view employee-owned business as too risky, having a perception these firms have ‘too many cooks’, rendering decision-making difficult and, I fear, holding a view that employee ownership is all a bit ‘alternative’. There is no evidence that shows employee-owned business are more risky. The opposite is usually true when power lies in the hands of the many, not the few. Nonetheless the perception is prevalent and, with your help, we would like to change that opinion in Wales.

There are already some great employee-owned businesses in Wales, but we want to see more. Aber Instruments was founded in Aberystwyth in 1988. It produces measurement equipment for use in fermentation and brewing. Originally owned by four partners, it decided to widen share ownership using a tax advantaged share ownership scheme. Individual employees acquired a direct share in the business. Aber Instruments speak about the productivity gain they achieved: ‘A surge of ambition swept across the firm when staff realised they didn’t have to just do what the founders’ mission was – they can run with it now... when that happens, you get a whoosh effect.’

From 2004, a proportion of profits were paid into an Employee Benefit Trust where they were used to gradually buy out the shares of the founders. Today, the company is 100% employee-owned and the company is still firmly rooted in its home town of Aberystwyth. It cannot be sold to an external buyer unless the employee owners and trustees agree to the sale.

Everyone knows about John Lewis, but usually people’s knowledge starts and ends there. But there exist many other successful and well-known businesses whose employee ownership status is less well known. Wilkin and Sons (the jam makers), Arup and Riverford Organic Farmers are other examples. These businesses are ready and willing to do their bit to help raise awareness in Wales.



**An independent evaluation shows that Scotland has seen a tenfold return on investment for every £1 devoted to on-the-ground-support**

We are not in a terrible place. Unlike in England, we do have a centre of expertise in the small team here at the Wales Co-operative Centre that is able to provide specialist business advice. There is a lot to learn from Scotland, however. As well as making available expert business advice, they have also carried out a long-term programme of awareness to promote the model, led by the Scottish Government. This is now showing dividends. An independent evaluation shows that Scotland has seen a tenfold return on investment for every £1 devoted to on-the-ground-support.

In Wales we have been justifiably driven by the need to create jobs over the last few years and we have been successful in doing so. As you will know, the rate of unemployment in Wales now stands at 3.8% compared with an average rate of 4.1% across the UK. This gives us the opportunity to focus on other things, not just jobs. Employee buy outs don't usually create new jobs when they happen, but they do help improve productivity and facilitate wealth distribution.

There is the potential to create a greater 'whoosh effect' here in Wales. Employee ownership aligns so closely to Welsh Government's commitment to inclusive economic growth and to supporting the foundational economy, which is where many employee-owned businesses can be found. There is not an easy or overnight solution. But

we can certainly up our game. A joined-up campaign to raise awareness, spearheaded by Welsh Government and supported by the Wales Co-operative Centre, would be a good place to start. Other bodies such as the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses and the ACCA could all be brought on board. These bodies already see the benefit for their members and have collaborated on work in Wales in the past.

I wish you the best of luck in your new role and look forward to working with you.

Yours in co-operation,

**Derek Walker**

CEO, Wales Co-operative Centre

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#### **Useful links:**

Rooted and Resilient; the case for employee ownership in the Welsh private sector:

<https://wales.coop/succession/>

The Ownership Effect Enquiry:

<http://theownershipeffect.co.uk/>

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Mae National Theatre Wales (NTW) yn creu theatr arloesol a radical ar draws tirwedd Cymru. Mewn llai na degawd rydym wedi dod yn gwmni theatr Saesneg ei iaith blaenllaw Cymru, gan holi'n gyson beth yw theatr, a'r hyn y gall ei gyflawni. Wrth inni baratoi i nodi ein degfed penblwydd, mae NTW yn dymuno i adeiladu perthnasoedd ystyrlon gyda busnesau ar draws y wlad. Byddwn yn cyflwyno prosiectau arloesol ag iddynt werth economaidd a chymdeithasol i greu partneriaethau pwrpasol sy'n gyfranogol, yn agored, ac yn gilyddol ysbrydoledig.

Cysylltwch ag Esther Morris [esthermorris@nationaltheatrewales.org](mailto:esthermorris@nationaltheatrewales.org) i drafod sut y gall eich cwmni Fuddsoddi mewn Arloesedd. Contact Esther Morris [esthermorris@nationaltheatrewales.org](mailto:esthermorris@nationaltheatrewales.org) to explore how your company can Invest in Innovation.

## Buddsoddi mewn Arloesedd Invest in Innovation

We create radical and innovative theatre throughout the landscape of Wales. In less than a decade we have become Wales' leading English-language theatre company, constantly questioning what theatre is, and what it can achieve. As we prepare to mark our tenth birthday, NTW is looking to build meaningful relationships with businesses across the nation. We will deliver innovative projects of economic and social value to create bespoke partnerships which are engaged, open, and mutually inspiring.



# What is Good Help?

**Alice Turner** outlines new research around Good Help and considers what organisations in Wales are doing to implement its characteristics

In February 2018, Nesta and OSCA published a report called *Good and bad help: How purpose and confidence transform lives*. It was followed in summer 2018 with the Good Help Awards which sought to find and highlight the work of organisations that offered effective and person-centred support across many different services. Finalists included NHS Community Pain Clinic, Off the Record in Bristol and the winner, Blue Marble Training, based in London, which runs training programmes for 16-25 year olds with challenging lives, offering tailored careers training whilst facilitating personal development and coaching.

Good Help is the right support at the right time that supports an individual to thrive. Frequently, help offered to vulnerable people and those at risk is short-term and doesn't take into account the full set of challenges experienced by that person that may hinder their chances of succeeding in their goal. Whilst 'bad help' could be defined as service-oriented – meeting the needs or outcomes pre-set by an organisation, 'good help' counters

with a careful, enabling offer of support with purpose, building confidence and self-efficacy in the individual.

A history of ideas that have contributed to the current understanding of what Good Help is include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Albert Bandura's paper, *Self-efficacy: Towards a unifying theory of behavioural change* and Susan Michie's COM-B model which identified three elements of behaviour change: capability, opportunity and motivation.

The authors of the 'Good Help' report have considered these, alongside the work of organisations across the UK and internationally, and have identified the following seven characteristics found where Good Help is offered.

## Seven Characteristics of Good Help

The Good Help report identifies patterns of behaviour that lead to confidence, self-efficacy and independence. Taking into account 80 case studies, the authors found seven common characteristics that came together to form a project offering Good Help.

Those characteristics are:

- 1 Power Sharing
- 2 Enabling Conversations
- 3 Tailoring

#### 4 Scaffolding

*Scaffolding describes a system in which practical and emotional support that enables individuals to act is provided first and then less actively offered over time. This means that change is more likely to be sustained after the initial support is offered, and then with less frequent interventions, creates a situation that builds the confidence in the individual to take action themselves.*

#### 5 Role Modelling and Peer support

#### 6 Opportunity making

*Creating new opportunities, whilst decreasing barriers encourages the individual to feel that the help on offer is for them, can lead to better engagement with a supportive project. These opportunities could be offered by brokering relationships, offering new services such as training or leisure activities, providing budgets for travel or equipment that mean existing opportunities are now within reach, or asking what barriers exist and listening carefully.*

#### 7 Transparency

### What does Good Help look like in Wales?

Organisations across Wales work hard to support the people they aim to help. Increasing challenges for organisations and individuals can create scenarios where the help offered isn't working well, and the needs of the person are lost. Two case studies from Wales demonstrate approaches that incorporate the seven common characteristics of Good Help.

#### Case Study: Tempo Time Credits

Tempo (previously known as Spice) work with local communities to develop time-based rewards that enable those who volunteer to earn credits that can be exchanged for tickets to theatre and cinema, fitness classes, training courses and other experiences. Tempo engages people who may not have volunteered before; 49% of Time Credit earners had not volunteered before. By creating tangible connections between people, voluntary organisations and activities in their local area, Tempo aim to improve health and wellbeing, and maintain strong, connected communities.

Tempo was established in 2008 and since then half a million Time Credits have been earned. Working with partnership organisations including local authorities, health boards, recovery organisations and schools, they develop a set of outcomes and build a tailored programme that responds to these. In 2018, Tempo worked with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board through Welsh Government's Innovate to Save programme to test the social prescription of Time Credits to those experiencing low-level anxiety and depression. Individuals identified by an in-surgery social prescriber were offered upfront Time Credits to spend on social and cultural experiences, and were then encouraged to take up volunteering opportunities to earn further credits.

Earning Time Credits injects a further sense of purpose into the act of volunteering time; earned Time Credits can be used by the individual, or given to family and friends to enjoy. Creating confidence by making information and the intention of the opportunity clear removes potential barriers and encourages continued engagement.

#### Case Study: Cartrefi Cymru Floating Support

Cartrefi Cymru work in rural Wales to support people with and without learning disabilities to live their lives with high quality support when needed. Since being established in 1989, Cartrefi have continually innovated and adapted the care and support they offer to ensure that everyone has access to the best support for them; they continue to develop their model to include Active Support, Positive Behavioural Support and Autism Sensitive Support. In 2016 they became a co-operative.

In Brecon, Cartrefi Cymru piloted 'floating support', which aimed to reverse a traditional top-down approach to providing care. In collaboration with those they were supporting, they designed a more flexible model that enabled people to request care when they required it, tailored to their needs at that time. Putting people in control of their own care improved independence and confidence to act. ➤

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**Alice Turner** is Engagement and Communications Manager for Y Lab, Nesta's public services innovation lab for Wales. Y Lab is a partnership between Cardiff University and Nesta, supporting new ideas and researching how and why innovation happens



**Dylan Moore** *counts his blessings from a year as Hay Festival's International Fellow, and looks forward to its legacy*

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**C**reative Wales Hay Festival International Fellow. An impressive title that often leaves people open-mouthed in bewilderment rather than awe. Even if you know what Hay Festival is, what would an International Fellow actually *do*?

'Oh well, basically,' I have become more and more blasé about saying, 'I travel around the world attending all of the Hay Festivals. Spain, Peru, Colombia, Mexico... and Hay, of course.' Pressed for more detail, I usually say that in each country I am interviewed about my own book of travel essays, *Driving Home Both Ways*, and that I also get to interview an eclectic range of writers whose work nevertheless intersects in some way with my own. It's nice work if you can get it, and is so much more than travelling the world talking about books, as wonderful as that would be in its own right.

A surprising number of people, I've discovered, are not aware of Hay Festival's international reach. The world's biggest and best festival of literature and the arts, improbably founded in the tiny mid-Wales market



town of Hay-on-Wye in 1988, has since visited umpteen cities around the world, from Aarhus in Denmark to Zacatecas in Mexico. Beirut, Dhaka, Nairobi and the Maldives have all hosted their own versions of what goes on in the Black Mountains for those ten magical days in late May and early June. But Hay is not a franchise. Each festival has its own distinct flavour, and under its banner inspired by Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Imagina El Mundo* – Imagine the World, many of those attending the current suite of festivals, all in the Spanish-speaking world – both readers and writers – are understandably hazy about the festival's origins in Wales, particularly given that in Spanish 'Hay' translates as simply 'There is'.

I'm the eighth International Fellow, following in the footsteps of Jon Gower, Tiffany Murray, Owen Sheers, Fflur Dafydd, Eurig Salisbury, Jay Griffiths and my immediate predecessor, novelist for young adults Jenny Valentine. Before setting out for Segovia, the first leg of the tour, I rang Valentine for the lowdown. 'It's what you make it,' was the thrust of Jenny's advice. 'Go with your own mission...'

The Fellowship is a free ticket to a global fiesta, a professional development programme, a writing residency, one long luncheon, and a dream. It sometimes seems like one of those who-would-you-invite-to-a-dinner-party conversations miraculously transmogrified into real life. I have shared taxis from airport terminals with winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, delivered workshops for postgraduate students following internationally renowned human rights lawyers, and

conversed with world-famous novelists over lunch. The Fellowship is also a non flag-flying exercise in flying the flag for Wales. Partly funded by Arts Council Wales, the scheme ensures at least one Welsh writer is among this august company at each of Hay's international iterations. When I first found out that I would be this year's Fellow, I also liked to think of it as the writing equivalent of winning my first cap, a sports-style 'call-up' onto the international stage.

Hay are not only expert in curating festivals featuring the very best writers and thinkers from around the world; they also select the best hotel roof terraces, with the most spectacular views. In Segovia in September, Penny Compton, Hay's box office manager, showed me the view from atop the Hotel Real Segovia. While I clambered up the final set of stairs to take in the cathedral's soft golden domes and spires, Penny fed the vending machine a couple of euros and pulled out some beers. We cracked open the ring-pulls, said cheers, and settled into one of those moments in life you know you will remember forever.

Two months later, in Arequipa, the cathedral's towers – white, milky stone this time, vaguely reminiscent of Cardiff's civic centre – are even closer to the hotel's roof terrace on the central Plaza de Armas. In the square below, colourful parades mark the beginnings of Peru's bicentennial celebrations, still two years away. Another two months on, it's January, and while my teaching colleagues enjoy a snow day back home, somebody has turned the heating up into the nineties. Cartagena de Indias on the Caribbean coast of Colombia is Hay's longest-running festival in the Americas and its roof

**I am aware not only of my own privilege in the sense of having been part of the incredible imagining of the world that the Hay Festivals have conjured, but also my responsibility as a writer...**

### **Creative Wales Hay Festival International Fellows**



**Jon Gower**  
2011



**Tiffany Murray**  
2012



**Owen Sheers**  
2013



**Fflur Dafydd**  
2014



**Eurig Salisbury**  
2015



**Jay Griffiths**  
2016



**Jenny Valentine**  
2017



**Dylan Moore**  
2018

terraces have views across the old town's former slave port toward the gleaming white skyscrapers that look down on the modern container port below.

These juxtapositions become a theme. En route to Segovia, I note Europe's soft borders hardening through the metaphor of mineral waters: Welsh Brecon Carreg placed on the tray table next to Spanish Solàn de Cabras; in Arequipa, my lively conversation with the Danish writer Janne Teller is followed by a visit to the small museum where 'Juanita' is displayed ('Juanita' is the teenage girl famous for having been sacrificed by the Inca and then perfectly preserved by Andean ice). In Cartagena, contradictions are everywhere: former slave cells repurposed as souvenir shops; statues of conquistadors, abolitionists and indigenous heroines; cocktail parties held in former palaces of persecution.

The stated purpose of my Fellowship – what Jenny Valentine would call my mission – is to explore issues of displacement and exile. The interviews I take part in alongside the Mexican writer Antonio Ruiz-Camacho in Arequipa and with the American writer Sarah Churchwell in Cartagena swirl around the big issues forcing record numbers of people globally to flee their homes and seek sanctuary elsewhere. War, violence, corruption, xenophobia, racism. After talking to Churchwell, I head straight to the airport where I pick up a copy of the Colombian news weekly *Semana*. A photograph of self-declared 'president' Juan Guaidó adorns its cover, the headline 'Man of Hope' emblazoned across the Venezuelan flag.

It has been instructive to have been International Fellow at this time of global uncertainty. Donald Trump and Brexit have cast their inevitable long shadows over discussions across Europe and the Americas. More often than not, because I am from Britain, the first audience question is about Brexit even when I have expressly – *deliberately* – omitted to mention it in my talk.

What has been clear as I have clocked up the air miles, waved my passport in the general direction of officialdom, checked in at five star hotels and sipped cocktails laid on by the festival's many sponsors and partners, is that – far from being the plucky Welsh outsider that I originally imagined

Time after time, as well as grappling with the currents affecting the contemporary world, I have found myself thinking and writing about my own family, community and country



myself to be – I am part of the global upper crust. I do not belong to a political (and certainly not economic!) elite, but there is the growing realisation that I have become part of the still relatively small segment of humanity for whom international jet travel and regular conversations with people from other backgrounds and cultures has become the norm.

*Driving Home Both Ways* is a collection of travel writing that concerns itself with the relationship between the local and the global, and so many of the onstage conversations I have had at Hay Festivals in both Europe and the Americas have revolved around the gap between those for whom globalisation has worked and those for whom it has abjectly failed. In *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*, Zygmunt Bauman argues that ‘the freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, fast becomes the main stratifying factor of our... postmodern times’.

Each time I touch down at Heathrow and board the National Express coach back to Newport, I am aware not only of my own privilege in the sense of having been part of the incredible imagining of the world that the Hay Festivals have conjured, but also my responsibility as a writer: my mission now is to connect the dots between those who have and those who have not, in my local as well as the global community. There can be little better down-to-earth ‘bump’ in this regard than to return each time from the world of cocktail parties with Nobel Prizewinners to the classrooms of a secondary school.

I am working on a collection of short stories that traces stories of displacement and exile through the

testimony not only of refugees but those whose lives intersect with them, both at home and elsewhere. My hope for the writing is that it will show how all of our lives are interconnected. And while the stories are not set in Spain or Peru or Colombia, all of these countries have served to inform my thinking; it will be a surprise if all of these rich, diverse cultures do not make an appearance in the future.

As for travel writing, one of the many other positive upshots of the Fellowship is the fact that by the time I reach my final destination – Queretaro in Mexico in September – another travel book will have written itself. By contrast, *Driving Home Both Ways* documents thirteen years’ worth of journeys. As in that volume, travelling, conversing with writers from all over the world and thinking about the other most often brings me to thinking about home. Time after time, as well as grappling with the currents affecting the contemporary world, I have found myself thinking and writing about my own family, community and country. There are many conclusions to draw from a year spent as Hay’s International Fellow, but one is certainly that an internationalist outlook makes for a creative Wales. ▼

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**Dylan Moore** is Editor of *the welsh agenda* and teaches English at Llanwern High School, Newport. His book of travel essays, *Driving Home Both Ways* (Parthian) is out now

[hayfestival.com/discover/international-hay-festival-fellowship](http://hayfestival.com/discover/international-hay-festival-fellowship)

# Emyr Humphreys: still a ‘necessary figure’ at one hundred

**M. Wynn Thomas** *argues that Emyr Humphreys, centenarian as of 15 April, is one of Wales’ outstanding cultural figures of any generation*

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**E**myr Humphreys was born in 1919, the year in which his compatriot, Lloyd George, sketched out the map of Europe as we know it at Versailles. So perhaps he was predestined to be a passionate Europhile, long before a period spent in post-war Florence administering a large camp for refugees and displaced persons instilled in him a life-long love of Italy. When I visited him some months before his hundredth birthday, I found him deep in the *Divina Commedia* of his beloved Dante.

He was then reborn a committed Welsh Nationalist in 1936, when the protest burning of Penyberth awakened in him, living within a stone’s throw of Offa’s Dyke, an awareness of the colonial status of Wales in its historic relation to England. So it is hardly surprising that his particular brand of Welsh Europeanism is

the same as that of his hero, friend, and collaborator, Saunders Lewis. For both, Wales is a product of the Roman Empire, born of the legionary occupation of Britain, and thus has always belonged by right of birth to the extensive community of European nations.

Emyr Humphreys is, of course, best known as a novelist – and a novelist of no mean achievement. His two dozen novels include at least two masterpieces – *A Toy Epic* and *Outside the House of Baal* – that help explain his reputation as the pre-eminent fiction writer of twentieth-century Wales. No wonder that Graham Greene enthused over his talent when first he appeared on the scene. And Greene was but the first of many famous names to stud Humphreys’ distinguished career. They include stellar acting talents such as Richard Burton, Sian Phillips, Peter O’Toole, Hugh Griffith, prominent artists like Patrick Heron, Terry Frost and Kyffin Williams, novelists like C.P. Snow and Anthony Powell, broadcasters such as Hugh Wheldon

**Long before a euphoric new National Assembly officially declared Wales to be a nation of two languages and two cultures, Emyr Humphreys had not only emphasised that biculturalism in his writings but also actively promoted it through his own practice**

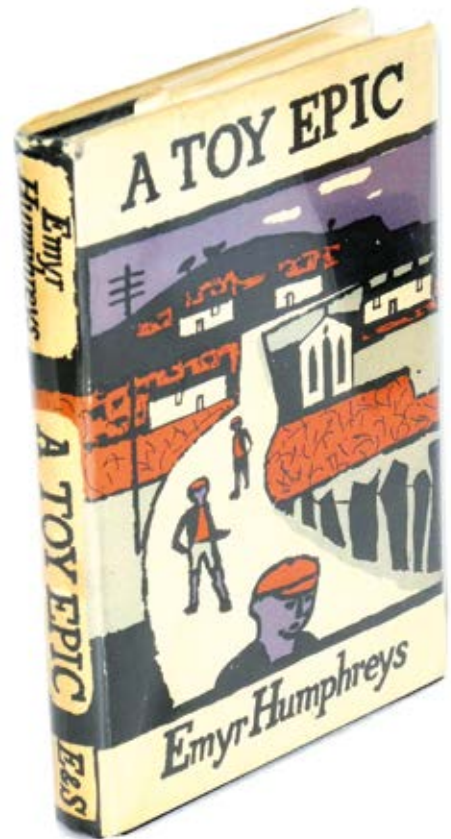
**[His] striking output clearly demonstrates him to be not only indisputably one of the major cultural figures of twentieth-century Wales but also arguably one of the greatest Wales has produced over its long cultural history**

and Martin Esslin, and poets such as R. S. Thomas and Louis Macneice.

His friends and associates in Welsh-language culture have been equally conspicuous talents. In addition to Saunders Lewis – with whom Humphreys enjoyed a fruitful creative collaboration following his appointment as the founding Director of Drama for the BBC in Wales – there were Kate Roberts, John Gwilym Jones, ‘Wil Sam’ Jones and R. Tudur Jones. Long before a euphoric new National Assembly officially declared Wales to be a nation of two languages and two cultures, Emyr Humphreys had not only emphasised that biculturalism in his writings but also actively promoted it through his own practice.

Humphreys is not only an outstanding novelist, he has also produced an impressively mixed portfolio of other writings. He has excelled as poet, as cultural historian, as essayist, as polemicist, as cultural activist and as television dramatist and documentary filmmaker. Taken all in all, this striking output clearly demonstrates him to be not only indisputably one of the major cultural figures of twentieth-century Wales but also arguably one of the greatest Wales has produced over its long cultural history.

He has never hidden his cultural and political commitments. Nor has he ever shrunk from principled action, well beyond the safe confines of writing, on behalf of what he believes. Concern at the plight of the Welsh language once even moved him to break the law and to endure a very brief period of imprisonment. He can, as I have suggested in my new study of his life and work, be usefully regarded as the last great survivor of




the heroic age of twentieth-century Welsh culture. This saw a cohort of talented writers devote themselves to arousing their country from the long torpor of its meekly subservient position within a profoundly anglocentric British polity.

Such devotion may make Emyr Humphreys seem old-fashioned and even embarrassingly irrelevant to the meek and docile Wales of today. But it is, I am certain, what will assure him a prominent, revered, place in the annals of what will hopefully be the better and more mature Wales of the future. ▸

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**M Wynn Thomas** is Professor of English and holder of the Emyr Humphreys Chair of Welsh Writing in English at Swansea University, having also held Visiting Professorships at the universities of Harvard and Tübingen

A photograph of a child with blonde hair, seen from behind, wearing a yellow raincoat with a colorful patterned collar. The child is holding the hand of an adult who is also wearing a yellow raincoat. They are standing on a sandy beach looking out at the ocean under a cloudy sky.

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# Shards of Light

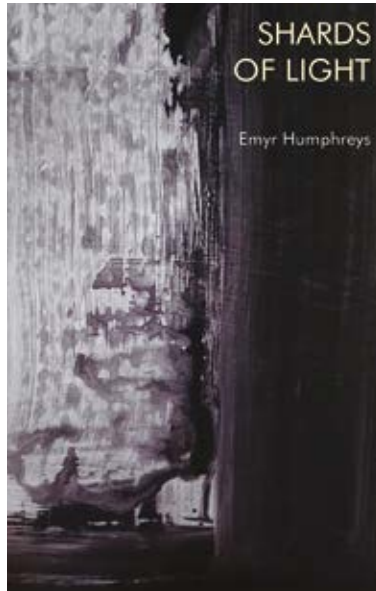
Emyr Humphreys

University of Wales Press, 2018

*Elinor Shepley*

Published during his hundredth year, *Shards of Light* is Emyr Humphreys' second major collection of verse. The writer is, of course, known primarily for his prize-winning fiction. If one were to give him a second job title, his career as a broadcaster and dramatist would likely spring to mind. Then there is Humphreys' fascinating life, including his time as a conscientious objector during the Second World War and his humanitarian work in places devastated by this conflict. Later, as a Welsh language campaigner, he served a short prison sentence for refusing to buy a television licence.

I am recounting these highlights from Humphreys' life and career in part to justify my mistaken expectation that *Shards of Light* would be chiefly an interesting digression from the main action. The poems do share preoccupations with the fiction and reflect the writer's life. However, to present them simply as a counterpoint to other works would be to overlook the delicate power and insight of this remarkable collection. 'The epigram is not for me / Long wind demands long form you see', Humphreys writes playfully in 'The Courteous Dig'; yet, this is anything but the case. His stripped-back but precise



expression demands that readers attend fully to the often complex ideas at play.

Unsurprisingly, old age is a thread that runs through *Shards of Light*. 'Age', for example, examines the changing perception of time in later life, while the experience of physical ageing is a recurring concern and poems such as 'To Whom it May Concern' and 'The Old Couple' are meditations on mortality. The address to a lost life partner in 'Lovesong' is particularly affecting.

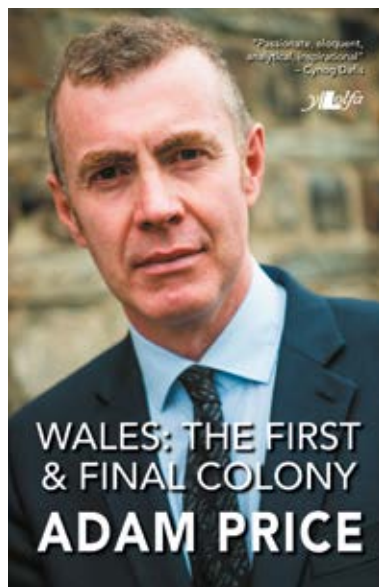
Perhaps relatedly, memories

– both renderings of the personal process of recollection and glimpses of twentieth-century upheavals – also feature. There is no room for nostalgia, however. Instead, poems such as 'Civil Unrest' – about a remembered refugee woman – feel like dark warnings in the current climate. Similarly, 'Hen Gerdd' ('Old Poem'), dramatises the death of a young man killed in war before his time – 'Before a girl lies in his bed / He will kneel into his own blood' – but is reminiscent of medieval Welsh saga poetry, suggesting humanity's senseless repetition of violent mistakes.

The stylistic and tonal variation of the collection is testament to the writer's merit. Humphreys moves from elegiac verse through interior monologue to works of satire and savagely sardonic responses to violence, privilege and corruption, in 'The Art of War' and 'Governing Class', for example. I know that I will return to *Shards of Light* for its sharp intellect, humour and humanity. ►

**Elinor Shepley** is the IWA's Understanding Welsh Places Project Officer. She recently graduated from Cardiff University with a PhD in Welsh Writing in English

# Wales: The First and Final Colony



Adam Price  
Y Lolfa, 2018

Gareth Leaman

Jacques Rancière's *Aesthetics and its Discontents* suggests that 'the exploited rarely require an explanation of the laws of exploitation', and that 'the dominated do not remain in subordination because they misunderstand the existing state of affairs but because they lack confidence in their capacity to transform it.' In Adam Price's *Wales: The First and Final Colony*, the new Plaid Cymru leader diagnoses various such laws of exploitation imposing themselves upon the people of Wales and identifies a lack of confidence as the prime reason for this continued plight. Yet his insistence on explaining the precise method of national subordination, along with his method of delivery, ultimately undermines his message.

Throughout this anthology of Price's political thought, the same analogies, idioms, 'inspirational quotes' and appeals to authentocracy repeat themselves endlessly. Comparisons to the moon landing, second-hand Obamaisms, references to 'Offa's Gap', the exact same Mark Twain quote, all make multiple appearances. If this book hadn't been so hastily produced to take advantage of the post-leadership election honeymoon period, perhaps Price would have been better served distilling these overlapping texts into one succinct manifesto.

Price is keenly aware of what he calls a 'poverty of circumstance', yet relies on a quasi-historicism, second-hand stock phrases and amorphous patriotism to convey this, rather than engaging with a materialist critique of poverty's causes. We hear that we need to

'turn our Welsh dreams into our Welsh reality', and that through Price 'we will win the new world and the new Wales', but it is not clear what these exhortations actually *mean*. As a consequence, this collection reads more like the words of an overconfident motivational speaker than those of a serious political theorist.

The key problem with this purple-prosed vacuity is the perpetual danger of overreaching into a crass disingenuousness – a threshold that Price frequently breaches. The most egregious example is a troubling passage in which Wales' 'colonial psyche' is likened to 'cultural autism', comparable to the behaviour of child sexual assault survivors. Likewise, it is simplistic at best, chauvinistically deceitful at worst, to compare Wales to the scars the British Empire has left upon the global south. Nor is it particularly sensitive to compare Tudor England's relationship with Wales to that of Nazi *lebensraum*. If the intention here is to exhibit Price's progressive credentials and leadership qualities, it is thoroughly undermined by these inappropriate false equivalencies.

Ultimately, these clumsy metaphors betray a privileged reluctance to engage with the actual modes of oppression faced by people in Wales. There are plenty of opportunities here to engage with a materialist, anticapitalist critique of endemic poverty in Wales, yet Price does not do so in any meaningful sense. Despite occasionally referencing the 'neo-liberal consensus', his solutions revolve around the same old neoliberal platitudes, in which we need to become 'a nation of entrepreneurs',

## If the intention here is to exhibit Price's progressive credentials and leadership qualities, it is thoroughly undermined by these inappropriate false equivalencies

a 'start-up society' and so forth. Indeed, the ideology he gestures towards is reminiscent of the Welsh Labour establishment he posits himself as the antithesis of: pseudo-radical rhetoric that obfuscates a failing politics.

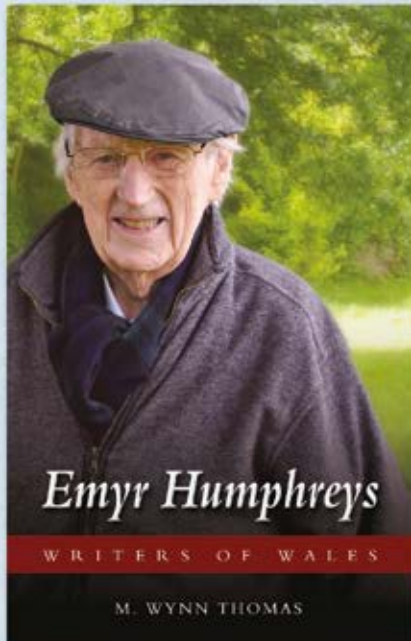
The apparent intention here is to build an understanding of what Wales needs to do to achieve political emancipation, and sell Price as the means through which

it can be achieved. Yet if, to return to Rancière, 'understanding does not, in and of itself, help to transform intellectual attitudes and situations', it is also apparent that Price's paternalistic approach is wholly inadequate if we are to identify and combat the actual socio-political problems that define modern Wales.

If national independence is to be the answer to all our woes, we have neither the time nor the energy

to be lulled into the false sense of security that we are just one mixed metaphor away from liberation. The rhetoric leaned on is most effective when articulating that which we cannot quite express. Here, however, it tells us little apart from Price's penchant for prosaic superfluity. It is perhaps best left in summation to use Price's own words to describe Carwyn Jones and Rhodri Morgan, but equally applicable to himself: 'a great communicator who has talked the talk, but without saying or doing anything of any substance.' ▸

**Gareth Leaman** is a writer and musician from Newport. He has recently contributed to *Poetry Wales*, *New Socialist* and *Wales Arts Review*



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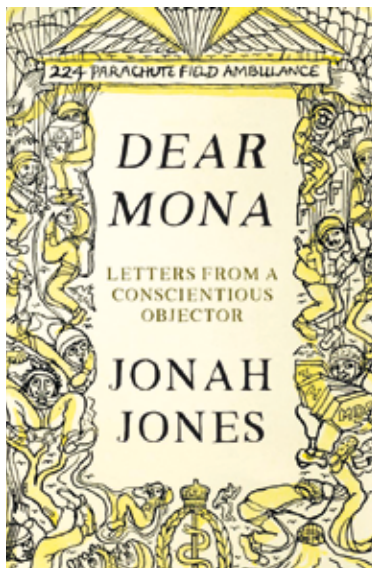
# Dear Mona: Letters from a Conscientious Objector

Jonah Jones,  
edited by Peter Jones  
Seren, 2018

*Aled Eirug*

Jonah Jones was perhaps the most pre-eminent Welsh sculptor and illustrator of the twentieth century. In the early 1950s he came to Llanystumdwy to work at Caseg Press with the artist John Petts, followed soon after by a short, intensive stay at the workshop of Eric Gill, where he learned the techniques of lettering and carving in stone.

He was a painter, writer, letter cutter, stained glass artist and educator and in 1974 became director of Ireland's National College of Art and Design. His work is displayed in countless plaques, plinths, stained glass windows and memorial stones across Wales and beyond, including the chapels of Ampleforth College, Loyola Hall, Rainhill, Merseyside; St Patrick's Catholic Church, Newport; the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff; Coleg Harlech; Mold Crown Court, and finely carved inscriptions on the memorial stones of Lloyd George and Dylan Thomas in Westminster Abbey. Although a Geordie, he adopted Wales as his country, and his close friends included his neighbour Clough Williams-Ellis, Bertrand Russell and John Cowper Powys. This book



is a collection of the intensely private correspondence from the young Jonah Jones – originally named Len – to Mona Lovell, which not only reveals the intensity of his relationship with Mona but also charts his experience as a conscientious objector on the home front as well as later serving in the army medical corps in Germany and Palestine.

We meet Len Jones, a working-class Geordie, at the age of twenty-one. The letters encapsulates his relationship with Mona Lovell, a Quaker, who was fifteen years older and whose sensibilities encouraged his pacifism but also introduced him to art, literature and sculpture, and helps him transform into the artist known as Jonah Jones.

These letters reveal his

personal crises as he struggled with his pacifism, culminating in his decision to join the medical corps. He parachuted into the Ardennes and Germany campaigns and participated in the liberation of concentration camps. Len is unsparing in his descriptions of the opprobrium with which conscientious objectors were dealt in the Second World War and the crisis of morals he suffered wrestling with his conscience. Rather shamefacedly, he renounced his absolutism and joined the army, albeit in a role in which he was not required to bear arms, and his personal account of this journey through his letters is always honest, evocative and perceptive.

Jones' letters suggest that Mona's love for him was not reciprocated and this became a source of increasing tension. As Len Jones developed a vocation as an artist, he met the Castle Bolton group, who encouraged him in his

**These letters reveal his personal crises as he struggled with his pacifism, culminating in his decision to join the medical corps**

first experiments in watercolours and linocuts, and his fellow CO, the poet James Kirkup, who unnerved him by his sexual advances. In 1943 Len joined the army as a non-combatant and at the end of the war was posted to Palestine where between 1945 and 1946 he was a witness to the chaos of

the British mandate that led to the creation of the state of Israel. At first sympathetic to the Arabs, he gradually favoured the Jews, in part perhaps because he was shocked by the vicious antisemitism of ordinary English soldiers: 'The general feeling,' he writes, 'is that it is time to finish Hitler's task and exterminate the remnants of this unhappy race.' While leaning towards the Jewish position, he saw that the incompatible demands of Jews and Arabs would be a source of endless conflict. In one of the last letters, Len breaks the news that he is to be married to a Jewish woman, Judith Grossman (later Maro). Mona is stunned and wrote (we can infer from Len's reply) a furious response which effectively

ended the correspondence and their relationship.

This is a wonderfully fluent and evocative collection of letters which marks Len's gradual maturing and reflects his difficult emotional journey throughout the war and his difficult relationship with Mona, from early naive commitment based on an unequal relationship between the clearly enamoured older woman and the younger ingenue to their gradual inevitable parting. As the book's foreword suggests, this collection is both intimate and intellectual and not only gives us a portrait of its creator but also a rare insight into his experiences as a conscientious objector, an army medic, and a participant in the developing crisis in Palestine.

His Palestine letters are intensely political and very different in tone from those written during his years on the forestry. They are indicative of the ways in which Len was profoundly changed and matured by his experience of war and how he outgrows his relationship with Mona. Even though they parted, his letters reflect a deep gratitude to her for giving him the confidence as a working-class boy from the north east of England to become an artist and, as the book's editor, Jones' son Peter, concludes, to help Len to become Jonah. ▶

**Aled Eirug** is a historian and member of the Morgan Academy



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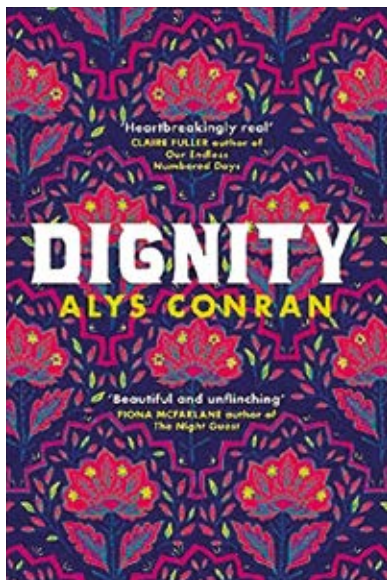
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# Dignity



Alys Conran

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2019

Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett

Alys Conran's debut novel *Pigeon* was a coming of age story set in a small Welsh village surrounded by slate quarries that grappled with questions of language and deprivation. It won the Wales Book of the Year in 2017 and was also shortlisted for the Dylan Thomas Prize, perhaps in recognition of its blended approach to language and vernacular. Her second novel,

*Dignity*, comes hotly anticipated.

*Dignity* is not a Welsh book insomuch as it is set between the post-referendum fictional English seaside town of Bay's Mouth and colonial India in the run up to independence, though Welsh ancestry is hinted at on the part of one of the protagonists, a former scientist and child of the empire. This is Magda, who occupies a large house in Bay's Mouth and whose health is deteriorating, meaning that she requires the assistance of zero-hours care worker Susheela, who is juggling work with her university studies and dealing with a partner with mental health issues and the aftermath of her mother's death. Conran uses the relationship between the characters as a lens with which to examine the colonial legacy, including the treatment of women under the British Empire and the revival of imperialistic tendencies in the aftermath of the Brexit vote.

In this, the novel's scope is ambitious. The present day intermixes with the past. Colonial India is portrayed through the eyes of Madga's mother, Evelyn, as she travels there to be with her new husband, a captain of the empire. The present day is narrated in alternating chapters by Magda and Susheela. Conran does a good job of changing registers to reflect the backgrounds of her characters: the restrained and timid Evelyn is particularly well rendered. At the beginning of her journey she is shocked by the absurdities of imperialistic life, and though this racist and patriarchal structure entraps her, she nevertheless

imbues much of its ethos. Small extracts from *The Complete Indian Housekeeper* and *Cook* mark the openings of her chapters, while the novel's epigraph, from Jules Michelet's *La Sorcière*, hammers home the notion that 'the gods' (or in the case of this novel, the empire) 'live on in the most intimate of domestic habits.'

This conceit is the intelligent core of the novel, which asks how we can continue to live when the structures we are born into are falling apart. The collapse of the empire is intended in some ways to mirror Susheela's struggle as a British woman of Indian parentage as she grapples with the disintegration of what she believed

**Dignity is not a Welsh book insomuch as it is set between the post-referendum fictional English seaside town of Bay's Mouth and colonial India in the run up to independence, though Welsh ancestry is hinted at on the part of one of the protagonists, a former scientist and child of the empire**

was the inclusive, multicultural society in which she lives. Instead, racist graffiti starts to appear in her hometown, and she receives abuse in the pub and in the street. In this way, *Dignity* is timely.

There are moments of overwriting: 'sashaying sea', 'vertiginous sleep'; a cobweb is a 'galactic ball of dust', the 'possibility of Magda having relationships' is 'like summer sun in midwinter'. It can all feel a bit wearing. There's a sense, meanwhile, that Conran hasn't quite captured the voice of a modern British young woman, relying instead on peppering her sentences with *fucks*. Young people certainly swear, but more creatively than that, and no one under forty describes weed as 'pot'.

**At the beginning of her journey she is shocked by the absurdities of imperialistic life, and though this racist and patriarchal structure entraps her, she nevertheless imbues much of its ethos**

Despite these distractions, Conran's depiction of the relationship between a patient (or 'service user' in modern governmental parlance) and her carer is sweetly and empathically done, and makes an important point about the impact of austerity on the social care system. Where Conran succeeds most, however, is in how vividly she makes life for women in Imperial India come alive. This is not a groundbreaking novel, but one that treads its ground deftly, and with heart. ▼

**Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett** is a Guardian columnist and the author of the novel *The Tyranny of Lost Things* (Sandstone Press)



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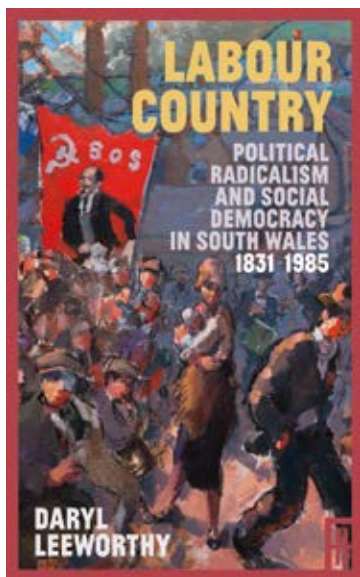
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# Labour Country: Political Radicalism and Social Democracy in South Wales, 1831–1985



**Daryl Leeworthy**  
Parthian, 2018

*Ben Curtis*

This is not a book about south Wales. It is, however, most definitely about South Wales – and this distinction encapsulates one of the principal themes of *Labour Country*. In this epic-sized new tome, Daryl Leeworthy's focus is on the distinctive radical and social-democratic culture of modern South Wales: how it came into being, what sustained it, and why – in his view – it ebbed away.

*Labour Country* is a remarkable piece of work in several respects. What impresses itself most forcibly upon the reader is the extensive amount of research and reading by

Leeworthy which has gone into its creation. The sheer level of historical detail throughout the volume is breathtaking, presenting a richly textured image of culture and society in bygone South Wales. (For instance, we learn that vegetarianism first arrived in Wales as a organised movement in July 1898, in Cardiff). This, coupled with the polished and poetic prose which characterises the book as a whole, gives *Labour Country* a fascinating quality uncommon to many history books. Leeworthy describes his methodology as being to 'shake the kaleidoscope for its shards of the unexpected, the glints and colours of a changing, now vanished, experience'. Certainly, this metaphor of scintillating brilliance seems an apt one.

Furthermore, in its literary style, its keen eye for detail, and its commitment to emphasising the distinctiveness of South Wales as a historical phenomenon, *Labour Country* is very much following in the footsteps of the distinguished Welsh historian Dai Smith; Smith also edited the volume and in Leeworthy's words provided 'a necessary critical eye which helped to transform the text'.

Although an excellent book in many ways, there are a few aspects of *Labour Country* which are a little unsatisfactory. Some of these are arguably just a matter of personal taste: I would have liked to see the

inclusion of a bibliography and some illustrations, for instance. Perhaps inevitably there are a small number of typographical errors in the book's text: for example, 'Labour Country' is occasionally italicised and 'Encyclopédie' is misspelt in the footnotes on several occasions. More surprising for a book which begins in 1831 and focuses on the radical socialist culture of South Wales is the absence of explicit discussion of the Merthyr Rising of 1831, and the Chartists' march on Newport in 1839 is to my mind an inexplicable and glaring omission. Additionally, the focus of the argument in its concluding chapter on Welsh politics in the twenty-first century, particularly Brexit and devolution, might be seen as a deviation from *Labour Country*'s 'remit' as a *history* book. Nevertheless, Leeworthy presents his case with detailed reference to historical developments – and to paraphrase Karl Marx – 'the role of historians is not just to interpret the world but to change it'.

All things considered, though, these are comparatively minor issues. Overall, *Labour Country* is clearly going to be an important, thought-provoking contribution to the historiography of modern South Wales. Even where readers may disagree with some of Leeworthy's arguments, they are well-researched, cogently presented, and not easily dismissed. ▼

**Ben Curtis** is postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Wolverhampton and author of *The South Wales Miners 1964–1985*



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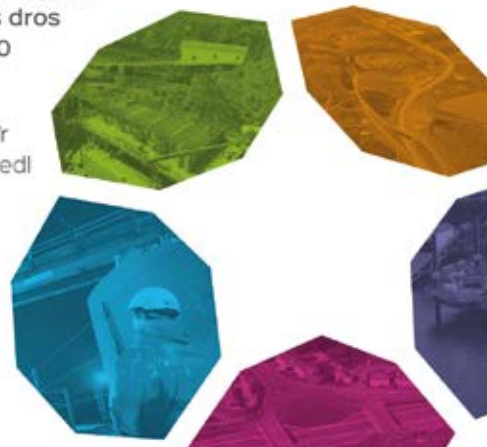
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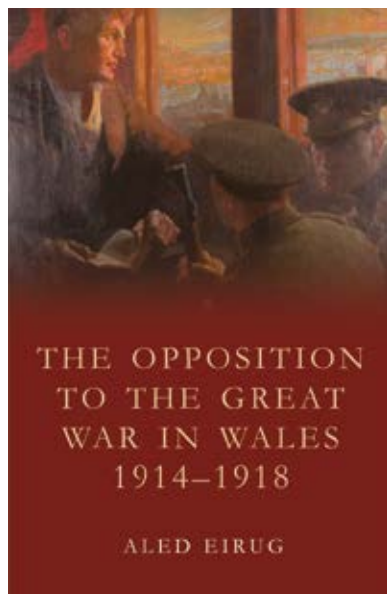
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# The Opposition to the Great War in Wales 1914–1918



**Aled Eirug**

University of Wales Press, 2018

*Craig Owen*

From January to June 2019, as we mark the centenary of the post World War One Paris Peace Process whilst simultaneously bracing for Brexit, the publication of a book that presents a different perspective to Wales' received 'Great War story' might not seem immediately relevant.

Aled Eirug's landmark work *The Opposition to the Great War in Wales 1914–18* is the most detailed study yet of the anti-war movement in any part of Britain during World

War One and paints a picture that is more three-dimensional. Previous histories airbrush over anti-war angles on the 'narrative' of the Great War, painting them as pockets of unrelated, individual activity; or conversely, lionise the heroism of conscientious objectors who took a stand against an imperialist and populist state.

But, as for conflicts today, such black and white views are simplistic. In looking 'behind the blinkers', this book is a thought-provoking contribution to UK-wide social history – and a read that is a profoundly revealing context for understanding Welsh identity, experience and political ideologies today.

One hundred years ago, as any reader of this book will soon see, to disagree with the government and populist tide could lead to being socially outcast and a prison sentence. Those who did so planted seeds that today we take for granted – the right to protest – yet their story is rarely part of Wales' First World War narrative. Even after four years of events marking WW100, one could be forgiven for thinking that Wales was as one with the whole UK, enthusiastically supporting 'the war that was to end war' – united under the leadership of Lloyd George, the UK's only 'Welsh' prime minister.

But just as with conflicts of

recent years – just think of 'Stop the War' against Iraq – the onset of the First World War divided the nation. Beneath the populist call to arms and government propaganda, religious and political opposition to the war emerged across Wales. Eirug maps this opposition systematically, not as 'pockets of resistance' but as patterns of beliefs – people motivated by a purpose – and looks at how this opposition became more organised and how societal views shifted as the war took its toll.

Eirug's analysis is organised across four main themes: religious opposition, political opposition, the organisation of opposition, and conscientious objectors. As well as an all-important national context and breadth, it is the *depth* that the author's accounts go into that most moved me: community and individual stories that are rooted in the fabric of Wales: the faith congregations torn between 'thou shalt not kill' and 'recruiting from the pulpit'; the interfaith efforts of Cymdeithas y Cymod (the Fellowship of Reconciliation), set up on the eve of the First World War to counter hatred; the unpopular anti-war stance of the Independent Labour Party under Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald and the huge swing in support as the realities of imperial war wore on; the impact of conscription on

Welsh liberalism and the stirring of Welsh nationalism; the nine hundred conscientious objectors identified from Wales, some of whom paid the ultimate sacrifice; the many hundreds more who were hastily accommodated as non-combatants so that Welsh objector figures stayed in line with the rest of the UK; the activism of anti-war communities in Briton Ferry, Carmarthenshire and Merthyr (where a 1917 anti-war rally drew crowds of 3,500); the role of the trade unions and the Miners' Federation; the massive shift in societal views towards peace from 1917 onwards; formerly reviled conscientious objectors being elected to Parliament in the early 1920s; the Welsh League of Nations

Union emerging in the 1920s as one of the nation's biggest membership organisations, with over 900 local branches in Wales alone promoting peace.

Today, vocal anti-war movements are a defining feature of a healthy civil society. Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen – these conflicts claim Welsh lives, inflict great suffering on innocent populations, and drive refugees to flee their homelands. A diversity of voices and perspectives against war is crucial to the checks and balances of politics, and national conscience.

One hundred years on from the First World War, the Temple of Peace and WCIA continue the mission of these visionaries to shape Wales' role in building a

better world. For me, what comes across so powerfully from Eirug's book is how, in a time of populism, polarisation and catastrophe, the peacebuilding efforts of Welsh people and communities inspired a new generation of internationalists – outward looking, but rooted in equity and communitarianism – and can do so again. This book is an essential long read for anyone seeking to understand the Welsh national psyche and where our spirit just might take us. ▶

**Craig Owen** is head of Wales for Peace and Global Action at the Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA)



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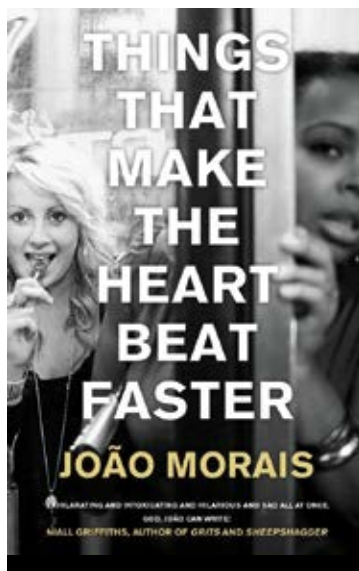


# Things That Make the Heart Beat Faster

João Morais  
Parthian, 2018

Rachel Trezise

João Morais' debut short story collection focuses on a city that only a native could know and that visitors glimpse and speculate about from the corner of their eye. The life and times of the charity collectors or 'chuggers' soliciting your money every day on Queen Street, the female street food stallholder chalking her menu up for the evening, the lad going through the visiting hall ID check at HMP Prison Cardiff, the ravers in the dance pit at the foot of Garth Mountain or the 'Pavement Poet' who lives in Bute Park. Morais is constantly pulling us away from the landmarks of the city centre and into Cardiff proper: 'and turns past the flats onto Beechley Drive, the last part of the hill and the first point of Pentrebanne,' to present contemporary reality on the outskirts of the shiny St Mary Street cocktail bars where predominantly working-class youngsters eke out a living peddling their 'wanksy-style' art work on Instagram, selling drugs from their back pockets to 'moshers' and 'akies' in the park, signing on at the Jobcentre, killing time drinking cheap booze in 'Spoons and obsessing over 'chest and triceps day' at the gym.



The characters in these stories seem always to be trying to get away from one another, only to find themselves getting even closer. In the opening story, Jolyon, keen to impress his new girlfriend and Kate Tempest-fan, Erin, roams the craft beer bars of the city until he can next see her, all the while avoiding giving any of his spare change to Tariq, a homeless man who seems to follow him around like a bad penny until it transpires Erin is also a fan of Tariq, aka 'The Pavement Poet'. In 'One of the Cullens' Glenn goes about hitting his 'Save the Turtles' charity sales target whilst hiding from one of the Cullen hardmen – 'either the one who went down for breaking into a salvage yard and smashing the dog with a hammer or... the one who drove around for four days with that nonce in his boot. They all kinda look the same with that big neck' – and who during an earlier incident has promised to 'smash' Glenn on seeing him again, only

for Glenn to realise he's about to embark on a relationship with said Cullen's ex-girlfriend.

In 'Yes Kung-Fu', Tommo, on a mission to see his daughter one last time before being hauled to prison, is waylaid by the mentally-disturbed Kung Fu (who is on a mission to destroy everything painted grey). 'Everyone knows Kung Fu,' says Tommo of the renowned local. 'There ain't no point asking him what his real name is. His name is Kung Fu now.' These recurring characters, men down on their luck, and men who believe 'the guy who attacks first... always wins' serve to suggest a claustrophobia and ever present threat of violence that Morais isn't afraid to confront. Nothing is perfect here. Women suffer sexist slimeballs. Relationships break up or have long ended. Parents are losing their kids. People are either in prison or about to be. And yet life in all its bittersweetness persists, sense of humour intact.

Part of what makes these stories feel so vibrant and urgent is the fresh terminology Morais employs at every possible stage, joking for example about the names of craft beers: 'I swear I just heard someone ask for two Starved Interns and a Peodo Biscuit', 'I'll have a bottle of Liberal Tears'. But for all of its up-to-the-minute contemporariness *Things That Make the Heart Beat Faster* can't hide an old-fashioned and undying love for its fabulously flawed subject.

**Rachel Trezise** is a prizewinning author of novels, short stories and plays

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# Q&A

Since 17th December 2018, **İlhan Şiş** has been on indefinite hunger strike at the Kurdish Community Centre in Newport. He tells *the welsh agenda* why.



## Your protest is against the conditions of imprisonment of Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan – why?

Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan has been kept in solitary confinement at İmralı Prison since 1999. He is currently not allowed to receive visits from his lawyers and family. This is a violation of basic human rights. Turkey is a signatory to international treaties for protection of human rights and by denying Abdullah Öcalan such visitation rights Turkey is in breach of these treaties too. We want Abdullah Öcalan to be allowed regular access to his lawyers and have his family visit him.

Currently around three hundred people are involved in this hunger strike, some of whom began before I did and some of whom began later, but I am the only one in Wales, or the UK actually. It started with Leyla Güven (55) on 8 November last year. Leyla Güven is an elected MP in the Turkish Parliament from Hakkari, but she is in prison in Diyarbakir. Leyla was imprisoned for criticising the Turkish illegal invasion of the Kurdish city of Afrin, which resulted in deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Kurds. She was recently released and is awaiting trial at her home where she continues her hunger strike. I started on the 17 December 2018 and I will not stop until I die or Abdullah Öcalan's isolation is ended.

## What brought you to Wales?

I grew up in Elbistan in southern Turkey. Elbistan is a Kurdish region yet it is governed with the heavy hand of assimilative policies. It was really difficult to be a Kurd in Elbistan. Our efforts to remain Kurdish – by speaking our language or identifying ourselves as Kurds – were defined as criminal activities. Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured in 1999 in a joint operation by the Turkish Intelligence and CIA. Kurdish people all over the world – in Europe, Turkey and Kurdistan – heavily protested this. Those taking part in these protests were punished heavily. In this climate, my father decided that we should move to the western part of Turkey, to avoid the wrath of the Turkish government and blend in with the Turks. My father hoped that our family could find peace in the Turkish city of Balıkesir, but our lives only became more difficult. We could not find jobs, socialise freely or be part of anything because of our Kurdish identity.

Such exclusion leads to isolation and eventually you find people from your own background who share your political views. I became politically active, demanding human rights for Kurdish people. It then became impossible for me to survive in Turkey and I had to flee to the UK in 2004 as an asylum seeker. I was given political refugee status in 2005. In 2006 my older brother was given a prison sentence for his activities as a university student. He escaped prison and joined the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) to fight for the freedom of Kurdish people. I continued my political activities and tried to raise awareness about the problems faced by Kurdish people in the UK. We set up Kurdish

Community Centres so that Kurdish people could get together and share our values, culture and our hopes for a free future. Eventually my journey brought me to Wales. After I arrived in Wales I learned more about Welsh history and realised the similarities between the histories of the Welsh and Kurdish people.

I have been living here since 2014 and continue my activities at the Kurdish Community Centre in Newport. In 2017 my brother who was fighting with the Kurdish forces since 2006 was killed by Turkish forces in Dersim district.

## What is the future for you now?

My hunger strike is indefinite and I am not going to give up. Some people ask me why I am on hunger strike in Wales. First of all I am Kurdish wherever I am, and secondly the UK and Turkey are both members of the European Council and CPT (European Committee for Prevention of Torture). Therefore both countries are fully aware that the solitary confinement of Abdullah Öcalan is a torture that qualifies as a crime against humanity. I want to express that Turkey's human rights violations are known to Western countries and to the UK and supported by them. I ask that the Welsh Assembly and UK Parliament take immediate actions against the Turkish government to stop these human rights violations.

We are committed to our protest, not because we want to die but because we desire our basic human rights. We want to be respected and live dignified and honourable lives. If we lose our lives in our demand for basic human rights, then the shame of this is on the entire world that remained as bystanders to our struggle.



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