

Myths, Memories and Futures

The National Library and National Museum
in the Story of Wales

Edited by John Osmond

Cover: 13th Century crowned head exhibited by Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales in Cathays Park, Cardiff. Excavated from the remains of Deganwy Castle, near Llandudno, in Spring 1966, it is thought to be the head of Llywelyn Fawr (1173-1240). This memory (or myth?) has been promoted by Harri Webb's poem *The Stone Face*, written as a response to the 1966 excavation and reproduced in his *The Green Desert* (Collected Poems 1950-1969). The poem is quoted overleaf and on page 72 of this volume. The crowned head may originally have lined the most embellished room at Llywelyn Fawr's castle at Deganwy, the now-vanished hall.

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Published in Wales by
Institute of Welsh Affairs

The Institute of Welsh Affairs exists to promote quality research and informed debate affecting the cultural, social, political and economic well-being of Wales. The IWA is an independent organisation owing no allegiance to any political or economic interest group. We are funded by a range of organisations and individuals. For more information about the Institute, its publications, and how to join, either as an individual or corporate supporter, contact:

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First Impression March 2007
ISBN 1 904 773 20 6

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*A stone face sleeps beneath the earth
With open eyes. All history is its dream.*

The Stone Face by Harri Webb

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Preface

Professor Prys Morgan declares in the opening chapter to this volume that National Museum Wales and the National Library of Wales were the product of the ‘first age of devolution’. As the centenary of their establishment more or less coincides with the commencement of the ‘second age’, it seemed appropriate for the Institute of Welsh Affairs to use the moment for some reflection and forward thinking about their role in the coming decades.

The National Library and Museum were established as a conscious nation-building statement at a unique period in the life of Wales. One hundred years ago saw the peak of the Edwardian period of prosperity based on the extractive industries of coal mining in the south, and slate quarrying in the north. Although this economic boom lasted barely a decade, the National Library and Museum survived the Depression years that followed. A century later they connect with a completely different country. What will be their role in 21st century Wales?

To answer that question we brought together the authors of this volume. Through 2006 and into 2007 they presented their thoughts to substantial audiences alternately at the National Museum in Cathys Park, Cardiff, and the National Library in Aberystwyth. We asked them to consider how myths, memories and futures have inter-mingled to create the unique institutions we have today. We also asked them to focus on contemporary debates and the future.

The Institute is grateful to the authors, to Peter Stead for providing the introductory overview, and to National Museum Wales and the National Library for supporting the project so whole-heartedly.

John Osmond
Director, IWA

Notes on Contributors

Peter Stead, a native of Barry, previously taught history at Swansea University and has been a visiting professor at the University of Glamorgan. He has twice been a Fulbright scholar in the United States and he is the author of books on film, television, opera and sport. He is the author of critical studies of Denis Potter and Richard Burton and also a study of Welsh acting. For the University of Wales Press he has jointly edited four volumes of essays on aspects of popular culture in Wales. In 1979 he was the Labour candidate for the Barry constituency. He was a member of the Welsh team that won Radio Four's Round Britain Quiz for four years, and a member of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport panel that chose Liverpool to be the European Capital of Culture in 2008. He is chairman of the Dylan Thomas Prize.

Professor Prys Morgan is Emeritus professor of History at the University of Wales, Swansea. A specialist in the history of 19th Century Wales, he has a wide-ranging interest in the development of Welsh institutions. His most recent publication has been the *Illustrated History of Wales*, published by Tempus in 2002. Educated at St John's College, Oxford, he began his long career in Swansea when he joined the History Department as a lecturer in 1964, later becoming Reader and eventually professor. A prolific broadcaster and contributor to periodicals on literary and historical subjects, he was deputy editor of *Barn* from 1966 to 1973 and editor of the *Transactions* of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion until 1988. From 1980 to 1983 he was Chairman of the Welsh Arts Council's Literature Committee. He has an abiding interest in Iolo Morganwg. His first foray in this field was his study of Iolo Morganwg's work in the *Writers of Wales* series in 1975. Famously he contributed a chapter on Iolo's intervention in relaunching the Eisteddfod in the early part of the 19th Century to the volume *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger and published in 1983. More recently he has contributed a chapter to *The Rattle Skull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, edited by Geraint H. Jenkins, and published by the University of Wales Press in 2005. He is author of the third volume in the series dealing with the history of the University of Wales, covering the period 1939 to 1993. In 1985 he published the authoritative study *Welsh Surnames* with his late father Professor T.J. Morgan who was Professor of Welsh at the University of Wales, Swansea. He has also edited *Glamorgan Society 1780-1880*, volume 4 in the Glamorgan County History series, published in 1991, and authored a study of the Welsh Bible, *Beible I Gymru*, in 1988.

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Dr Rhiannon Mason is Lecturer in Museum, Gallery and Heritage Studies at the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies, University of Newcastle. In her teaching, she leads modules on the history and theory of museums, and history curatorship in museums. Prior to joining Newcastle University in 2001, she studied for an MA and a PhD at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory, at the University of Wales, Cardiff, and taught part-time at the universities of Cardiff and Glamorgan. Her research interests include: the relationship between critical and cultural theory and new museology; museum histories; the representation of identities in museums (gender, cultural diversity); national museums and national identities. She is co-convenor of the British Sociological Association Study Group: Museums and Society. Her book *Museums, Nations, Identities: Wales and its National Museums* is published by the University of Wales Press in 2007.

Declan McGonagle is Director of the Centre for Research in Art, Technologies, and Design at the University of Ulster. He worked and exhibited as an artist for a period after graduation from Belfast College of Art in 1976 before being appointed the first Organiser of the Orchard Gallery in Derry in 1978. His practice as a curator and Director has included the Orchard Gallery, the ICA in London and the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. He also directed independent projects such as first Tyne International and initiated innovative public art and community and educational programme's. He has been short-listed for the Turner Prize and has also served on the Jury and has been external examiner in a number of UK institutions. He speaks and writes regularly on the relationships between art, the artist, the institution and communities and is a contributing Editor of Art Forum. He was Irish Commissioner for the 1993 Venice and 1994 Sao Paulo Biennale, and has served on many Boards and Government cultural bodies.

Professor Gaynor Kavanagh is Dean of Cardiff School of Art and Design at UWIC. An internationally recognized scholar within the field of museum studies, she has an extensive publication record. She is author of three books *History Curatorship; Museums and the First World War*; and *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum*. She has edited seven books and was editor of the *Making Histories in Museums* series. Her current research project is on objects and narratives that disturb, part of a larger study on museums and trauma. A qualified and experienced curator, she was part of the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester between 1980 and 1999. She left to set up the Graduate School at Bath Spa University. Between 2000 and 2004 she was Dean of Media and Culture at Falmouth College of Art. During this period the College successfully established itself as the hub of the Combined Universities of Cornwall and gained degree award giving powers. Gaynor then took a year out because of her father's failing health, during which time she taught museum studies part-time at Winchester School of Art and chaired their Research Committee. She joined UWIC in 2005. Originally from Pontypool, she now lives in Cardiff and Camerton in Somerset.

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Dr John Davies is a native of the Rhondda. He was educated in schools in Treorci, Rhondda, and Bwlchllan and Tregaron in Ceredigion, and at University College, Cardiff, and Trinity College, Cambridge. He was the first secretary of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg. He taught at the University Colleges of Swansea and Aberystwyth and was for eighteen years the Warden of Neuadd Pantycelyn, Aberystwyth. His publications include *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute*; *Hanes Cymru, A History of Wales*; *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales*; *The Making of Wales*; *The Celts*; and *Cardiff: a Pocket Guide*. He is the consultant editor and a joint editor of *The Encyclopaedia of Wales*, to be published by the University of Wales Press in 2007. In 1997, he was the keynote speaker at the inaugural meeting of the North American Association for the Study of Welsh History and Culture. He has broadcasted extensively, especially on historical subjects. His wife comes from Blaenau Gwent and they have two daughters and two sons. He lives in Grangetown, Cardiff, but often commutes to his garden in rural Ceredigion.

Tom Nairn is Research Professor in Nationalism and Global Diversity with the Globalism Institute, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. He is widely known for developing in the early 1960s what would later be named the Nairn-Anderson thesis on British decline, which has had a definitive influence upon studies of nationalism and politics in Britain and beyond. He is one of the four most widely cited authorities on nationalism, along with Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith and the late Ernest Gellner. His book *The Break-up of Britain* (1977) has been a central reference for the growing field of nationalism studies and is used in hundreds of university courses across the world. Where the *Break-up of Britain* refocused studies of nationalism and uneven development, *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (1998) established the field of argument that civic and secular nationalism is a key feature of modernity and not an archaic reaction against it. It is part of his general contribution to fundamentally rethinking the place of 'nationalism from below'. His book *After Britain* (2000) continued the argument of *The Break-up of Britain*, concentrating especially on Scotland and devolutionary politics, along with the structural tensions within Blairism. Through his analytical and translating work, he is credited, together with Perry Anderson, with introducing Antonio Gramsci's work to Anglophone culture, especially the notion of 'hegemony', which has had a major influence on the field of political and cultural studies.

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Andrew Green has been the Librarian of the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth since 1998. In that time he has been responsible for developing the Library's facilities in many important ways, including major extensions of its visitor facilities and digital services. He helped to set up the 'Gathering the Jewels' project, a pioneering attempt to digitise many of Wales's distributed cultural assets. Andrew was born in Lincolnshire and brought up in Yorkshire. However, apart from three years in the University of Sheffield, he has devoted his whole career to libraries in Wales. A graduate of the University of Cambridge and the College of Librarianship, Aberystwyth, he worked first in the University Library in Aberystwyth, then for 14 years at Cardiff University, and six years at Swansea, before becoming National Librarian. He is involved in many library organisations, including the Legal Deposit Advisory Panel, the Legal Deposit Libraries Committee, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, the CyMAL Advisory Council, the Society of College, National and University Libraries; and the National Libraries Committee of the International Federation of Library Associations. In addition he is chair of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales's steering group on Welsh medium higher education. Among his publications is *Wales on the Web*, published by IWA in 2005.

Michael Houlihan has been Director General of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales since 2003. He started his career as a research assistant at the Imperial War Museum, becoming Keeper of Permanent Exhibitions and Head of Exhibitions Research before joining the Horniman Museum in London as Deputy Director and then Director from 1994. He was appointed the first Chief Executive of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland in 1998. A specialist in First World War military history, he is also Chair and a Director of the mda, the UK organisation promoting documentation and management of information about museum collections; a Director of the National Coal Mining Museum for England; and of NMGW Enterprises Ltd, the trading company of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales. He is a Visiting Professor at the University of Ulster.

INTRODUCTION

Museums and Libraries in Our Lives

Peter Stead

Of the many phrases that we all love quoting from Dylan Thomas's recollection of childhood, in "that splendidly ugly sea town" that was Swansea, one of the favourites is his passing reference to "the museum, which should have been in a museum".¹ For those who know Swansea's Royal Institution this always seemed a particularly apposite judgement. Moreover, the resonance of the quote comes from the sense that Dylan had identified a quality that we once felt all real museums should possess.

There was a time when we wanted and expected our museums to be places apart. When we entered them we knew we were leaving the real world and, perhaps, real time. What we were confronted with were relics, collected and not too carefully arranged by absent-minded and elderly antiquarians whose small cards of identification we could never be bothered to read. The phrase that always came to mind was 'Dickensian' and in any room one half expected to come across Miss Havisham. When visiting the provincial museums of that era the poet John Betjeman was always reminded of lines from Tennyson's *The Princess*:

*And on the tables every clime and age
Jumbled together; celts and calumets,
Claymore and snowshoe, toys in lava, fans
Of sandal, amber, ancient rosaries,
Laborious orient ivory sphere in sphere,
The cursed Malayan crease, and battle-clubs
From the isles of palm.*²

There was no doubt that in those museums, as indeed in the reference rooms of local libraries, the regulars, the habitués, came across as a separate breed of people. For me, that crowd was best summed up by the poet Louis MacNeice when he described the British Museum Reading Room:

*Cranks, hacks, poverty-stricken scholars,
In pince-nez, period hats or romantic beards
And cherishing their hobby or their doom,
Some are too much alive and some are asleep
Hanging like bats in a world of inverted values,
Folded up in themselves in a world which is safe and silent.*³

1) Dylan Thomas, 'Reminiscences Of Childhood', *Quite Early One Morning*, 1954.

2) John Betjeman, 'Museums', *The Spectator*, 29 October 1954.

3) Louis MacNeice, 'The British Museum Reading Room', *Collected Poems*, 1966.

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As children we were taken to these places sensing that we were being tested. These were serious places and in those crowded, dusty and mysterious rooms it was our response to the relics that would indicate whether we were capable of being serious people in our own right. I'm afraid I failed the test. My first museum was the one at Cyfarthfa Castle and my early visits there left me with two vivid recollections. My relatives invariably reminded me that the Crawshays, who had built the Castle and for whom my family had worked, had been cruel ironmasters and one of them had died begging forgiveness. Whatever the value of this instruction, my first ever history lesson, it did not put me in a receptive mood for the exhibits. Throughout my childhood I was frightened by the life-size figures, and, in particular the be-spectacled matriarch in Cyfarthfa's traditional Welsh Kitchen display.

My second experience of relics came at the very different National Museum of Wales. Naturally, in this case it was, with one exception, the building itself that made the impact. As a child one could sense that this was an important building, second only to the Castle as an indication of Cardiff's importance. And that, of course, was the whole point. At that time, Cardiff was just about to be made a capital city. However, in itself, this was less important than the more general fact that it was clearly advertising itself as a sophisticated city, as evidenced by its imposing museum. The building was a badge, a statement of rank, a bulwark of cultural status to an extent greater than anything displayed within.

In time I would learn that every important city had similar museums, libraries and edifices. In his essay Dylan had referred to "blackened monuments of civic pride", but the point was that Cardiff's great museum had been planned as one of the best. Roy Jenkins thought that in its 'Beaux Arts style' it was good enough to "have made a fine railroad station for Philadelphia".⁴ Precisely.

As one entered the National Museum of Wales of that time one was confronted by Sir Goscombe John's statue *The Drummer Boy*. With its connotations of warfare, youth and rhythm it was the one thing I remembered from my first and subsequent visits. It became so central to my whole notion of the seriousness of visits, not only to Cathays Park, but of Cardiff itself, that I came to regard it as a personal icon defining my cultural identity. I took its subsequent removal as a sure sign that the city was about to fall.

It was St. Fagans that completed my childhood network of museums. Initially I hated the name and the whole alien notion of a 'Folk' museum, but, eventually, I developed an affection for St. Fagans and especially its out-buildings. In truth, I never thought of it as a museum but rather as a fairly accurate depiction of the surroundings in which my relatives in Cardiganshire were living at the time. So it was a useful place, I thought, for folk without Cardiganshire roots.

In later days I was to visit similar institutions in Scandinavia and New England and came to see what could have been achieved if more money had been put into St. Fagans. Of course, it

4) Roy Jenkins, *Twelve Cities, A Memoir*, MacMillan, 2004.

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was a delight to see St. Fagans change its name and begin impressively to display the buildings, both domestic and public, in which my urban relatives had spent their lives. It is uncanny to see the world of one's own childhood being reconstructed in a museum. One is reminded of Calvino's invisible city of Zora which

...like an armature... cannot be expunged from the mind, a honeycomb in whose cells each of us can place the things he wants to remember.⁵

Inevitably, one's whole attitude to museums, galleries and libraries changes as one matures, not least of course, as one realises that one's intellectual and cultural interests determine that a considerable proportion of one's life is now to spent in such institutions. First it was libraries with the Reference Departments at Swansea and Cardiff, and then the Reading Room of the British Museum becoming homes from home. From the months I spent in the Hayes in Cardiff I have piles of notes and the haunting memory of the busker who played his plaintive recorder outside Cardiff Market. He had ensured that there were often tears in my eyes as I read of old trade union battles. Further insight into what was possible came with my first experience of North American campus libraries that were open around the clock and offered armchairs, sofas and coffee. Obviously our old libraries had not quite been homes from home.

Then it was the turn of galleries to stake their claim. In particular there came the realisation that one could on almost any day walk from the streets of Swansea, Cardiff and, I later realised, Aberystwyth, into public galleries in which there were not only internationally acclaimed masterpieces, but quite stunning works by Welsh artists who demanded far more attention. The visual arts have been one of the glories of the new Wales and we must salute the way in which our traditional galleries prepared the ground for this flowering of the arts in Wales.

The Glynn Vivian in Swansea has a special place in my affections and in recent years I have admired its full programme of exhibitions, classes and social events. I am always surprised, both by the people and the displays I see there. On every visit I find myself saying of a particular work, "I had no idea that they had that".

Finally, it was the turn of museums to win a new place in my perception of culture. Over the decades I had changed, but museums had changed even more. The extent and nature of that change is the story that is told in the essays that follow. We are shown how Dylan's "blackened monuments", Roy Jenkins's railway stations manqué, and what Rhiannon Mason here terms the traditional "temples of culture" have been transformed into dynamic cultural and social agencies. As such they set themselves demanding targets and agendas that involve intervention in, and confrontation with, the wider issues of the day.

5) Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, Harvest, 1974.

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There were two main elements that gave museums their new role in what was a rapidly changing world. Historically museums had been defined in the Victorian and Imperial era. The same logic had prevailed in the civic strategies of London, Dublin, New York, Cardiff, and Bombay: that is civic pride combined with either confirmation or modification of Empire. For decades the only refinement had been the Scandinavian folk dimension. As the twentieth century progressed there were new nations and, even more, there were new cities faced with the challenge of claiming international recognition and prestige. The notion developed of once again turning to architects to make statements that would define identity, only this time eschewing classical models and embracing indigenous themes and contemporary styles.

In this process it was Mexico and, in particular Mexico City that set the agenda. Long before India, Mexico had been the first country to challenge great power imperialism and in the post-1945 world it was still laying claim to world leadership in many cultural respects. In Mexico City's beautiful Chapultepec Park the architect Pedro Ramirez Vazquez designed what was to become the world's greatest museum, the Museo Nacional de Antropologia, in which all the treasures of the Aztec, Mayan and Toltec cultures are displayed and explained.⁶ Nearby is his Galeria de Historia, the world's finest historical museum in which one literally walks down through the post-1810 decades. These and other galleries place culture and history at the centre of the nation's attention, whilst the beauty of the setting and design ensure that for native and visitor alike the experience is compelling and unforgettable. In the decades since the 1960s other cities and countries have turned to architects and asked them to provide iconic museums, galleries and concert halls that would thrill critics and visitors whilst confirming the cultural identity of the indigenous population.

Meanwhile, in first-world countries an ideological debate had issued a new challenge to the growing number of museum authorities. As manufacturing and extractive industries disappeared, churches, railways and harbours closed down, city centres, churches and historic buildings were demolished, it appeared to many observers as if our past was being destroyed by the day. Soon there was a mushrooming of protest groups and preservation trusts as well as obliging brewers prepared to turn pubs into museums. In the 1980s the author Robert Hewison famously identified what he termed *The Heritage Industry*, a book that was subtitled *British Culture in a Climate of Decline*. As Hewison argued:

Individually, museums are fine institutions but their growth in numbers points to the imaginative death of this country.⁷

In the ensuing debate there was considerable support for this view, not least on the Left where it was thought that museums reflecting industrial themes were taking the place of real jobs and that 'heritage' was being institutionalised in American or Disneyesque terms.

6) Pedro Ramirez Vazquez, *Ramirez Vazquez on Architecture*, 1988.

7) Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*, Methuen, 1987.

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There were, however, dissenting voices. In particular there was Raphael Samuel, the Jewish, Marxist scholar from the East End who had organised the History Workshop at Oxford's Ruskin College and published the *History Workshop Journal*. It was Samuel who taught the Left, the Unions and working-class leaders to treasure their past, to respect songs, banners, oral tradition, popular culture and material relics and to learn from them. His method was summed up by Iain Sinclair as one in which "we excavate the history we need, bend the past to colonise the present".⁸

Samuel died in 1996 but his influence lives on. In London's East End both his Archive and History Centre exist to "create public forums for historical discussion and debate", committed to taking history into the wider community through educational and outreach initiatives.⁹ Samuel's Workshops and publications, particularly his *Theatres of Memory* (1994) ensured a wider and continuing following. In his obituary Gareth Stedman Jones identified Samuel's "engagement with the continuous remaking of a people's past", an exercise in which he "anticipated an understanding of culture which is now global".¹⁰

Meanwhile, in Wales we had our own Raphael Samuel in the person of Dr. Hywel Francis. Francis has been by far the most important and influential influence in the Welsh museum world in the modern era. Reacting in the early 1970s to the disappearance of the Welsh coal industry he inspired a South Wales Coalfield Project to collect and preserve written and oral material relating to the pits and their communities. He then persuaded Swansea University to establish the South Wales Miners Library to house the material.

At the same time *Llafur*, the Welsh Labour History Society, which Francis had also created, organised conferences in which miners, trade unionists and academics came together to discuss the past, present and future of Welsh society and politics. Now that we take it for granted that students in Welsh schools, colleges and adult classes should have access to original written, oral and photographic evidence, and that all galleries, libraries and museums should engage with communities and confront class, gender and ethnic issues, we have tended to forget that it all started with the reaction of Francis to pit closures. Nothing would be more appropriate here than to apply to Francis the words used by Stedman Jones to assess the role of Raphael Samuel.¹¹

In the essays that follow it is clear that the authors appreciate the immense challenge that a rapidly changing society presents to those charged with the running of public and, especially national, galleries, libraries and museums. There are financial constraints and technological innovations to be mastered. The whole issue of architectural design and presentation has to be dealt with in ways that will satisfy critics in both professional journals and the national press and at the same time bring in the notoriously fickle great Welsh public.

8) Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room*, Granta Books, 2000.

9) Raphael Samuel, *Theatres Of Memory*, Verso, 1994.

10) Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Raphael Samuel', *The Independent*, 11 December 1996.

11) See The South Wales Miners Library website, www.swan.ac.uk/lis/historicalcollections/swml/.

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Of course, our national institutions have to give pride of place to reflecting the Welsh experience and identifying the decisive elements that determine Welsh identity. They also have to do so in the context of a diverse global culture that inevitably will have local connotations and complications. Never have curators and their staffs had to be so technologically attuned, politically canny, socially sensitive, and culturally imaginative. The evidence presented here is that our institutions are in good hands and that on a regular basis we are engaging with our past and presenting our cultural jewels in ways that is making our nation more complex, sophisticated and attractive.

CHAPTER 1

The Creation of the National Museum and National Library

Prys Morgan

Why should the Institute for Welsh Affairs bother about two institutions founded a hundred years ago? Surely, at first glance, they are too academic and antiquarian for an up-to-date body concerned with current affairs?

But I should argue that, if one looks a bit more deeply, one can see that they were only the most glorious of a large number of institutions created in the 'first age of devolution' from the 1880s to 1914. And, indeed, the achievements of that age, now long past, have once again become relevant to our 'second age of devolution'. By looking at them, we may see more clearly the wellsprings of our own phase of devolution, and by touching them we may be freshly inspired.

I shall try to describe the tortuous path by which the two institutions were founded in 1907, and then ask what were the elements making them possible, the factors which created a new kind of Wales in this period. I shall try not to lose myself in too many byways, mindful of the caution of Professor J. Gwynn Williams when he talks of Sir William Allchin's many volumes on the development of the constitution of the University of London, Volume Three being devoted only to 1891 and 1892 – remarking that not for nothing was Allchin an expert on indigestion.¹²

The story ending in 1907 begins really in the 1850s in the wake of the Blue Books crisis of 1847. The Welsh reacted in very different ways to the criticism of the government reports: there was a strong, progressive, utilitarian and positivist movement to re-educate and modernise the Welsh people, to bring them up to the level of the English. Others nervously defended a beleaguered traditional Welsh history and culture. Yet another response was a strong movement to reconfigure a Welsh nationality around Nonconformity. There were some discernible stirrings for the Welsh, who had had virtually no institutions of any kind for centuries, to have some of their own at last.

These stirrings of the 1850s were no more than stirrings. The omnivorous bibliophile Sir Thomas Philipps of Middle Hill looked across mid-Wales for a site for a National Library where he might deposit part of his collections. He gave up the struggle some years later. R.J. Derfel at the end of the play in 1854 which gave to the Blue Books crisis the sobriquet 'Treason of the Blue Books', *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*, demanded things like a national library, monuments for Welsh heroes and so on. In 1858 G. H. Whalley of Plas Madoc, Ruabon, at the first of the great series of national eisteddfodau 1858–68, again proposed a National Museum for Wales either near Ruabon or somewhere public

¹² Williams, J. G., *The University Movement in Wales*, University of Wales Press, 1993.

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opinion might like. Another piece of the jigsaw puzzle appears with Thomas Gee in *Y Faner* calling for a National Library in 1860, which marks the intervention of the Welsh radical press in the story.

Hugh Owen's Social Science Section at the National Eisteddfod from 1861 onwards has been rightly criticised for its indifferent attitude towards the Welsh language. But it acted as a forum where national institutions were discussed, and it is well known that in such meetings steps were taken in 1863 to found a University College for Wales. Its opening in 1872 suggested the possibility that a Museum or Library might be attached to the new college at Aberystwyth. Several small local museums and learned societies had been founded in Wales – the Royal Institution of South Wales at Swansea in 1835 for example – and a Geological Museum for Wales was mentioned in 1868, though it was not until 1876 that it was proposed that a Natural History Museum for Wales should be attached to the new Aberystwyth college.

A Revived Welsh Patriotism

Library and Museum were seen as tools of social progress, the past of Wales was that fashioned by new sciences such as archaeology, geology, palaeontology and natural history. The new science of philology, for example, was telling the Welsh to drop the silly language theories dreamed up by the generation of Iolo Morganwg and William Owen Pughe, and to embrace modern linguistics instead. So by the early 1870s collections and collecting were in the air, educational institutions founded, and new sciences, new interpretations of the distant past appeared, all part of the movement of social progress for the Welsh.

Then another most important element appeared, which would eventually prove to be crucial, a new kind of Welsh MP. As a result of the great extension of the franchise in 1867, the election of 1868 had an electrifying effect in Wales, bringing to the fore a much greater number of Liberal MPs aware that their electorates were not only self-consciously nonconformist but also much more enthusiastically Welsh.

The Eisteddfod movement had stumbled badly into debt in 1868, and faced great uncertainty for about twelve years. However, the Mold Eisteddfod of 1873 was a remarkable one for the lively discussions about national institutions, out of which sprang a committee to found a National Library. From the surplus of the money collected to take *Côr Caradog* (more or less a national Welsh choir) to its victories in London choral competitions, it was decided to re-establish the defunct Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, in London later in 1873.

The Library Committee achieved very little in thirty years. However, the Cymmrodorion became an important new piece in the jigsaw puzzle. They provided two platforms for

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discussion of institutions, one in London, and another in the Eisteddfod. The Eisteddfod itself needed to be reformed and reshaped by technocrats such as Hugh Owen. This was achieved in 1880, at long last putting it on a firm footing. Its meetings each year provided the Welsh with an excellent forum for discussions.

The temperature was rapidly raised from 1880 with the growing confidence of Welsh MPs and the appearance of a small proto-nationalist movement of *Cymru Fydd* (Young Wales) from 1886 onwards. *Cymru Fydd* had a historical and romantic vision of the Welsh past, so the projected or imagined Library and Museum were seen as part of a revived Welsh patriotism, not simply as steps to educational progress. There were seers at work not merely technocrats. It is striking that this period also sees The Royal Cambrian Academy in 1882 and the reformed Gorsedd of Bards in 1888. T. H. Thomas 'Arlunydd Penygarn' of Cardiff, linked the Academy group with the reformed Gorsedd and the group demanding a library-cum-museum in Cardiff.

Cardiff, with its wealth and ambitious civic leaders, swiftly established a powerful case for a University College in the town in 1881. Opened in 1883, the new college purchased the extensive Welsh library of E.R.G. Salisbury which, when added to a rapidly growing public library with a good collection of Welsh books, not to mention a rapidly growing municipal museum of art and natural history, meant that Cardiff suddenly became an important player in the drama, making a bid for a library-cum-museum, on the model of London's British Museum.

County councils were established in 1888, and elected in 1889. Welsh radical MPs, especially those linked to the new proto-nationalist group of *Cymru Fydd*, established in 1886 with an intention of founding more Welsh institutions, saw that the new county councils might be forged together to create a body of opinion or head of steam to force government to grant Welsh institutions. This was the hope of the young and visionary Merioneth MP Thomas Edward Ellis. National institutions – for example, a Museum, Library and Gallery – were part of the *Cymru Fydd* vision for a new Wales. Ellis became friendly with the solicitor Herbert Lewis in 1886, and by 1890 they shared a vision for a Museum and Library for Wales. In July 1891 Lewis and others called a conference of Welsh local authorities in Shrewsbury which demanded a Museum and Library for Wales. When Lewis became MP in 1892 he took over the mantle of Tom Ellis, spending the rest of his life campaigning in and out of Parliament for a Museum and Library.

The Question of Institutions

Alfred Thomas the MP for Cardiff, and also a member of *Cymru Fydd*, failed in the Commons with his National Institutions (Wales) Bill in 1892, which proposed a weak form of assembly for Wales. However, the question of institutions was now to be kept in

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the public eye, partly by Herbert Lewis's persistent questioning in the Commons, and partly by pushing public opinion in Wales through the eisteddfod meetings of the Cymmrodorion. One example occurred in Pontypridd in 1893 when Brynmor Jones proposed a Museum and Library, with the rider that the Library should be a copyright library. In the same year Herbert Lewis and others attacked the government's Museum Grant, asking for Wales to have a share of what was given to Scotland and Ireland, for their museums and libraries. It was said that Lewis had to become extremely thick-skinned, to endure the loud laughter of English MPs.

Cardiff not only had a University library after 1883, it also built up a large public library, under the dynamic leadership of the librarian John Ballinger. Cardiff also had a lively and vocal Naturalists' Society, encouraging the expansion of the scientific side of the Cardiff Museum, which also had a growing fine and applied art section, and propagandists such as T. H. Thomas 'Arlunydd Penygarn'. From 1887 on it also had a resourceful Cymrodorion – Cymrodorion with one m – Society run by local politicians such as Edward Thomas 'Cochfarf', acting as a pressure group. By 1894 Cardiff believed it ought to house both national library and museum.

At the same time, however, the College in Aberystwyth was developing its Welsh Library, and by 1896 had a Welsh Library Committee. It built powerful support amongst the Cymmrodorion in London for turning this into a National Library. In the process it gained the support of the man who would eventually decide where the library would go, Sir John Williams, Queen Victoria's doctor, who had become an avid collector of Welsh books and manuscripts. The story goes that John Williams, then a Swansea doctor, happened to drop into Leeders auction rooms about 1870. The auctioneer turned to Williams, who had never thought of collecting anything, and said, "Buy these Welsh books: in fifty years' time it will be too late". He bought and was smitten by the collecting bug, becoming one of the greatest collectors of the age. Williams disliked Cardiff, but liked Aberystwyth.

Another crucial supporter of Aberystwyth was Gwenogvryn Evans, the leading Welsh palaeographer, who, as a result of the criticism made of the Historical Manuscripts Commission by Welsh MPs, was appointed to catalogue all Welsh MSS for the commission from 1894 to 1906. Aberystwyth also had the help of J. H. Davies, registrar and eventual Principal of Aberystwyth, an avid bibliographer and also brother in law of Tom Ellis. Another ally to the Aberystwyth cause was the president of the College, Stuart Rendel, by now Lord Rendel, a rich English arms manufacturer, but who had led the Welsh parliamentary party for some years. By 1896 Aberystwyth had an executive committee for the Welsh Library, and in the following year Rendel bought the Grogythan site on the hill above the town where the National Library was eventually built.

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Cardiff still persisted in its attempts to be home to the two institutions. However, Sir John Williams stole a march, first by buying the magnificent Welsh books and manuscripts collection of the Earls of Macclesfield from Shirburn Castle, in the depths of Oxfordshire in 1898. He also bought the superlative Hengwrt-Peniarth collection of manuscripts from the Wynne family at Peniarth in 1904. In addition to which, of course, Sir John had his own gargantuan collection of some 25,000 valuable Welsh books. These treasures were all destined for Aberystwyth, whatever any government might decide.

So, after 1900 there was persistent pressure on the Unionist government from Welsh MPs and from the supporters of Cardiff and of Aberystwyth, and all this was backed up by support from Welsh local authorities. This was the time of the famous 'Welsh Revolt'. From 1902 the Welsh local authorities (almost all Liberals), goaded by Lloyd George and other opposition MPs, were up in arms against Balfour's new Education Act. Wales and Welsh bellicosity attracted British attention to things Welsh. The Unionist government may well have felt – if one may surmise on this point – it would be a clever move to draw opposition fire by stealing some of their ideas, in order to weaken them. For all these reasons there was a change of atmosphere between 1902 and 1903, with a climate more favourable to funding Welsh institutions.

By 1903 pressure was built up on several fronts and at long last in the Commons that year the Unionist government made concessive noises, to the effect that the Welsh MPs should state what kind of institutions they wanted and where they should be. The atmosphere changed and the supporters of Cardiff and Aberystwyth saw that they would have to agree or get outsiders to umpire for them as to the sites, or site. In 1904 there were two Welsh delegations to discuss financial details of the proposed institutions, first to the President of Board of Education and then to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. In February 1905 it was decided that a committee of the Privy Council would arbitrate on two sites and who should get what. This committee reported on 10 June, deciding swiftly that Aberystwyth should get the Library and Cardiff the Museum. By July the government had accepted this arbitration and so the schemes for founding the two institutions could speed ahead. The two charters for the institutions were drawn up by a Joint Conference in Parliament and by 1907 they were both ready. In that year the college in Aberystwyth transferred its Welsh Library to the new National Library.

The Library opened in temporary accommodation in Aberystwyth's old Assembly Rooms, in Laura Place, and the Museum in a corner of the newly-built Cardiff town hall, since the end of 1905 the City Hall. The Cardiff librarian John Ballinger had greatly impressed Sir John Williams, and it was he who was appointed to be national Librarian of the new institution, starting his work in 1909. I remember the late Professor Griffith John Williams telling me that when he started research in the new Library in 1917, the people of Cardiganshire could not pronounce the name of

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Ballinger, and thought it rhymed with *llynger* (tapeworms). They could only say *Ballynger* as if it were Welsh. Or was he just teasing me? In Cardiff a distinguished zoologist Dr Evans Hoyle, who rejoiced in the bardic name of *Amgueddfab*, was appointed director of the Museum.

Competitions were held for the best designs. The Library design was awarded to S. Kyffin Greenslade, and that for the Museum to the firm of Dunbar Smith and Brewer. Greenslade is often called Sydney, but the late Eirene White told me he was always called Kyffin. Building started quickly, especially at the Library. King George V laid the foundation stone very soon after the Investiture in July 1911. The King returned to Cardiff to lay the stone of the Museum in the summer of 1912. Herbert Lewis later made it clear that Lloyd George as Chancellor of the Exchequer had listened to pleas by him and Welsh MPs, and generously supported the Welsh institutions and colleges from the exchequer. This had especially helped the Library to get started. The buildings had begun to take shape before the First World War delayed the projects for some years. Lewis was convinced the Library owed more to Lloyd George than to any other man.

Thinking of Wales

Those are the bare facts of the story, and in a sense the facts of the chapter end there with the two institutions securely founded and building underway after 1911-12. But what had really made them possible? What sort of institutions were they and how British and how truly Welsh? The first thing to remember is that these institutions were for the whole of Wales. They were not local or regional institutions. At that time thinking of Wales as a whole, rather than one's neighbourhood or bro, or one's religious denomination, was something quite new.

The new institutions were free from *odium theologicum*, and there was no sectarianism in their creation. A much clearer sense of Welshness appeared in the last quarter of the nineteenth century than had been seen earlier. The only thing which occasionally cut across the unity of purpose was the desire of some radicals to disendow the Church and transfer its endowments to sustain the Museum and Library. Yet nothing much came of that idea. At this point there was a real need for an overarching vision of Welshness to transcend the parochial denominationalism of most Welsh people of the period. The late Dora Herbert Jones told me that when she was Herbert Lewis's secretary he would go around the Eisteddfodau, speaking to innumerable ministers, especially to Calvinistic Methodists, referring to each as "*Mae o gyda ni yn Bootle*" ('He's one of ours at Bootle'). Lady Lewis used '*gyda ni*' as short hand for Calvinists. She would turn to Dora and ask "Is that one a Baptist, or is he a '*gyda-ni*'?" The romantic but secular Welshness of the late nineteenth century came just at the right time to provide an overarching power and vision, touching many different institutions.

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A patriotic middle class, often of nonconformist origins, appeared late in the century. Dissenting leaders began in the age of the Methodist preacher John Elias (1774–1841) by being concerned for the soul. Then there arose a second generation, with men such as Sir Hugh Owen (1804–1881), one of the original promoters of the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth who burned with a strong social conscience. Finally, a third generation arose late in the century with visionaries such as Tom Ellis, combining a Welsh consciousness with a cultural and aesthetic awareness. This third stage was an outgrowth of an earlier nonconformist Welshness. Take, for example, the Davieses of Llandinam, Herbert Lewis, Alfred Thomas, Brynmor and Viriamu Jones, and Sir John Williams himself. They had inherited the “pseudo-nationality of Welsh Nonconformity”, as the late Gwyn Alfred Williams put it, but had found it too limited and too limiting.

Connected to that was the rise of a self-conscious political class in Wales from 1868 and especially from 1880. MPs of this era were usually far more responsive to their constituents than previously, aware that they were often nonconformists, keen on moral improvement, social reform and on Welshness. The whole movement starts with that dissenting Wales, seen almost as a Protestant community or mini-state, a religious community taking on firstly a political form and then cultural flesh and bone, as shown in the recent work of Matthew Cragoe.¹³ This happens by the 1880s and 1890s. The changes are well reflected in the title of Kenneth O. Morgan’s *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales, 1880–1980*.

Crucial to the whole operation was the formation of a political lobby from 1890 onwards on the matter of the Museum and Library, led by Tom Ellis¹⁴ and especially Herbert Lewis and William Jones (of Arfon), and others. From 1889 onwards this lobby was made more effective by an alliance with the county councils. It all helped to put pressure on the conservative Unionist government by 1903.

Possibly the political failure of *Cymru Fydd* in 1896 helped to turn members towards cultural aims in long years of opposition for Welsh Liberals, from 1895 to 1906. Kenneth O. Morgan’s argument is that the political collapse of *Cymru Fydd* (brought down by the opposition of Cardiff and Newport) helped to concentrate resources for the Welsh cultural renaissance of the period. The romantic vision of the 1880s onwards helped to transcend the more humdrum everyday struggles of Wales. This was a vision of Welshness which Tom Ellis, O.M. Edwards, John Edward Lloyd and others, tried to communicate to a whole generation.

The Neglect of Welsh Treasures

However, from 1889 the emergent Welsh nationhood of this era relied on a much broader vision than that of *Cymru Fydd*. In fact, it had started well before *Cymru Fydd* in

13) Matthew Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales, 1832–86*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

14) It was most appropriate that Dr Mari Ellis, Tom Ellis’s daughter in law, was present at the lecture in January 2006 on which this chapter is based, providing a remarkable continuity.

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1886. Just consider the revived Cymmrodorion of 1873, the Football Association of 1876, the Rugby Union of 1880, Eisteddfod reform in 1880, the creation of the Cambrian Academy in 1882, the Language Society in 1885, Gorsedd reform in 1888, the Musical Association in 1888, the University of Wales in 1893, the Central Welsh Board of Education in 1896, the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society in 1904, the Folk Song Society in 1906, the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments for Wales in 1908, the Welsh Insurance Commission in 1911, and so on up to the Act Disestablishing the Welsh Church in 1914.

Until the change of heart in 1903, the British government and establishment had been hostile to what were seen as rivals to the British Museum, and unnecessary Welsh whims and fancies. It seems to me that both Library and Museum were founded as an act of criticism of these British institutions. Their creation was a protest against the neglect of Welsh treasures, and in particular the inability of the British Museum to deal with Welsh material, its inability to display it, and the lack of work done in the Historical Manuscripts Commission until Gwenogvryn's time. Both institutions were set up in the teeth of hostility and disdain of the British Museum and London.

Essentially, the National Library and National Museum of Wales were anti-British institutions, founded out of bitter protest at British neglect of all things Welsh, though of course they were to be financed by the central state. People such as O. M. Edwards, Tom Ellis and John Edward Lloyd claimed that the new college in Aberystwyth from 1872 onwards almost unwittingly fostered a secular national spirit in Wales for the first time. It is obviously true of the Museum and Library that, as Welsh institutions, they arise from a romantic vision of the Welsh past and Welsh nationality. In my opinion they are primarily Welsh not British institutions in their aim and purpose.

The slogan of this group is *Codi'r Hen Wlad yn ei Hôl*, that is 'Helping the old country back on its feet'. Consider Alfred Thomas's motto for the Museum, *Dysgu'r byd am Gymru, a'r Cymry am Wlad eu Tadau* ('Teach the World about Wales and the Welsh about their Fatherland'). The ambiguity of many of the Welsh institutions of this period comes from an element of imitation of others to be discerned in the founding all national institutions, including the national football and rugby teams.

There are surely at least two kinds of nationality, negative and positive. The negative was long important for the Welsh, a people surviving because no one bothers to conquer them, and they go on preserving for ages their ancient mores in their remote mountain fastnesses. However, from the later nineteenth century onwards another nationality takes over. This is a positive nationality, entailing constructing national institutions to defend a national culture, often by copying things onlooking nationalities also have found good, such as a library or museum.

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There is nothing quintessentially Welsh or English about museums and libraries. It depends on what they contain. From 1907 onwards our Library and Museum were storehouses of things Welsh: geology, zoology, bygones, pictures, literary treasures and so on. They also contain books and artefacts from many other countries so that we can take a proper measure of our own achievements, and put our own things in a worldwide context.

A Rib Cage for Nationality

I think the two institutions were both fundamentally contrary to the dominant Imperial British culture of the period, though they were made to fit into a kind of 'Dominion status' for Wales and its culture in the Empire. Essentially, they form part of that movement of Welshness which arose from what I feel should be called the 'Age of Anxiety' in the 1847-50s in the wake of the Blue Books. Utilitarianism, Philistinism, and Anglicisation were rampant, but there was also resistance to all that, and an urge to shape a rib cage for nationality. That was the role of both institutions in differing ways. We should note them as exemplars for our own age of devolution, and take pride in them.

Today we can hardly conceive of Welsh life without the Museum and Library. Institutions are needed to inspire scholars and scientists to reveal the character of Wales, whether it is through literary treasures or through aeons of geology or natural history. I find it hard to deliver an objective scholarly lecture about two institutions which I have loved since childhood. I can still see myself peering as an eight-year old boy at the Museum's numismatics displays in Cardiff, and asking myself, "If the island of Guernsey is allowed to have a coin of *Un Double*, why don't we have even a farthing for Wales?" and also asking myself, "How is it possible to have people in such dire poverty that the British Caribbean islands used coins of no more than a tenth of a penny?" I recall coming home and telling my parents that their favourite garden plant, the Sea Lavender, was called *Llemyg* by the Botany department.

I return at the close to the theme I mentioned at the beginning, that of the life-giving and recreative relationship that should prevail between us today and our past history. This is made possible by such places as the Museum and Library. If it were a Sunday I should have no hesitation in having started by taking a text for a sermon from the Second Book of Kings, where there are Jews and Moabites chasing each other back and fore across the desert. At one point a young Jew is slain, and is hurriedly buried in the sand, in what by sheer accident happens to be the grave of the prophet Elisha. The moment the young man's body touches the dead remains of Elisha it springs back to life, and (presumably) is able to leap back into the fray. I hope that is our relationship today with the Welsh past.

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CHAPTER 2

Representing the Nation*

Rhiannon Mason

National museums play an important role in articulating and shaping public perceptions of a nation's histories, identities, and cultures. At the same time, national museums are themselves shaped by the nations within which they are located. Viewed in this way, Wales's national museums have considerable potential to tell us about changing conceptions of national identities in Wales. The 2007 centenary of the granting of the first museum's charter reminds us that as European museums go National Museum Wales is a relatively youthful organisation. However, what Wales's national museums lack in age they make-up for in diversity and interest.

The first National Museum of Wales was granted its charter in 1907 at the same time as the National Library of Wales. The museum opened fully to the public in 1927 in the centre of what is now the capital city, Cardiff. This first site is today known as Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Caerdydd – National Museum Cardiff, one of eight branches of the Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales network. For the sake of brevity, only the English names will be used from this point onwards.¹⁵

Today the majority of the museums are concentrated in the south of Wales with some branches in the west and north. Following a name change in 2005, the other sites now comprise: St. Fagans National History Museum; Big Pit National Coal Museum; National Roman Legion Museum; National Slate Museum; National Wool Museum; National Waterfront Museum; and the National Collections Centre.¹⁶

Over the last century, other sites have been added while some have been closed or transferred out of the network.¹⁷ The overall network itself has also changed in both name and nature. It started off as a loose confederation of individual sites initially with

* I should like to thank Alistair Robinson for his comments on this chapter. I would also like to acknowledge the staff of National Museum Wales and many other colleagues who advised and assisted with the research. Full acknowledgements and sources are given in my forthcoming book *Museums, Nations, Identities: Wales and its National Museums*, to be published by the University of Wales Press in 2007. This research was made possible by support from Newcastle University Arts and Humanities Research Fund, the Arts and Humanities Research Council Research Leave Scheme, and colleagues in the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University. Any errors remain my own responsibility.

15) There is much that could be said, for example, about the translation of the names. What is now called St. Fagans: National History Museum remains in Welsh much closer to the original English title, the Welsh Folk Museum. Similarly, while the most recent name change removed the term "Welsh" from the English translation. "Cymru" remains in the majority of the other site names.

16) In addition National Museum Wales has a partnership arrangement for the management of Segontium Roman Museum in Caernarfon and Turner House Gallery in Penarth.

17) Over the years other sites were acquired but are no longer operated by *National Museum Wales*. These are the Graham Sutherland Gallery, Tre'r-ddol Chapel and Oriel Eryi.

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the National Museum and the Welsh Folk Museum. In 1995, under the directorship of Colin Ford, it became the National Museums and Galleries of Wales and in 2005 under the current directorship of Michael Houlihan it was renamed National Museum Wales. From this point on I will refer to the overall network of museums by their current English name National Museum Wales.¹⁸ The aim of the chapter is to explore how Wales's national institutions – particularly its museums – have responded to the challenge of representing 'the nation' past, present, and future.

The chapter is organised into three parts. The first looks at debates about the status of the Welsh nation generated by the proposal to create national institutions. It reveals significant differences of opinion both about the relationship between Britain and Wales and which national institutions (British or Welsh) should have responsibility for representing Wales. The focus here is on the role played by the national institutions in staking out a space of cultural distinctiveness and, crucially, in obtaining official recognition within Britain for Wales's status as a nation.

Secondly, I argue that more attention is needed to understand both how the national museums have represented Wales in the past and why. The third section looks to contemporary developments and what the future might hold for the national museums of Wales in an era of globalisation and increasing cultural diversity. To address this point this section will consider the newest branch, the National Waterfront Museum, Swansea. Although this chapter focuses primarily on Wales's national museums rather than its national library, the former have many resonances for the latter.

Nations and Museums

National museums have been traditionally understood as instruments for advancing the cause of the nation-state. As many studies of nationalism have noted, museums and other national institutions such as libraries, portrait galleries, and civic buildings have been regarded as prerequisites for nation-building. Museums are particularly useful because they promise to translate the abstract idea of 'the nation' into tangible form for both internal and external audiences.

However, national museums face a number of difficulties. Firstly, definitions of a national culture, history, or identity are always contested. It is more appropriate to talk of multiple cultures, histories, and identities. Some of these competing versions will be awarded more recognition than others and will dominate or suppress alternatives. This has to do with questions of power and influence. Who or what has the power to promote certain

18) National Museum Wales today is an Assembly Sponsored Public Body (ASPB) and as such receives both funding and strategic direction from the Welsh Assembly Government and the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport. National Museum Wales is a registered charity and an independent chartered body which receives its core funding through grant-in-aid from the Welsh Assembly Government. It generates further revenue from its trading company and from grant-giving bodies like the UK's Heritage Lottery Fund. In the year 2005-2006, National Museum Wales received a total of 1,343,685 visitors (NMW website).

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versions of a national identity as opposed to others at a given time. Museums develop incrementally which means that a museum today will invariably hold collections built-up according to previous and selective definitions of national heritage; ideas which may well now be considered anachronistic. Consequently, there may be a degree of dislocation between the values and ideals embodied in past collections and subsequent perceptions of what constitutes 'the nation'. National museums are always involved in an abalancing act between what they have been bequeathed and what current society expects of them.

The role of Wales' national institutions – both museum and library – has been further complicated by the hierarchical and complex arrangement of nations and state within the United Kingdom. Wales, Scotland and Ireland have long been dominated politically, culturally, economically, and constitutionally by their more powerful neighbour, England. England, in turn, has traditionally been conflated with the idea of Britain, with the designation 'United Kingdom' further confusing the nature of the relationships between the constituent parts. As David McCrone explains:

The UK has long had a constitutional contradiction at its heart: it is manifestly a multinational state, but its system of governance has been unitary...¹⁹

Wales can be understood as a nation within a state (the UK) which is itself often described as another nation. So, for example, it is common to speak of the British nation or people as a single entity. This has led McCrone to describe Scotland and, by implication, Wales as "stateless nations". Clearly, this situation has changed to varying extents since the introduction of the National Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. However, this is a recent change and was not the case for the majority of the existence of Wales's national institutions.

Winning the Argument for Wales's National Institutions

The UK's constitutional arrangements created a specific set of challenges for Wales's national institutions at the time of their proposal at the end of the 1880s and during the 1890s. Bassett observes that one of the reasons given by the government in Westminster for refusing the proposal for a Welsh National Museum and Library was that the British Museum was:

...always ready to receive material from Wales or of interest to the Welsh people ... The only development that the Government was prepared to consider was the creation of a branch of the South Kensington Museum somewhere in the Principality.²⁰

19) McCrone, D., *Understanding Scotland: the Sociology of a Nation*, Routledge, 2001.

20) Bassett, D. A., 'The Making of a National Museum: Part I', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*: 153-185, 1982.

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This point is often given no more attention but if we look back at the original debates in the 1890s it becomes clear that this was a significant issue bound up with conflicting perceptions about the status of Wales within the UK.

The records of parliamentary debates in 1896 make clear that various British government ministers and many of the staff in the London museums took for granted that their sphere of influence naturally included Wales, Ireland and Scotland. According to this view, the British Museum served to preserve and represent Wales's heritage, while South Kensington's museums catered for its educational and technical instruction needs. When Welsh MPs argued for a national museum and library for Wales, the British MPs in Westminster responded that Wales already had a national museum and library because – in their view – Wales was naturally encompassed by the British national institutions. In the same way that Wales's default national capital was London until 1955, its default national institutions were assumed to be those in the British capital.

The campaign to establish a separate national museum and library in Wales was therefore complicated because it challenged the role of the South Kensington Museums and the British Museum. It had to fundamentally overturn the existing assumption within the British government that it was only right and proper that the Welsh nation should be subsumed culturally within an overarching Imperial, British nation. In his history of the campaign for a national library in Wales between 1893 and 1905, David Jenkins notes that the British government regarded Wales as no different from Cornwall, Yorkshire, or the Western Isles of Scotland.²¹

Elizabeth Crooke's study of the national museum in Ireland reveals similar debates about the control and power of Dublin's existing museum during the 1890s. Those debates also focused on the perceived legal and conceptual boundaries of the Irish nation. An example was the case of the Brougher Hoard found in County Londonderry in 1896 and purchased by the British Museum in 1897. The Royal Irish Academy claimed that the hoard was Irish treasure trove and thus should not have been acquired by the British Museum. Initial attempts to secure its return failed but in 1898 a Royal Commission was set up:

*... to advise on the circumstances of the case and the relations between the British Museum and the museums of Edinburgh and Dublin regarding the acquisition and retention of antiquities.*²²

There is a longer story here but, in short, the Royal Commission found in favour of the museums in Edinburgh and Dublin and against the British Museum. In the Irish context these debates were as much about politics and the concurrent campaigns for home rule as they were about national institutions. The links were not lost on some contemporary

21) Jenkins, D., 'A National Library for Wales: the Prologue', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*: 139-152, 1982.

22) Crooke, E., *Politics, Archaeology, and the Creation of a National Museum of Ireland: An Expression of National Life*, Irish Academic Press, page 130, 2000.

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commentators who viewed concessions on the cultural front as setting a dangerous precedent. There were parallels with the Cymru Fydd movement in Wales although to a lesser degree.

When the National Museum of Wales was finally established much care was taken by its directors to emphasise that Wales was seeking parity rather than full independence. Press coverage of royal visits to open the national institutions similarly stressed the Welsh people's loyalty to the British monarch. Again there is much more that could be said about the formative years of the national institutions and new research on this topic is forthcoming.²³ However, for the purpose of this chapter, it will suffice to note that the National Museum and Library of Wales were finally given their charters in 1907 and the first branch of Wales's national museums was fully opened to the public in Cathays Park, Cardiff, in 1927.²⁴

The important point to derive from this brief look at the inception of the National Library and Museum is that their creation stimulated debates and challenged existing ideas about Wales's status as a nation and which national institutions were tasked with its representation. It signified a new acceptance that Wales's history and culture could henceforth not be simply subsumed within Britain's cultural institutions. By creating its own national institutions, Wales both won – and was granted – official recognition for its national distinctiveness. In the process a symbolic space was carved out for its cultural autonomy. This episode also demonstrates how ideas about Welsh nationhood and Wales's relationship with England and Britain were challenged and revised in the past just as they are today.²⁵

Creating National Institutions for Wales

Important as these debates were, winning the argument for the establishment of the national institutions was only half the battle. Once Wales had its National Museum and Library, the next step was to decide what to put in them and how to answer the question: what makes a museum or a library deserving of the title 'national'?

Moreover, how would the collections inherited by the new National Library and Museum be made to fit the requirements of representing the nation? In the case of the museum much of its initial collection came from Cardiff's earlier Municipal Museum and Art Gallery and reflected the tastes of individual benefactors who had collected for their own purposes.²⁶ How would the national institutions of Wales be made appropriately 'Welsh' and what form would that take?

23) Jones, B., *Rooms At The Top: Cardiff's Municipal Museum 1862-1912*, unpublished article, 2006; and Campbell, B., *The Battle of the Sites: A National Museum for Wales* (PhD thesis), Department of Museum Studies, Leicester, Leicester University, 2006.

24) The Roman Legionary Museum which is today a branch of National Museum Wales dates from 1850 but only passed over to the national museum in 1930.

25) We see the same process of debating and revising ideas of national identity in current debates about the relationship between English and British identity post-devolution.

26) Jones, B., *Rooms At The Top: Cardiff's Municipal Museum 1862-1912*, unpublished article, 2006.

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In the case of the National Library, David Jenkins notes that the initial campaign had proposed to restrict itself to collecting books in the Welsh language or relating to Wales and other Celtic countries. However, Brynmor Jones, one of the library's most ardent advocates, subsequently expanded this remit by arguing that the library should:

...aim to collect scholarly works on all subjects and in as many languages as would be possible.²⁷

The initial granting of the National Museum's charter in 1907 prompted similar debates about content and remit. The Museum's founders explicitly recognised the need to distinguish clearly between Britain's existing museums and the new National Museum of Wales. However, they also recognised the need for illustrative materials. This led to the much quoted instruction outlined at the time of the laying of the foundation stone in 1912:

It is intended that the new Museum shall be primarily and essentially National in character. Its special and characteristic function must, according to the views of its Council, be to teach the stranger about Wales and to teach the Welsh people about their own country. Above all things, it must not attempt to be a copy of the British Museum on a small scale which happens to be situated in Wales. Does this imply that only Welsh specimens are to be collected and exhibited in our Museum? By no means: the adage 'Little he knows of England who only England knows' applies equally to Wales, and it is impossible thoroughly to understand either the natural or artificial products or the history of Wales without examples drawn from a wide area for comparison. Nothing should be admitted, however, which does not illustrate or elucidate Wales in some aspect or other.²⁸

As the quotation demonstrates, it was clear from the outset that the National Museum was intended for the purpose of telling the world about Wales and the Welsh about Wales and the World. It was also clear that this would involve non-Welsh material in certain cases. How to balance Wales and the world was – as it always is with national museums – the perennial question. How did the national museum respond to this challenge?

The short answer is that it did so in a number of quite different ways. One of the reasons for this has to do with the nature and development of museums as a cultural form rather than anything specifically about Wales. What I mean here is that there are many different possible types of national museum and different museum disciplines – art history, geology, folk-culture, industrial history, archaeology and so on. All respond to the task of collecting and representing society in ways specific to their own disciplines. The existence of a range of different types of national museums can be clearly seen in Wales.

27) Jenkins *op.cit.*, page 146.

28) This quotation is taken from the *National Museum of Wales: Its History and Aims. Official Programme of the Proceedings for the visit of HM George V and Queen to lay Foundation stone on Wednesday 26 June 1912*, p15.

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For example, the first National Museum in Cathays Park was based on an encyclopaedic approach which encompassed all aspects of natural and human life in Wales and beyond. The grand, neo-classical building, one of a number of civic buildings constructed in Cathays Park in the early part of the 20th Century, was based on the traditional idea of the public museum as a temple to culture. Its presence was a statement of civic and national pride, announcing the arrival of Wales at a certain level of cultural sophistication. It was also bound up with furthering Cardiff's ambitions to become the capital city of Wales.²⁹

In this sense, the first National Museum can be understood to be 'for the nation' in the sense of being seen as a valuable asset for the Welsh public to see and visit. Its contents would be the 'best of culture' as understood at the time, rather than being necessarily representative or 'reflective of' the nation, although as the earlier quotation indicates, there was a stress on including Welsh material where possible. The balance between indigenous and non-indigenous material was interpreted differently by various disciplines and this accounts for the variety and eclecticism of the national collections.

This is a common feature of many European national museums. For example, the Victoria and Albert and the British Museum in London are both classed as British 'national' museums but they are defined as such primarily for historical reasons and because they contain artefacts deemed to be of 'outstanding national importance'. Despite their national status, such museums are not necessarily expected to be representative of a particular ethnicity. For example, the British Museum is arguably more representative of the activities of the British Empire than of Britain itself. This highlights one of the key points to understand about national museums which is that there are many ways that a museum can be understood as 'national'.

By contrast, the second branch of Wales's national museums – the Welsh Folk Museum – was premised on the idea of the museum as the 'nation-in-miniature'. Created in 1948 as an open-air, folk museum which set out to capture the idea of the 'everyday' Welsh people and their customs, it strove to collect that which was considered typically national. Whereas the first branch in Cathays Park was supposed to be 'for the nation' the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans was meant to be the museum 'of the nation', albeit that this definition was inevitably selective. In these two branches – Cathays Park and St. Fagans – we see two national museums belonging to the same organisation but with very different approaches, ethos, collections, styles, and results.

Yet more responses to the challenge of representing the nation can be found in other museums in the National Museum Wales network. These represent the specific story of a particular industrial process or material such as slate, wool, mining, industrial and maritime history and their associated cultural histories. Museums devoted to specific

29) For a full discussion see Campbell, B., *The Battle of the Sites: A National Museum for Wales*, Department of Museum Studies, Leicester University: unpublished PhD thesis, 2006.

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industries or disciplines are common. What differs about those within National Museum Wales is that each one is presented as a component within a greater, national story stretching across all the sites.

The main point is that there are a whole range of possible answers to the question what makes a museum 'national'. It really depends on when it was constructed, what its purpose was imagined to be at that time and since, and what kind of museum it is. Approaches between disciplines and sites differ and this inevitably produces alternative views of what constitute Welsh histories, cultures, and identities.

Approaches also differ between the National Library and the National Museum. This can be seen in the collecting of art and visual culture. National Museum Wales describes itself as the home of the Welsh national collection of fine and applied art but also collects art from beyond Wales. According to its website it holds:

...a unique resource documenting the history of art in Wales since the 16th century and a major international collection of British and European art. We also hold art from other cultures. While recognising the inherent difficulties and contradictions in defining art within national parameters, the museum has developed the following guidelines, favouring:

...a definition based on the contribution made by artists to the visual culture of Wales at home and internationally. For the purposes of our collections policy, we regard works of art as 'Welsh' if they are

- a) by artists of Welsh birth, family background or extended residence; or*
- b) if they depict Welsh subjects.³⁰*

The National Library also collects the visual culture of Wales. Its website explains the purpose of the library's picture collection as follows:

The Library's founding Royal Charter encouraged the collection of 'portraits, views of scenery, buildings, towns and villages, places of worship, bridges and other topographical pictures'. The collection embraces work in various media – paintings, drawings, sculpture, prints and photographs; lesser and anonymous work as well as ephemeral material is included if it contributes to our knowledge of place, person or custom in Wales.³¹

This has resulted in a substantial collection of some 5,000 paintings and drawings. It also means that the Library holds works by a number of artists who also feature in the

30) National Museums and Galleries of Wales, *Views of the Future: A Consultation Document*, Cardiff, 2001.

31) National Library of Wales website.

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National Museum's art collection. Both institutions therefore collect visual material relating to Wales but in different ways and for different purposes.

Earlier I posed the question how have the national institutions of Wales responded to the challenge of representing the nation and why? I have suggested two answers. The first is that they have followed different approaches depending on how and why they were established. This has much more to do with the nature of the institutions rather than with Wales specifically. Similar patterns in terms of collection and display can be seen in other national museums around the world. In contrast, the second answer has *everything* to do with Wales because it relates to changing and competing perceptions of what is 'authentic' national culture.

Defining 'Wales'

Opened in 1948, the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans gave a home to the collection of by-gones which had been initiated by Cardiff's Municipal Museum and Art Gallery and subsequently transferred to the Cathays Park branch. As has been well documented, at the time of its creation the Folk Museum's traditional view of pre-industrial, rural, Welsh-speaking Wales was deemed to be the most 'authentic' representation of Welsh culture.³²

This valorisation of the folk and the popular was by no means unique to Wales. Many of the European open-air museums of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – such as Skansen in Sweden upon which St. Fagans was directly modelled – were established to 'preserve' the vernacular, rural, folk-culture perceived to be threatened by modernisation. Here, as in Wales, the pre-modern, agrarian aspect of national cultures came to be seen as the 'true' picture of the nation. On the other hand, the cultures and histories of mass-industrialised societies were identified with processes of colonisation, immigration, and the arrival of 'outsiders'.

According to many of those involved with establishing the Welsh Folk Museum, the combined effect of these forces had been the alienation of 'the Welsh people' from their national origins. This partly explains why industrial heritage was represented within the National Museums in terms of technological innovation and economic benefits from at least the 1950s, but did not achieve the same kind of national status accorded to the Welsh Folk Museum until much later.

Indeed, it was not until the post-war decline of heavy industries that parts of Britain's industrial heritage came to be seen as under threat and in need of preservation. Public interest in British industrial archaeology had been growing during the 1950s and 1960s

32) Dicks, B., *Heritage, Place and Community*, University of Wales Press, 2000.

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and institutional recognition began to follow suite.³³ From the 1960s new academic research challenged the hegemonic discourse of rural Wales as the 'true' Wales and emphasised the complexity and importance of industrial Wales.³⁴ The idea of the multiple nature of national identities within Wales was encapsulated by historian Dai Smith when he wrote: "Wales is a singular noun but a plural experience".³⁵ This was accompanied by changes within the museum profession itself and growing interest in working-class and social history specifically.³⁶

Wales's national museums began to respond to these changes by converting existing large-scale industrial sites into museums in-situ. The first came in 1969 with the reclaiming of Dinorwic Quarry as the North Wales Quarrying Museum. This later became the Welsh Slate Museum and in 2005 the National Slate Museum. Next was the acquisition of the Cambrian Woollen Mill in 1976, at Drefach Felindre in Carmarthenshire. Originally titled the Museum of the Welsh Woollen Industry, the museum today is called the National Wool Museum. The first stage of the creation of the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum took place the following year, in the Bute Docks area of Cardiff in 1977. In 2001 the Big Pit mining museum at Blaenafon was added to the network.

Meanwhile the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans attracted criticism in the late 1980s and 1990s for its perceived rural, folk bias. In 1987 it took on-board industrial heritage from the surrounding south Wales area for the first time in the form of the Rhyd-y-car ironworkers cottages. In 1995 it changed its title to the broader Museum of Welsh Life.³⁷

The addition of the in-situ industrial museums represented a distinct break with the National Museum's earlier approach to representing Wales. Previously, the museums had been purpose built in the case of Cathays Park, or involved filling an open-air site with objects and reconstructed buildings in the case of St. Fagans. By contrast, from Dinorwic Quarry onwards the sites themselves became the museums. The recognition of heavy industry as an integral part of Wales' national heritage has been further consolidated by the establishment of the latest branch: the National Waterfront Museum, Swansea. Taken as a whole the changing status of industrial history in the national museums since the

33) In 1967 the Ancient Monuments Boards of England, Scotland and Wales appointed specialists of industrial archaeology for the first time. The Welsh Board swiftly proposed to the national museum that it "should consider setting up a Museum of Industrial Archaeology for the Principality": Bassett, D.A. and Bassett, M., *Wales in Miniature*, National Museum of Wales, 1993, page 22. In the same year the Ancient Monuments Board for Wales "took the first industrial monument into care": Jenkins, G., *Exploring Museums: Wales: A Museums Association Guide*. London, HMSO The Stationery Office, page 31, 1990.

34) Dicks, B., *Heritage, Place and Community*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, page 90, 2000.

35) Smith, D., *Wales: A Question for History*, Seren, page 36, 1999

36) Explicit recognition of a more pluralist understanding of national identities within Wales is evident in the seminal historiographical texts of the 1980s: Dai Smith's *Wales! Wales?* (1984); Gwyn A Williams' *When was Wales?* (1985); Tony Curtis (Ed.) *Wales: the Imagined Nation* (1986); and Prys Morgan's contribution 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period' in Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, 1994.

37) Mason, R., 'Nation Building at the Museum of Welsh Life', *Museum and Society* 3(1): 18-34, 2005.

end of the 1960s combined with the repositioning of the Museum of Welsh Life in the late 1980s demonstrates the extent to which changing ideas about what counted as Welsh culture have both defined, and been defined by, the national museums.

Redefining Wales at the National Museums

What does the future hold for National Museum Wales in an era of globalisation and cultural diversity? As outlined earlier, national museums have traditionally functioned to represent 'the nation' and institutionalise a given discourse of national identity. At the same time academic literature suggests that throughout the world national museums are experiencing something of an identity crisis in today's multicultural, postcolonial, and arguably post national societies.³⁸ In this context, national museums are presented with a number of challenges:

- How can they reinvent their displays and collections to reflect a broader, inclusive, civic nationalism rather than a narrower, cultural one?
- How can they respond to academic critiques of essentialist, nationalist ideologies?
- How can they represent and address increasingly diverse and multicultural national audiences?
- How can they do all of the above and continue to serve local and national agendas set by funders, and promote their areas as distinct and identifiable tourist destinations?
- Finally, how can they still provide a recognisable point of entry into the histories they present and take their audiences with them intellectually even as they might invite those same visitors to question their own assumptions about national history and identity?

National Waterfront Museum Swansea opened in October 2005 and by early January 2006 had already received over 53,000 visitors rising to 200,000 by the end of August 2006. Costing £33.5 million, it represents the fourth and final stage of the national museum's industrial strategy begun in 1998. Many of the museum's exhibits were drawn from the existing collections of National Museum Wales, in particular from the former Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum in Cardiff. Other artefacts were drawn from the collections of the former Swansea Industrial and Maritime Museum. The new museum's self-declared mission is to: "tell the story of Wales' industrial and maritime heritage and its role in shaping today's economy and society." To achieve this, displays are organised around 15 themes including energy, landscape, people, sea, communities, heroes, and coal.

The overarching theme is: 'Wales as the first industrial nation'. The museum bases this claim on the fact that by the 1840s Wales was the first country with more of its population employed in industry than in agriculture. Indeed, the museum focuses on the 1851 census as one of its key interpretative strategies. It uses new technology to bring the census data to life and crucially to populate Wales's industrial and maritime history.

38) See Williams, C., 'A Post National Wales' in *Agenda*, IWA. Winter 2003-04, for a discussion of this issue as it relates to Wales.

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How does this latest branch set about representing the nation and how does it compare with what preceded it? In a number of ways, it is very different from the other parts of the network with one exception. It does encompass a former industrial site – a former dockside warehouse dating from 1901 – which makes it similar to the other industrial sites acquired by the national museums since 1969. However, unlike those sites which primarily worked with inherited buildings, architects Wilkinson Eyre were commissioned to design an adjoining new flagship building in Swansea's new maritime quarter.

It is also the first national museum to be designed around the principle of free access to national museums introduced in 2001. This has shaped the methods of display and interpretation. For example, there are different ways of entering and exiting the building as opposed to just one in the more traditional museums built under the regime of entry charges. The new museum also differs from the other sites in terms of funding, management and governance arrangements.³⁹

It is not only governance which sets the new museum apart from the other branches of National Museum Wales. Its location is typical of a new global trend for creating museums in post-industrial quaysides as part of a larger leisure complex. Comparative UK examples include Tate Liverpool, the Arnolfini in Bristol, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Newcastle Gateshead, and The Lowry and the Imperial War Museum North in Salford Quays, Manchester. Like these other examples, emphasis has been placed upon the creation of a landmark building which can speak to both the international press and tourist market and to local interest through the use of indigenous building materials, in this case Welsh slate.

Like many of these other new museums, National Waterfront Museum Swansea has to be multifunctional and generate its revenue from a range of sources.⁴⁰ Like Tate Liverpool, the National Waterfront Museum shares its location with retail outlets promoting the idea of the museum visit as part of an overall day out. It is even possible to get married in the museum. In all these respects, the National Waterfront Museum is symptomatic of global trends and indicative of the current financial context within which larger new museums are required to operate.

How does it compare to the creation of the first National Museum created in 1907 in Cathays Park? Whereas the first National Museum was more explicitly charged with the task of representing the nation, promoting national pride, and protecting the nation's

39) Swansea council offered the land free plus £400,000 a year revenue funding and the museum is jointly managed by National Museum Wales with the City and County of Swansea. Both partners have a 50 per cent representation on the management board which is chaired by Assembly Member, Rosemary Butler. The project is therefore being managed as a limited company with charitable status. It is the only branch of National Museum Wales to be run in this way and reflects the extent to which the museum is seen as integral to the city's overall tourism and regeneration strategy. On a day-to-day basis the museum is operated by National Museum Wales like any of its other sites and its staff are employees of National Museum Wales.

40) This multi-purposing can be clearly seen in the design of the main gallery which has a special flooring system so object cases can be rolled back to create a large event space suitable for conference hire complete with full catering facilities.

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heritage, today's museums have to do all this and fundraise, provide corporate hospitality, attract tourists to a leisure destination, as well as deliver on government policies regarding access, social inclusion, cultural diversity, and life-long learning.

Despite this considerably expanded remit, the National Waterfront Museum still manages to fulfil its commitment to present Wales to the world. Although it does pay particular attention to its immediate location in Swansea, the museum's emphasis is definitely on Welsh industrial and maritime history as a whole. A good example can be found in the introductory text panel at the main entrance which sets out what the visitor can expect to see and how the museum will tell a nation-wide story. Rolling news-coverage in the lobby similarly draws attention to current affairs in Wales. Panels in this section make deliberate links between Wales's industrial past and a high-tech future. Here the museum is fulfilling one of the traditional core roles of a national museum which is to act as an advocate for its nation – past and present – to both internal and external audiences.

Another pertinent example of the way that the museum continues to play a traditional role in nation building can be found in its 'Achievers' section. This gallery "celebrates the life of 15 individuals and their contribution to Wales", embracing a range of people including entrepreneurs, cultural and sporting icons, and politicians. In one respect, this latter-day national portrait gallery is reminiscent of another 'Hall of Heroes' dating from 1909 and located in Cardiff City Hall. However, while the newer display is in one sense typically nationalistic in celebrating national heroes, it differs from the former in that it draws from a much wider spectrum of individuals who have contributed Welsh society. Indeed, it is particularly interesting that it does not restrict itself to industrial entrepreneurs – as one might expect in such a museum – but includes sports personalities, politicians, and fashion designers.

It also differs in terms of the diversity of nationalities of its chosen heroes. So, there are those Welsh icons that visitors might expect like Lloyd George, Aneurin Bevan, Richard Trevithick and Gareth Edwards. However, it also features Adelina Patti, a Spanish Opera Singer who lived in Wales around the 1870s; Sarah Jane Rees (1839-1916) the first woman to qualify as a sea captain; Charles William Siemens, originally from Germany but knighted by the Queen in 1883; and Paul Robeson, an African American singer who formed strong attachments with Wales, to name but a few.

As the list makes clear, the key difference between this display and older halls of Welsh heroes is that this new pantheon is not restricted to those who originated from Wales. It will also change year on year as visitors vote for new heroes from an interactive database of biographical information of over eighty individuals. This highlights how national stories are constructed and are currently up for discussion and, most importantly, stresses the diversity of those who have made a contribution to Wales past and present.

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Theoretically speaking, this follows a civic rather than a cultural nationalist approach because the criteria for eligibility are not ancestral or ethnic but territorial and inclusive. This idea of a more diverse, civic understanding of Wales can also be found elsewhere in the museum. In particular, displays and the guidebook stress the diversity of those who came to work and settle in Wales: Italians, Spaniards, Irish, Scots, English, and Jews, as well as people from the Caribbean, Asia, Somalia, and the Yemen. The 1851 census display features inhabitants from different countries, for example Ireland, England, and the West Indies. Crucially, this provides historical evidence of long-standing immigration to counter common perceptions that immigration to Britain is primarily a post World War II phenomenon.

Displays also feature the countries to which Welsh people emigrated, for example, the United States, Russia, and England. Displays equally feature those who moved to Wales in search of work bringing with them cultural traditions which, in turn, became a staple of industrial south Wales. One case on the ground floor, for example, holds ice-cream glasses from an Italian café typical of those which sprang up all around the south of Wales and can still be seen today in towns such as Newport.

Much greater space could be given to the issue of diversity and particularly the multicultural nature of the communities which grew up around the industrial docks of Cardiff and Newport.⁴¹ Nonetheless, what is already there about those who came to work and live in Wales, for all manner of reasons, is valuable because it stresses that cultural diversity is not restricted to post-World War II Wales but can be clearly seen in the 1851 census. This has the potential to prompt visitors to rethink assumptions about who lives in Wales and who therefore might be described as Welsh. In other words, it should encourage them to re-examine their criteria for national identity. This message is picked up in another display which explicitly foregrounds these tensions within identity formation by juxtaposing two questions with potentially very different answers: “Where do you come from?” and “Where do you belong?”

National Waterfront Museum Swansea is particularly well placed to ask such questions given that Wales’s industrial and maritime history is intertwined with stories of empire, trade and migration. Its collections link histories of international trade and migration to patterns of local and national employment through individual stories. As such National Waterfront Museum has a real opportunity to deconstruct the opposition between ‘Wales’ and ‘the world’ (the phrase which featured in its founding mission statement). Instead, it presents a chance to highlight the extent to which the global can always be found in the local and vice versa, both now and in the past. As outlined above, it can help to diversify the national story from within rather than treating cultural diversity as though it were a contemporary adjunct to national histories.

Because of its subject-matter and its emphasis on how nations and societies were changed by industrialisation, National Waterfront Museum has considerable potential to

41) In January and February 2006 issues of immigration and emigration were extensively covered by a series of television programmes for BBC Wales entitled *Wales: The Making of a People*.

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help shape the public debate over what people understand Welshness and Wales to mean. Elsewhere in National Museum Wales other branches and disciplines are similarly undergoing an important process of revisiting and repositioning their collections, displays and interpretation strategies.⁴²

These new developments open up opportunities for National Museum Wales to reinvent the roles it plays as a national museum and promote ideas of a more civic, inclusive and diverse nationalism. In this respect, National Museum Wales has a crucial part in helping people to explore and question who the Welsh are, and what are their histories. Above all else, this is the challenge for national museums in the twenty-first century. They can deconstruct outmoded notions of nationalism, and help their citizens to make sense of the relationships between the local, the national, and the global past, present, and future. They can re-imagine the nation in its global context whilst recognising a sense of local distinctiveness.

Earlier, I discussed a number of different roles that national museums have historically adopted. What I have now outlined is, in my opinion, the emerging new role that national museums need to adopt for the future. Public perceptions of 'the nation' are constantly being revisited, challenged, and adapted in response to cultural and political change. National museums can contribute a great deal to this process of collective re-imagining. Their collections and displays can provide evidence of the long-standing diversity within nations in the broadest sense – be this diversity of languages, religions, cultural practices, identities, interest groups, or other 'communities'. Their interpretation can provide space and encouragement for the public, within Wales and beyond, to discover this richness and to reflect with others on their own sense of identity, culture, history, and belonging.

Understood in this way the challenge for National Museum Wales and other institutions is not only to hold the nation's 'treasures' in perpetuity, although this is a valuable role. Nor is their challenge simply to celebrate or represent 'the nation'. Instead, they need to find new ways to engage the public in a conversation about what 'Wales' actually means to them here and now. This is the role of a national museum in the twenty-first century.

42) See also developments at the National History Museum, St. Fagans; plans for the relocation of the archaeology collections; and for the re-display of the art collection. Planning documents and consultations can be found on the museum's website.

CHAPTER 3

New Negotiations: A role for Art and Institutions Within Society

Declan McGonagle

In this Chapter I will address the role for art and institutions *within* society on the basis of my own working experience as a curator, dealing with contemporary art and artists in a variety of situations. As a result my position is empirical rather than theoretical, based on working directly with a range of artists in different institutional and community contexts. I hope that the propositions I will make are relevant to the debates and issues which I know are ongoing in Wales.

But first I want to raise the key issue of distrust of contemporary art and artists. A story the writer Gordon Burn has about the artist Damien Hirst makes the point. He tells of Damien Hirst taking his mother to see an exhibition of contemporary sculpture in a typical white box gallery space. Hirst noticed that his mother was not only uncomfortable but she was also distrustful of the experience. On the way home she had to go to a Chemist's shop to get some medication and Hirst noticed that his mother was completely comfortable making her purchase in the shop. Of course, should the Chemist have made a mistake with the prescription it could have been, literally, lethal. Yet his mother had complete trust in the transaction on offer. It is suggested that it was this experience that contributed to the development of Hirst's early works, which took the form of medicine cabinets, filled with different medications, representing treatments for parts of the body. It was an attempt by the artist to connect with people and transactions that normally are not the subject of contemporary art.

The point is that contemporary art process does not usually engage someone like Hirst's mother. Instead, it functions beyond if not ahead of society. This is typical of an idea, best articulated by the poet Ezra Pound, that the job of the Modern (he should have said the Modernist) artist is "to make it new". This places a responsibility on the artist to occupy an avant-garde position in relation to society. It is, of course, an exclusive concept which, by definition, can only ever be available to a limited number of people in a limited number of locations.

Parity of Esteem

That kind of exclusivity has been a problem for places like Ireland, initially colonised and now post-colonial, because the idea of value was always thought to lie somewhere else. And I wonder if this condition is also recognised in Wales? Historically, one response

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has been for institutions and art production to mimic those of elsewhere or to have such models imposed. This is ultimately a dis-empowering process: dis-empowering of the local while at the same time empowering the metropolitan centre. The local is always 'other' in this institutional scenario.

Of course, the issue of colonisation and contested identity has been central in Ireland and has dramatised our condition for centuries. In the process it has internalised a presumption of cultural inferiority. After all, Irishmen were just inferior Englishmen, a cultural condition which was, and continues to be, compounded by political and economic disempowerment. This contested cultural condition was not addressed fully until the negotiation process for the Belfast Good Friday Agreement in the late 1990s.

Unlike earlier attempts, the Good Friday Agreement was important because it was about mindsets rather than about territory. It was about how we identify ourselves and about how civil society should reflect and nourish difference. In my view that makes it, at root, a cultural agreement, and only after that a political agreement between sovereign states. The key phrase coined during the negotiations was 'parity of esteem'. It was this which moved the negotiations beyond victory or defeat for one side or the other. It embodied the idea of acceptance of difference, rather than an attempt to resolve the issue of difference.

We now have attempts to construct ways to live with difference, ways to co-exist, not to erase. I would argue that the construction of that co-existence is a cultural process which then leads to political, social and economic processes, which are enacted in civil space, in public institutions as manifestations of civil society. And because that process is fundamentally cultural my argument is that it creates enormous opportunities but also enormous responsibilities for artists and arts provision to strike a 'new deal' within the society.

These issues may have been dramatised in the Northern Irish context but the principles revealed in our drama are, I believe, applicable elsewhere. This is especially the case in relations between art, artists, institutions and the social field.

I would like to show how necessary this idea of co-existence is if art and institutional practice is to function effectively within that social space. When I use these terms, art and the social, there is the possibility that some will hear the word 'socialist'. However, that misrepresents my argument because it immediately relegates the proposition to the realm of missionary work, to the community arts area, as if it is actually possible for artists or curators to have the choice to function within or without society.

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The Artist as Genius-producer

This is really an issue of 'figure and ground': the figures of artist and institution and the ground of society. These relations are central, not marginal, to the Western European tradition. Without deviating to historical discourse, I would refer to the 15th century Italian artist Giotto, whose seminal contribution to the Renaissance art was claimed to be the separation of figure from (a Byzantine) ground, in pictorial space.

Along with the development of perspective, this separation of figure and ground was central to the proposition that man was at the centre of the universe, a rediscovery of Classical Humanism that was the essence of the Renaissance. The separation was not just a novel two dimensional, stylistic device but a core reflection of a developing world view. It then evolved through the Reformation and the Enlightenment to consolidate the idea that the world was knowable and measurable by man.

If the world was knowable, a key function of the institutions familiar to us was to describe that knowing and sustain that authority over nature, over life. This culminated in a 19th century idea of the integrated self and, by extension, the autonomous object, a powerful socially constructed idea. In turn this led to the separation of the aesthetic responsibilities of art from its ethical (social and moral) responsibilities.

And it is no coincidence that the early 19th century was also the period when key dimensions of 'modernity', as we know it, crystallised. These included the consolidation of Nation States in Europe; the development of Industrial Capitalism; the projection of the museum as a Temple, where value was fixed and Classical architecture was mimicked; and the notion of the artist as a tragic, poetic figure, disconnected and powerless in social space. This last is still a very powerful model of art practice, and where value still resides, for artists and for institutions.

The idea of art being autonomous and separated from society was not accidental. It reflected the vested interests of powerful forces in society. And, through the dominant model of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MOMA), it still exercises authority over the field. MOMA, of course, is a model of (high) Modernism. We have to remember that the ideas bound up in the words 'modern' and 'Modernism' are not synonyms. The word 'modern' means 'of the present or recent past'. On the other hand Modernism means a particular mindset which reflects man's (usually man's) authority.

Places like Ireland suffered from the idea that the only way to be modern was, and is, to be *Modernist*. This was especially the case when it came to the nature and purpose of art institutions. The architectural identity of the museum as a Temple was deliberate, aimed at accruing authority from the classical Graeco-Roman period when man was also thought to be the centre of the universe.

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One risk in this argument is that one may be thought to be recommending the destruction of the 'Temple'. But what I am actually proposing is that we shift the way we think about the institution, by linking the ideas of Temple and Forum (in Greek, the Agora). They should be thought of as where social interaction takes place. So this is not an argument for burning down the inherited institutional Temples. Instead, it is an argument for negotiating co-existence.

The 19th Century idea of the artist as a separated genius-producer is challenged in this dialectic social field, but not replaced. It is not the only model of artist which can function. Nonetheless, there continues to be an enormous investment in the existing armature of support which sustains and validates this particular model. Essentially what I am proposing is a negotiable field in which the artist is a negotiator. In my view the task is not to replace the idea of the artist as 'genius-producer' but to generate, test and nourish other models. We need to expand our vision of the field, to widen our lens.

The support structure for the genius-producer model has been so internalised in our culture that its protagonists, and those who benefit from it, argue that it is 'natural' and not man-made. Some will argue that there isn't any prescriptive support structure at all, just quality and excellence which speaks for itself!

My argument for co-existence between different models of practice and provision *within* society, in dialogue and negotiation with social processes, allows a whole range of publics to participate and contribute to the conversation. Different values need to be negotiated. We should not confine ourselves to the norms of élite groupings and metropolitan experience.

The Context of Art

My very first curatorial job was running Derry City Council's Orchard Gallery when it opened in 1978. In a context where political violence and community division was deeply rooted and ongoing it would have been irresponsible to operate as if art could provide an antidote to reality and particularly those realities. One had to realise that the foundation myths of both communities were stated clearly in the graffiti ***You Are Now Entering Free Derry***, and, ***No Surrender, Londonderry Loyalists Still Under Siege*** on gable walls at the entrances to Nationalist and Loyalist areas of the city. They articulated ideas of power and powerlessness which underpinned a strong sense of identity. Public space and the public 'mind' in Northern Ireland was littered by such claims on the space and on the identity of communities.

These were fundamental cultural positions before they were political positions. So a publicly funded, albeit small, institution had a responsibility to address them. Our aim

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was to explore the reservoir of meanings which informed the drama of the Troubles, rather than the drama itself. This was not a case of simply putting on 'political' art, but of programming a public institution 'politically'. There was no point in pretending that the gallery, or its art programme could operate outside the social processes of place and context.

As a result the Orchard Gallery became a trusted institution. It was not 'abstracted' from what was going on around it. The locality and the wider world were addressed at the same time, including work by a wide range of local, regional, national and international artists. A good example was one of the first major public art projects undertaken by the sculptor Antony Gormley, later the creator of the 'Angel of the North'. The project was part of the first Television South West/South West Arts initiative which commissioned artworks for public spaces in a number of cities throughout the UK.

Antony Gormley's proposal for Derry was to place three cast iron Janus-like figures, cast from his own body on three strategic locations on the historic City Walls in Derry. These double-sided figures simultaneously looked out of, and into, the walled city. It is impossible to overstate the importance to the Protestant community of the 17th Century city walls in Derry and throughout Northern Ireland. They represented the survival of Protestantism in Ireland, dramatised by the survival of the city's Protestant population in a long siege during the late 17th century. Of course, this was set in the context of the wider conflict about succession to the English throne, also characterised by religious division.

Gormley's proposal focused on the key issue of duality in the context of the city of Derry. There are, of course, two names for the city – Derry, if your allegiance is Nationalist, and Londonderry, if your allegiance is Unionist/Loyalist. There are two Cathedrals. At the time in 1987 there were also two newspapers, reflecting the community division. Moreover, the river Foyle physically divided the city between Catholics and Protestants.

Consequently, Gormley's blank double-sided cruciform figures embodied the idea of two identities occupying the same territory. He stated that the work was intended to act like a poultice, to draw out whatever was already present in the public mind about the place. When asked if he was concerned about vandalism he responded that if this occurred it would only add meaning to the work. Of course, the figures were cast iron and the artist had ensured that they would physically survive any attention by vandals.

However, sensitivities about the city walls and the political situation at the time ensured that some responses were immediate and, for me, clarified that the meaning and value of art is extrinsic rather than intrinsic. In this case the work was not just the three figurative

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'objects', the artefacts made by the artist, but the artefacts and the city walls in combination. It was the artefact and the context which created meaning. And it was this meaning that was immediately questioned by groups from both communities who, on the day of installation, gathered at different locations on the walls.

The Protestant crowd demanded to know if the artwork was intended to confirm their ownership of the history of the city walls, to reflect their historical victory. When this could not be answered one dimensionally they rejected the work as an intrusion on 'hallowed ground'. Later the Catholic crowd assumed that this process was an attempt to reinstate an official statue of Governor Walker, who was Governor at the time of the siege and whose statue had for generations overlooked the Catholic area, until it was blown up by the I.R.A. in the early 1970s.

We can see, therefore, that the meaning of the artwork was changed by the context and the community reading of that context, even though the sculptural object and its material aesthetic remained the same. Taken together the figure (literally in this case) of the artwork and the ground of context, communicated meaning. Moreover, it did so in a way that empowered the local 'reader' over the metropolitan reader. This was evidenced by the difficulty visiting journalists from London had in seeing beyond the 'Gormley sculpture' to the wider, fuller meaning of the work. In fact, it reversed the usual power relations in contemporary art between centre and margin.

Responsibilities of a National Institution

A similar sense of the need for a wider view, inclusive of social as well as aesthetic processes was present in my work as the first Director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Established by the Irish Government the Museum opened in 1991 in the restored 17th century Royal Hospital building in Dublin. The Royal Hospital has been described as the first Classical building in Ireland, its form and function modelled on Les Invalides in Paris. Other characteristics mean that it is also the last major medieval building in Ireland. Again there is a duality.

Its designation as the Museum of Modern Art prompted a controversy that such an important historical building should be used for this purpose. Critics also described it as too charged, historically, to be an art museum and anyway it was in the wrong place in the city. It was said that without tens of millions of pounds to 'buy in collections' it could not be successful. To me these arguments revealed major limiting presumptions about the form, content and purpose of a Museum of Modern Art. Facing into a new century we should seize the opportunity of following on from a period when the exclusivity of the Modernist monolith had been successfully challenged.

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Although presented as serious disadvantages, I saw these issues as advantages. They provided an opportunity not to replicate models from elsewhere, but to do something which was particular to our place and time. We could put in place another set of relations between art and artist, the institution and community. For me the name itself – The Irish Museum Of Modern Art – gave us the agenda for the work of the institution. It announced the intention of connecting with lived experience. And it allowed the right questions to be asked of a new national cultural institution opening at the end of the 20th century in a rapidly changing Ireland. What was it to be Irish, when the word had become a question rather than an answer? What was a museum? What was Modern Art and what could it be, what did it need to be, in the future?

At times some people reacted to the institution's work as if its name had been the Museum of *Irish* Modern Art rather than simply a Museum of Modern Art in Ireland, or as if this national cultural institution was supposed to be a Museum of *Modernist* Art. These mistakes were easy to make and many people made them.

For me the term national describes the responsibilities of the institution not its contents. In this case we had the 'figure' of the institution and its relationship with the 'ground' of a changing Irish society. Some sociologists have referred to this as a 'collision' culture. And certainly it is impossible for a public institution to ignore collisions of old and new stories of the nation and the State, of old and new communities, of extreme wealth and ongoing poverty.

Inheritance and Transformation, the title of the Museum's opening season of exhibitions in 1991, reflected that sense of collision, of fault lines which had to be negotiated in Irish society. There was obvious reference to the historical identity of the Royal Hospital and its transformation into a contemporary art space. But there was also reference to the transformation of inherited ideas about the nature and purpose of art and its relationship to its own recent past, a metaphor for forces at work in Irish society.

The architecture of the Royal Hospital building, with its relatively small rooms alongside wide corridor spaces, created many opportunities for generating debate. For example, a small painting of a West of Ireland landscape, from the 1930s, by Irish artist Paul Henry was shown in a space with a newly commissioned floor piece or installation, using Kilkenny limestone, by English artist Richard Long. This particular juxtaposition really summed up the argument the institution would then set out to explore more fully – between past and present, notions of Irish and other identities, tradition and innovation, artwork and viewer.

This was also present in the juxtaposition of works by Sean Scully, a painter who uses abstract forms in painting to convey a sense of displacement, and work by Leon Golub, a painter who also draws on the traditions of painting and contemporary political imagery to examine displacement as a political, not just an aesthetic, issue.

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These and other examples, for instance lens-based media, were then juxtaposed by works produced by members of a local Active Retirement Association, in workshops in the Museum. Their paintings, which were typically landscapes, were shown with commentaries by the artists talking about how and why they made art. The main point was that the work was given parity of esteem in the context of a public institution.

Another key juxtaposition involved the exhibition of a series of Sheela Na Gigs. These were stone display figures, thought to be of 12th Century origin, borrowed from the National Museum of Ireland and shown in relation to a body of work from canonical male figures of the 20th century – Duchamp, Picasso, Warhol, Beuys and Koons. All of these artists dealt with the power of the female and in completely different ways, sometimes elliptically. The juxtaposition of 20th century art, much contested in its day, with carved stone figures of female display from the 12th century, also contested, was intended to create a dynamic which opened up the issue of male/female which is often, in art, closed and academic.

This strategy informed the programming of the first years of the Museum's life. As an art institution with a public remit it had to establish a presence on the basis of content and critical credibility rather than its material or financial resources. It proved to be effective, not only as a way of engaging community trust and support, but also of foregrounding new models of practice for artists concerned with art's relations with the social field.

Connecting Art with Society

Further, this strategy was not at all based on sentimentality. That would have simplified it as a form of missionary work, and elevated the artist and the curator as the agents of change – leaving the community as merely their subject.

I am proposing this strategic form, of juxtaposition and co-existence of models of practice, for a public institution working within society as a way of creating participation in the art process and of the art process participating in society. The idea of the non-artist participating in the making and meaning and value of art is not whimsical or even a new idea. Nor has it been marginal in the longer story of art in human society.

For the purposes of this chapter I want to compress my argument into a single, very powerful example of the process at work. It can be found in *The Ambassadors* by Hans Holbein, a painting of the mid 16th Century High Renaissance period which is in the National Gallery in London. It is a double portrait of French Ambassadors to the Court of Henry VIII. On one level, it is a summary of the Renaissance/Modernist principles of the power and authority of man in the world. In this, and in the formal pictorial devices used, the painting appears to predict later forms of Modernist art practice. In its celebration of power it is also a political painting. This can be seen in its innovative

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depiction of expensive clothing and fabrics, and of musical and navigational instruments which Western European man was beginning to use to explore and dominate the rest of the planet. At first reading, therefore, *The Ambassadors* is a typical, if brilliant, example of an artist delivering a flattering portrayal of two very rich and powerful men, located at the forefront and in command of the culture of their time.

However, it remains a highly complex work which recent art historical research has shown to be even more multi-layered than previously thought. I refer to the key device which the artist used to turn the viewer from a consumer of an authoritative viewpoint into a participant in the construction of another meaning in the work. When looked at directly there is a strange, formless lozenge shape in the lower part of the painting which bears no relationship to the precision with which other imagery is rendered. But, as is generally known, if the viewer moves about ten feet or so to the right, the form becomes a skull which functions as a *memento mori* – a standard device in art and especially painting of the period, to provide a ‘memory of death’.

This was understood and was accepted by those commissioning portraits of themselves as a necessary component in a successful portrait. However, the question with the Holbein painting is why did he use a different optic to include the image of the skull? A traditionally rendered *memento mori* in a painting normally provides the required dimension of humility.

In my view Holbein was doing something more. He was inviting the viewer, or the reader if you will, to physically shift position in order to create the other reading of the work while leaving the original reading unchanged. It was not necessary to erase the original reading in order to create the second reading. The two readings co-exist and empower the viewer. In fact they transform the viewer from consumer to participant in the process of creating the meaning of the work. That is the model of empowerment that I am recommending. It does not depend on erasure of any existing model of art or institutional practice. It is not so much a case of rejecting an institution as of shifting our position in relation to it, that is to say changing our reading of it and our attitude towards it. In this sense Holbein’s painting from the 16th Century insists on the participation of the viewer in the 21st.

I am recommending we take this idea and make public art institutions participatory within society. First, we should admit that they already operate within society, and, secondly we should generate new forms of practice to achieve that. In doing so we will reconnect the art process to the ground of the social field. It is only out of this reorientation that I believe the new role (actually an old role) of art and institutional practice will become real. Certainly, it needs to come if art is not to wither as a disconnected, élitist and niche activity. It is time to strike a new deal between art and artist, between the art institution and society and to create the means to deliver on that promise.

CHAPTER 4

Museums in a Broken World

Gaynor Kavanagh

In this volume we are aiming to get to the heart of how the 'story of Wales' is told by the National Library and the National Museum. The emphasis is on the myths and memories from which the current provision appears to spring and which, if unrecognised, will continue to influence their future. In this chapter, I shall concentrate on the issues relating specifically to the National Museum Wales.

My intent is not to offer a simple de-construction of the patterns of meaning created through the collections and public services of the National Museum. The mechanisms and theoretical models for this form of analysis are well-established and easy to access. Instead, what I would like to propose is a correlation between what is happening in the Museum and the temper and moment of Wales itself. Indeed, I shall be examining the extent to which the National Museum reflects what Wales as a country is prepared to remember and forget.

One of the central concerns in this is the assumption that there is only one 'story of Wales', one 'narrative', one historical voice, indeed one canon of Welsh history and culture, unmediated and incontrovertible. Such singulars ring alarm bells. Where any museum service deals in them there is evidence of simplification and gloss that opens the door to myths, yet closes it to memories. Not so long ago, the International Council of Museums chose to define a museum as a

...permanent institution... which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.

In recent years, they have managed to change this to *people and their environment*, but the drift as well as the singular remains the same. I contend that where museum practice roots its thinking in such anodyne expressions, we are most likely to find bland provision and generalities so weak that any potential for relevance and stimulating open discussion is dis-empowered.

What do I mean by this? If we take as our principal point that museums are about people, their environments and contexts, then I would argue we have no other choice but to recognise that social and individual experience is more complex and darker than most national museums would admit. Indeed, to 'do' justice to the evidence of people and their

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environment requires any museum to be open to historical and social experiences that are uncomfortable, confusing and contradictory. In this we have a choice. We can continue to work with the bland and myth-laden, or begin to work with memories and other evidence that will be swift to tell us that no single story-line will do.

A State of Denial

It doesn't take an advanced level of historical or contemporary knowledge of Wales to begin to recognise the gaps and the silences in the singular narrative that the National Museum provides about Wales. The traditional Welsh kitchen was also home to traditional Welsh abuse, poverty, hunger and illiteracy. The traditional Welsh mine, blacksmiths shop or woollen mill were places where class division and social inequalities were lived everyday. The potteries that created the fine ceramics in the collections were places of endemic ill-health and regular accidents, without benefits of health or social care to pick up the pieces. Moreover, things offered as being 'within tradition' do not connect with the realities of the world markets, global social movements and cultural phenomena that shaped them. Indeed, it can be argued that the traditional Welsh anything is in fact a fantasy of grand proportions.

The term *traditional* is a euphemism for denial. It gives itself away in the gaps and silences, the absence of material and other evidence that discloses a Wales that is much more fractured, and indeed more interesting than current museum provision allows. This is not simply an issue for the National Museum, it is evident in many museums throughout Wales.

Here are some fairly obvious gaps. There is no substantial reference to the role of Wales in wartime. The impact that wars in the twentieth century played on the kind of country Wales has become cannot be underestimated. Wars changed Wales, at times destroying and at other times bolstering its fragile economies. Wales suffered war. The very nature of the eastern valleys changed because the Navy moved away from the use of steam coal to fuel faster warships by other means. Yet Wales also contributed directly to war, through its involvement in munitions industries. Either way, it paid the price. The privation of war, the way land usage altered, the bombings, and the effects on heavy industries are a major part of Welsh histories. Why is this avoided? More than anything, the massive impact that war has had on Welsh lives lost, and the experiences of the people who returned and continue to return maimed in body and mind are not acknowledged in any museum form. The regimental museums in Wales address regimental issues as is their brief, whilst other museums keep an uneasy silence.

If led only by the 'story' of Welsh industry in the National Museum, one could be convinced that a benign coal and iron ore extraction industry, carried out somewhere else happily out of sight, sat cheek by jowl with indigenous craft industries distinguished

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by their unchanging style of output and the complete inability to make anything duff or substandard. The inference would seem to be that these are industries incapable of delivering a Senghennydd or an Aberfan. We would not know from the Museum about the decline and failure of such heavy industries, nor the impact this had on the economies and psychology of the south eastern part of Wales. Neither would we know anything about the decades of often only partially successful regeneration projects and the switch in forms of employment from heavy to light industries.

The Museum's representation of our working past does not acknowledge that more people in Wales have worked in service and finance industries than ever worked in the mines and foundries. Nor, indeed, that the efficiencies of these industries were vital to the economic success of Wales in its hey day. Through their ability to adapt and change swiftly, they were central to sustaining Wales through difficult periods of change and underpinning its success in the years of recovery. Of course, such service industries didn't have the icons of the pithead or the rolling mill, nor the dynamic cultures of the silver bands and the male voice choir to recommend them for recognition. Moreover, the fact that the service industries workforce was largely female may also have had something to do with their long term absence in this 'story' of Wales.

Curiously, too, the National Museum does not recognise the plurality of Wales. We are not, nor have we ever been, one people. The population of Wales is deeply infused by generations of in-migrants, brought here by the need for work or refuge, or by some kind accident of the shipping system. Part of my own family came here from north Somerset in the 1830s because of the opening of the extractive industries in the Varteg area. Another part migrated to the same area from west Wales, moving from agriculture to mining. It's a familiar story and one that continues.

Further, this is not solely a phenomenon associated with industrial areas. From the coastal areas of Wales to the deepest rural interiors, there have been constant shifts and movements of people, from Ireland, England, Spain, China, the Indian sub-continent, Italy and so on. Indeed, people continue to move in, bringing with them their culture, languages and sense of identity to enrich and diversify the lives of all of us that live here. This is neither new nor unusual, but in the case of the National Museum it goes substantially unnoticed. By default, therefore, the Museum is in a state of denial about the plurality of Wales wrought by these complex migration patterns.

A Single History of Wales

I could go on, but it gets depressing and sounds like a grand whinge. It is very easy to de-construct any museum, to point to that which is missing, seemingly through lack of

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recognition of the world as it is. Such critiques have been the life-blood of much academic analysis of museums. European cultural theory has been employed to strip away the signs and signals to expose dominant political and cultural meta-narratives within museum collections.

The defensive rhetoric from museums to such analysis is easy to predict. It would be pointed out that material evidence of the more difficult experiences or the less 'traditional' is not easy to come by. It would be intrusive to collect and not 'museum-like'. Similarly, it would be said that time needs to elapse before material can be identified as really relevant. It is said that visitors would not come to see voyeuristic displays on human misery. It would be argued, too, that minorities are such small minorities in Wales that concentrating on their experiences would be discriminating against majorities, where it is hard enough to achieve adequate coverage as it is.

Finally, it would be said that the National Museum is about Wales and Welsh Life, culture not narrative, objects not critiques, description not analysis (singulars again). It would also be argued that there is no political will, that being in any sense 'radical' would annoy the governors, offend visitors and risk relations with the Assembly Government. And anyway, there has never been sufficient funding to affect such a change.

However passionately made, such a defence is not tenable. The fact is that museums can and do address different aspects of social and individual experience, from domestic abuse to economic failure, and by the same token record recovery and renewal. Museums can and do continue to attract good audiences when the exhibitions get more challenging in their content. Museums have moved successfully to more inclusive means of operation, without new forms of funding. Plurality is not an option, it is demographic reality and a national advantage. Politicians, trustees and principal funders continue to support museums that address histories and cultural dynamics rather than avoid them.

So why does this not happen in Wales? If we take the Gwyn Alf Williams adage that history is about *who what and when you are*, then what does the singular history of Wales as expressed or implied in the National Museum tell us about *who what and when Wales* is at the moment?

In general terms it is possible to recognise the kind of circumstances that lead to museum development, atrophy or change. That is to say, we can acknowledge the specific factors which impact on the kind of places museums become.

In broad terms, societies that are socially static, whose economies show little evidence of variation or dynamism, or whose social structures are in some ways controlled, are the slowest and possibly the least likely to move forward in museum terms. The models of

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museum provision to be found in such circumstances tend to remain unchanged, if they exist at all. The reason for this is that the museum model may be the least effective means of self-reflection, or that self-reflection is not engaged to any degree. Static societies have a variety of other means, not least rich oral and literary traditions, which serve the purpose.

Where static societies foster museums at all, their collections address archaeology or natural history, or the collections of the wealthy given in a moment of generosity. In other words, those things that are remote and separate, and not immediately controversial. Such museums are not at all likely to engage with the recent past or with difficult memories. They are either too 'polite' or too oblivious to what has gone before. Consequently, their collections remain undeveloped and the exhibitions unchanged. Examples can be given not only from within the UK, but from elsewhere in Europe and from many places around the world.

In contrast, societies that are changing and dynamic are more likely to have museums that attempt to encompass issues of the past and present. Dynamic societies tend to be confident and forward looking, capable of integrating the past with the present. On a pragmatic level, such societies are continuously shedding material that has got to go somewhere or be scrapped. To give just one example, in the late 1950s and 1960s the rise of UK rural collections came on the heels of mechanisation and the cull of the heavy horse between 1946 and 1949.

Political stability and instability, identity confirmation or denial, social renewal or revision all have their impact on disabling or precipitating museum changes and capabilities. In South Africa, for example, Nelson Mandela's Rainbow Nation empowered a complete revision of museum ideas and functions. The imperative was to bear witness and look forward. Extraordinary projects like the District Six Museum in Cape Town now operate to share rather than deny experience.

In 1945, the end of Nazi occupation freed the Danish resistance movement to bring together an extraordinary record of their wartime activities in a Copenhagen museum opened in 1946. The impact of the First World War on British Society precipitated the formation of extraordinary collections and records of the experience *before* the war had even ended. In the 1980s rapid economic change in Sweden led to a country-wide contemporary collecting policy, where all areas of social and economic activity were encompassed. The self-determination of indigenous groups in America and Canada and their unwillingness to be expunged from the museum record, similarly led to changes. I could go on, but put simply where there is a will, a need, or an opportunity, people find ways of using museums to address societies as they are, rather than as we would want them to be.

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Working with Social Diversity

What external points of reference can be taken on this? The first I would point to is the Glasgow Museums, the largest of the local authority funded museum services in the UK. It serves a population of 1.2 million, compared with Cardiff's 305,000, not including people who visit from other parts of Scotland. The population of Scotland is five million, compared with Wales's three million, while Glasgow Museums work from a very similar Victorian base to National Museum Wales.

It could be argued that the imaginative and inclusive ways that Glasgow Museums address representation and interpretation have something to do with the city's innate political radicalism, a commodity not unknown in Wales. Indeed, political will and confidence in what it can achieve has enabled the Glasgow Museum service to tackle such subjects as: faith and religion (in a city not unknown for its bitter sectarianism), industrial decline, revival and reinvention, plus the domestic violence that accompanies deprived or unstable male led societies. Moreover, it has done this alongside thought-provoking, and often celebratory insights into the many facets of artistic, cultural and creative experience so resonant of Glasgow's place in the wider world. Much of this springs from the city's diverse and wide-ranging collections which are of considerable quality.

One of the ways that this has been achieved has been to break down the boundaries between the collection disciplines. Why should anything with a frame around it be viewed solely as art, or anything with an engine be viewed solely as science and technology? All the collections in Glasgow are now managed for their intrinsic material requirements, but with the lead curators in history, science and art having access to all the collections, thereby enhancing understanding.

The second example I give is that of *Tē Papa*, the national museum of New Zealand, a country that has many remarkable parallels with Wales including rugby, sheep, bilingualism, mountains, sea and a landscape of awesome beauty. The imperative for building *Tē Papa* came in 1987 when there was a recognition that the National Museum and National Gallery no longer served the wider community. It was out of kilter with the kind of country New Zealand had become. There was a need for a museum that was more representative of New Zealand's culturally diverse society, one that had a broader audience appeal. The aim was for a museum that could preserve images of the past as a foundation for the present and the future. It addressed the need for a place that could speak with authority about the peoples of New Zealand, both Maori and the non-indigenous Pakeha, and communicate a sense of involvement, pride, and celebration.

An Act of Parliament was passed in 1992, with the new Museum opened six years later. *Tē Papa* is a global example of what can be achieved in a museum that whole heartedly

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seeks to work with social diversity as an asset rather than a problem. It ascribes its success to being a museum, support service, and bicultural organization *that depends on its relationships with communities throughout New Zealand*. What I take from this is that there was courage at a political level to embrace change, to accept that the country was no longer the same as it had been when the original museums were founded. There was an acknowledgement that their diverse peoples, their '*Gwerin*', deserved to be represented as they were and not as the museum system believed them to be.

My third example is in direct contrast. It is the founding of the long awaited National Museum of Australia. Established by the National Museum of Australia Act 1980 and opened in 2001, on time and on budget, it won national and international acclaim for its architecture and its insightful, accessible and brave exhibitions. Like many museums throughout the world, it had no difficulty with the idea that there are many different pasts and histories in Australia – that differing identities can exist within *one* national identity.

Through its exhibitions and collections, the museum tackled a range of cultural experiences, well documented within mainstream academic and other literature, including sections called 'contested frontiers' and 'tangled destinies'. Among the topics covered were aboriginal land rights, aboriginal deaths in custody and the stolen generations. However sensitive they might be, such issues were well researched and well represented in a variety of media including novels, films and documentaries.

However, the view that emerged at a governmental level was that the national museum remit was primarily "to tell the story (*singular*) of the nation, to provide a coherent narrative (*singular*) to show the nation's (*singular*) progress." John Howard's Conservative administration was so alarmed it established a review of the new museum's exhibitions and programmes. Not long after the museum's director, Dawn Casey, a woman of aboriginal descent and an extraordinarily gifted professional, was dismissed.

All three of the examples I have given are of major museums enabled and disabled by their political environments. They also illustrate an extra element that is required. All are, or were, dependent on professional curators who, while being thoroughly professional in their specialist fields, are also capable of influencing the political agenda. The great museums are those that have extraordinary levels of professional understanding, imagination and energy, but which are empowered to exercise this to the full.

Acquiring Meaning Through Association

Within professional museum practice there are a very wide variety of specialisms that temper or inform priorities and approaches. The common ground is that an object is

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seen as a bearer of a unique form of evidence. Of course, the essence of museums is that they hold objects for exhibition, education and research. The key question is: *which* objects, and from this, *which meanings*. It is here, I believe that the liberation or disablement of museums, at the most practical level, takes place. On this, choice between objects and the meanings ascribed to them, depends how representative museums are of the communities they serve.

Conventional approaches to objects in museums still situates them in some kind of typological sequence (I'm using the word typological very loosely here). A print or sculpture is situated within an artist's oeuvre or within movements of which that work is seen to be part. A car or bicycle is situated within a chronological series of technical developments. A farmhouse is situated within its typology of build and regional build variation.

What is happening here is a surface level reading, one that does not move deeper into other meanings or outwards into all the hopes and dreams, experiences and possibilities such objects represent. They lie disconnected from other materials, objects and meanings because of the impenetrable boundaries of discipline division. They fail to achieve what J. Geraint Jenkins, former Curator of the Welsh Folk Museum, advised us in the 1970s, that objects and collections are a means of reaching those people for whom those things had the meaning of everyday life. Such meanings lie hidden, obscured by the high walls of collection discipline.

When such walls are breached, extraordinary vistas emerge. To take an example, much unease among art historians and curators accompanied Glasgow's movement of Dali's *Christ of St John of the Cross* from the art gallery at Kelvingrove, where it was understood as a Dali, to St Mungo's the Museum of Religion in Glasgow, where it was understood in relation to the fundamental tenets of Christianity, essentially Our Lord's sacrifice for the world. Thirteen years later, in July 2006, it was returned to Kelvingrove for its reopening after extensive refurbishment. Curiously, Glasgow's Lord Provost Liz Cameron described *Christ of St John of the Cross* as Glasgow's greatest painting and said Kelvingrove was its "spiritual home".

The acceptance that all objects are polysemantic has enabled many museums to make substantially more from their established collections and to extend their collections with material that is resonant of personal experiences in truly tangible ways. Seemingly harmless objects can be transformed into ones that excite or terrify if people's memories and experiences, ideas and fantasies are allowed free play.

Central to this way of working is the understanding that an object acquires meanings through its *associations*, which are more significant than its implicit physical characteristics.

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A simple plastic alarm clock in a museum in Sweden is not there because it is part of the clock collection, but because it was somehow brought back by a survivor of the M/S Estonia disaster. A shabby tent and recovered container for potato salad in the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm is not about textiles or food, but evidence of the life of a woman who lived on the street. A television remote control and a bottle of whisky are on exhibition in Glasgow's revised Kelvingrove, as having associations with domestic abuse. The remote symbolised to one woman the control her abusive husband took over her family by monopolising family choice in viewing. For another woman the whisky bottle symbolized her husband's violence: he only hit her when he had been drinking whisky.

The difficulty with this type of curatorship is that it requires courage, emotional literacy and a high level of insight. There is a fear that it panders to sensationalism, that it oversteps the mark, even that it puts museums at risk. What actually is happening is based on a very fine and certain distinction between emotion and sensation, between evidence and assumption. The cultural sector is becoming more intimate, and hence more accurate. Museums in the past have shied away from such fraught places and cultural minefields. As a result they lost insights about identity and memories that no fine displays of furniture, carts, landscape paintings, majolica china and mining tools can achieve.

Stuck in the Victorian Past

I am obligated to return to the question I dodged earlier on. What does the current configuration of National Museum Wales tell us about Wales itself? What is Wales prepared to allow its national museums to be? Why are these museums like they are right now?

The first thing I am struck by is the extent to which the histories of these museums and their collections have been allowed to dictate their contemporary approaches. National Museum Wales is a relatively late arrival on the UK museum scene. Cathays Park rode on the back of late Victorian museum growth while the Welsh Folk Museum sprang from the urge for renewal as expressed in post World War II reconstruction plans.

In this, Cathays Park retains the characteristics of its originating period. These include aspirations for fine and decorative art collections; natural history collections based initially on the hunting fraternity's accuracy with a twelve bore; and the compulsive collection disorders that lead to extraordinary collections of geological specimens. All are set off by collections of Welsh archaeology from those periods too remote from current experience for anyone to argue about much.

Successive generations of curators and governors have amended and redefined these collections, and this is still going on today with plans for extensions and new galleries.

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However, the fact remains that this is still fundamentally a Victorian Museum. Its very structures and collections continue to confine it.

It is too easy to say that the National Museum in Cathays Park has never needed to deal with the Welsh past and Welsh identity as St. Fagans has this remit. Fine art, the decorative arts and the environment are as much about who we are culturally as is the spinning wheel and the Davy lamp. It is all down to the questions we ask and how penetrating they are.

The one important question we need to ask is this: if the National Museum did not exist and we were planning one today, what would it be like and what would we want it to contain and do? I suggest that it would be radically different from the one we have. This is not just because we would be free to devise a museum system without certain inherited structures, but because Wales is a very different place to the one into which the museum was originally delivered. The surprise to me is that, in spite of the many opportunities, over the decades the collections have been largely stuck in their Victorian structures.

Finding the Courage and Imagination to be Different

Wales has moved on, but the museum somehow hasn't. Of course, Wales has moved on fitfully, at times with great speed and at others considerable difficulty. I wonder if the long decades of economic decline, erratic periods of revival and the shadow of control from London has robbed the country's National Museum of the courage to be different, to be more honest and open in our histories, to be more certain in who we are right now. As a result are we more comfortable with our myths rather than with our realities?

I wonder whether the contemporary abundance of confidence in being Welsh, as wonderful as this is, has been substantially an inward-looking phenomenon. Has being Welsh in the wider world been embraced with the same degree of confidence and imagination? Indeed, I wonder whether that underlies all that I am arguing in this essay.

I wonder, too, whether the real confidence to be seen for who, what and where we are, to view this with insight, humour and humility, has directly affected all that the National Museum has done and could do. It clings to a singular narrative that fails to resonate, that deals in cliché rather than experience. It never becomes compelling because it gets no further than a neat and anodyne fantasy. Better to stay silent and say nothing, than to remember and speak in ways that depart from established practices, the practices of tradition, the practices of denial; the things that hurt.

We should be staggered that in modern day Wales, we have got to this position. Embedded in the histories and cultures of Wales is all the evidence of innate creativity,

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optimism and instinct essential to the future of Wales. Developing the National Museum to be more resonant of the memories of Wales is not an argument for a psychotic form of chasing sorrows, filth and misery. Instead, it is for enabling a deeper reflection on the human condition, the ability to survive, with humor and affection, pride and energy. Welsh life has such varied dimensions, is so rich in diversity and unpredictability and this is played out as much through its material and visual culture as it is through other means. Indeed, in terms of cultural production there has never been any hesitation in exploring Welsh experiences: it is to be found in our poetry, drama, novels, arts and the works of our creative makers. Somehow, the National Museum has not quite joined in this experience.

I would like to end on another piece of museum rhetoric:

Museum collections transform and inspire people. Collections can be exotic, intriguing, affirming, pleasurable and challenging. They stir emotions and stimulate ideas.

Let us also remember that they are also capable of being irrelevant, boring, silent, wasteful, and dull. The measure of this is the extent to which anyone of us can find a particular level of meaning in that which is collected in our name, about our identities, histories, cultures and our selves. Making the National Museum to be truly about Wales, as a country of influence and standing in a dynamic Europe, is perhaps the biggest challenge our National Museum now faces. I hope it will have the courage and the imagination to rise to that challenge.

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CHAPTER 5

Whose Memory Do We Keep?

John Davies

In his *Concept of History*, published in 1939, Walter Benjamin declared: “Nothing that has ever taken place should be lost to history”. Waldo Williams was inspired by the same concept:

O genedlaethau dirifedi daear (Of the numberless generations of the earth), *daw hiraeth am eich nabod chwi bob un* (I have a yearning to know all of you).⁴³

The sentiment is admirable, but the task is impossible. Some selection has to be made. I remember being acutely aware of that necessity when I was back and fore to the National Library in Aberystwyth some forty years ago, undertaking the task of working through the archive of the Bute estate. Indeed, the largest body of archival material in the National Library is the mass of collections of the landed estates of Wales. It is perhaps ironic that the chief depository of a nation which likes to see itself as a nation of *gwerin* – of common people – should have at its heart the records of its gentry.

The second Marquess of Bute wrote some five letters a day concerning his lands in Glamorgan. The letters were copied into letter books as were the replies. Sitting in Mountstuart House on the Isle of Bute, the Marquess was conducting an industrial revolution in Wales through correspondence. He kept up his labours for a quarter of a century and more, activity which produced at least a hundred thousand letters. I think I have read them all, but I only made use of a tiny proportion. I did not have any clear theory about what to select and what to reject. Perhaps the closest comparison would be with workers in a silver-lead mine in Cwmystwyth in the mid 19th Century. They would move a mass of dross to a tip. They would follow with enthusiasm a vein of lead ore and would gloat in delight on discovering a nugget of silver ore. What they did not perhaps consider is that others, of a later generation, would come along and examine the tips of dross and find in them riches which had no value to the makers of the tips. Those of later generations would be looking for something else, for they would be inspired by new concerns.

In the same way, the memories that those of a later generation will want to keep will not be the same memories that we, of this generation, want to keep. And that, perhaps, is the most fascinating aspect of history and of the study of history. Not only does history evolve; so also does the study of history. To Carlyle, “The history of the world is but the

43) Waldo Williams, *Dail Pren*, 1957, page 78.

biography of great men". The memory he wanted to keep concerned Julius Caesar, Oliver Cromwell and Frederick the Great.

State and Nation Builders

There followed the phalanx of historians who believed that the memories that should be kept were those of state builders, in line with the conviction that the supreme end-product of the historical process is the creation of the sovereign state. I remember the dying days of that concept, for I began as a student at the feet of Professor Chrimes, a fine constitutional historian who was adamant that a history degree course should largely be concerned with the development of the British constitution. So he took us through the Magna Carta, the baronial plan of reform, the development of parliament under the Tudors, the Civil War and the rise of party politics, and ended his course with the curtailment of the powers of the House of Lords in 1911, a wholly regrettable happening in his opinion. When asked why the course did not venture further into the twentieth century, he snorted – he was a very good snorter – and declared that everything since 1911 was "mere journalism". The memories he wanted to keep were those of Simon de Montfort, Henry VIII, Pitt the Elder, Pitt the Younger, Lord Castlereagh, and the Duke of Wellington.

The belief that the rise of sovereign states is the supreme end-product of the historical process is epitomised by the adage that history is always written by the victors. The notion that sovereign states are the supreme end-product of the historic process implies that those peoples who did not succeed in creating their own sovereign states are not worthy of serious study. Thus, the history of Wales during the attempts up to the late thirteenth century to create a viable Welsh principality is certainly a respectable subject; indeed, it is the theme of the greatest monument to Welsh historical scholarship – J. E. Lloyd's *History of Wales from the earliest times to the Edwardian Conquest*. But after the failure of those attempts, the 'sovereign-staters' would argue that there is no history of Wales, a point of view neatly encapsulated in the entry in the 1907 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* – 'for Wales, see England'.

However, that entry was published in the very same year that the National Museum and the National Library received their charters. And it could be argued that gaining those charters proved that history is not always written by the victors. Indeed, as Wales in 1907 did not in any sense resemble a sovereign state, the charters, in that they were the foundation documents of institutions founded to study and commemorate the history of a non-victor in the sovereign state stakes, were declarations that history could be written by those who were not victors. But perhaps this argument should not be pushed too far, for those who willed the two national institutions into existence were in a sense victors. In the social struggles of nineteenth century Wales – in particular against landlordism,

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and against seemingly Anglicising institutions such as the established church – the victors were precisely the people who were intent upon a conscious, if limited, exercise in nation building.

The two institutions founded in 1907 were intended primarily to be show-cases for the concerns of those victors. Indeed, if Iorwerth Peate's testimony is to be relied upon, some of the defeated in the battle over the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales sought to sabotage the prospects of the National Museum.⁴⁴ They sought to insist that the institution should not benefit from what they called 'blood money'. This was the income set aside for the Museum following the disendowment of the one-time Established Church.

Pushing the Story Along

Yet the concerns of the victors of 1907 would not be the concerns of 2007. When different memories are kept, when different questions are asked – how people lived, what people believed, how they earned their living, what made them happy, what made them sad – then new concepts arise concerning whose memory we should keep. The historiographical revolution we have seen over the past generation or two has caused history to be concerned with what matters to all of us. The change is perhaps above all symbolised by the most remarkable of the recent studies published on the history of Wales. I am thinking of Russell Davies's *Hope and Heartbreak*, which has chapters with headings such as 'Love, Lust and Loneliness', 'Fear and Anger' and 'Happiness and Humour'.⁴⁵ What Professor Chrimes would have thought of the book I dare not think.

Russell Davies provides us with a rich array of memories to keep. One example is William Morgan, captain of the *Amelia*, who claimed that his eight gallons of contraband brandy was the prescribed medicine of his sick wife. Another is Betty Williams, who donned a sailor's uniform and went to sea in a man of war in search of her lover. Russell offers a wonderful kaleidoscope, but he resists the temptation to theorise, hoping, as he puts it, that "those interested in such matters can themselves unravel the threads of theory from the tapestry".

Russell gets as close as it is possible to get to including everyone in the historic memory. But what should we attach special significance to, and what should we just mention in passing? For example, should we go by numbers? Is an event in which a large number of people take part more important than one in which far fewer people are involved? I remember ruminating on this matter when I was examining the *Rhondda Leader's* coverage of the Tonypany Riots. The newspaper noted that many hundreds were involved in the disturbances, but it reported that several thousand were spectators at a football match at Tonypany in the very same week. Is an event in which thousands take part more worthy of remembrance than an event in which mere hundreds take part?

44) Iorwerth C. Peate, *Rhwng Dau Fyd*, Gwasg Gee, 1976.

45) Russell Davies, *Hope and Heartbreak: A social history of Wales 1776 – 1871*, University of Wales Press, 2006.

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That most lovable of Welsh historians, Thomas Price (Carnhuanawc) would certainly have commented on the Tonypandy Riots. In the eleven pages, out of 794, he devoted to the years between the battle of Bosworth and the publication of his *Hanes Cymru* in 1842, he only mentioned four events – the Civil War, the French landing in Fishguard, the Merthyr Rising, and the Chartist attack on Newport. Clearly, the memory he sought to keep was essentially about violence. But modern historians, with historians of leisure increasingly vocal among them, seem to be moving towards head counting – presumably an essentially democratic process – and are coming to the conclusion that the mass enjoyment of sport is at least as worthy of being an object of memory as is a minority participation in unrest.

It could be argued that a football match in the Rhondda, of which there were hundreds in a year and thousands in a decade, did not push the story along. The Tonypandy Riots, a symptom as they were of deep tensions and profound aspirations, did push the story along. So we should remember Samuel Rays, who was killed in the riots, Lionel Lindsay, chief constable of Glamorgan, and D. A. Thomas, owner of the colliery where the trouble began, and leave the Rhondda football players on the side lines. But pushing the story along suggests that the story was going somewhere, presumably towards a conclusion of which the chronicler of the story approves.

Making Our Memories Inclusive

However, it is possible that the notion that the story is going somewhere is an unwarranted one. Instead of looking for markers towards a destination, we should perhaps seek out those elements in our history that we have neglected to remember. Gwyn Alfred Williams, in his uniquely provocative way, used to like to argue that those elements included almost everybody, for much of Welsh history, he often asserted, was history with the Welsh left out. One element that has certainly been left out is women, although, as they have in almost every generation constituted more than half the population, to describe them as merely an element is grossly misleading. I once spent a wet afternoon counting how many of the 3,223 individual entries in the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* were specific entries on women. The number is 58, giving a proportion of 1.8 per cent. If there is any area in which we should think again about whose memory we want to keep, it must be this.

The *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, begun in its Welsh-language version in 1937 and published in 1959, was very much a monument to what Prys Morgan, in Chapter 1, describes as “the movement to recreate Welsh nationality around Nonconformity”. “Black with Parches” as Dylan Thomas said of the beer tent, it is rare to find within the volume an entry not flanked on both sides by an entry on a Nonconformist minister. Other traditions are given space, for its chief editor, the wonderfully humane and genial R. T. Jenkins, knew his history better than any of us. But there can be little doubt that

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the thrust of the volume is that the authentic essence of Wales lay in its chapel traditions. Thus Owen M. Edwards, in his charming *Cartrefi Cymru*, informs us that the places to remember are Trefeca, Cefn-brith, Llangeitho and Dolwar-fach. Implicit in that is the casting of other traditions – other religious traditions, in particular, perhaps – into mute oblivion. And here again, Waldo Williams offers a necessary corrective. He belonged to a Nonconformist tradition that had excluded from its collective memory the Roman Catholic traditions of Wales. But he knew that if the Welsh were to be a nation in any meaningful sense, memories of those traditions – in particular the sufferings of the Welsh Catholic martyrs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – have to be kept:

Wedi'r canrifoedd mudan, he wrote; clymaf eu clod (After the mute centuries, I bind myself to their praise). Mawr ac ardderchog fyddai y rhain yn eich chwedl, / Gymru, pe baech chwi'n genedl (Great and radiant these would be in your fable, Wales, if you were a nation).⁴⁶

While we should be inclusive in keeping the memory of our varying religious traditions, the issue becomes more problematic when we seek to remember those who created the essentially secular society of the Wales of today, a country in which fewer than 10 per cent of the inhabitants have a sustained relationship with a place of worship. Of late, I have been involved with the reorganisation of the displays of the National History Museum at St. Fagans relating to belief. One aim is to make the displays more inclusive by including materials relating to the Moslem Welsh, the Jewish Welsh, the Hindu Welsh, the Buddhist Welsh, and indeed those of our compatriots who follow animist and pagan beliefs. But how should the non-belief of the majority be portrayed? While religion can be interpreted through the portrayals of the services of practitioners and through the interpretation of their ritual objects, how do we keep the memory of secularists, who, almost by definition, have no services and no ritual objects? Any advice would be gratefully received.

The notion of restricting the memories we should keep to those elements which represent the 'authentic essence' was a favourite target of Gwyn Alfred Williams. He recalled wading through books which

...were not history in any meaningful sense, but were concerned with some mystical 'authenticity', with what was 'really Welsh' in all the infinite gradations of that pristine and paralytic condition.⁴⁷

I remember having a similar experience on reading books on the history of Ireland. Many of them insisted on celebrating the authentic original inhabitants – Celts of course – and then went on to lament the coming of Viking invasions, Norman colonisation, English plantations and Scottish Presbyterian settlers. It was refreshing to come across

46) Waldo Williams, *Dail Pren*, Gomer, 1957, page 90.

47) Gwyn A. Williams, 'With the History left in', *Planet*, No 82, August/September 1990.

Sean O'Faolain's 1947 volume *The Irish* (a book published by Penguin, a company which has been responsible for some admirable works) in which the author chose to write about the Viking, Norman, English and Scottish contributions to the rich tapestry of Irish society.

Welsh Heroes and Heroines

As Prys Morgan emphasises, the granting of charters to the National Library and National Museum of Wales in 1907 was the fruit of a new assertiveness. That assertiveness could be civic as well as national, for the campaign for Welsh national institutions coincided exactly with Cardiff's growing insistence that it was the metropolis of Wales. The year 1905, when a committee of the Privy Council was appointed to decide upon the location of the institutions, was the year in which Cardiff became a city. It gained the Museum, but, as the *Western Mail* put it, the Library was "banished to the cold shades of isolated Aberystwyth".

The year 1905 also saw the completion of Cardiff's City Hall, the design of which included the niches and pedestals which would by 1916 be graced by the statues of those heroes whose memory the early twentieth century Welsh believed should pre-eminently be kept. The marble hall of heroes, together with the splendid snarling dragon on the City Hall dome, was Cardiff's way of declaring that it was the de facto, if not the de jure capital of Wales. The city fathers had come to the conclusion that there was more dignity in being at the top of Wales's urban hierarchy than in being one of a number of middle range British provincial towns.

Cardiff decided to honour the memory of eleven individuals, with St David, fittingly, in the centre, although Nonconformists on the Cardiff corporation did try to insist that his statue should not feature a mitre. Of the others, six – Hywel Dda, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Dafydd ap Gwilym, Owain Glyn Dŵr, Bishop William Morgan and Williams Pantycelyn – would probably be wholly accepted today as authentic heroes of the Welsh. There might be some doubts about Giraldus Cambrensis, and even stronger doubts about Henry VII. The latter's accession to the English throne was hailed by Owen Rhoscomyl – that curious celebrator of those whose memory we should keep – as denoting for the Welsh that "the long struggle was over and that victory had been won". Incidentally, it was Rhoscomyl that Sir Frederick Rees had in mind when he declared that those who seek to find the flame-bearers of Welsh history are apt to burn their fingers.⁴⁸

The remaining two statutes are more intriguing. The only heroine among the eleven is Boudicea, hailed as Buddug by Theophilus Evans. The statue may have been a backhanded compliment to Queen Victoria, whom Welsh royalists liked to address as Buddug II. But it

48) James Frederick Rees, *Of Welsh Nationality and Historians*, BBC Welsh Home Service Annual Lecture, 1951. He was referring to Owen Rhoscomyl's volume, *Flamebearers of Welsh History*, 1905.

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probably represents the long arm of Geoffrey of Monmouth and his account of how the Brythons lost 'the crown of the kingdom'. I see that in a recent issue of *Planet*, Ewais and Clun are portrayed as *Cambria irredenta*, but Norfolk is pushing it a bit.

The last remaining statue is that of General Picton, the most prominent Welshman to be killed in the Battle of Waterloo. As a man famous for his cruelty when governor of Jamaica, I doubt whether he is a person whose memory we should be anxious to keep. But his inclusion among the heroes in Cardiff's City Hall does underline one sphere of endeavour which the Welsh collective memory has tended to ignore – the Welsh contribution to the British armed forces and to the British Empire. I am at present involved with the preparation of the *Encyclopaedia of Wales*, and we as editors have found difficulty in finding Welsh historians who feel competent to prepare entries on institutions such as the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the South Wales Borderers. Indeed, several of those we approached could not understand why we thought that such entries should be included at all. Mind you, if Welsh historians are prone to overlook the British dimension, those purporting to chronicle British history – with a few honourable exceptions such as Norman Davies – can be even more cavalier towards Welsh dimension. I notice that in a recently published history of Britain by a well known television historian, the only entry on Wales in the index is a reference to 'Wales, war with'.

Expanding Our Memory

But we should seek to expand our collective memory into spheres towards which many of us feel no particular emotional attachment. The Scots have done better in this area, as have other nations.

I was delighted to see recently a book entitled, *A Basque History of the World*. The writing of *A Welsh History of the World* would not be a wholly unfeasible project. Not only did we go out to the Empire, but inhabitants of the Empire came to us. I live now in south Cardiff, in Grangetown, and many of my neighbours are Welsh people with ancestors in Somalia, Aden, Nigeria, Pakistan or the Caribbean. One becomes rapidly aware that Welsh is just one language among many others in Grangetown's polyglot community – although, as Grangetown is the new Pontcanna, Welsh is increasingly spoke there. Indeed, on moving in we were heard speaking Welsh by our neighbours – whose roots are in Jamaica – and I heard the one telling the other: "I think they are yet more of those *Cymracis*". Another neighbour, a migrant from Nigeria, described his schooling to me, schooling which included what sounded very much like a 'Yoruba Not', the exact equivalent of the old 'Welsh Not'.

These certainly are memories we should seek to preserve and appreciate, for they are the memories of the new Welsh, and they are memories, like the memories of the old Welsh,

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which are part of a fascinating post-Imperial web. I remember visiting the Nehru Museum in Bombay, where one of the exhibits is a postcard Nehru sent in 1911 to his mother in Allahabad. It featured the classic view of Snowdon, and the message read: "I am in Beddgelert; you can see Snowdon from here". Thus did empire inspire the young Nehru, whose ancestry lay among the far more impressive mountains of Kashmir, to boast that he had seen Snowdon. We should look to Jan Morris, who finds no difficulty in being the enthusiastic chronicler of the British Empire while also declaring herself to be a Welsh Republican.

But what of the role of the National Museum and the National Library in the story of Wales? Where the museum in Cathays Park is concerned, this was a few years ago an issue of some controversy, with Peter Lord arguing that the museum was cavalier in its attitude to the art produced in Wales.⁴⁹ He claimed the museum authorities restricted their enthusiasm to the international renown of its collection of Impressionist paintings. There is heroism and doggedness in Peter's virtual single-handed insistence that Wales has produced art and that that art is worthy of celebration. He is almost certainly correct in arguing that the Davies Bequest skewed the museum's policy in a direction which he considered objectionable. But that the Davies sisters, living in Montgomeryshire, should have used the money drawn from mid Wales railways, Rhondda coalmines and the Barry Docks to buy paintings with the intention of ensuring that they should enrich a national Welsh institution in Cardiff is in itself part of the story of Wales. After all, it would have been inconceivable for the museum authorities, on being offered the Monets and the Manets and the Cézannes and the Van Goghs, to have said: "We don't want them. Give them to the Newtown Public Library". And I am unsure too about the notion that the entire archive relating to the history of Wales should be kept in the National Library. There are archives which are only fully meaningful in the context of other related material. It would be folly, for example, to insist that documents relating to the Welsh lordships of the duchy of Lancaster should be removed from the duchy archives and deposited in Aberystwyth.

In his useful survey of record sources, Philip Ridden writes of the "unhappy archival history of Welsh medieval documents".⁵⁰ Perhaps he protests too much. Admittedly, the conquerors had little motive to preserve the archives of the independent Welsh princes, for, if history is not always written by the victors, it is the victors' archives which are always those that are best preserved. Nevertheless, as Huw Price's admirable work shows, more has survived of the Acts of the Welsh rulers than is generally realised.⁵¹ And perhaps Wales was fortunate in that, before it had the resources to acquire an adequate depository, London took care of much of the country's history's written sources. At least we were spared the plan of Sir Thomas Philipps who in 1850 suggested that his great collection, and other materials relating to the history of Wales, should be deposited in the library of St David's

49) Peter Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance*, Gomer, 1992.

50) Philip Ridden, *Record Sources for Local History*, 1987.

51) Huw Pryce, *The Acts of Welsh Rulers, 1120-1283*, University of Wales Press, 2005.

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College, Lampeter, a building whose roof leaked and which was only open once a week “lest the students read too much”. And above all, we were saved the fate of Ireland, where the unrest which led to the creation of the Irish Free State involved the burning of the Custom House in Dublin, thereby tragically crippling any exhaustive study of the history of Ireland.

Remembering North East Wales

Earlier, I discussed the tendency to omit to remember strands of our history. More perturbing to me is the propensity to omit to remember wide swathes of our country. I am thinking of the north-east, the old counties of Flintshire and Denbighshire. To many in the south, the north means Gwynedd, and to many in Gwynedd, the north-east seems to be an appendage of Merseyside rather than an integral part of Wales. Indeed, in some of the material prepared to celebrate the double centenary in 2007 it is claimed that the era of prosperity which produced the National Museum and the National Library was based on the south Wales coalfield and the north Wales slate industry. This fails to acknowledge that in 2007 the industries of north-east Wales had five times as many employees than did the industries of north-west Wales.

Of the memories that are vital to keep, among the most important is to ensure that the north-east remains firmly within the collective memory of Wales as a whole. When we consider the north east’s role throughout the ages – the richness of its prehistoric culture, its central position in Welsh medieval history, its wholly disproportionate contribution to Welsh medieval literature, its pivotal importance as the cradle of the Glyn Dŵr revolt, its centrality in the history of the Renaissance in Wales, its innovative architecture, its pioneering role in the Industrial Revolution – it is evident that rather than being an adjunct of the rest of Wales, the rest of Wales is in fact an adjunct of the north-east.

And yet, we in the rest of Wales have granted the north-east very little. It did not get one of the original colleges of the University of Wales. It was denied the northern headquarters of the BBC. None of its urban centres have been granted city status. It lacks an out station of the National Museum, although Bersham and Holywell could well be considered prime candidates for a national museum of metallurgy. It has no world heritage sites, although the Froncysyllte aqueduct may gain that status in the near future. Whose memory should we keep? Above all, we should seek to ensure that the north-east remains firmly in the collective memory of all of us.

Devolution’s ‘Second Age’

And after that little rant, I will return to individuals. In the opening Chapter Prys Morgan rightly describes the Library and the Museum as the most glorious of the institutions created in the ‘first age of devolution’ – that between the 1880s and 1914.

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We are now in the second age of devolution and have what the most dedicated patriots of the first age wanted above all, a national body elected by the Welsh people. Many voiced their hopes for such a body. The most articulate among them was Thomas Edward Ellis, who in a powerful speech in Bala in 1890 called for an Assembly (*Gymanfa* was his word), “which would be a symbol of our national unity, a means of achieving our social ideals and our cultural interests, and an embodiment and a fulfilment of our aspirations as a people”. I would not claim that the National Assembly has yet fulfilled all Ellis’s hopes, but the fact that it exists at all borders upon the miraculous.

Among those whose memory we should keep, let us keep the memory of those who first dreamt of such an institution. Thomas Edward Ellis died on 5 April 1899. A hundred years and 31 days later, the first elections to the National Assembly were held. In April 1999 I was in the Bala area. I went to Ellis’s grave at Cefnddwysarn and whispered to the pillar surmounting it: “Mae gennym ni *gymanfa* nawr” (We have a *gymanfa* now). It was a ridiculous act, of course, but perhaps we should be proud that we have something worth whispering to our precursors in their tombs.

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CHAPTER 6

Myths and Memories in National Pasts and Futures

Tom Nairn

One might say that historical reality travels with historiography not as a paying passenger but as a stowaway. As a stowaway the past 'survives' the text; as a stowaway the past may spring surprises on us ... the fact (is) that the past is present in the present, that the past does spring surprises on us, that though we may not be able to get in contact with historical reality as intensively as we would like, historical reality is, so to speak, very able to get in contact with us.

Eelco Runia, 'Presence', *History and Theory* No 45, February 2006.

What I want to do in this chapter is revisit one curious feature of national mythology and memory, something that we can't avoid having inherited. It seems to be implanted as part of the peculiar English-language discourse most of us acquire early and (unless challenged) pretty permanently. The Queen's discourse, as it were, implies not just the 'greatness' of this and that, but what one can call the assumptions of such superior or expansive scale. The presupposition here is simply that a wider world favours (or at the very least tolerates) such a scale of affairs. Reality may in that sense include a Deity, with a 'Chosen People' as a possible accompaniment; but it can do without this. The vital point is that greatness, size, expanding importance or influence must appear natural – aspects of the world or cosmos that has engendered relative bigness, whether the ultimate causes be supernatural, or simply located in physics, bio-chemistry and genes.

To use the term especially favoured by present-day United Kingdom rulers and pundits, the way of the world must favour 'clout'. That is to say, the ability to impose one's will, to make a difference. Not necessarily with an upper-cut or the latest military hardware, perhaps, but something along those lines. No doubt an ex-empire exposed to 'clout-loss' is bound to brood on the matter. Its leaders are fated to feel that no day is what it once might have been, were they only a bit bigger, still in command of more resources, and so forth.

Scale means more than just size, certainly. However, on the whole bigger remains distinctly better than smaller in this instinctive world-view. While not all may aspire to super- or hyper-power standing, it is self-evidently preferable not to appear 'unviable',

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tiddle-pot, abjectly dependent, or a push-over. The scale of nations inclines towards the biggish rather than the smallish: the reasonably-sized proportions of something like the larger European 19th and 20th century national states, and their successors (sometimes their progeny) on other continents. France has become standard: not Brittany, Savoy or Provence, let alone Monaco. Thus the prevalent discourse assumption of 'big' or at least 'biggish' being normal, while 'small' and 'smallish' are questionable: if not merely insignificant, then quite probably troublesome.

Yugoslavia was in that sense no problem for Cold War common sense, in spite of all its socialistic failings, and its substitution of class ('worker self-management') for democracy. Serbia might have been just about tolerable in the aftermath. However, what followed was, of course, the Yugoslav break-up into one damn diminutive ethno-drama after another, culminating in Montenegro's 2006 admission into the United Nations. This was, indeed, a counter-assertion of absurd Lilliputs over the previous, apparently unstoppable onward march of actual and would-be Brobdignags.

The Invention of 'Invention'

In truth, there's nothing natural about either bigness or the modern mythologies of scale. As the late Ernest Gellner liked to point out, the 'common anthropological equipment' of our bipedal species is strikingly different. We have inherited a 'natural' division into about seven or eight thousand groups, separated by both linguistic and socially-constructed boundaries. No-one knows quite how many, since the drawing of ethno-linguistic maps is so difficult and, of course, contentious. In this important respect, the human species remains a mystery to itself. All we do have is the current data on the schoolroom 'political globe' and its accompanying United Nations Membership Table. This shows approaching two hundred 'nations' in the sense of recognized states – a ridiculously small proportion of what the inherited equipment should make possible.

So what has happened to all the rest? Gellner's sardonic strain could never resist the temptation of joking about them: 'A Note on the Weakness of Nationalism' is his most famous comment, in his book *Nations and Nationalism*, published in 1983. Himself a product of Bohemia, of an ethnos that had not made it, he was fond of crowing about other possibilities, and the supposed reasonableness of larger entities like the Hapsburg Empire, or his adopted United Kingdom. On the other hand, as a number of observers have noted, he took everywhere with him an old mouth-organ, upon which he loved to wheeze out Bohemian peasant folk-tunes. In fact, he personally embodied the deep ambiguity manifested in his post-1970s Modernisation *Theory of Nationalism*.

This theory argued that the absurd disproportion between potential and actual nations was made inevitable by the actual development of modern industry and commerce. This was

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capitalism from below, rather than wise, Confucian dispensation from above. Accidents on the outer edge, far from China, North India or the Andean and Central-American nuclei of civilization, decided the matter. The miserable littoral of the North Atlantic was where the carrion crow of chance chose to alight and built his nest.

So coal, steel boats, artillery and all the rest of it became available for exploitation by backwoods chieftains, bandits, naval pirates and businessmen. The region's dense 'inherited equipment' was mobilised by warfare and then expansion. After the crow, Minerva's Owl hooted on to the scene with her tales about progress, inevitability and divine (that is, Christian) sanction. Enlightenment and Darkenment came to bless the nest as one.

Gellner maintained that a reconstitution of inherited societal equipment was one necessary part of the process. Neither the old dynastic imperia nor the abundant ethno-linguistic clans had in themselves the means to exploit the new possibilities. Yet both had to try and do so. It was the latter that won out – though only at the cost of amalgamation, or fusion into intermediate units considerably larger than, for example, the Picts, Cymrics, Slovaks, Basques, Friesians, Anglo-Saxons, Bohemians, Bretons, Sardis (several pages would be needed to complete the list). The consequence was another shorter and more familiar list: Holland, England, Spain, France, and so on. Even over the whole globe, it's only approaching the two hundred mark.

Uneven development has always remained its keynote, however. Certain regions and social classes led the way, until challenged or arrested by competitors, or whoever was left behind earlier. These challenges all required societal mobilisation, for assertion or reinsertion into capitalist growth and (turning to the Owl) for rights to do so, places in the new sun. That turning was of course 'nationalism', the climate of actual rather than of any blue-printed development. An antagonistic tension has always run through it. While some populations found satisfaction in the bigger-is-better era, others were (and remain) hostile and disgruntled. This included both old-metropolitan, imperial groups and restive, newly-emergent ones. Unsurprisingly, warfare has been endemic under these arrangements. Indeed the term 'national-ism', now part of everyday discourse, originated from one of the most violent and characteristic conflicts of the later 19th century, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71.

Gellner's mapping of the process didn't emerge until a century after that.⁵² His contention was that, although inevitable, modern nationality-politics were also invented. Modernity itself was responsible for the new coinage. Medium-to-bigish states had been required for modernisation's purposes, and over the 19th and 20th

52) Revealingly little has been written about the scale of modern nations. Gellner's own main contribution was 'Scale and Nation', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1973, a modest, fairly unreadable – and one suspects, largely unread – essay. However, the argument there is re-presented more readably in *Nations and Nationalism* ten years later. The section noted earlier, 'A Note on the Weakness of Nationalism' is the thing to look up (pp.43-50).

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centuries intellectuals thought them up, with help from artillery, bankers and poets. Myths and memories were needed, and this was their matrix. Nations demand traditions for their citizens or subjects to sign up to. However, these were not just lying around to be dusted off and rejuvenated. Rather it had now to be pretended they were always there, awaiting resurrection, a pretence became the responsibility of emerging nationalist intelligentsias.

Thus arrived *The Invention of Tradition*, in the title of the celebrated and influential academic tome, published by historian Eric Hobsbawm and anthropologist Terence Ranger in 1992. Like Gellner, its authors were intelligently hostile to nationalism, and wished above all to explain it away in broader terms, leaving the door open to alternative modes of development they thought they preferred – post-national, internationalist, cosmopolitan, socialist or whatever. They thought that what had been so blatantly invented could surely be dis-invented or replaced with more correct and edifying stories. A past thus exalted could be brought down to earth. One set of representations should give way to another. Historians had been the artificers of nation-state ideologies. Surely a new lot might generate something better, nobler and more convincing?

New 'Presences'

Yet nationalism has defeated all those worthies of the wider view. Had the Cold War ended differently, they would have been defeated anyway. Globalisation would then have assumed the shape of hundreds of national versions of Managed Socialism, competing if not warring with one another. The actual globe of Managed Capitalisms is likely to increase United Nations membership towards something between two hundred and two hundred and fifty over the coming century. As Eelco Runia has put up, the past has in no uncertain terms got in contact with us, most strikingly via the huge explosion of United States nationalism that followed the Twin Towers attack of 2001.

One feature of 'Inventionism' had been the fixed idea of nationalism's decline, and its welcome replacement by belief-systems engineered from places like Harvard, Oxford, Paris and Delhi (Moscow and Peking dropped temporarily off the list in the 1980s). Gellner himself expected this to happen beyond the point where modernisation was, if not completed, then attained to a degree sufficient to leave no developmental alternative.⁵³

This volume's cover picture suggests a more enduring way forward: the stone visage of Llywelyn Fawr, uncovered in 1966 after seven and a half centuries of darkness. Harri Webb's poem, 'The Stone Face' describes onlookers astounded by this presence:

53) Although he was, interestingly, always uncertain about Muslim society's role in this script, and increasingly preoccupied with the question in his last years.

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*Now in a cold and stormy Spring we stand
At the unearthing of the sovereign head,
The human face under the chipped crown.
Belatedly, but not too late, the rendez-vous is made.
The dream and the inheritors of the dream...*

They are surprised to find themselves exchanging ‘the gaze of eagles, in the time of the cleansing of the eyes’. But the point isn’t what an optometrist would make of Harri Webb and the Blaid. Rather, it is that we all, since the 1980s, find ourselves in a ‘cold and stormy spring’, compelled to seek for human faces under the mounting debris of progress. Some have found simulacra of this in rediscovered religion.⁵⁴ Some are lucky enough to be a little more able to see through the clouds of dust (occasionally rubbing their eyes in disbelief).⁵⁵ They rediscover the past within the present. Or is it the past which has found them?

The Search for ‘Presence’

In his essay ‘Presence’, quoted at the outset of this chapter, Runia surveys historiography from the time of Giambattista Vico to our own visibly altering scene. He questions the nature of the memory and “recent phenomena such as lieux de mémoire, remembrance, and trauma”, and concludes that what he calls ‘metonymy’ offers a key to the shift.

My thesis is that what is pursued in the Vietnam Veterans memorial, in having a diamond made “from the carbon of your loved one as a memorial to their (sic) unique life”; in the reading of names on the anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Centre; in the craze for reunions; and in a host of comparable phenomena, is not ‘meaning’ but what for want of a better word I will call ‘presence’.⁵⁶

Presence is ‘being in touch’ with people, things, events and feelings that made you into the person you are. It is having a whisper of life breathed into what has become routine and clichéd. It is fully realising things instead of just taking them for granted. Not wish-fulfillment or day-dreaming, therefore, but a passion for the real.

Globalisation has awakened this passion, alongside (or beneath) all its infamies and failures. Let me remind you of another great Welsh example. Writing for Welsh current affairs magazine *Arcade* away back in 1980, Raymond Williams also tried to conjure up ‘presence’, in literary terms corresponding to Runia’s theoretical sense:

Every reader of this new history will find, at some point, a moment when his own memory stirs and becomes that new thing,

54) The best short coverage of religious revival is the special international edition of *Der Spiegel*, ‘The Power of Faith: How Religion Impacts Our World’ (www.international.spiegel.de 2006), especially the interview with theologian Friedrich Wilhelm Graf on ‘Roots of Fundamentalism’, pp.20-23.

55) Harri Webb, *Looking Up England’s Arsehole: The Patriotic Poems and Boozy Ballads of Harri Webb*, Y Lolfa, 2000.

56) *History and Theory* 45 (February 2006) pp. 1-5.

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an historical memory, a new sense of identity and relationships. I can record my own moment. I have always remembered my father, a railwayman, growing potatoes along the edge of a neighbouring farmer's field, and then helping his farmer friend with the harvest. But what I just did not know was the complex history of potato setting, and its formal and informal labour obligations... The personal memory, local and specific, is then suddenly connected with the history of thousands of people, through several generations. As the particular and general, the personal and the social, are at last brought together, each kind of memory and sense of identity is clarified and strengthened. The relations between people and 'a people' begin to move in the mind.⁵⁷

The 'Stowaways' Are Coming on Deck

The point of 'metonymy' (the part standing in for the whole) is that the 'inventionists' and official Modernizers have travestied history for their own purposes. The past is not a bow-tied, properly paid-up passenger with registered luggage, but something more like a 'stowaway'. Indeed, there is a whole shipload of them surviving in the dark below decks. As Runia puts it: "historical reality travels with historiography... (and) 'survives' the text". Consequently, it is quite capable of springing surprises upon us.

Stowaways are also waiting their chance to get back on deck. They may have been sentenced to the hold, but are in no way inventions of the judges who relegated them to oblivion. This is of course why societies and communities, like individuals, can 'surprise themselves', and behave quite differently from the official texts handed down from the bridge.

Metonymy is 'a metaphor for discontinuity', which means a metaphor for something essential to human nature, to society itself. What globalisation has accomplished is a potential reactivation of stowaways, the transportees of globalisation's 'First Fleet'. This case above all in what one can call "border situations" (like Raymond Williams's), where diversity has gone on fertilizing populations and, as it were, inoculating them against uniformed officialdoms from both sides. A single world, of course, bears with it the threat of all-encompassing official texthood. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz evokes it very well in these terms:

The next necessary thing... is neither the construction of a universal Esperanto-like culture... nor the invention of some vast

57) Raymond Williams, 'Remaking Welsh history', *Arcade*, December 1980. I quote it from John Osmond, *Building the Nation: Creating 'Internal Political Solidarity' – the 1979, 1997 and 2011 referendums in Wales*, IWA, 2007. Williams was reviewing David Smith (Ed.), *A People and a Proletariat: Essays in the History of Wales*, Pluto Press, 1980; and Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1980.

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technology of human management. It is to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth, and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way.⁵⁸

They are contained, as it were, in a tumble-dryer world from which there is no escape. In fact, there is a finality to it. As a result it is a world where the retention, reassertion or simply the more reliable discovery of identity is that much more important. Moreover, this cannot come from simply getting bigger, or following and emulating the erstwhile leaders – leaders who themselves are now struggling, and visibly failing, to keep leadership pretensions and old command-structures going. Hence plurality imposes itself. We have to get out of each other's way and we can only do so by the preservation, and probably the accentuation, of diversity. In turn this means societal, more or less national diversity, assuming differential responsibilities for separate trajectories and collective ambitions.

Another analogy, which Runia doesn't employ, might be with the theory of psychoanalysis. Freud's conception of the unconscious suggested that individual minds also rest upon a much larger cargo of 'stowaways', who also tend to appear on deck, contacting the official Ego with either reassuring or profoundly uncomfortable messages. This living freight may have been relegated, or even scorned and denied. Yet it remains capable not only of re-emergence but of re-configuring the above-deck vessel, and altering its course. The plan of 'human nature' in the socio-historical sense therefore bears a striking structural resemblance to its individual embodiments. The relationship is dependent upon language (or 'culture') and presumably necessary to most important change or development.

Something else follows from this. The resultant plurality of development is likely to be on a smaller scale than the old theories imagined, and to have quite different political consequences. Stowaways are likely to be more democratic, for obvious reasons. Only smaller, more flexible and innovative units are capable of the invention and experiments required to render globality more tolerable. There was never any hope of the ancient mega-entities, like the Habsburg or Ottoman Empires, the Tsars, or the oriental courts, adapting to take over Gellner's 'modernisation'. One suspects there is as little chance of today's successors adapting to global post-modernisation either. These, of course, include the mega-body-building cults pursued in the USA and China, are aspired to in Indonesia and India, and pathetically clung to by the UK.

Stowaways can only act collectively as nations. Hence smaller-scale democracies can acquire the constitutions they need solely via collective will-power; which is unattainable except via nationhood, independence, and recognition. The officer class is

58) Cited in 'Obituary for Clifford Geertz' in October 2006: <<www.ias.edu/Newsroom/>> The text came originally from Geertz's *The Anthropologist as Author* (1988).

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awfully liberal with supposed substitutes: regionalisms, autonomies, special or high-powered autonomies, home rules deemed just as good as the old model, and a lot less troublesome. What they want to divert attention from is not trouble, but troublesome democracy. Nationalism generated democracy originally.⁵⁹ Under the post-1989 conditions nationalism is being forced to modify and advance democracy's form of power, and its popular support for power. Incidentally, this is true whether one approaches the matter from an idealising, theoretical angle, or from the practical point of view of, for example, the World Bank, the IMF and other agencies of development and re-structuring.

The two general vehicles previously on trial were 'class' and 'nation'. The former failed. The latter is being revived and adapted to the new circumstances. Far from being dis-invented, as the older gold-braid intéllos believed, nationalism has gained a new lease of life.

Bigger is No Longer Better

Part of history's new lease is a shift of scale. The earlier stages of industrialisation, urbanisation and expanding commerce did indeed (as Gellner described so well) force the formation of appropriate bigger vehicles, and an identikit of 'viability' for modernity. But the entire point of globalisation is that this phase is over. Bigger is no longer better, in that original, functional sense. Instead, smaller is more viable, and now effective in a way that has little to do with being beautiful, cosy, or aesthetically pleasing. The world of stowaways and mongrels has not the slightest wish to be either de- or re-invented, or channeled by orders from the old bridge.

This is why 'myths and memories' are being re-galvanized everywhere along the lines Williams forecast. It is also why smaller nation-states consistently lead the way in our globalising times. Ireland, Finland, and the Baltic countries come to mind. Even with all the limitations of devolution, we have had some experience in Britain of the kind of innovation and new possibilities that this development can bring with it. Our reforms may have been sanctioned with the idea of keeping the peripheral natives dancing happily, and thus reinforcing a largely unreformed centre. But that isn't the way things have turned out. Above all, the centre is disintegrating under the oppressive burden of the Special Relationship and the Mesopotamian War, followed by Blair's parting decision to keep Britain a Great Power at all costs, by replacing its nuclear deterrent.

In these circumstances, electing for smaller-scale independence and a different direction is no longer 'opting out' of the 'Real World', or choosing isolation and marginalisation. Rather, it is deciding to go with the emerging mainstream of the globalisation process. It is opting to join the world of lessening scale and pretensions. In the process it is acknowledging that overall unity can be reached only by an expansion of the numbers of

59) See Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Harvard University Press, 1992.

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nations and states, upon the foundation of better, more deeply-rooted democratic practices. In practical terms, this could mean an increase of the United Nations to somewhere between two hundred and two hundred and fifty, in the course of the present century.

It can be asked of course, if this might not eventually mean or imply a huge increase, to something like the thousands of ethnies that anthropologists have identified – and hence to the sort of ‘unmanageable’ condition that defenders of the status quo have invariably brandished like a scarecrow. The answer here is surely that, in a more democratic world, there’s no way of knowing in advance.

However, what we do know in advance is that it’s perfectly futile to foreclose on the process. In this globe of lessening scale and expanding opportunities for nations, the forces really in charge are different from those of Gellner’s initial modernisation and industrialisation.⁶⁰

The Past is the Future

The ‘Future’ this volume addresses follows from such an interpretation of ‘Myths and Memories’. In Runia’s terms, the latter are the ‘stowaways’ emerging into the light from the stone face’s imposed oblivion. And we’re not ‘inventing’ an alternative future time. They are doing this for us, since they have us by the throat. They are that ‘future’. Listen to them – not that one will have much option, but you’d better get used to it.

When Mrs Ewing reintroduced the Scottish Parliament in 1999 by saying it had simply been ‘reconvened’ after a regrettable lapse of three centuries, she spoke even more truly than she knew. That was another act of ‘presence’, which the Scots are still living out eight years later. Others will follow, there as well as in Wales. And who knows, maybe up the back passage too, even in that England that believed it had got rid of Llywelyn once and for all. “We’ll be back” is how Harri Webb puts it. Yes, we all will, and to stay in this one world.

60) For a contrary view., see the recent dystopia *No More States? Globalization, National Self-Determination and Terrorism* (Rowan and Littlefield, August 2006), edited by Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein of UCLA in California. The publishers probably imposed the question-mark, for both Editors and contributors plainly feel it’s superfluous. The thesis is that there are already more than enough wretched little nation-states, but (fortunately) the way things are going there aren’t likely to be many (if any) more of them. The international order of 2106 will therefore look much like that of today. ‘Indeed’ – they conclude with a curiously flat, sombre kind of satisfaction – ‘...a reverse political-economic trend may well have set in, with states getting bigger, rather than smaller in size. Consolidation through new international or supranational organizations may become the rule, rather than farther division into smaller entities’ (Preface p.vii).

CHAPTER 7

The Future of National Libraries and Archives

Andrew Green

Writing the history of the future is a perilous business. It is probably best avoided. David Edgerton, the historian of technology, recently echoed a famous quotation of Samuel Johnson by saying that “futurism is the last refuge of the scoundrel”.⁶¹ On the other hand, by temperament I always prefer to look forward than back, and I take heart from the remark of the White Queen to Alice, in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the looking glass*: “It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards”.⁶²

Many would say that the modern era began two years before the National Library of Wales was founded, in 1905. In August of that year the *Annalen der Physik* published a short article entitled ‘On the electrodynamics of moving bodies’. With this article Albert Einstein overturned Newtonian physics and long-established ideas about space and time.

Einstein’s intellectual bomb exploded immediately. Within a generation his basic notion, that time is not universal but relative and dependent on the observer, was generally accepted. For a century and more since, however, physicists have been wrestling with the problems and complexities thrown up by Einstein’s theory.⁶³ In the meantime, relativity, of time and much else, has had a profound influence on politics, sociology, literary criticism and literature itself. In Wales, for example, the scientist-poet T.H. Parry-Williams was quickly aware of the shift in the universe that had taken place; the after-effects can be traced in some of his early poems.⁶⁴

From the distance of a century we can see that the foundation and development of the National Library were firmly rooted in the old Newtonian world. Its stock-in-trade, recorded knowledge, was easily defined and static, its time-lines were constant and unchanging. It is only quite recently that librarians and archivists have begun to feel the winds of Einstein’s revolution in their own fields, as knowledge loses its solidity and universality, especially in the wake of the current digital revolution. Without doubt, writing the history of the next hundred years is a much more uncertain task than thinking ahead to 2007 would have been in 1907.

First Vision

As far as we know, the first person to articulate a clear idea of what a national library of Wales might do was the radical publisher and printer Thomas Gee. On 29 August 1860

61) *Sunday Times, Culture*, 31 December 2006. See David Edgerton, *The shock of the old: technology and global history since 1900*, London: Profile, 2007.

62) Lewis Carroll, *Through the looking-glass and what Alice found there*, London: Macmillan, 1872, Ch. 5.

63) Paul Davies, *About time: Einstein’s unfinished revolution*, London: Penguin, 1995.

64) For example, ‘Ar y dec’ (1925). See R. Gerallt Jones, *T.H. Parry-Williams, Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru*, 1999.

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he wrote an editorial in his weekly newspaper *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*.⁶⁵ In discussing the National Eisteddfod in Denbigh that year he lamented the lack of entries for the essay competition that called for original literary or historical research. As a remedy he proposed the foundation of a national library to provide the essential resource to support well-founded research.

Gee's library would contain a copy of every book printed in the Welsh language, every book about Wales published in other languages, all manuscripts of Welsh relevance, and books on all subjects irrespective of whether or not they dealt with Wales.

It took another 47 years to realise Thomas Gee's vision, but the National Library that took shape in Aberystwyth after 1907, and especially after 1912 when it gained legal deposit status, remained remarkably true to his ideas. It sought to collect publications and archives that comprehensively documented Wales and its people, but also publications on every field of knowledge. The aim was to further the work of researchers.

So durable has this idea been that in its essence it has survived intact for the first hundred years of the Library's existence. It is true that new media have joined those of print and manuscript, with increasing frequency. But this would probably not have surprised the founding fathers. Their vision of the collecting scope of the Library was far from restricted. Indeed, it was remarkably and far-sightedly catholic. The new formats – microform, sound and moving image, and electronic – have simply taken their place alongside the original ones.

It is true, too, that in recent years the boundaries of the word 'researcher' have been stretched and indeed broken, as the Library's field of appeal has extended to encompass anyone with an interest or curiosity about Wales or the world. But, again, this elasticity of audience would not have shocked the pioneers. One of the prime concerns of the first, and I would argue the greatest, Librarian, John Ballinger, was to extend the benefits of the new Library to learners, at all levels and in all parts of Wales: hence the remarkable book box lending service he offered to adult education classes in the South Wales Valleys.⁶⁶ In David Jenkins's words, he was:

*...convinced that libraries should not be ivory towers but should, on the contrary, reach out to the community ... he saw no reason why he should discard his public library idealism when he became Librarian of the National Library of Wales.*⁶⁷

65) David Jenkins, *A refuge in peace and war: the National Library of Wales to 1952*, Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 2002, p.6.

66) Christopher M. Baggs, 'The National Library of Wales book box scheme and the South Wales Coalfield', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 30, 1997, p. 207-29.

67) David Jenkins, *A refuge in peace and war: the National Library of Wales to 1952*, Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 2002, p.154.

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If Thomas Gee's vision has stood the test of time up to 2007, is it likely to survive for another century? Will the Library itself survive? We can already see that the ways in which the basic goals are pursued are changing quickly, but in what new directions in future? These are the questions I aim to address in this chapter. They are questions that face not only our institution, but all national – and indeed many non-national – libraries and archives.

Almost all of the pressures and contexts that affect a national library are changing with a rapidity that defies confident prediction. They include social, economic and political changes, the internationalisation of culture, goods and services, concepts of national identity, the dizzying development of digital technologies, and new patterns in originating, sharing and storing knowledge.

All that I can hope to do here is to select two of what seem now to be the most powerful and urgent of these factors, and to suggest both how they will affect our world, and how libraries and archives might take advantage of them on behalf of their users.

The New Democracy

Let us start with Wales. Our generation is in the privileged position of being participants in our country's most significant political alteration for many centuries. This process is conventionally termed 'devolution'. But that dry term underplays the importance of what is happening: a development that is not merely administrative or even narrowly political. A better word would be 'democratisation'. Whatever the failings of the successive National Assemblies may have been, no one can doubt that the people – even if they are not yet fully aware of the fact – are much closer to the decisions that affect them than at any time in the past.

One of the most obvious results is that the lids of public institutions have been opened wide. Not only is the way they function available to scrutiny as never before, but their very existence and aims are open for public discussion. Rhodri Morgan's 'bonfire of the quangos' in 2004, which directly questioned the National Library's existence as an independent body, was a critical moment. More typical is our continual awareness of the need to legitimise the Library's basic roles in the eyes of a much wider democratic polity.

An inevitable consequence of these changes is a closer alignment of government and Library policy. This process is certain to continue, and may intensify, at least for as long as heavy financial dependency on public funds continues. The so-called 'arm's length' principle is now little understood or appreciated. Where aims coincide, happiness reigns. The Library's desire to open its building, its collections and its services to a much wider public meshes well with a government accent on access,

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public accountability and social responsibility. Similarly, the recent government emphasis on collaboration between public bodies echoes a much earlier tradition of Library co-operation. It is less clear how politically unappealing causes can be promoted and funded successfully. For example, the long-term preservation of collections is difficult to advocate, except through the use of metaphorical appeals to environmental sustainability.

It should also be said that politicians have a large responsibility. Their role is to protect and promote the national institutions they fund on behalf of the people. They should value them for what they are, rather than as merely yet another agent for whatever their latest initiative happens to be.

Many of these issues of democratisation and accountability are shared by national libraries in other small countries struggling to establish their distinctiveness in a changed world. Notable examples are the countries that achieved independence on the collapse of the Soviet Union. This comparison reminds us, too, that there is an underlying debate in small nations about identity. When a nation lacks its own government and the institutions surrounding it, as did Wales before 1999, identity tends to be defined against that of the external dominant culture, and often by means of obvious or mobilising symbols. A national library is one such symbol. When a nation gains an element of self-determination identities become less certain and more diffuse. It becomes more possible to acknowledge multiple identities, and the old symbols, though still important, begin to lose explanatory power. In other words, national institutions, whose existence and functions used to be taken for granted, are forced to rethink what they are for in a changed world.

Wider economic and social changes cannot be ignored either. If a national library can be said to reflect back, in its collections and services, the life and culture of its country's people, today its mirror surely needs reshaping. A Welsh mirror needs to document anew a country where more people work in call centres than coal mines, where Christian observance is in steep decline and Islam in the ascendant, where the old multicultures typified by Cardiff's Butetown are joined by new waves of in-migration from Poland and other eastern European countries. These and other changes have implications for the Library, its users and its collections.

The New Electronic Age

The second challenge facing knowledge organisations in all countries is the need to search for a secure foothold in the vertiginous world of global electronic information. Libraries have felt the force and rapidity of the digital revolution as acutely as any other institution in our society. Computers, the wires that link them, and the protocols

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organising digital knowledge have combined to form a powerful triple alliance, the internet. The internet has created a revolution at least as pervasive as the invention of moveable type in fifteenth century Germany. The name of its contemporary defining technology, the World Wide Web, is no empty boast.

What are the main features of this digital revolution, as it has affected knowledge institutions? First is the vast proliferation in the quantity of publicly available information. It is estimated that there are more than 100m websites worldwide⁶⁸. There are at least 63m blogs, a genre unknown only five years ago.⁶⁹ And there are more than 80,000 podcasts, unheard of even two years ago.⁷⁰

The word 'publisher' used to refer to a limited number of knowledge gatekeepers, responsible for a few tens or hundreds of publications each year. Now virtually everyone with access to basic equipment, software and skills can publish, on a worldwide scale and with none of the trouble and costs of printing and distribution.

Second, despite the fact that there has been no diminution in the total volume of printed publications, there are clear signs of a shift within traditional publishing towards digital and away from print. In higher education, where the internet first took hold, researchers in some disciplines have all but abandoned print: most now elect for the electronic if it is available. A recent report on the behaviour of academic researchers in the UK concluded that they:

*...have recently become rapidly so accustomed to getting resources directly on their desktop from anywhere in the world, that dissatisfaction when something isn't available is now the natural reaction.*⁷¹

Likewise, universities themselves are beginning to develop electronic institutional repositories as alternatives to the traditional distribution and storage of academic and other publications.

There is also a generational shift at work. Most young people under the age of twenty turn naturally to their computers or mobiles to acquire or communicate information. For them print libraries may hold little attraction. One of the reasons for this is that knowledge is no longer seen as either static and authoritative on the one hand, or dynamic and interactive on the other. It has been freed from the fixity of print. In the download-remix-upload culture that is now taken for granted knowledge exists to be shared, reused, and shared again. *MySpace* and *You Tube* combine social networking with

68) Netcraft counted 105,244,649 websites around the world in December 2006; of these, 30m were added in 2006.

69) Technorati.com tracked 63.2m blogs in December 2006.

70) 82,292 podcasts were logged by FeedBurner in December 2006.

71) Research Information Network, *Researchers and discovery services: behaviour, perceptions and needs*.

London: Research Information Network, 2006, p.11: <http://www.rin.ac.uk/files/Report%20-%20final.pdf>

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DIY publishing in a kind of space-time continuum that Einstein would have well understood. It is only a matter of time before the boundaries between hard-wired and mobile technologies, already eroded by wi-fi and 3G, collapse completely, and knowledge becomes completely free-form.

Of course this is a partial picture. Though the centrifugal, anarchic nature of the internet is as alive as ever, the established forces of control and ownership have not gone away. Copyright continues to favour the owner of information, especially in digital form. Traditional publishers like Elsevier still thrive in an online world. Multinational giants like Google and Microsoft use their industrial muscle to enclose ever larger fields of knowledge, threatening or bypassing the old agricultural economy of publishers, bookshops and libraries.

Electronic Publication

What will all this mean for libraries, and specifically national libraries? An apocalyptic forecast might run like this. Libraries and archives have no future except as museums of the written word. Future generations will get their knowledge online and direct, either free from its originators or on payment from giant aggregators like the fictional 'Googlezon'.⁷² Even what libraries used to call 'special collections', historic or rare publications and unique archives, will have been electronically cloned and networked long ago by commercial organisations.

Our reading rooms will empty. Even when it is libraries that provide access to online information, its users will be unaware of the fact. Skills for which librarians and archivists used to be valued, such as metadata creation, will have been undermined by further improvements in search engine technology. Long before the bicentenary of the National Library of Wales in 2107 the last reader will have been escorted out, and the building sealed, preserved like the statue of Ozymandias in the sands to remind travellers of the absurdity of monumental ambition.

If this is the future we can all start planning for retirement now. But there is an alternative, more hopeful prospect, which allots to libraries and archives, and especially, I would argue, national libraries, a much more positive and leading part in how people produce and consume recorded knowledge and culture. That role, I want to argue, rests on how successfully libraries are able to do two things:

- To claim and to hold a unique set of functions in the new digital economy of knowledge.
- To act as a mediator between existing 'stored culture' and the re-creation and production of new living culture and knowledge.

I want to start with the digital knowledge economy, but first a word about the print world.

72) Googlezon was the name given in 2004 by Robin Sloan and Matt Thompson to an information monopoly created by the putative merger of Google and Amazon.com.

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To some people one of the surprising outcomes of the digital revolution has been the reluctance of print publications to wither and die. It is true that some categories have migrated, in whole or part, to electronic. Esoteric literature, including, as we have seen, an increasing number of academic and research publications, is shifting rapidly out of print. But in the wider world of general literature, the number of books published in the UK continues to grow each year. Novels proliferate, and more and more leisure magazines crowd one another for space on newsagents' shelves.⁷³

For the time being, then, many kinds of books and other print materials will still be with us – at least until someone can devise a satisfactory portable electronic book reader.⁷⁴ As public libraries have discovered to their cost, increasing affluence, together with the decreasing cost of books in real terms, has led to buying rather than borrowing becoming the norm. But there will still be a need for national libraries, in their roles as curators of the national print archive, to store and give access to this material in perpetuity.

The same curatorial role will now apply to the digital publications of the United Kingdom, following the Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003, which extended legal deposit from print to non-print publications. The process of giving practical effect to the Act by means of subordinate legislation is proving lengthy and difficult, but there can be little doubt that the collection and preservation of native electronic publications will become a critical, additional part of our responsibilities in future. Not a moment too soon, some will say, since already large quantities of evanescent electronic material are going unrecorded.

Two major issues arise: how to select what to keep, and how to guarantee continued access to these new digital publications. What exactly will be kept depends on three factors: the scope of the secondary legislation, the collecting policy of the National Library, and the degree of co-operation with other legal deposit libraries.

The second of these, our own collecting policy, is especially critical, especially in the light of the huge proliferation of digital publications on the web. If it is possible to capture a crude but regular 'panoramic photograph' of the whole landscape of publications freely available on the web throughout the UK, to what extent does that snapshot need to be supplemented by more detailed and more frequent pictures of key sites in Wales? How would one choose them? And how would one ensure the capture of electronic publications hidden behind the protection of passwords and subscriptions and therefore not susceptible to automatic harvesting? Must we concede, even within a small publishing universe such as Wales, that we must operate as 'selectivist' archivists rather than as 'comprehensivist' librarians, assuming that only a fraction of what is now available can realistically be captured for future availability?

73) Over 206,000 book titles were published in the UK in 2005.

74) Ruth Wilson, 'Evolution of portable electronic books', *Ariadne*, 29, 2004:

<http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue29/wilson/>

Alfred Hermida, 'Sony reader targets book lovers', 6 January 2006:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4586800.stm>

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The second issue is guaranteeing future access. The preservation of electronic material is an art still in its infancy. If we are serious about it we must be prepared to invest seriously – and at a much earlier stage than is necessary with print material. Books, if suitably stored and handled, will normally only require conservation treatment in the distant future. Decisions about how digital material will be retrieved and read in future need to be taken at the point of acquisition. We also know, thanks to the British Library's LIFE project, that digital preservation is formidably expensive.⁷⁵

Since electronic legal deposit is the result of compromises between libraries, publishers and government, we can be reasonably sure that the material collected under the Act will be available to readers only within the walls of the five legal deposit libraries. Of course, this denies one of the essences of such material, its networkability. It follows that if the National Library wishes to reach readers who cannot or choose not to come to Aberystwyth, it must operate beyond the provisions of legal deposit, and buy or lease online publications – books, periodicals and other material – to be networked to its members.

This question – how should a national library serve its audiences by offering networked access to paid-for digital publications? – is now becoming critical. Unless we can answer it positively we will find ourselves becoming less and less used, as the assumption of instant desktop or mobile access to publications takes hold among the general population. The answer is also a great opportunity, because it opens the door to reaching many more people in Wales than have ever used the Library in the past: a 21st century equivalent of John Ballinger's book boxes.

Through the embryonic 'Athens' service we already network some electronic publications to our existing registered readers, that is, users of our reading rooms. The challenge is to increase the size of this digital collection, and to extend its reach far beyond registered readers. This will mean a radical rethink of what it means to be a Library member. If we can succeed it might be possible to unite the Library's Athens service and that offered through all public libraries in Wales through CyMAL, the result being a truly national online knowledge service available freely to every Welsh citizen. This is exactly the model chosen in Iceland, where the National and University Library in Reykjavík is responsible, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, for providing free access to over 8,000 full-text journals and databases for all citizens.⁷⁶

There remains a third category of electronic publication: material originally published in print, but now also available online in digital form thanks to the process of digitisation. Until recently printed material was often overlooked by digitising institutions. Unique and rare material was seen as more obvious and more attractive, whereas the world of print was discouragingly vast. However, since Google announced its plans in 2004 to

75) The Life Cycle Information for E-literature (LIFE) project:

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lis/lifeproject/>

76) This service is called 'hvar.is': <http://www.hvar.is/sida.php?id=5>

digitise hundreds of thousands of books from selected research libraries, including the Bodleian Library in Oxford⁷⁷, libraries and commercial organisations have come to realise both the power and the possibility of translating the heritage of print into a medium so well suited to the twenty-first century. As a result libraries are becoming large-scale 'reprint' publishers – without the need for 'print'.

An On-line National Library

For small countries like Wales, though, the enticing prospect opens up of creating a near-comprehensive online library of the entire printed output of the nation: available, free and searchable, to everyone with an internet connection, and publicly owned.⁷⁸ In a small country, where relations with publishers and copyright-holders tend to be close and positive, such a library may be able to contain works still in copyright. Indeed, it would not be impossible to foresee a national library becoming responsible for storing the electronic texts of publications on behalf of their publishers from the time of their generation, and including them later in the online library once their economic returns were exhausted (but long before copyright expires).

These are ideas explored by the Library in 2006 in the prospectus entitled 'The Theatre of Memory'. We already have enough funds to realise part of the programme it promotes, by republishing online the key periodicals published in Wales between 1900 and the present.⁷⁹ Finding the means to construct other parts of 'The Theatre of Memory' is likely to absorb much of our efforts over the coming years. The prize will be considerable, and there will be many beneficiaries. Historians, for example, will be able to search through the complete newspapers of Wales in a few seconds. Schoolchildren and their teachers will have access at their fingertips to original sources illustrating Welsh history and life.

What distinguishes national libraries from many other libraries is not only the size and comprehensiveness of print collections: it is also the high proportion of non-print material in their collections, much of it rare or unique. The National Library of Wales is an extreme example, with its large amounts of archival, graphic and audiovisual material.

As I mentioned, some of these areas were an early focus for digitisation, the aim being to give easy access to material that was immediately attractive, fragile or rare, or not often seen. Selectivity in what is digitised is inescapable. It is inconceivable that all archive collections, for example, will eventually be available in digital form. Libraries must therefore be clear about the reasons why they choose material for treatment, which audiences they are addressing, and how digital collections should be presented to those audiences.

77) <http://www.google.co.uk/intl/en/googlebooks/library.html>; <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/google/>

78) There is a lively debate about whether libraries or commercial organisations should be responsible for large-scale digitisation, and, crucially, who should own the resulting product. See David Bearman, 'Jean-Noël Jeanneney's critique of Google: private sector book digitisation and digital library policy', *D-lib Magazine*, vol.12, no.12, December 2006: <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/december06/bearman/12bearman.html>

79) http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/programme_digitisation/welshjournals.aspx

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Whereas in the case of print the text usually matters more than its original appearance, the reader of these materials in digitised form is at least as concerned with image as with content. The quality of the image will be crucial. As download speeds and storage capacities increase in future, libraries will need to make sure they can provide high quality images, starting with the original capture at high resolution.

Another challenge is working out how to present digitised archives and other original works in a way that is likely to engage the reader. To what extent, for example, should we package them with interpretive, contextual or other additional material?

The main barrier, though, to the online reproduction of material, apart from cost, is, and will remain, copyright. The effort of gaining permissions is laborious and costly, especially in the case of audiovisual productions, which normally contain multiple copyrights. Meanwhile, the trend of intellectual property law works consistently in favour of the powerful interests of copyright-holders rather than the weaker public interest.

Returning for a moment to the 'born digital' world, just as print is migrating to digital, so too are other previously analogue media. They too need to be represented in the Library's collection if it is to remain a faithful mirror of Wales's intellectual output. Broadcasting is likely to be exclusively digital within a few years. Archives and records now start life as digital, never achieving paper form. Some manifestations of contemporary art are conceived, expressed and consumed in an exclusively electronic space.

Again, the most striking characteristic of this new born-digital wave is its size. It threatens to overwhelm traditional notions of comprehensiveness of collecting, and calls for an archivist's eye for selecting for present and future need, rather than the 'just in case' approach to collecting of the librarian. In addition, most media, in making the transition from analogue to digital, have undergone a sea change. Their boundaries become permeable: television programmes dissolve into 'red button' sub-programmes and internet message boards. Some traditional genres may disappear: for example, though institutional records and archives may survive recognizably in electronic form, the working drafts of poets or composers may not survive electronic overwriting. In all cases the multiplying formats and software platforms will provide a challenge for preservation for many years to come. National libraries already contain the kernel of advanced skills needed to wrestle with these issues. The challenge of the future will be to grow these skills, at a time when extra resources are likely to be scarce.

Research Engine

I have ranged widely and superficially over the new digital landscape to suggest how libraries might stake their claims within it. I'd like now to discuss the other vital element

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in a thriving national library of the future: the ability to reanimate knowledge and recreate culture for new generations.

One of the most important means of reanimating knowledge is by supporting scholarship. As major research institutions national libraries have a duty to serve scholarship, by enabling 'stored knowledge' to be rediscovered and reinterpreted in order to give birth to fresh insights and new understanding. In Wales this role of the National Library is crucial. There are few other research libraries and archives, and few public advocates of the humanities scholarship in which the Library specialises.

Collection building – selecting what is likely to interest present and future researchers – is clearly essential to supporting scholarship. So is providing access to collections that meets the exacting needs of researchers. In navigating the new oceans of digital data they are likely to need more sophisticated intellectual access to the content of collections than the crude tools Google and its like offer. National libraries, from their base of expertise in metadata, should be able to contribute to improving search and retrieval techniques, for example by applying geographical information systems or data mining techniques to multimedia collections.

But libraries can do more than simply offer up the materials of scholarship. The close relationship the National Library of Wales has always had with research institutions – the umbilical link with the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies is probably the most obvious example – is also the basis of partnerships, for example in applications to research funders. Other means, like the Legonna Prize for Celtic studies research, help us to take a more active lead in promoting research. To go a step further, some national libraries, like the Library of Congress, have in the past actually created research materials, rather than just collecting them, for example through recording American folk musicians in the field in the mid-20th century. It is interesting to speculate how this function might be carried out in the different circumstances of the 21st century.

Beyond researchers, of course, there is a much larger group of people for whom the process of re-imagining the collections of a national library is critical.

For many years, of course, we have served learners as opposed to researchers. Traditionally, however, these have been a narrow band, higher education students, and usually we have served them in a passive way. More recently national libraries have opened their doors to a much wider range of learners, including school students, and begun to experiment with active ways of engaging with them. National museums, of course, have very long experience of bringing collections alive in the minds of young people. The National Museum of Wales was one of the first to develop an extensive education department which has much to teach us about how to enrich learning through contact with original materials.

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What the national collection has to offer the learner, above all else in the age of the replica and the surrogate, is the chance to come into contact with what is original and authentic. Even better if the object is one of historic national significance. The word 'iconic' is much overused, but we should not underestimate the magnetism of a single object or document if invested with significant meaning. In 2000 the National Library displayed the so-called 'Pennal Letter', on loan from the Archives Nationales in Paris. This was the letter Owain Glyn Dŵr sent to the King of France in 1404 asking him for his support. The response from the public was astonishing and, I believe, not unconnected with the fact that the National Assembly for Wales was being born at the time.

Conversations Across Space and Time

The National Library is lucky enough to own original collections across a remarkably wide range of media. There is much more we can do to bring learners into creative contact with them. Art exhibitions have been a means of doing so from the Library's earliest days. More recently the availability of additional public space has allowed us to exhibit all kinds of object, including of course films from the National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales. It will always be a challenge to stage and market these encounters between achieved works in collections and a public whose senses are supersaturated by the media. Sometimes it is through stealing the clothes of the new media, by using such techniques as gaming and visualisation, that we can best bring them alive. Often, though, human beings are the best *animateurs*: the staff of the Education Section, for example, or an artist-in-residence, arranging workshops for schoolchildren, staff of Culturenet Cymru demonstrating the potential of community digitisation, or originators of creative work – authors, artists or film-makers – talking to and debating with groups in the Drwm.

Though the physical encounter is an excellent way of bringing cultural objects to life, it is not always essential, or indeed possible. The digital revolution I have already described is now opening up new possibilities for learners and others, beyond the simple replication and re-presentation of texts and other objects as bits and bytes. We are just beginning to understand the ways in which people can re-use and respond to texts and images in digital space. Some involve manipulating, incorporating or rewriting electronic entities (only possible, from the libraries' point of view, of course, with copyright-free material). Others rely on the natural interactivity and sociability of the contemporary internet, the so-called Web 2.0. Texts and images elicit reader reaction – in the form of digital marginalia, commentary, diatribes, poems or digital art – which in turn are incorporated and recycled through the Library's role as legal depository and national archive. Quite how these processes will work in future it is impossible for us to forecast, but the opportunities for bodies like national libraries – large-scale custodians of digital knowledge and adepts in its use – are there to be taken.⁸⁰

80) See Charles Leadbeater, *We-think*, London: Profile Books, 2007.

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To return to Einstein, and to sum up, a national library should be seen as an agency for translating mass (its collections of stored knowledge) into energy (study, learning and artistry), and energy back again into mass.

Let me provide some concrete examples. During 2006 we staged a large and fine exhibition of pictures by the leading Welsh artist Mary Lloyd-Jones. Some of them dated in conception from Mary's unofficial residency in the National Library, and from her study of items from the collections, including the earliest medieval Welsh poetry and the manuscripts of Iolo Morganwg. Some of them incorporate digitally remastered copies of these texts. During the exhibition Mary led tours and discussions of the works and their relationship with the Library originals. The show spawned an illustrated book with essays on the pictures.⁸¹ Finally, some of the pictures along with the book, entered the Library's collections. There they will lie, waiting to pollinate the imaginations of our descendants.

A second example is the pictures of Wales created by four photographers on the staff of the National Library, initially for an exhibition in the National Library of Latvia in Riga in April 2007. They originate from the personal experience of the four artists and, with luck, will draw out reactions from the Latvians who see them. The pictures, together with the record of their travels, will then return to form part of the Library's photographic archives for future generations here in Wales to rediscover.

What these projects try to achieve is a continuing conversation across space and time. Sometimes people describe the National Library building as a 'Parthenon on the hill'. They usually mean it in a mildly derogatory way, to suggest that the Library is remote, elitist and impenetrable. Declan McGonagle, in his earlier chapter, rightly suggests that cultural institutions need to supplement the temples they have inherited with 'agorae' or market places, open spaces for general debate and participation. Today these may be both physical and virtual, but the need for them is clear.

It is through this continuous process of reinvention and re-creation that the Library's collections can avoid becoming a museum, in the derogatory sense of a 'cabinet of curiosities' pored over by a few antiquarians. If we can succeed in keeping the collections live and relevant to contemporary needs, and – to recall my earlier themes – if we can find valid roles in the new digital knowledge environment, then there must be a secure future for the National Library of Wales, and by extension for other national and research libraries.

Universal, Free Access to Knowledge

These are necessary, but in my view not sufficient, conditions for success. I should like to end by talking about two values that I believe should lie at the heart of what we do. Both are connected with the themes I have discussed so far.

81) Mary Lloyd Jones, *First Language*, Gomer, 2006.

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The first is to do with a subject you may feel has been unaccountably absent so far: the Library's users. It is all too easy, when considering national libraries, to focus on the collections. It is the size and richness of the collections, after all, that help to define what it means to be a national library. But no collection, however rich, is of use without people to read, interpret and react to it.

One of the big changes that has taken place in national libraries in the last ten years or so, as I suggested earlier, has been an extension of the franchise of users. We have moved from reaching a restricted number of scholars or those who could otherwise prove their serious research credentials, to a wider audience of learners or even, as in our own case, literally everyone (in the case of reading rooms, those aged 16 years and over).

In essence the National Library is now, in terms of access, a public library. It joins the network of public libraries begun in the UK by the Public Libraries Act of 1850. Perhaps John Ballinger would have approved. The library open to the public was, along with the bicycle, one of the greatest democratic instruments invented in the Victorian age. Here was a collective resource, available freely to all without distinction, for whatever purpose, undirected by external authority.

It will take many years to work through all the implications of universality of access for a national library. Even convincing people that they have the right to use the Library is no small task. We are still exploring how the digital library can be presented appropriately to different audiences. But to have arrived at the principle of truly open access for all is in itself a considerable achievement: it will be central to how the Library develops in future.

The second guiding principle is that of free, uncharged access to knowledge. In print libraries open to the public uncharged access is long established. In the digital library the picture is less clear. The cultural default of the web may appear to be free access, but much important material is available only on payment or other authorisation. It is the function of the library to bear the costs of access to this material if its users are not to be disadvantaged. The same is true of material republished electronically by the library itself. The assumption should be that this will mainly be available at no direct cost to the user. Some public knowledge institutions, like the National Archives and the Ordnance Survey, have embraced charging without hesitation. But I believe strongly that we in the National Library of Wales must resist that trend. For us, free access for our readers must remain a crucial axiom.

These twin principles of universal admission and uncharged access are the National Library's main contribution to the inclusion of all citizens, irrespective of their background or means, in the commonwealth of knowledge. It is beyond the power and

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the responsibility of a single institution to overcome other barriers, such as lack of literacy or education, or of network access. However, these two values are fundamental in themselves to one of the most important foundations of a democratic society: equality of access to information and culture.

What are my conclusions? In brief they are these. Thomas Gee's basic blueprint for a national library and archive is in its essence as relevant now as in 1860. Closer public scrutiny should hold no anxieties for an institution sure of its distinctive democratic contribution. There are critical roles for a national library in the new digital economy of knowledge. There are exciting ways of bringing stored knowledge alive for each new generation. And finally there are certain values that should be sustained by a national library as part of society's commitment to the democratic right to knowledge.

There is still room, in other words, for an institution that welcomes unconditionally, that speaks without preaching or expecting payment, that enriches our common human experience, that hands on our inheritance to our successors, in the rest of this century and beyond.

CHAPTER 8

National Museums of the Future

Michael Houlihan

The future for National Museums in the 21st Century will be about coping with ambiguity and uncertainty. As an historian, I should simply recognise this duality, deny any further responsibility or interest and walk away from this chapter on the grounds that the future is nothing to do with me. However, I also know that museums are places where the past and present are accumulated for the purposes of the future. Unlike historians, those who work in museums quite often look to and perceive themselves to be part of a future, signified by the present.

And what does the present signify? In the case of the national museums, it will be a future evolving upon connected precedent rather than any radical shearing off from past practice. Those traditionalist relics of enlightenment, acculturation and reason will continue to entwine with the political and managerial insensibilities of complicity with government, financial amorality and intellectual timidity. This is not dissimilar from either the past or the present. It also tells us that the future is not finite; that there will be no arrival; and, more importantly, that the ever present should not be made a prisoner to prophecies of the future or the self-fulfilling determinism of museum histories. Rather, the future will be as much about the swings in emphases and jockeying for position between old issues and arguments as the more transforming impacts brought about by society, technology and culture.

National Museums will regain their position, lost during the first half of the 20th century, as a dynamic part of the cultural and social mainstream. However, they will be less independent and more political. They will be far more engaging and responsive, but increasingly focussed on social re-engineering, the transformation of public behaviour and the delivery of government policy. They will be more scholarly, but increasingly lacking in both the skills and funding to grow their collections. Thanks to the creative technologies, they will be more innovative and attuned to the needs of their users, both real and virtual. They will be more challenging but less objective in the ways that they configure their collections and knowledge in order to present their stories.

This is not a dark future. It is simply an assessment based on the route we are travelling and the range of external forces beyond our walls that are currently shaping intellectual direction and future.

Defining 'National'

Internationally, the history of the creation of national museums during the 19th and 20th Centuries has been inconsistent both between and within nation states. However, I would like to offer two definitions of 'national museums' in the United Kingdom. First, there is the English definition. According to this prescription, a national museum is located, for preference, in London, although it is now recognised that some, such as Liverpool Museums, may exist beyond Maida Vale or that the London nationals themselves may have further flung satellites. All are funded by the nation and house great collections of international quality. Their remit is to show the world to Britain: they are museums for the nation.

Then, there is the Celtic definition: the museum of the nation. To-day, in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the national museums are firmly rooted in issues of national identity, national culture and national ownership, articulated in the ways they collect, the exhibitions they mount and the regional communities that they serve. In these countries, the creation of national assemblies has further sharpened this definition of a national museum as a nation's museum.

This Celtic quasi political, cultural and social definition of a national museum now sits firmly alongside those 'nationals', all based in England, which define themselves purely by the quality, standing and international outlook of their collections and scholarship. This latter 'English' definition of a national museum, currently being re-branded, in parts, as the 'universal museum', explains, perhaps, why none of those museums is addressing the current debate on the plurality of English identity and histories. Instead, and certainly in the case of the British Museum, they are seeking to hitch their wagons to a politically-led and as yet indiscernible concept of Britishness and British values; the latter, of course, common to most civil societies across the world.

There are, inevitably, shades of interpretation within these descriptors. In Northern Ireland, the definition is far more ambiguous. There the questions arise: which nation, who's collections and, more fundamentally, how do you define the role of a national museum in a society split by the very issue of nationhood and where a 'Celtic' descriptor would itself be unacceptable to some? In Wales, there is no ambiguity. Here the foundation of a National Museum, a hundred years ago, was an unashamed, intellectual underpinning and articulation of a nation's cultural identity and aspirations.

The World To Come

I hope that museum colleagues will not be too put out if I say that the profession, including its leadership bodies, is not too good at far sight. That is, identifying the macro

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issues which will shape our little world in the future, and then planning accordingly. Museum people are great on the nuts and bolts of functionality, be it budgets, humidity control, target audiences or toilet roll. In a sense, we ourselves have become a barrier to developing the museum.

Essentially this is an internal, cultural matter. We are very fortunate not to work in an environment where anticipating and acting upon market or social change becomes a matter of survival. However, more and more we are working and being driven by increasingly complex forces, largely external to and, therefore, frequently beyond the control of the museum. Such macro issues include the way in which knowledge has become a commodity, the economisation of human activity and the growth of international communications technology. Against this background of what is usually termed globalisation lies the apparent paradox of rising political fragmentation, social alienation, vast migrations of peoples and a world where, according to the World Bank, more than half of the population has still to make its first phone call.

In trying to achieve an overview of the likely future of national museums, it is possible to identify three key themes, old and new, where, depending upon the outcome, the next twenty years of evolution will be determined. I would identify these as:

- The relationship between national museums and government.
- The ethical challenges of cultural identity, entitlement and community memory.
- The impact of new 'environmental' issues, particularly sustainability and the participation revolution.

National Museums and Government

Apart from the already close financial links between national museums and government, as their principal funder, I would predict an even closer relationship of control. This will be based on increased scrutiny and accountability; continuing encouragement by government for museums to adopt the business functions and activities characteristic of the not-for-profit sector; growing state influence over governance; and, possibly, an expectation on the part of government that ongoing financial sustenance should reflect a more overt commitment on the part of national museums to the support of government agendas and policies in public programming.

If museums were ranked by social class, then the nationals would naturally consider themselves to be the aristocracy. After all, they are endowed with rich cultural treasures and knowledge accumulated over successive generations, which are made available for the instruction and improvement of the commonwealth. Equally, others might well regard them as well-fed, snobbish, backward looking and out of touch with the people: an anachronism in a democratic age.

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Indeed, the modern national museum does have aristocratic antecedents. But it is a more complex and contradictory construct. It originates in dilettantism and the private collections hidden in the studioli of Renaissance princes, in the galleria of absolutist monarchs and the gabinetto of wealthy and influential individuals. Yet, the national museum also takes its inspiration from Renaissance humanism, the eighteenth-century enlightenment, the French Revolution and 19th Century democracy. All these created the conditions for the emergence of a new mechanism of government education, the public museum.

Some commentators argue that during the 19th Century the national museum became a social space harnessed for the promotion of the state's civic values, the regulation of its people and the delivery of its social agenda. In short, they articulated the role of government in the modern state as an educational and civilising agency. This view of the museum as a 'disciplinary' organisation places it alongside other 19th Century technologies and institutions such as asylums, hospitals and prisons. All were part of a state apparatus developed to regulate the conduct of individuals and populations.

Although this view is challenged by some academics, there can be no doubt about the firm establishment of a close relationship between the national museum and government, which has remained unbroken for over two hundred years. As a result, and contrary, perhaps, to the perceptions of those working in them, national museums have been ranked highly in the funding priorities of all developed nation states. Moreover, they have proved influential and adept in the extent to which they have sustained the interest, participation and support of the people.

Today, however, all governments in the United Kingdom tend to lack truly visionary, strategic or intellectual frameworks for culture. Elaborate policy documents have tended to focus on process, management and funding structures rather than direction, content and contribution. By and large over the past twenty years, government involvement in national museums has been seen in two key areas, accountability and control of governance. But it is now possible to discern some more subtle changes in the relationship with government that could lead to a revival of the national museum's 19th Century role as an instrument of social re-engineering.

Since the late 1970s, government involvement has been expressed through the paradox of the declared arm's length principle and the reality of administrative frogmarching, as it seeks to take ownership of financial and managerial systems through the mechanism of accountability. Recent, international research across Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States has shown that where governments intervene managerially the result has actually been less effectiveness, with reforms centred on outmoded management fads, tight cost control, and compliance with disparate,

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government initiatives. Thus, the role of the Director became redefined as one of financial management and accountability, fundraising and entrepreneurship. Staff complements have declined through downsizing and restructuring. Corporate planning, three to five year budgeting, outsourcing, and fixed-term contract employment have all become more common, frequently in response to a decline funds.

However, it is in the arena of governance that the tension between the arms length principle of government involvement and the increasing tendency of governments to interfere in the detail of management becomes more apparent.

In the United Kingdom national museums are bound to the state by legal statute. Yet their classic form of governance, the independent Trust, given effect through a board of trustees, deliberately seeks to distance them from government. In fact, the first Trust was created by Parliament for the governance of the British Museum, specifically to avoid overbearing political interference in its business. The concept of the Trust embodies the principle of public ownership in that the collections are held, by the trustees, on behalf of the people who are the legal owners.

Yet, of course, government is the representative of the people and its policies are an expression of their will. It is also government that provides and accounts for the public funds which support the national museums. This dichotomy is succinctly expressed in the role of all national museum directors as Accounting Officers under which they carry responsibility jointly to both their board and the government for the proper use of resources.

It is, therefore, interesting and not wholly unexpected that, allied to exerting financial control through accountability, government has sought greater influence over matters of governance. Under the banners of propriety and democratisation, government now ostensibly controls the appointment of Board members to the national museums through a process of public recruitment and ministerial approval. However, trustees appointed by the Minister should not necessarily be regarded as the scions of government as they still have a legal responsibility to act in the best interests of the Trust. Secondly, because of the personal liabilities that now accrue to being a trustee, this role and its responsibilities are changing significantly as trustees take on a closer, managerial involvement in the running of the museum. This is a development which, in itself, can generate tensions between the policy framing body and the executive.

The Future is the Past

However, since the 1990s there are a number of areas where government has sought to harness the potential of museums more strategically and which may be a

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determinant of the future. The first is in our cities. In these centres of established economic and social significance, governments have allowed the museum to play a renewed role and in so doing have projected it back into the mainstream of cultural and economic life.

At the heart of the most successful urban regeneration projects such as in Boston, Barcelona, Bilbao, Sydney, London Docklands, Valencia, Trafford and Swansea, cultural expression and civic pride in the form of event architecture, art galleries and museums have thrived alongside more conventional, commercial enterprises. Although the future will see far fewer of these major capital developments, as available money diminishes or shifts to other initiatives, the legacy has been a positioning of national museums and other cultural projects at the heart of civic life, a position not enjoyed since the second half of the 19th Century.

Another area where the characteristics of a 19th Century relationship between government and the national museums is emerging lies in relation to government's rediscovery of its role as a catalyst for social change through the setting and compelling of standards in social and ethical behaviour, evidenced by initiatives such as social inclusion, citizenship and the questioning of the cultural diversity agenda. This raises an interesting internal debate for museums which, having thrived in the 19th Century as a tool of social engineering, often see their role today as being more sharply focussed around the development and dissemination of knowledge.

There is also a further area of potential for growing state intervention. I would argue that in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland political scrutiny of the national museums is even closer than in England. This can be seen in the active interest that local politicians can take in museum content, the stress that they place on issues of regional history or histories, their sometimes narrow local and cultural focus, and, occasionally, the casual dismissal of international context and inspiration.

National museums can already be criticised for their rhetoric of the universal museum. This declares that they present the world to everyone, yet do so in a way that is, inevitably, only partial and that denies representation to certain groups. One of the earliest aspirations of the National Museum of Wales was to "Show Wales to the World, and the World to Wales". We still strive to do that. However, there is a risk that, under pressure from politicians and micro-historians, we could end up presenting our own world to ourselves. I would argue that the national museums in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland should be alert to the risk of becoming complicit in the promotion of invented tradition and culture, the creation of imagined communities and the portrayal of merry history.

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For example, in Northern Ireland the national museum came under considerable pressure to record and present Ulster-Scots culture, which some would argue is a politically charged amalgam of language, literature, religion and history specifically contrived to counter the stronger, cultural manifestations of Catholic nationalism and identity. It will be frustrating, humbling and self-challenging for museum staff to recognise that there are epistemic communities out there for whom our skills of objectivity, reason and rationale count for little when expecting them to accept our stories which may not be contiguous with their own histories and faiths.

As government veers from the managerial towards the morally and socially interventionist, the national museum remains chained by cash to its paymaster. It is one of the ironies of recent years that the democratic benefits of free entry were intangibly off-set by the removal of a significant alternative income stream, which has placed them inextricably in hock to government. All of this poses challenges to the independence and objectivity of our national museums. It can be argued that national museums are already ahead of government in responding to a wide and complex range of social changes, which in turn are now driving government policy.

However, as government takes particular stances on moral and ethical issues such as diversity versus integration or remains ambivalent on the detail of bio-diversity, is there a risk that the national museums will just settle for the monthly pay check and timidity in the face of the challenges being posed?

Ethical Challenges

Issues of cultural entitlement, identity and social memory will pose some of the most important ethical challenges to be faced by national museums. Ownership of the museum, in terms of the pressure to re-define its collections, knowledge and spaces as community property will shape the intellectual direction, collection development and communication strategies of most national museums. The price of success could be a loss of objectivity; assuming, of course, that it is there to be lost. It is important to remember that museums are not, by nature, neutral. They collect, preserve, display and educate on the basis of selection. They also select themes, tell stories and develop arguments.

Any discussion of the future role of national museums and the use of their collections must take into account the continuing splintering and re-shaping of colonial and nation states into smaller entities. They must also take into account the growing diversification of national societies as a result of the largest migration of labour and political refugees in Europe and the Middle East witnessed since the end of the Second World War. These are movements which are already having implications for all of us.

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The problem for museums will be to establish contact, and then engagement, with new and existing communities. This may present opportunities for some museums to define their role as places where deeper historical issues and tensions within society can be examined, communities recreated and objects and meaning reinstated. Or in bravely going there, will the museum itself become a cultural battlefield and vulnerable to external manipulation?

In 1914 there were 62 separate states in the world, 74 in 1946 and nearly 200 today. The rise of ethnic, racial and religious tensions in many parts of the world as well as the rise of 'internal' nationalism – often within individual states – increasingly suggests a threat to world and national stability through a pattern of fragmentation. Across the world there are many thousands of geographical, ethnic and cultural 'peoples' who are demanding or could claim the status of nations in the traditional rather than the modern political sense. The devolution of limited powers to regional assemblies in Spain and the United Kingdom also reflects this movement.

In parallel, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed an enormous expansion in the preservation and presentation of the physical symbols and evidence of cultural identity. Although museums have been around for several hundred years, it is estimated that about 95 per cent of all the world's museums have been established since the end of the Second World War. Governments, museums and those involved in the preservation of the patrimony have increasingly emphasised the importance of museum collections and historic sites as symbols of cultural identity at community, regional and national levels.

It has been pointed out that in November and December 1991 and again in May and June of 1992, Serbian warships and land-based artillery systematically targeted cultural property, including museums, along the Croatian coastline. This deliberate destruction of property associated with cultural identity also crippled Croatia's post-war tourism industry.

Either way, for those who work in museums, this is a significant wake-up call as to the power of the places we work in, the objects we work with, the people who seek representation in our galleries and the changing nature of the world that is really driving the evolution of our workplace. Issues of cultural identity are inevitably open to multiple responses and so museums attempting to act responsibly in complex, multicultural environments are bound to find themselves enmeshed in controversy.

The People's Museum

So, how do the issues of government, identity and the plural society converge and re-figure themselves in the context of the national museum. We are, perhaps, at a pivotal

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moment in the history of national museum ownership which is increasingly shifting towards the people. Specifically, it is expressed in the way institutions have recently been obliged to address the re-definition of the museum, by its users, as community property, a social space and a site for contemporary cultural development, dialogue and representation.

Ownership of the museum's purpose, its space, presentations and its collections has already become one of the most important and contentious issues in museums. For example, the now numerous calls for the repatriation of objects or the return of looted art to victims of the holocaust are the more obvious, publicised examples. More subtly, at the Museum of the American Indian in New York and Washington; the Te Papa Museum in Auckland, New Zealand; the older Australian Museum in Sydney (all national museums), aboriginal peoples and ethnic groups have been recognised as the authorities to author and voice meanings about their own cultural artefacts and past.

Equally, the process of public recruitment to trustee boards, previously referred to, is also an acknowledgement of public ownership as are the setting up of external advisory panels and consultation fora. There is also a growing formalisation of this public accountability through freedom of information and the increasing obligation to enter into detailed public consultation on a variety of policy and development issues. Again, national museum partnership programmes – not least in England and Wales – are already bringing the national collections to new audiences and fuelling a very real debate around the concept of 'distributed' national collections.

I believe that national museums will place less emphasis on building capital projects and more on building social capital or trust between the institution and its owners, particularly given the contentiousness and sensitivity of ownership claims. This will be achieved by national museums setting out their collections, telling stories, and allowing other people to tell theirs, in ways that reflect a broader political, cultural and social reality and that contribute to mutual understanding and cultural respect.

In such places, there will be opportunities for dialogue between people and communities, as collections provide a gateway to understanding how other people live and uniquely view their world. For example, the gallery spaces of the national museums in Northern Ireland are considered by both communities to be neutral, non-threatening spaces where cultural debate and even dialogue can be generated. This is a rare commodity and an inspiring opportunity amidst the ghettos and no-go areas of a divided society.

All of these developments will require morality and integrity. Museums need to be less defensive, more confident in their own objectivity, and willing to resist direct pressures to

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tell a different version of history or reflect the pre-conceptions, politics and cultural agenda of a particular viewpoint. This will be especially difficult for those museums that currently portray their recent past as a vacuum. Secondly, it will oblige museums to pay more attention to collecting the contemporary in order to reflect the society in which we live. It will, however, be particularly difficult for national museums to identify and reflect in their collecting those themes, objects and testimonies which will still be deemed as nationally significant in the year 2100.

Community Memory

Among the potentially most disruptive forces to objectivity in the museum of the future will be the representation and portrayal of community memory. Let me quickly and quirkily illustrate the link between memory and museum. Commonality of heritage is asserted through many varied events, objects and activities such as voting, attendance at political rallies, at religious gatherings or the wearing of badges.

One of the most dramatic contributors to sustained common cause is the way in which societies remember wars and commemorate the fallen. Certainly, remembrance days, the creation of memorials and the wearing of signs of remembrance all tend to fabricate a common narrative of the past. Interestingly, museums can often be perceived as appropriate places of commemoration in the weave of remembrance. For example, the entrance hall of the National Museum of Wales was designed with a memorial purpose and to display the Book of Remembrance for those who died in the Great War. Secondly, when visitors to the Vietnam Wall in Washington began leaving personal mementos of the dead such as letters, photos, items of uniform etc, it was decided that these should be placed, uncaptioned, in the Museum of American History, just along the Mall. Not dissimilarly, dust from the Twin Towers was configured and displayed, in both a memorial and artistic context at the National Museum in Cardiff by the winning artist, Xu Bing, as part of the first Artes Mundi show.

For museums as well as society, reconciling memory with multiple identities is a difficult challenge. Do not forget that twenty years ago, the National Museum of Wales gave up this challenge, when it surrendered its ethnography collection to the Horniman Museum in South London. As a result, today, we have significant curatorial difficulty in reflecting the multiple histories and cultures which are modern Wales. The collecting challenge will be to reconstitute a collection which reflects this contemporary reality.

For communities, as for individuals, there can be no sense of identity without remembering. However, the selection of what is remembered will be determined by the group to which we belong. In turn this sets limits to the perceptions and aspirations of the next generation. That discourse may not be objective. The problem with memory,

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which is on the same spectrum as amnesia, is that it plays tricks and can be selective. In fact, we should not get too sentimental about community memory. It can exert a tremendous distorting power because a sense of the past conveyed through folk memory is not easily disproved by the rational and, therefore, can undermine the dispassionate historical process. History is frequently the incomplete reconstruction of what is no longer. However, memory is organic and alive within the minds of living societies and, therefore, in permanent evolution and dynamic change.

Furthermore, any examination of identity politics reveals an overriding sense that each fragmented identity has asserted its case on the basis of past trauma. That sense of hurt and wounding recurs, making itself felt time and time again, in self-renewing manifestations of the original experience. Trauma is more than the experience of pain and injury. It is a wound scratching impulse that revives the painful memory. So for museums, commemorating the past can also be negative to the community in that it can nurture a self-renewing sense of bitterness.

Yet these ambiguities are relished by museums. Whilst historians are sometimes disinterested in how societies remember and might even classify oral tradition, icons, monuments, ritual ceremonies and performances of the past as mindless behaviour, this is what we do. This is our stock in trade. It is where we connect. Issues that might otherwise seem academic or abstract assume a material immediacy and compelling reality when they are placed on display. We, and the public, know that museums serve as places to imagine, as places to discover, as places to remember. Collections are at the heart of all those experiences.

Museums are places loaded with cargoes of memories. They are places where objects are reunited with stories of the past, ostensibly with the curatorial intention of telling 'objective' history. At the same time they are used by the public as a vehicle for promoting community memory – although only where those communities are represented. One of the more enduring and highly developed skills of museums has been their ability to collect and develop knowledge, and then to configure and reconfigure that knowledge. National Museums will need to add the skills and role of cultural negotiator to those strengths.

Sustainability

For national museums with earth sciences collections there will only be one message: how to save the planet. This theme will exert inordinate influence over collecting, fieldwork and research. As public institutions, we will also be looking at our own organisational performance to ensure that we contribute to sustaining economic, social, institutional and environmental activity in both the human and natural environment.

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The impact of this work will affect how we care for our collections, how we manage our resources and how we contribute to a sustainable environment and sustainable communities for the future.

For all national museums the adoption of a sustainable development agenda will pose similar problems. I will try to illustrate these from the perspective of Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales. It is already clear that the implementation of more sustainable activity in certain areas of our work will mean challenging certain conventional beliefs and practices. In some cases, this will involve significant financial outlay in order to derive longer term benefit both for the organisation and the wider world.

As with portraying cultural identity and community memory, sustainability will pose some challenging dilemmas to the curator, teacher and museum manager in relation to our duty as a learning organisation with education and advancement of knowledge at the centre of our remit.

The Museum's natural science curators already believe that they can no longer interpret the collections without drawing attention to the threat posed by human activity to our natural environment. On the basis of the scientific evidence, they see themselves as having a campaigning mission to call people to action before it's too late.

Increasingly, our science education officers cannot carry out their daily duties without reference to the sustainability agenda. But, in getting involved with such proselytising, the Museum is entering a political debate. Certainly it is advancing from a tendentious position which is implicitly criticising the actions of international governments. Deliberately courting controversy is not comfortable territory for curators or those charged with the equally political task of ensuring the long term funding health of the organisation. It is likely that the future will be littered with such dilemmas if national museums seek to engage their collections with the contemporary world.

More mundanely, the day to day management of national museums will have to adapt to ensure that we are not only delivering messages, but are also taking action. There will be a whole myriad of decisions implicit in every 'sustainable' purchasing decision. This will be the case whether it is the distance travelled by goods, the employment rights of the workers who made them, the materials they're made from, and their energy efficiency once we put them into use. And these are just the goods we are taking in for our own use as opposed to what we sell through our shops or that our franchisees provide in the cafes and restaurants.

We will also have to consider our own energy efficiency and the amelioration of our carbon footprint. We are a multi-site operation with buildings and land, ranging from

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turn-of-the-century structures to a coal mine, office blocks and assorted woods and farmland. Within these spaces we hold collections of oil paintings, furniture, fossils, textiles, plant and animal matter, all with varying needs for stable environmental conditions.

In addition we employ about 700 people who use computers, photocopiers, kettles, fridges, toasters, travel to and from work, between sites, as do our visitors who rarely use public transport to access our museums. All of these issues will shape the physical and managerial environment of the Museum in ways which are currently difficult to predict. However, it is clear that we will all be working towards achieving increasingly challenging statutory targets.

In terms of the stewardship of our collections, conservators will have to engage in difficult conversations as we begin to face the reality that continued reliance on traditional air handling systems in gallery spaces is not only damaging to the environment but may be, quite literally, unsustainable as utility costs rise and institutions simply can not afford the electricity bills generated by this type of collection care. Increasingly, new build museum spaces and structures will be looking to alternative methods of construction, environmental control or factoring in alternative methods of power generation so that where air handling is needed a total or partial element of micro-generation will offset the energy needs.

The Participation Revolution

I would like to suggest that the defining difference between the national museum of today and the museum of the future will be the disappearance of the museum audience. Thirty years ago no one talked in terms of a 'museum audience'. In another thirty years the phrase will be an anachronism. The straws are already in the wind. The misconception of a museum 'audience' as a bunch of passive onlookers and novices deferentially and gratefully receiving selected crumbs of knowledge from the experts is already disappearing. Instead, the audience, in all its complexities and varieties, is becoming the authority, and more importantly, as we have seen, the owner of the museum.

Fired by technology, people are changing how they think about themselves and how they think about culture. If the last twenty years of the 20th century was about consumerism, then the start of the new century is about the creative participant. These people seek dynamic transactions with institutions and others through active involvement.

What the development of the worldwide web has shown is that high worth, international and professional institutions are not disappearing. Instead, they are the high

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end of a spectrum which has enlarged thanks to an explosion in micro-niche communities which now form a tail of passionate amateurs who are talking to each other and are search driven. Connected individuals now form an abundant distributed network of knowledge with which the established institutions will need to engage, because we share so many things in common. As with metal detectorists, twenty years ago, they will be disdained and disregarded by some. However, they will inevitably become part of the interchange.

The personal and creative transaction between the museum and the participant will be seen most clearly on the galleries and in the way learning will occur. At the present, the interactive experience on galleries is frequently criticised for displacing objects with technology. In my view such exhibits are no more than linear, moving display panels and will disappear from museums under pressure of maintenance costs and developments in new, personal technologies. These will be the next generation of iPods, PDAs, converged mobile phones and wireless environments. They will enable creative exchanges in which the participant can develop and configure knowledge and stories around objects to suit his or her needs.

The museum's investment will not be in hardware, but rather in the research and deployment of deep knowledge about the collections as well as the configuration of the multiple storylines and meanings inherent in every object. There will be more expertise, more objects, and less kit.

It is also apparent that in a virtual world, the real and authentic is more highly valued. By providing context and meaning in the real world, museum collections have the potential to be more overt about offering insights and ideas. The galleries of the future will be object rich spaces, where our participants will create their own knowledge-based experiences. We will also move away from the fascism of the storyline and encourage people to develop thinking skills stimulated by the playfulness of both their own technology and the arrangement of our collections. All of this will pose profound challenges to the Victorian intellectual constructs, culture and organisation of many museums.

The Curator as Innovator

At the centre of all these developments will sit the museum object and its curator. Museums not only preserve objects, they grace them with cultural coherence and meaning. This is the task of the curator. I have suggested that the future may be more about the primacy of the object as opposed to the overbearance of the narrative. Certainly, the versatility of the object to iterate multiple discourses as to its meaning and testimony could reposition the object at the centre of the museum.

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Strangely, perhaps, this poses a serious challenge to the museum curator, perhaps one of the most alienated of professional groups within national museums in recent years. As others such as educationalists and ethnic peoples have gained a louder voice in mediating the objects, the curator has become increasingly speechless, or maybe gagged. Over the last thirty years, museums have developed the confidence, educational infrastructure and relationship with their public, to enable them to step outside the 19th Century concept of self-improvement. However, the parallel decline in basic curatorial skills of developing and growing collections, and presenting challenging ideas through the interpretation and communication of objects creates a significant weakness. It is one that may ultimately inhibit the achievement of a more socially transforming and interactive role.

In recent years, museums have got better at communicating with their users and have made improvements to the ways they manage their collections. Yet, it would be my observation that there are fewer specialist curators than there were, and the specialists that do exist in museums tend to have to take on a wide range of other roles, such as management and administration, leaving little time for research and knowledge development. Such a wider role for curators must not be made at the expense of investment in knowledge. It is also important to note that the past twenty years have also witnessed a universal decline in the funds available for the purchase and growth of collections in all national museums, to a point where some museums have ceased collecting. There are no indications that this trend will be significantly reversed.

At a time when museums, professional bodies and funders such as the Clore Duffield Foundation are becoming exercised by the lack of emerging leaders within the sector, I am inclined to argue that the real crisis is in curation. As the national museums enter a period of profound change in ownership, during which their purpose, direction and objectivity will be challenged in unprecedented ways, they should ensure that the curator is pivotal to their intellectual independence and standing. The curator should be the innovator driving the museum of the 21st century. This, in my view, is the only appropriate and proper way to face the future. There is no certain way of preparing for it, other than learning how to cope with ambiguity and the inevitably subjective environment in which the curator will have to work.