

the welsh agenda

Kully Thiarai
talks to Jasper Rees

Christopher Gage
on The End of the Liberal Elite

Jo Hunt
on A Welsh Brexit

Interviews:
Jo Kiernan, Shahien Taj,
Joanna Penberthy,
Kirsty Williams

& The Next 30:
Wales' Rising Stars



**MAKING
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Spring 2017 | No. 58 | £4.95
www.iwa.org.uk

Cover Photo: NTW/Dan Green



MAKING WALES BETTER

The Institute of Welsh Affairs gratefully acknowledges funding support from the **Jane Hodge Foundation**, the **Welsh Books Council**, the **Friends Provident Foundation**, and the **Polden Puckham Charitable Foundation**.

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To advertise, tel: 029 2048 4387

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

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Cardiff, CF10 5EZ
Tel: 02920 484 387

Charity number: 1078435

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

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editorial

“A week is a long time in politics”. This is perhaps one of Harold Wilson’s most famous utterances, and it’s certainly proving to be true in a digital age where news from across the world is now available live on our iPhones while we wait for a bus. If a week is a long time, what does that say about thirty years?

It’s been three decades since the IWA was established and a lot has happened in this time. In 1987 Margaret Thatcher was re-elected for her third term, the Channel Tunnel was given the go ahead and George Michael had a hit with ‘Faith’. In the years that followed we’ve seen just five Prime Ministers succeed Thatcher, devolution come to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and of course the unstoppable rise of the internet, with Google, Twitter and Facebook now practically unavoidable in modern life.

The IWA has lived through all these changes and been integral in driving some of the most important developments in Wales. It’ll be twenty years this September since the referendum that founded a National Assembly for Wales, a landmark moment in Welsh history. The IWA has led on setting the *welsh agenda*, outlining how Objective One funding could be utilised in Wales, and making the case for the city region concept, and has recently been a leading voice in key areas such as the media in Wales, healthcare, education and the Welsh economy.

We’ll be celebrating our past achievements throughout the year, but we also want to look forward and highlight some of the exciting things that will be coming up in the future. That’s why in this issue of *agenda* we’ve selected ‘The next

thirty’; thirty young people who we think will be making a substantial contribution to Wales over the next thirty years. They represent all parts of Wales and come from a variety of sectors. We’ve compiled this list from your nominations and can’t wait to see what the next three decades have in store for these people – we’ll be watching closely. We’re also delighted to have Kully Thiarai, the new Artistic Director of National Theatre Wales as our cover feature for this issue, as well as exclusive interviews with former Chief Special Adviser to the Welsh Government, Jo Kiernan, Henna Foundation Founder, Shahien Taj, and the new Bishop of St Davids, Joanna Penberthy.

In 1985 our founders Geraint Talfan Davies and Keith James made the case for the IWA in a document which called for “a body that can provide a regular intellectual challenge to current practice in all those spheres of Welsh life and administration that impact on our industrial and economic performance”. Our purpose has stood the test of time. Our role is to provide a platform for thoughtful comment and debate, and to be a constructively challenging voice in discussions with government and other stakeholders. We will continue to champion this over the next thirty years. We very much hope you’ll join us so that, together, we can make Wales better.

While a week may be a long time in politics we all know that thirty years goes past in the twinkling of an eye. There’s no time to waste.

Auriol Miller,
IWA Director.



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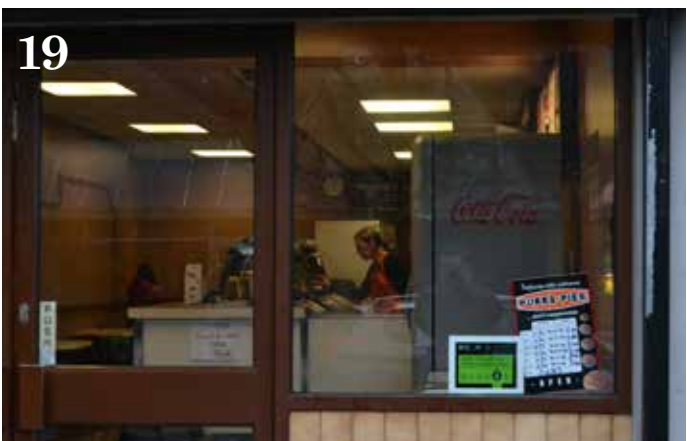
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Christopher Gage charts the decline of the West's liberal elites and the rise of a new brand of conservatism

The End of the Liberal Elite



Barack Obama gathered the CEOs of thirteen major US banks around a mahogany table in the White House in April 2009. Just six months before, these same faces oversaw the greatest financial disaster in history. 'I stand between you, and the pitchforks,' said the president.

Seven million Americans had their homes repossessed, as the Great Crash crushed liberal consensus and Western infallibility.

Meanwhile, the phalanx of moneymen jokingly handed cheques worth billions of dollars around the table, as the world's most powerful man attempted to excoriate them for an act of vandalism from which the West would not recover.

Wall Street, they knew, always won.

Donald Trump's seemingly impossible course to the White House was paved with an anger at Washington unseen before. Not since the wretches of Vietnam had the American people felt such naked vulnerability.

Such desperation excused the five-dozen hull-piercing remarks deigned to sink any other presidential hopeful; in fact, Trump's phosphoric language quietly delighted those who struggled to marry their shrinking pay cheques with spreadsheet sermons insistent that things had never been better. Hillary Clinton's fatal mistake was to proclaim such falsehood.

Most Americans realised that 95 million

people 'not in the labour force' meant the official five percent unemployment rate held as much water as Soviet-era tractor production figures.

They also realised the American Dream, for most, was a mirage. Middle-class Americans are seven times less likely to reach the top rung of society than in the 1970s. The average family is worse off than their 1980s counterpart. The richest fifth have doubled their slice. The one percent? Some charts cannot fit their loot onto the paper.

Though genetically anti-socialist, Americans expect to play fair. The great liberal experiment which began in the 1980s, many Americans felt, had not played by the rules. The Great Crash, as they saw it, was the penny that snapped the scale.

What should have heralded a renaissance for the Left, sparked a revolt on the right. Disaster capitalism, rising inequality, stagnant wages and disastrous conflicts – all typical left-wing fare – should have reset the paradigm leftwards for generations, but this is not the case. The West is heading rightwards as traditional left-wing parties are degraded – often into puzzling parody.

Struggling political parties often do the exact opposite of what is needed before they eventually reach for the anti-venom, shed their skin, and dose up to the new reality. Remember when Iain Duncan Smith led the

Tories? Exactly.

As Britain heads for the EU exit door, many in the political-media complex have yet bent their heads around such a notion. Labour's policy is not in support, but supportive of either being pro or against, it seems.

But Labour's gangrenous problems cannot all be blamed on Jeremy Corbyn. Across Europe, and indeed the US, the traditional left faces an existential crisis; the irony being that today's political environs have never been more suited.

Their current woes are like that of their ideological European brethren. Having abandoned their traditional base, Labour and its ilk now face being skewered by the populist right who are tough on immigration, sceptical of crony capitalism and sympathetic to voters concerned with their culture and nationhood – 'racist' per left-wing high priests.

Having run Wales for almost a century, Labour now finds itself with a populist threat of its own. Although UKIP often resembles warring factions of a countryside golf club, they have proven combative where it matters. Still the subject of sniggers from Labour circles, the insurgent party is entrenched on Labour territory, awaiting the call to clamour over the top. UKIP polls a strong second in Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhymney, Blaenau Gwent and Islwyn

despite its characteristic self-sabotage. Establishment sniggers didn't stop seven Assembly seats falling to UKIP guerrillas.

Welsh Labour bears all the hallmarks of a party seemingly assured of its immutable hegemony. But the Lucky General and his dwindling troops may soon be forced to change tack if they are to avoid the fate of other European left-wing parties which have sleepwalked into the quagmire of irrelevance whilst populist parties stormed their citadels.

The First Minister may laugh off the threat of UKIP, and fraying Labour nerves may have smoothed after Paul Nuttall's bid for Stoke was bounced off by tribal residues, but the gaping problems with Corbyn's Labour are obvious to all but the inoculated leadership.

What followed the undoubtedly seismic loss of Copeland to the Tories was a level of political spin of Zimbabwe-like delusion. After seven years of Tory 'austerity', the Opposition managed to surrender one of its citadels, despite running an emotive campaign on Labour's silver bullet - the NHS. Copeland Labourites told locals 'babies will die' if the Tories took the seat. Voters, it seems, would rather risk it.

Labour's win in Stoke shouldn't be

What the experts have termed populism is indeed a strange phenomenon in which voters demand their concerns are addressed



celebrated too loudly, given that in better weather the Tories could have pipped UKIP to second. This is significant because the old reliables are no longer available for Labour door knockers; the NHS is no longer a cattle prod; Theresa May's party no longer 'nasty'.

Both results should pulse through Welsh Labour like an tazer. There's nothing to stop the Prime Minister triggering Article 50, and then calling a snap election in which Labour is sure to be eviscerated further into Europe's largest Critical Theory debating society with under 200 seats. The consequences for democracy induce frantic bleeping on radioactive scales.

Across the West, voters are calling time on thirty years of liberal consensus which has excused rampant inequality,

prised open borders for big business, and entertained the disastrous forays into the Middle-East. The bonfire of the Davosie has drawn quite the crowd.

What the experts have termed populism is indeed a strange phenomenon in which voters demand their concerns are addressed. This is certainly more than the paroxysm liberals hope will come to pass.

The New Politics places culture and identity atop the old drivers of class which herded voters into their specified pen. A recent Eurobarometer poll, which tracks sentiment across the bloc, found immigration and terrorism to be the foremost concerns of the majority.

Not surprisingly, these issues are where European leaders fail most miserably. Terror attacks in our major cities go without hindrance to Isis operatives slipping through non-existent borders to dissemble, degrade and destroy whoever fancies exercising rights the West is founded upon.

In a year where the European Union must quell populist uprisings in France, Holland, Germany and Austria, the crumbling union will be judged by most voters on the issues it fares worst. Perhaps





the most dangerous, for the EU at least - is France, where immigration and terrorism go together to underline the establishment's insipid inability to perform the most basic function: protect its citizens from harm.

Marine Le Pen knows this. As the French republic riddles with Islamist attacks often incubated on home soil, anxious voters veer rightwards; just how far we will find out early in May.

Her likely opponent, Francois Fillon, apes the detoxified rhetoric of Le Pen's Front National, calling for hard borders to stymie terrorists, an end to 'growing Islamification' and renewed focus on French culture and custom. Despite allegations of corruption

clouding his candidacy, Mr Fillon is likely to beat off the advances of Emmanuel Macron, a centrist with ties to the remarkably unpopular Hollande government.

Ms Le Pen, buoyed by the seemingly implausible fact we now call Donald Trump president, sees an opening to (quite unbelievably given her party's history) paint Fillon as a hard-hearted Thatcherite bent on shredding famed French working conditions and the welfare state.

Despondent French left-wingers may have to choose between Nigel Farage, and Donald Trump - two cups of cold sick for any *soi-disant* progressive. A low turnout across the left could push Le Pen into the Élysée, and

the French out of the European Union.

Populists don't need to win outright. Political winds have shifted enough to push the needle in their favour. Le Pen (running as 'Marine' to avoid association with a surname the French find indigestible) has homed in on voter anxieties fomented by homeland terror attacks. Much like President Trump, easy to swallow solutions are promised.

Even in Germany - where Angela Merkel is expected to head-off the ascendant hard-right Alternative for Deutschland - the liberal establishment which summoned one million Syrian refugees to pour through the non-border has called for a public burqa ban, and the deportation of some of those its ingrained virtue-signalling brought to Germany in the first place.

The theme is strikingly similar: thirty years of liberalism has left us less rich, less together and less safe. The elites have failed: it is time to turf them out.

One master of such incendiary rhetoric is Geert Wilders, the bouffant Dutch firebrand currently under state protection thanks to his igneous anti-Islam rhetoric. Mr Wilders, ideological cousin of Trump and Le Pen, is riding high in Dutch polls, an ascendancy clearly threatening to the order of Dutch Prime Minister Rutte, who recently upset liberal sensibilities with his insistence that new arrivals adapt to Dutch ways of life, or leave.

Given Holland's political setup, Wilders could win March's election and be unable to form a government, a scenario likely to enshrine his status as martyr against a corrupt order.

Yet help may arrive in the form of Thierry Baudet, one of Holland's smartest and most prominent intellectuals - a thirtysomething hipster of the right whose new Forum for Democracy party flowered from the Brexit referendum.

The Forum, just months old, is on track to gain six seats. Crucially, Baudet is keen to play kingmaker and back Wilders in a coalition which would install the firebrand as Prime Minister.

Europe is now a continent entrenched in cold civil wars and peaceful uprisings, with populists ready to evict the insipid establishment from their temple.

In Italy, the staid constitutional



referendum last December should have induced even the most committed political wonk into a winter-long stupor. Instead, it was seized upon by a growing rabble eager to kick the establishment in the teeth. They did so by a 60/40 margin.

Strangled by huge debts, and a torpid growth rate effectively annulling the last 20 years, Italians are clamouring to leave the disastrous Euro currency which calcifies their economic woes. A successful insurrection would nuke the European project.

2016 will be a year political academics study in the same vein as the fall of the USSR. Despite progressive hopes pinned on an injection of intellectual ballast, political winds have already shifted. Those still fighting a proxy war against Brexit are yet to discover the conflict has already been lost.

This new order takes shape as the Tim Farrons and Nick Cleggs of this world call for a second referendum they would lose even more handily than the result in June. The elite class still has little idea of what is engulfing the West. Its solution, like that of any waning power, is a purified version of what has already been rejected.

Key tenets of the liberal age are being dismantled. Those who proclaimed the end of history now find themselves on its wrong side. The 'citizens of the world' are indeed denizens of delusion.

Experts busy explaining the rise of populism have been busy ignoring the evidence. In the UK, over seventy percent express a desire for strong immigration controls; just over half want immigration stopped entirely. Neither fact can be found on BBC airwaves.

Despite liberal abulia insisting those who voted for Brexit and Trump took leave of their senses; were influenced by 'fake news' or were somehow 'racist', the issue of identity drove both campaigns, igniting similar brush fires across Europe.

This political shift is less a lurch to 'fascism', more a return to traditional conservative principles. As Theresa May outlined in a recent address to the Republican party, nationhood and identity have always been key planks in the house of conservatism.

Hijacked by fanatics of the free-market, conservatism has for too long been the barbicane of crony capitalists and the globally-

minded Davosie which views national borders as a hindrance and citizens as subjects.

Citizens want strong borders, a government referee to capitalist free-for-all and the sense of nationhood they hold dear, to be protected – anathema to the vanquished liberal consensus.

Theresa May and Donald Trump understand this shift.

Breaking with decades of liberal orthodoxy, Trump and May have a chance to remould conservatism into an electoral force that could spark a new era of conservative domination, unhindered by a left entranced by an identity crisis of its own making.

The Great Crash created Trump. In his inaugural address, he reminded the outgoing Barack Obama of the meeting in which he let Wall Street off the hook. That day, the Liberal Age came to its end.



Christopher Gage is a freelance journalist and contributor to *The Spectator* and *American Greatness*.

Making Wales Better: The next thirty

30 people working to make Wales better over the next 30 years

To mark three decades of the IWA's role in making Wales better, we would like to look forward by introducing some of the people who will be shaping 'the Welsh agenda' over the next thirty years. We asked for your nominations for those who have made their mark in the public square already, or who may be working quietly but influentially behind the scenes or below the radar in a range of fields.

We are excited to present what we feel is a wonderful list. Far from definitive (no such list could ever be that), the thirty people represented here offer a genuine snapshot of a modern, inclusive and talented Wales. Let's meet them...



Ali Abdi

• Ali Abdi, 30

Community Organiser, Citizens Cymru Wales
Butetown, Riverside and Grangetown, Cardiff

Change is possible if we act together with others for social justice and the common good. I am passionate about tackling powerlessness in my community and the frustration connected with it; I lead young people from Somali, BME and other disadvantaged backgrounds into non-partisan political action.

Previously, we persuaded Nando's to open the first mainstream halal-compliant restaurant in Cardiff city centre and this year we launch the Bay Citizen's Community Jobs Compact which aims to bring local people and employers together to tackle poverty, unemployment and under-representation in the workforce.

My hope for Wales in the future is to help shape 'not the world as it is... but the world as it should be.'

• Ami Jones, 36

HR Consultant, aible
Cardiff

It can be tricky working with people day in and day out and then having to manage a situation when things go wrong, but managing people doesn't have to be a nightmare. I am one of those lucky people - I really love what I do and that is because I love people! It is the people who make or break a business and that is why I enjoy helping my clients to really value their employees so that they can get the best out of them, but also as employees we spend the majority of our time in work.

I get my drive and energy from my parents who were both in the position when they were young not to be able to continue their education, yet they worked hard and built a good life for my brother and I. They encouraged us to work hard in school but also to get part-time jobs to teach us the value of money and the structure of working life.

We have a major skills gap in our country and unfortunately I don't think the education and business sector are working closely enough to bridge this gap effectively. I want to start supporting youngsters to increase their skills base, especially in regard to business and entrepreneurial skills. I hope we can create a generation with the skills to support Wales to become more productive, leading to a higher level of wealth, spread more equally across all classes.

• **Andrew Isidoro, 27**

SEO and Outreach Manager at
Gocompare.com
Cwmbran

Recently nominated as European Young Search Professional of the Year, I was humbled to be recognised for doing something I really enjoy: helping people do more business online.

I firmly believe that Wales has so much untapped potential in the digital and tech space. There are a number of great start-ups and professionals as well as a really unique community here that I would love to see thrive even more. That is one of the reasons behind starting Cardiff Digital, to deliver more digital expertise to Welsh businesses so that they can build their own success; a journey I also hope to make soon.

• **Azim Ahmed, 28**

Editor of On Religion magazine
Cardiff

I founded On Religion to host the voices of academics and experts on religion into the debate about faith and society, to raise the tone of discussion and quality of religious literacy. I hope I can help contribute towards a vision of Wales that is confident of its multi-religious and multi-cultural history, that celebrates diversity, and finds unity in differences. These probably sound like grand ambitions, but there are few alternatives for me and other Muslims, migrants and minorities.

I volunteer for the Muslim Council of Wales as Assistant Secretary General. Naturally, interfaith has been a staple part of the work we have done for the past ten years. As society is becoming seemingly more polarised, we'll be continuing with this in the future with even more commitment.

My parents sacrificed a lot to move to Wales, and to give me the opportunity to call Cardiff my home.

• **Angharad Williams, 27**

Trainee Clinical Scientist, All Wales Medical Genetics Service, University Hospital of Wales
Cardiff

My current role introduces new DNA cancer biomarkers into routine clinical practice. I have been heavily involved in developing an innovative new service which allows patients who are too ill for an intrusive lung biopsy to



receive blood based testing for life extending treatments; treatments that they would not otherwise be able to access. Our service was the first NHS genetic diagnostic service to use non-invasive liquid biopsies for cancer patients in the UK. Oncologists have enthusiastically related stories of patients making excellent progress on these treatments which would not have been possible without our service. Our team recently won a MediWales Innovation award for this new diagnostic service.

I want to continue to develop and implement new diagnostic technologies into NHS practice to better support and direct patient care. My next role will be utilising new DNA sequencing technologies to help diagnose children with developmental delays, where current testing methods cannot provide answers.

Genomics in healthcare is now a fast moving field, with constant developments, and at the All Wales Medical Genetics Service, I feel we have the skills and capabilities to keep Wales at the forefront of genomic healthcare.

• **Catrin Stewart, 29**

Actress
from Cardiff, now based in London

I feel very proud to be Welsh and and have enjoyed working in Wales for the past few years on varied, exciting projects with passionate and talented collaborators. I love living in London but have a hiraeth for home! I want to continue to have that connection with Wales and also to work on challenging and exciting projects in the UK and all over the world.

I feel now, more than ever, art needs to speak to people, to inspire change and provoke thought. Performing in a production of 1984 last year gave me a taste for that and I would like to choose work that tells important and powerful stories.

For the past year and a half I have been volunteering with refugees and asylum seekers. I felt helpless watching and reading the news and wanted to help, if only in a small way. I have met wonderful people and hope to continue.



Elis James, Image: Idil Sukan

• **David Gardner, 34**

Administrative Court Office Lawyer for Wales
Cardiff

I was called to the bar by the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn in 2006 and cross-qualified as a Solicitor of the Senior Courts in 2011; facilitating and assisting the public in exercising their public law rights and democratic safeguards is both a fascinating and enjoyable endeavour.

From a young age it was impressed upon me by my parents that no matter what you are doing, no matter what those around you are doing, you should always strive to do it to the best of your ability. I am currently applying for part-time judicial roles, so I hope that in the future you may see me on the bench in Wales.

If Wales wishes to take up 'the challenge' and a separate legal jurisdiction for Wales is to be a reality within ten years, the Government, the legal profession, and the universities in Wales must act now. The public authorities must show that they are capable of setting up and maintaining an infrastructure, the legal profession must show that it has the capability and breadth of experience to conduct legal proceedings, and the universities must show

that they can train suitable lawyers for the future. In those circumstances I hope to be at the forefront of a brave new world for the constitutional and administrative law of Wales.

• **Elena Cresci, 27**

Social editor at the Guardian & presenter
for Sianel Pump
from Dinas Powys, living in London

My aim is to help people understand the internet and its place in the world today. I trained as a newspaper journalist, so presenting is a bit new to me, but I hope in the next year or so I can do more of it, not just in Welsh but also in English. National media doesn't often talk about Wales, so I hope, as a Welsh person in the London media set, I can try and fly the flag and make them pay attention.

• **Elis James, 36**

Comedian and Radio DJ
from Carmarthen, based in south London

I started doing stand up comedy in 2005,

having worked for a homelessness charity after graduating from Cardiff University with a degree in Modern History and Politics. Having written four stand up shows in English for tours and the Edinburgh Festival, and performing thousands of English gigs all over the world, in 2015 I wrote my first stand up show in Welsh, which is my first language.

I'm filming the third series of the BBC3 sitcom *Josh* this summer, and I've just finished a tour based on the Saturday afternoon Radio X show I do with my friend and fellow comedian John Robins. I feel hugely lucky to be making sitcoms, as it's been my dream since I was very young - to act in a sitcom with my mates was one ambition, the other one is to write a sitcom of my own.

• **Eleri Williams, 27**

Development Worker, Displaced People in
Action & Swansea City of Sanctuary
Swansea

I work to develop a culture of welcome for asylum seekers and refugees who find themselves dispersed to Swansea. I support

people seeking sanctuary to deliver awareness-raising training and workshops. In future, I would like to move to a role in policy work linked to human rights, and have recently become a trustee of Asylum Justice, a charity providing free legal services to asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. Outside of my full-time job I am the sole carer for my disabled father, following the very sudden and unexpected death of my mother in early 2016.

I believe wholeheartedly that the world can become a better, more inclusive place, and recognise the role that Wales and its residents have to play in this never-ending challenge.

• **Emma Picton Jones, 28**

Primary teacher and charity founder
Haverfordwest

My story really began on July 5th 2016 when my husband Daniel took his own life. Although I knew he struggled with his mental health, what happened came as a huge shock to us all. It was difficult trying to understand how someone who seemingly had it all felt completely worthless and the person who adored his wife and children felt in his heart that they would be better off without them. In a lengthy note that Daniel had left he had written 'you couldn't help me but you could try helping

someone else'. I took this statement in and decided that something positive had to come out of this awful situation. It was important that the children (Mali, 4, and Trystan, 2) and I had something positive to focus on.

The DPJ Foundation was born. Raising £8,000 within two months and a total of £16,000 to date, we have taken funeral donations and organised teas, bungee jumps, Ironman, Mud Run and many more, most of which I try to take an active role in!

We aim to support people in the rural communities of Wales especially those in agriculture as this sector carries the highest rate of suicide. We have trained 38 people in mental health awareness including vets, reps and representatives from the NFU and FUW who can use those tools to support those they work with in the community.

I aim to talk about mental health as much as I can and reduce the stigma that surrounds it. I hope, and to this end have appeared on various radio and television programmes, each time to encourage others to speak in a way that Daniel couldn't. I want his legacy to be one that has helped and supported many people who feel the way he did. I also want my children to have an understanding of mental health and the importance of self-care and also an understanding of what their daddy went through.



Eleri Williams

• **Gareth Evans, 31**

Executive Director of Education Policy,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Cardiff

I was the Western Mail's Education Editor for seven years from 2009, during which I established a reputation as a leading and fearless commentator in the field of Welsh education. Having developed a broad knowledge and understanding of the many issues and challenges facing our education system and its practitioners, I decided late last year to 'put my money where my mouth is' and join the sector itself. Having entered the education system at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, my new role puts into practice everything I have learned over the past decade - as well as analysing, scrutinising and contributing to education policy in Wales, I now work with schools and other key stakeholders to help in its successful implementation.

A proud Welshman, I am committed to helping redress the imbalance that sees Wales lagging behind the rest of the UK in key education comparators. I firmly believe that huge untapped potential lies within Wales' schools system and I am passionate about ensuring all children achieve to the best of their abilities, regardless of their background.

• **Gareth Morgan, 36**

Managing Director, Liberty Marketing
Cardiff

I want to grow our digital marketing agency to one of the largest and most successful in the UK and really put Wales on the marketing map. Wales has some of the most creative, innovative and analytical minds in the country, yet our talent rarely gets the recognition it deserves. Things are changing though - our agency has won the projects from some of the biggest brands in the world this past year, proving you don't have to be in London to do amazing work.

• **Gareth Iwan Jones, 32**

Founder and CEO of ICE, Wales' largest start-up community
from Llangollen, now based in Caerphilly

Since launching ICE in July 2012, we have built a community of over 150 companies across three buildings, with an independent report in 2016 finding that ICE has delivered an impact on the local area of over £14 million. We have just announced the plans to open a centre in Wrexham, and launched an online platform,

Boma Camp, to support people to develop their ideas around their full-time lives.

My drive comes from my own struggles, dropping out of university twice, and dealing with a total sense of hopelessness and isolation from the modern economy. The support of the start-up community in Wales has given me a clear sense of purpose, and I am keen to do everything I can to ensure more people avoid that path rather than deal with it alone.

• **Grant Santos, 42**
Managing Director, Educ8 Ltd
Tredomen, Ystrad Mynach

I am passionate about vocational education and improving the parity of esteem between vocational education and academia. Wales has a huge opportunity over the next few years – with the recommendations from the Donaldson review – to develop a curriculum which harnesses the best from both academic and vocational education. We have an opportunity for schools, colleges, training providers and higher education to work together and develop seamless pathways from schools into work which match the priorities for Wales.

I am very excited for the future and have been totally humbled by our recent successes. As Educ8 continues to develop and grow, so do my own ambitions and so do my expectations of myself and our people. Within the next two years, we would love to be up from our current 6th to reach 1st place on the Sunday Times Top 100 Small Best Companies to Work For.

• **Harry Wilson, 19**
Footballer
Wrexham

I'm a typical winger – pace, touch, and acceleration with the ball at my feet. Having been on the books at Liverpool since Under 9 level, I was handed my first-team debut by Jürgen Klopp when I appeared as a substitute against Plymouth Argyle in the FA Cup third-round replay on January 18 2017. I had already made a first appearance for Wales in a World Cup qualifier against Belgium in October 2013, taking Gareth Bale's record to become, at 16 years, 208 days, the country's youngest ever player.

• **Jade Jones, 23**
Olympic taekwondo medallist
Flint

I was introduced to taekwondo by my grandfather as a means of self-defence when I was just 8 years old and fell in love with the sport. By 18, fighting in the -57kg category, I won a silver medal at the World Championships in South Korea, narrowly missing out on the Gold medal in a sudden death decider against Hou Yuzhuo of China. The following year, at the London Olympics, I vowed that it wasn't happening again in front of my home crowd, and I became Team GB's youngest Olympic champion. This led to my becoming BBC Wales Sports Personality of the Year and an MBE – all whilst still a teenager!

After winning again in Rio, I want to retain the crown at Tokyo 2020 to become a triple Olympic champion, something that nobody in taekwondo has ever achieved.

• **John Hurst, 35**
Co-owner and Director, b2b IT Services
Cardiff

The attraction of b2b IT and the thing that makes it unique is its people – a collection of talented achievers that care passionately about the client. Our ambition is for our people – all of whom have spent their entire working life under devolution. We want them to have a good work-life balance, be happy and healthy and realise their own ambitions – whether that be to buy their own home or grow their skill base. It is about going beyond fair work practices and ensuring our bunch of IT superheroes are all they can be.

Whilst Wales is a vibrant country with a unique and rich heritage, it is about time we took those characteristics and used them as a foundation to build a strong and progressive country with a robust and sustainable economy that attracts, retains and nurtures talent. We need a vision that isn't dictated by political cycles. We need accountability across the public sector for supporting business and not consistently trying to define it.

• **Katie Dalton, 32**
Interim Director, Cymorth Cymru
Cardiff

Prior to my current role, representing organisations that provide homelessness and housing-related support services to the most vulnerable people in Wales, I was Policy and Public Affairs Manager at the mental health charity Gofal, influencing mental health, housing and criminal justice policy, legislation and practice. I've also been President of NUS Wales, where I secured an increase in student support and protection from higher tuition fees, as well as leading the Students Say Yes referendum campaign in 2011.

I've never really had a life plan or career ambitions, but I want to make a difference. I'm now lucky to be in a position where I can influence decision makers – and I feel a responsibility to do everything I can to have a positive impact on the lives of people less fortunate and privileged than me. I don't think I'd be where I am now without all of the women who encouraged, supported and inspired me to stand up, speak out and believe in myself. Role models are crucial and we need to do more to improve women's representation in leadership positions across Wales.

In thirty years I want Wales to be a fairer, more equal place than it is now. I want



Jade Jones, Image: Emmanuel Hammond



Leon Ward



Laura Emily Dunn

our leaders to reflect the diversity of our communities and for vulnerable people to face fewer health and economic inequalities. I want those of us with mental health problems to be valued, not discriminated against, and I want us to be proud of what devolution has delivered.

• **Leon Ward, 25**

Programme Manager, Wales for First Give and Deputy Chair of Brook
Cardiff-based but working across South Wales

First Give launched here in August 2016 and in our first year will work with 4,500 Welsh students. We will help them and their schools engage with their local communities, unlock their social conscience and kick start their journeys in volunteering. I am also a trustee and Deputy Chair of the young person's sexual health charity Brook. I have been a trustee since I was 18 and have been campaigning for organisations to ensure their governing boards are diverse.

The charity sector was my 'way out' from a tough life when growing up; my Mum was an alcoholic and there wasn't much opportunity in Grimsby, where I'm from. I want Wales to be the destination of choice for people to live and work. Wales has ample room for growth and opportunity - I have experienced the ambition and drive that Cardiff is currently incubating and I would love to see that seep into the communities where opportunities are limited.

• **Luke Evetts, 29**

Lawyer & Political Campaigner
from Ceredigion, now in Newport

I've always wanted to help people. That's why I decided to go into the law and why I later got involved in local politics. I first became involved in politics in 2007 when I felt that many elected representatives were too inward looking and lacked the drive and ambition to look to the future and change things for the better.

I'm currently seeking election to Newport City Council and my political focus in the short term is to be elected to represent the residents of Stow Hill. I have enjoyed the experience of campaigning in a city centre ward over the last few years and while some of the issues are naturally different from what I experienced growing up in rural Wales, we are united in caring about issues like health, education, job creation and infrastructure.

I stood as Conservative candidate for Ceredigion in the 2010 General Election and the 2011 Assembly Election. The Welsh Assembly is responsible for making decisions about the things that matter to us day to day; over the next 30 years the role and powers of the Assembly will only increase and I would love to be a part of that. In the long term, I would like to help shape future policy in Wales using my personal experience of the issues facing both rural and urban communities, and seeking innovative, outward looking ways to make life in Wales better.

• **Laura Emily Dunn, 28**

Director, LED Media and Founder of Political Style
Newport

I've always been passionate about how digital can break down barriers and nurture real engagement in society. Over the past several years I have been committed to introducing organisations to the benefits of digital - whether that be boosting business, highlighting a campaign or helping politicians to reach their constituents.

My experience of working in the House of Representatives in Washington DC opened up many possibilities, and it gave me the confidence and the contacts to begin my business and work with clients in the US. The unique mix of organisations and individuals that I work with continually gives me the energy to try new things and spot new digital opportunities to create dialogue and empower society from the bottom up.

Wales is a nation unafraid to think big and take risks. I hope that this continues over the next thirty years, and that we will become a truly digitally connected nation, with the use of new technology empowering citizens from the North to the South. I also hope that Wales will embrace the change that our new political, economic and social circumstances will bring, pushing us to continue to be a leader both in the UK and across the world.



Manon George

• **Manon George, 29**

Lecturer in Law and member of the Wales Governance Centre, Cardiff University
Canton, Cardiff

My interest in Welsh devolution started as a Law student and after graduating I worked on the project 'Wales Legislation Online', before being appointed to a Law lectureship, partly funded by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, at Cardiff University. I'm passionate about Welsh medium education and equal opportunities and have helped transform legal education through the medium of Welsh at Cardiff University where you can now study a full Law programme in Welsh.

I contributed to the scrutiny of the Wales Act 2017, but Wales' constitutional journey still faces major challenges. I'd like to see an end to quick-fix solutions and political compromises, to give Wales a workable and sustainable devolution settlement.

I recently presented my first documentary: on my great, great uncle, David Lloyd George. I share his prominent square chin and energy but not his political ambitions - I'm much happier analysing decisions than making them myself! I'm inspired by the generosity and sincerity of my great-grandfather William George, the younger brother of David Lloyd George, who sacrificed his personal and professional life so that his brother could pursue his career.

• **Nick Evans, 43**

Managing Director, EvaBuild
Newtown

Founded in 2011, our business has grown rapidly and now employs eighteen full time staff. Our most notable accolades to date have been winning the South Wales Chamber of Commerce Business start-up in 2013, and winner of the Wales Fast Growth 50 Award 2015. My big ideas are coupled with even bigger ambitions. Most importantly I don't just think it - I execute it. My strength is in building highly motivated teams who buy into the company values and ultimately deliver high performance levels. My achievements to date accumulated in being a finalist in this year's Wales Entrepreneurship Awards.

My aspirations are to play a proactive role in improving the infrastructure in Mid Wales to assist in improving working conditions for both existing small businesses, and to hopefully attract new businesses to the area. From a personal perspective I aim to further grow our business to become the leading civil engineering company in Mid Wales, with the aim of partnering with the local Neath Port Talbot College to furnish the opportunity for apprenticeships.

• **Noreen Blanluet, 38**

Public Services Consultant
Cardiff

I grew up in France but my heart and future belong to Wales. In 2011 I co-founded Co-production Wales, a voluntary collaborative of citizens and professionals working to embed co-production at the heart of our services and our lives - my aim is to make our public services more inclusive, fairer, more relevant and more people-focused. Over the last couple of years I worked on a successful campaign to ensure that co-production principles were written into the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and underpinned the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. My professional focus is now on helping organisations implement co-production, working with service-users and communities to design more inclusive and sustainable services.

I have also been working voluntarily on Trade School Cardiff, which offers community-based learning on a barter basis, as well as co-founding the Cardiff Activists Café, a monthly event for activists and people effecting change in all areas.

• **Rhian Elizabeth, 28**

Writer
from Rhondda, based in Whitchurch, Cardiff

I wrote a book a few years ago called *Six Pounds Eight Ounces* (published by Seren in 2014 and shortlisted for The International Rubery Book Award) that was loosely based around my experiences of growing up in the Rhondda Valley and what a grimly wonderful time that was.

Words are a form of protest, expression and freedom and now more than ever I believe it's vital to support the arts in Wales and to invest and make sure money is put into the appropriate places. Art is something no one can take away from you... the ability to write a song, a play, a book, or to simply scribble a message on a piece of cardboard and hold it up to the world. It's even more important in a world where the people whose voices need to be heard are the voices actually being muted out. However, I am too tattooed and too fond of swear words to ever get into politics.

On a personal level, I was recently diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and my poems are my protest against the disease. I am writing a collection all about getting sick and I am trying to make something positive out of it and maybe even help others who are going through the same thing.

• **Seth Thomas, mid 40s**

International advisor at the Bank of England
from Pembrokeshire, based in London

After growing up in rural West Wales, I've found myself living in *the* global city. I'd like to be able to contribute more to my country in future, to bring my international and business experience back home. I've felt fulfilled by public service whether in my private or public sector roles. I think that comes from my family - my mother was a primary school teacher; one grandfather worked for the old electricity board as a linesman; and the other served on the Council of Wales, a 1950s forerunner of devolution. It also comes from the community that helped to form me - which still, I feel, faces many of the issues that it did when I was growing up there.

If I have a vision for Wales, it is of a country which provides opportunities for its people in terms of education, jobs, and having a fulfilling life; rightly proud of its culture and heritage, but forward-looking and actively engaged with the complexities of the wider world. That engagement is absolutely fundamental to Wales' future prosperity and something I'd like to promote.

• **Shazia Awan, 34**

Presenter, Communications Consultant,
Writer, Equality Campaigner
Cardiff & London

I'm always showcasing Wales in everything that I do. One day it might be talking about the importance of devolution, the Welsh Language and the Eisteddfod on the live three-hour debate show I host on BBC Asian Network and other days it's writing articles about the importance of equality and diversity in Welsh life and politics and highlighting when politicians get things wrong. Last year I wrote an article for the New Statesman which highlighted how very wrong the Assembly Commission had got things with their equality form: they only had an option for people to identify as white and Welsh. Within 24 hours of filing my piece, they had publicly given a statement saying they would amend their form.

Being born in Caerphilly and growing up in Cardiff, I've grown up in a Wales where I have not seen people who look like me take roles of power whether it be in politics in Wales or third sector organisations. It is clear to me that the Welsh Government and third sector organisations and businesses have a lot of work to do in Wales if they are to fully represent the strong heritage and diversity of people that live and work here and proudly identify as Welsh. Ultimately I'd like to see Wales flourish on the international stage at every opportunity and for that to happen the people and politics that we see must reflect all that live here.



Shazia Awan



Steffan Powell

• **Sophie McKeand, 41**

Poet and current Young People's
Laureate Wales
across Wales

Working as a community poet for the past decade has been an insightful, challenging and rewarding education. As this year unfolds I am becoming more convinced that a radical overhaul of our ways of working in, and as part of, our communities needs to happen. I've always held the belief that if communities could truly engage with their creativity at a grassroots level this would encourage deeper understanding of the self and each other, whilst also feeding into a greater sense of empathy for our global community and increasingly fragile ecosystem.

This year I'm moving into a van and figuring out a way to work and travel across Cymru, the UK and Europe with a new poetry collection *Rebel Sun* - a collection of starlings and socialism - while also writing a new book. Part of this is a political statement responding to Brexit - I still feel a great affinity with our European neighbours; part is an increased yearning to have a more profound connection with the land and become aware of my consumption of precious resources; another part is the need to understand how the pressures of modern life and capitalism have compressed our once fertile and rich communities into cold, hard slate.

• **Steffan Powell, 29**

Senior Broadcast Journalist:
Newsbeat BBC Radio 1
from Amman Valley, based in London

Every day is different. I could be reporting on a major news event, interviewing the Prime Minister or talking to someone with a heart-breaking but important story to share. For many of those listeners - in Wales and across the UK - it'll be the only news they interact with all day. The challenge of trying to help 16-24 year olds make sense of the world around them is never dull. The reason I became a journalist in the first place was because I thought (and still do to some degree) that young people were being largely ignored by mainstream news providers. That means there is a risk of people becoming alienated from society or disconnected from the political process. I'm lucky to work somewhere that understands that and helps me to try to do it every day.

I'm always very proud to tell people about the Amman Valley. I've been told the humility that comes with being Welsh (sweeping statement I know) is one of our most endearing qualities as a nation. I've agreed with everyone who's said that to me over the years; but I also think it might have held some back. I hope, in thirty years, we will have achieved that balance of being both a humble and proud nation, a nation that is more outward looking and confident in its qualities, abilities and its future.

Kully Thiarai

'I'm not your obvious choice to run a national company'

Jasper Rees meets the new director of National Theatre Wales

What does an artistic director of a British national theatre look like? White, obviously. And male, probably. At the National Theatre of Great Britain, the first four people to hold the post could additionally boast of a degree in English from Cambridge University. In appointing Kully Thiarai as the successor to John McGrath, National Theatre Wales has defiantly turned its back on the traditional template.

Thiarai was three years into the job running Cast, the gleaming new glass-fronted theatre in Doncaster. Previously she had been co-artistic director of Leicester Haymarket. So her CV comprised the requisite qualifications. But even Thiarai herself seems disinclined to believe that, on the assumption it would go to someone with Welsh heritage, she landed a job for which initially she didn't even apply.

'I'm not your obvious choice to run a national company,' she says. 'I've been told for many decades that I shouldn't even be in the arts. My journey from where I began to where I am has been quite an extraordinary one.'

A soft-spoken presence exuding not

the merest smidgen of directorial swagger, she says this not to sound her own trumpet but with an air of detached objectivity. That journey began in Smethwick, which has left its trace in her Black Country accent. She grew up the oldest of five. Her father was a steelworker and both her parents illiterate. Once their daughter had learned to read and write in Punjabi and English, she assumed the role of family's fulcrum, and link with wider society.

'I became the primary communicator for my parents. By about seven or eight, I was cooking for everybody, cleaning for everybody, looking after my siblings, I was going with my dad or mum wherever they might need help.' So running a national theatre...? 'Is a doddle!' Thiarai explodes in guffaws.

'I've been told for many decades that I shouldn't even be in the arts. My journey from where I began to where I am has been quite an extraordinary one.'

The family lived close to West Bromwich Albion football club, which in the mid-1970s did much to counteract the racism of the era by peopling the team with black stars. But that progressive mentality didn't percolate down to local classrooms. 'I went to a school where nobody expected anything from you. I had a maths teacher who told me I didn't need to know anything other than how to count my husband's money. I remember feeling rage at that. We were just factory fodder and that's how we were described by teachers.'

Not all teachers though. One of them left a permanent mark when, aged 11, Kulwinder Kaur was told to discover her family name (Kaur being the female equivalent of the male generic Punjabi name Singh). 'My dad said, "I suppose you could say it's Thiarai." He phonetically told it to me and I phonetically told my teacher and she wrote it down.' She and her four younger siblings have used the surname (pronounced The-ar-ay) ever since.

She didn't enjoy much exposure to theatre. An A level school trip to see *The Winter's Tale* in Stratford-upon-Avon 'felt very grand and a bit scary'. When her school won a community award for teaching English to Asian women, the prize was a trip to London, where she saw

Annie. 'I'd never seen anything like that either.' Then in her first week at Bradford University, she and a friend signed up to the drama group, 'partly because I could – for the first time – do things like that'.

The campus theatre was run by Ruth Mackenzie, who went on to run the Cultural Olympiad, the Holland Festival and is now destined for the Châtelet theatre in Paris. She was then in her first job. Thiarai acted in a play of Mackenzie's devising, based on the trial of the Bradford 12, a group of young Asians arrested for manufacturing petrol bombs during the race riots of 1981, but acquitted on the grounds of self-defence. 'It was just a real eye-opener for me that that kind of work could happen that was political and significant.'

What Thiarai took from social work into theatre is an understanding that 'every individual has an extraordinary story', often located under the surface: 'What is theatre all about? It's all about the subtext.'

Thiarai's degree was in applied social studies, chosen 'because I'd met social workers who I thought were rubbish, and I thought I can't complain about them if I'm not prepared to do something about it myself'. But having spent a year in the field managing caseloads, she was asked by Red Ladder Theatre Company to help them broker relationships with the probation service and the youth service. In due course she joined the company and for two years learned the ropes as a stage manager until she felt the pull of her original vocation. 'I said, "Guys, this is great, but I did say I was going to be a social worker."'

She rejoined the profession at a bad time. 'It was the early 90s when a change in approach became more about control



Image: John Briggs

and policing rather than support.' When she was urged to apply for a director's bursary, the lure of theatre proved irresistible.

What Thiarai took from social work into theatre is an understanding that 'every individual has an extraordinary story', often located under the surface: 'What is theatre all about? It's all about the subtext.' The other lesson is that 'talent is everywhere but opportunity isn't, so how do we create the space for that talent to rise?'

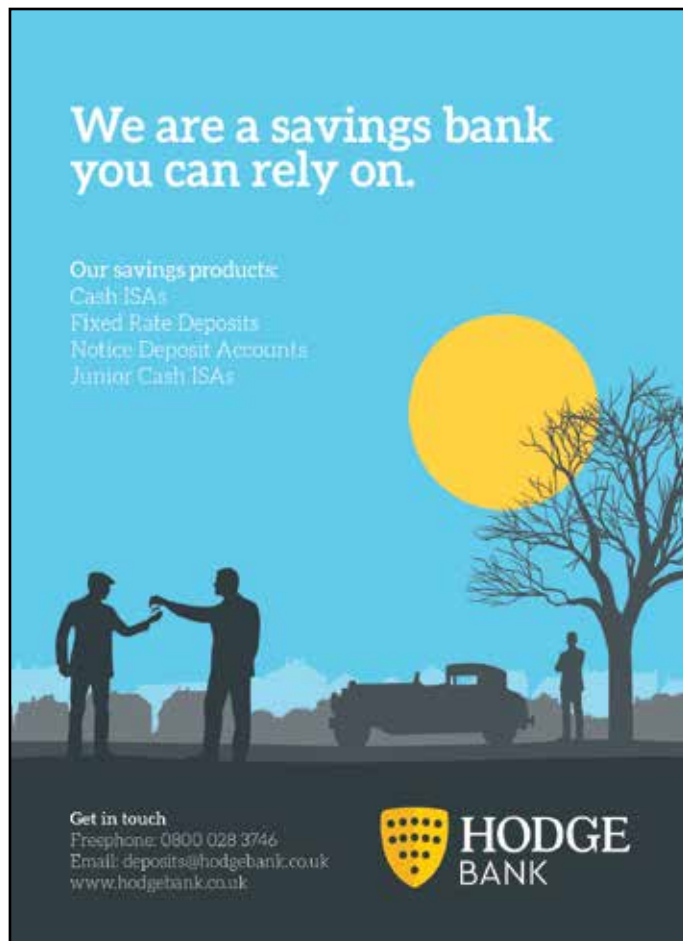
Early on Thiarai felt an expectation that she would work for the British Asian company Tara Arts. 'But they were as far away from me as possible in terms of class in those early days and it was the last place I wanted to be.' Her first major job was reinventing Contact Theatre in Manchester, but she fell pregnant at the key moment and withdrew; the company was taken on by John McGrath. Her next major opportunity was at Leicester in 2001. She stayed for nearly six years and directed several productions a year. Her first was *Death of a Salesman*; she was the

first director to cast a black actor as Willy Loman. 'I remember someone saying, "That's the directors' test. It's a great play and if you fuck it up it's your fault."'

In 2012 she was appointed the director of Cast before the theatre opened. The project was in crisis, faced political opposition from local government and a widespread feeling that the theatre was unwanted. 'Everybody said, "Well why would you build a £22 million theatre in a town like Doncaster?"' - then in the opening weekend 6,000 people came through the doors. Thiarai's hugely ambitious promenade adaptation of Barry Hines's *Kes*, featuring a huge community company and live falconry, should give Welsh theatre-goers some idea of what to expect from her tenure. Not that she promises too much revolution. 'I came in saying if they wanted reinvention I wasn't the right person. I absolutely endorse the values of the company. At the heart it's still about people and place. The place just happens to be vast!'

When her appointment was announced she was overwhelmed by well-wishers on social media delighted that a woman of colour was to run a national theatre. 'It shouldn't be an issue,' she says. 'but the fact that it is says something of the challenges we have in our cultural sector around ensuring that the voices of the many are represented in as wide a way as possible. The conversations around diversity bemoan me because they've been going on for 20 years. And there are plenty of people who could make a difference if they really wanted to. I sort of feel I've just got on and done it. It's all possible. It's just having the will.'


Jasper Rees is a freelance arts writer, co-founder of theartsdesk.com and the author of *Bred of Heaven: One Man's Quest to Reclaim His Welsh Roots*. *Lifted by Beauty: Adventures in Dreaming* opens in Rhyl on March 31.



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Left behind: Brexit and the valleys, a story of decline

PHOTO ESSAY
BY SEBASTIAN COOKE

Sebastian Cooke visits Tredegar to ask why people voted to leave the European Union, and finds an anger that is often justified

The figures speak for themselves. In 2014, the Campaign to End Child poverty said that the constituency of Blaenau Gwent had the highest child poverty rate in Wales. Over 30% of children were living in poverty. In a BBC report into the same area in 2013, some texture was given to that statistic: at a primary school in Waundeg, at the top of the valley, donated shoes were kept for children who arrived with nothing on their feet, something that used to happen during the Great Depression.

In the years following, the situation has not improved. A toxic mix of further benefits

cuts, unprecedented pressure on council budgets and record wage suppression have injected places that were already on their knees with a formula that seemed custom-made to make things worse.

Then, on 23rd June 2016, like most of Wales, Blaenau Gwent voted to leave the European Union. Brexit was a seismic shock, one that the *Financial Times* described as an 'extraordinary political upheaval'. Suddenly there was a scramble to find the people who had swung the vote to leave. Statistically, however, they

couldn't be found.

In total, over 21,000 people in Blaenau Gwent voted to leave the European Union on an unusually high turnout. But it was impossible to ascribe this figure to a traditional eurosceptic base. After all, the number of Leave voters was more than double that of UKIP and Tory voters. It was this group that provided the element of the leave vote that pollsters simply hadn't been able to predict. Their ballots were decisive but for a long time, their voices have been largely ignored.

In total, over 21,000 people in Blaenau Gwent voted to leave the European Union on an unusually high turnout. But it was impossible to ascribe this figure to a traditional eurosceptic base



One of these voices is Helena Llewellyn, a 60-year-old woman who has lived in Blaenau Gwent all her life. When I met her in Tredegar, I asked about the referendum and there was palpable anger in her response: 'They've done me out of six years of retirement!' she tells me. 'I was supposed to retire in April, but instead they've put me on jobseekers allowance of £73 per week. I can't live on that! I can't even put gas and electric on the meter or food on the table. I've worked since before I left school! I've worked all my life and now I can't touch money I've put away'.

Helena voted Leave and this was the first reason she gave for doing so. She knows that it wasn't the EU that forced her onto jobseekers allowance, but voting for Brexit became a way in which to protest against it. And it was far from the only grievance she had: 'I want my children to have a better future. Everybody I know voted out because we remember what it was like when everyone had work,' she tells

When I ask Helena about the EU money that areas such as Blaenau Gwent benefit from, she points to boarded up buildings and asks 'Well, where is it? They've taken the industries from the valleys; they've replaced the steelworks and sewing factories with lots of little companies that just exploit people'

me. 'Look what they're doing to people now on this minimum wage nonsense. It's not enough to live on!'

Helena tells me that her son spent three years searching 'all day, every day' for a job before he had any luck. There is a swelling of rage on her child's behalf as she recounts this ordeal. And for those who find a job, the story's not much better. Helena's sister, 52, works a 60-hour-week at a nearby furniture factory and brings home less than £300 a week. £140 of this goes on rent and council tax. Then there are bills, food, standard outgoings that must be met simply to sustain a level of existence and carry on, but it's not a life.

When I ask Helena about the EU money that areas such as Blaenau Gwent benefit from, she points to boarded up buildings and asks 'Well, where is it? They've taken the industries from the valleys; they've replaced the steelworks and sewing factories with lots of little companies that just exploit people'.



'I feel sorry for the youngsters today,' she tells me: 'so many don't want to get out of bed. I can see why'

It is these testaments to decline that come across time and again in the conversations I have with people. In Tredegar, the old town hall stands over the central clock tower. It is partially boarded up and the grand facade is slowly wasting away. Two men nearby, Kevin and John, tell me that the building used to be the social club for the National Coal Board. 'In years gone by it was really busy,' one says, 'in the 80s and 90s there were dances and shows'. When I ask how many people used to turn up, Kevin guesses around 250 – 300 people, a number that doesn't seem possible today.

He points to the balcony and tells me that it was there that Nye Bevan, a child of Tredegar, once delivered a rousing speech. But as we look up to the spot now, the balcony has turned green with moss and the window where Bevan once stood has been smashed.

Valerie, 72, tells me that she used to work in a nearby sewing factory and that

the town centre was bustling back then. 'People would come from Rhymney and Bargoed,' she says. The two cinemas she used to frequent have both disappeared. One has been knocked down, the other is a Wetherspoons. I ask her to explain what else has changed in the last 40 years, and the response she gives is one that comes up again and again: 'When I was young' she says 'you used to be able to leave a job on the Friday and you'd be in another one on the Monday'. But now, she confesses, that kind of employment security doesn't exist at all. 'I feel sorry for the youngsters today,' she tells me: 'so many don't want to get out of bed. I can see why'.

Asking who or what is to blame for this situation brings a mixture of responses, but two come up more than any other: government and immigration. The anger directed towards David Cameron is particularly acute, and it seems that he was the best campaigner Leave could have hoped for in a place like this. But even



though there is anger at Cameron, nobody has filled the gap. 'Not that I know of,' is Helena's response when I ask if there are any politicians that speak for her. 'We only hear about them at election time'. She confesses that she doesn't vote in general elections, but that the referendum was different.

Part of the reason she felt motivated to vote Leave, she says, was immigration. She is sure that when she received a reply from the government about why her pension was changing, it said that it was due to the economy and immigration. This sort of story isn't rare.

David tells me that when a meat factory nearby was bought by Polish owners, they enforced a 'Poles only' recruitment policy. He contrasts this to the situation of his grandchildren, for whom he sees little future in the job market. Another story I hear is about a Welsh soldier who became

homeless on his return from combat, only for an empty house to be given to a Romanian family. Getting details to confirm such emotive stories often sees their factual basis slip away, but that hasn't stopped them taking hold.

Despite this, several people tell me that immigration doesn't affect them in any way and there is little discernable anger towards migrants. Rather, immigration is only ever discussed in relation to jobs, welfare, the NHS and housing. It's almost as if it has become the most accepted way to convey the deep anger there is over the gradual erosion of these basic rights.

There is no mystery about why places such as Blaenau Gwent voted to leave the EU. Here is a group of people who haven't simply been left behind by the march of neoliberal economics, they have been deliberately pushed back to a place

Here is a group of people who haven't simply been left behind by the march of neoliberal economics, they have been deliberately pushed back to a place many thought they had seen the last of



many thought they had seen the last of. It is a place of joblessness, low wages, poor housing, child poverty and a future people don't want to be a part of.

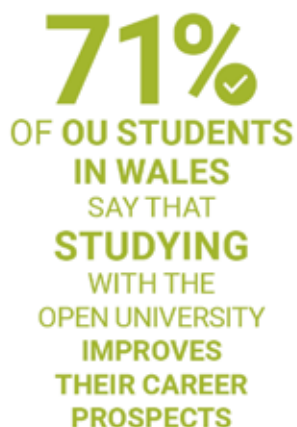
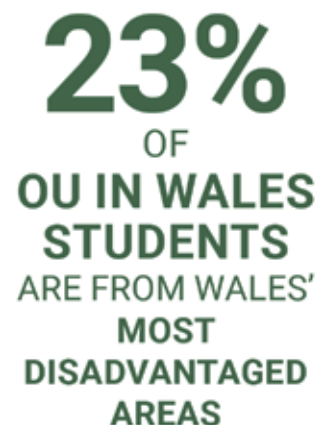
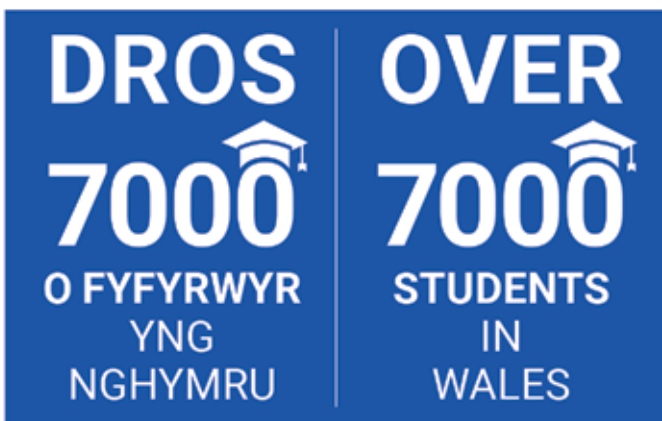
As Helena bluntly puts it: 'Our children can't get work! No work. No families. No housing!'

The biggest surprise of June 23rd is that the referendum result was even a shock at all. If the people who dictate our political discourse had talked less and listened more, they would have seen it coming a mile off.

Brexit was a wake-up call from the people in Blaenau Gwent and beyond. We ignore it at our peril.



Sebastian Cooke is a writer and photographer living in Cardiff.
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Jo Kiernan

A decade at the heart of government

Jess Blair meets Jo Kiernan, the former Senior Special Adviser to First Minister, Carwyn Jones

Alistair Campbell, Andy Coulson, perhaps even Malcolm Tucker. These are the names that likely come to mind if you're asked to name a Special Adviser (SpAd). Yet, Jo Kiernan is a name that few outside the 'Cardiff Bay bubble' would cite. This comes as a relief to Jo when we meet at a cafe near Cardiff's Roath Park on a crisp January morning. 'When I was leading the team, if we were in the media there was something wrong,' she says, highlighting the stark contrast between SpAds in Cardiff Bay and Westminster. In London each Minister appoints his or her own advisers, with four each not uncommon. 'The public wouldn't hear of that here,' she points out, 'this isn't a gravy train for political cronies'. In Wales, each SpAd is directly appointed by the First Minister and then works to a brief. Rather than the briefing against those in their own party that SpAds for the UK Government are routinely used for, the Wales team appears far more collegiate.

It's been just eight months since Jo Kiernan stepped down from her role as Senior Special Advisor following ten years at the centre of Welsh Government. But since then the political landscape in Wales, and across the world, has changed fundamentally. Kiernan watched from afar as UKIP took seats in the Assembly, Wales voted to leave the EU, David Cameron resigned and Theresa May became the UK Prime Minister. Despite the drama, Kiernan doesn't regret her decision to



'I got a call from Rhodri's staff out of the blue... If the job had been advertised I wouldn't have gone for it'

leave: 'I was tired and thought it was time to hand the baton on,' she reflects on the end of her career as a SpAd.

The beginnings of this period in her life marked a significant change. In 2006, then a successful journalist at the BBC and formerly ITV's Political Editor and host of their *Waterfront* programme for six years, Kiernan was approached directly by then First Minister Rhodri Morgan's team about becoming Communications Adviser: 'I got a call from Rhodri's staff out of the blue... If the job had been advertised I wouldn't have gone for it'. The First Minister himself talked her into it, selling the role as 'a mix of the wonderful and the awful'. The about-turn didn't make things easy for Kiernan initially. Her previous role as a journalist meant that she maintained informal relationships with her former colleagues, which she admits was a 'steep learning curve'. She tells a story of an instance not long after she had started

where an offhand comment she had made to former BBC Wales Political Editor, Betsan Powys, was repeated on the evening news.

Despite these challenges, Kiernan had to learn quickly. Less than a year after beginning her role she was faced with a significant challenge: a coalition government. This brought a new dynamic to the way things worked in Wales and there was a huge task in keeping the show on the road. The 2007 election result saw a credible opportunity for a so-called 'rainbow coalition' that would have seen a now unlikely-seeming alliance of Conservatives, Plaid Cymru and Liberal Democrats locking Labour out of government. But the eventual outcome of that third Assembly election was the Labour/Plaid Cymru 'One Wales' coalition. Jo Kiernan credits the success of the deal struck between the parties as being due to the huge amount of work spent on the negotiation. 'There was a great deal of work in managing the coalition... building trust and putting in place the proper mechanisms'. This was in stark contrast to the putative rainbow coalition, which she says was 'worked out on the back of a fag packet'. The week we meet the Northern Ireland administration has fallen into chaos with the resignation of Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness. Kiernan can't help but

Party politics between the UK Government and the devolved administrations have risen to the fore since Labour lost power in Westminster, culminating in David Cameron's infamous comment about Offa's Dyke being a line between life and death

draw comparisons between that coalition and the one she worked hard to make work. 'If trust breaks down, the whole thing falls apart. You can't ever take it for granted'.

In 2009, Rhodri Morgan stood down as First Minister after nearly a decade in the role. His successor, Carwyn Jones, quickly promoted Kiernan to the role of Senior Special Adviser. Over those four years, she had become integral to keeping the show on the road for the Labour government. 'While Carwyn's government had many differences from Rhodri's,' Kiernan says that

'there were many similarities between the two of them - both clever, grasping policy details quickly, both good with the media and both clearly had that undefinable *something* which meant voters had confidence in them leading the country'. Her working relationship with each of them was different, however. 'My relationship with Rhodri was slightly more formal than that I had with Carwyn, I suspect because Carwyn and I were much closer in age. Also as Senior Special Adviser by then, you inevitably worked very closely. To Carwyn's credit, a less formal working relationship meant I felt able to tell him very honestly if I thought we could have done better or that we needed to up our game on a particular issue, and he was always prepared to listen'.

The 2011 election was one of Kiernan's proudest moments in the job. 'There was a desire by some of the media to have anyone but Labour', she explains. 'To have 30 seats after a coalition despite people writing the Labour Party off was quite an achievement'. I compare the situation in Wales to the one in Scotland and ask Kiernan whether Labour haven't just been lucky that no single overwhelming opposition force has emerged in parallel with the SNP. 'It's more than luck,' she argues, citing the Labour Party in Wales' broad appeal to voters and its move that has traditionally put the party in Wales to the left of the UK Labour party. 'We had to appeal to the electorate and put forward a socialist agenda with social justice principles'. This



'socialist agenda' was certainly divergent from Labour under Blair or Brown, but what about Jeremy Corbyn? Kiernan isn't sure that he is 'an electorate asset'.

Party politics between the UK Government and the devolved administrations have risen to the fore since Labour lost power in Westminster, culminating in David Cameron's infamous comment about Offa's Dyke being a line between life and death. Conservative attacks on the Welsh health service permeated the last UK General Election, and caused concern for the Welsh Government. Kiernan recalls, 'There was a lot of guff... but we are being naive if we think politicians don't go for the perceived weakness of the opposition'.

It is interesting that while the UK election was dominated by talk of health – a devolved matter – last year's Welsh election was focused on the crisis with Tata Steel, something that the Welsh Government had little control over. Yet, the First Minister's

response to the crisis defined the election for Kiernan. 'The First Minister had to be seen to be on top of that situation'. He actively pursued a good relationship with the unions and this, Kiernan believes, went a long way to achieving the positive result for Labour last May. That election was Kiernan's last as a SpAd. Her plan had initially been to leave a couple of years earlier but she was persuaded to stay on to see the Welsh Government through its full term.

While May's result offered some relief to Labour, with the party losing just one seat in total, it also heralded a new chapter for the assembly with the Labour/ Plaid Cymru Compact, which Kiernan deems 'pragmatic' and the addition of UKIP. Just a month later Wales voted to leave the EU. Kiernan reflects on the changes that have taken place since she left her role: 'I thought after UKIP had done so well in the Assembly elections that there was a good chance the referendum would go to Leave. The signs were there: concern around immigration, jobs, public

services and housing... in hindsight, it was David Cameron pandering to vested interests in his party... but we are where we are... the Welsh Government's job now is to act in the best interests of the people of Wales'.

There don't appear to be any plans for Jo Kiernan to return to the front line of politics, and certainly not as an elected member. She is currently helping Rhodri Morgan on his memoir, and plans to become a consultant and to work with organisations she is passionate about. Yet the last decade is one of which she is particularly proud. 'It was a huge privilege to be in that position for a decade and I'll always be grateful for the opportunities they [Rhodri Morgan and Carwyn Jones] gave me'.

Jess Blair is the outgoing Policy and Projects Manager for the IWA and the new Director of ERS Cymru.

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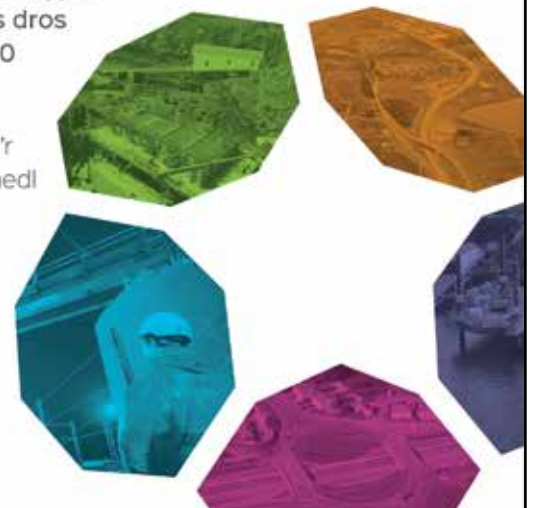
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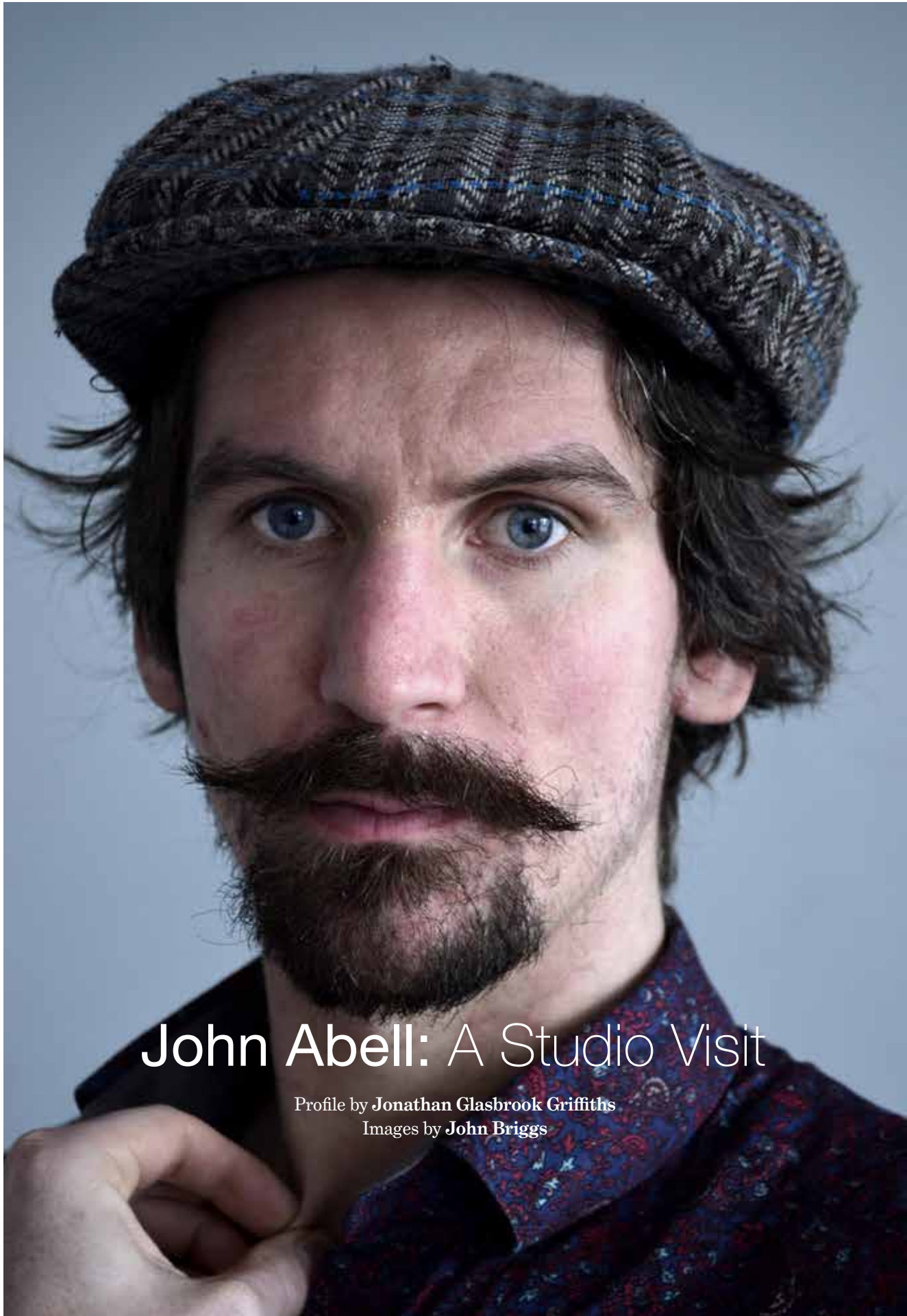
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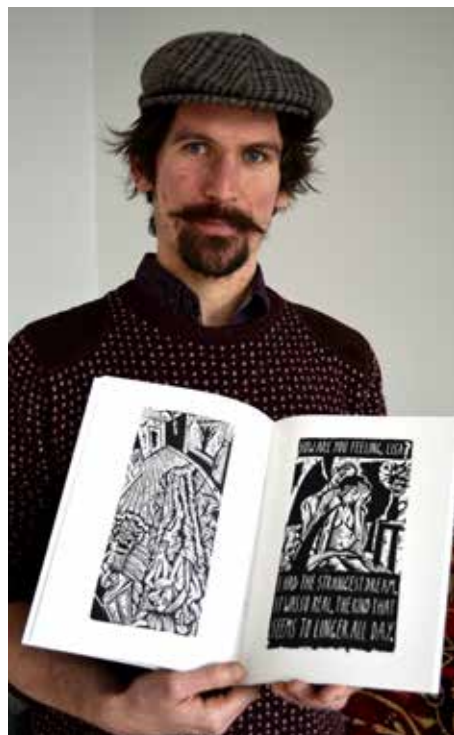
John Abell: A Studio Visit

Profile by Jonathan Glasbrook Griffiths
Images by John Briggs

Approached via a labyrinth of corridors, fluorescent lighting and mottled suspended ceilings, an anonymous second floor office suite facing Cardiff Central Station seems an unlikely environment in which to find one of Wales' foremost emerging creative minds.

John Abell first caught the attention of the nation's gallery goers during the summer of 2013 when his large woodcut, *The Three Graces, All That The Floods Had Left Them* won first prize for printmaking at the now defunct Wales Artist of the Year competition. Championed in particular by Neale Howells, another of Wales' dynamic artistic forces, this striking black and white print had also, much to its creator's credit, scooped second prize overall.

Having dispatched his latest one-man show, *Lost Conquistadors and Other Works* to Oriol Myrddin in Carmarthen (January 14th - March 11th) only recently, Abell apologises for the somewhat spartan appearance of his studio, explaining that there is usually much more to see. Nevertheless what remains behind offers evidence enough to confirm his status as one of Welsh art's rising stars. Taking up much of the available floor space in the centre of the room is an eight by four mdf board familiar to home improvers



and builders everywhere, mapped out in places in coloured felt pens and partially cut away to reveal a nascent woodcut. As yet not fully resolved, this particular item will eventually form yet another stanza in the evolution of Abell's magnum opus, *The Horse with the Human Heart*. Melding together in a narrative quest, British folk tales, The Bible, *Don Quixote*, and one of his artistic idols, Franz Marc amongst many others, it is envisaged that the work, when completed, will comprise around three hundred super-sized prints that Abell hopes will in due course be published as one single graphic novel.

'If it was good enough for William Blake, it is good enough for me,' Abell says, smiling playfully as he reveals that combining pictures with words, history and biography have always been a preoccupation. Nonchalantly filed in one corner amongst various other catalogues, reference and art history books are proof copies of two beautiful hand printed, limited edition publications from the Old Stile Press in Monmouthshire. Approached by the owners, Frances and Nicholas McDowall, following his success at the *Wales Artist of the Year*, the press commissioned him to provide the visual element for their letterpress and linocut reissue of Arthur Graeme West's *Diary of a Dead Officer*. Evidently pleased with the outcome, the collaboration was reprised

'If it was good enough for William Blake, it is good enough for me'

again in 2016 with a second offering, *The Book of Job*, using scriptures from the King James translation of The Bible. Self-taught in his preferred medium of woodcut, Abell's time at The Press allowed him an opportunity to once again work with another leading artist in his field and build on the skills he had previously honed following a residency he was awarded in 2012 by the Josef Herman Foundation, Wales, to practice lithography with Stanley Jones, the doyen of printmakers at the world famous Curwen Press.

Latterly Abell's talents have been employed in more accessible formats via various record sleeves and by Richard Davies of publishers Parthian who asked him to provide suitable illustrations for an anthology of contemporary short stories entitled *Rarebit: New Welsh Fiction*, a potpourri that included a tale by Joao Morais, the artist's friend and former flatmate, alongside twenty other budding authors.

Taking up space in another corner of his studio is evidence of Abell's innate resourcefulness, a bricolage of inked up boards in varying shapes, sizes and states of



repair. An ardent pedestrian, as a fledgling artist short of cash he took to liberating pieces of wood or mdf from skips and other such places, a *modus operandi* he continues to employ today whenever a suitable opportunity presents itself. Included amongst the stockpile are a number of panels acquired from a particularly fruitful trip to the Cardiff branch of Ikea, his repurposing of discarded packaging materials in his own mantle a suitably mischievous counterpoint to the Scandinavian retail behemoth's signature vanilla aesthetic.

The beneficiary of several one-man shows since 2013 in various Welsh galleries, both maintained as well as private, if Abell's success to date seems rare for someone only just turned thirty it is all the more so given his unpropitious adolescence. Of above average academic

ability Abell's schooldays in Cardiff did not end well. Excluded from the classroom, as a sixteen-year-old he found himself immersed in a demimonde of couch-surfing, hard drugs and sleeping rough beneath a bridge beside the River Taff. Sent to stay with his grandparents in rural mid Wales, a period of quiet self-reflection away from Cardiff and its temptations brought Abell to the realisation that if he were to achieve anything in life, art might yet prove his salvation. Enrolling on the Foundation Course at Hereford School of Art, he later gained a place at Camberwell College of Art and Design where he briefly studied Illustration before switching to Fine Art. Leaving in 2009 without graduating he entered a period of toing and froing between Cardiff and Bristol where a summer spent crewing a tall ship at the

renowned Brest International Maritime Festival and elsewhere helped to reinforce his earlier conviction that he had in fact made the right decision.

Whilst those of a more mercenary mindset might regard his decision to return to south Wales as a retrograde step given London's centrality to the contemporary art world, Cardiff's relatively affordable rents allowed Abell the time and freedom to develop his career at his own pace whilst still being close enough to town to pop up and down as and when necessary.

'Most of my friends that I was at uni with, hardly any of them are still practicing art ... the reason they're not still working is a reason I foresaw quite quickly ... how the hell can I stay in this city ... you can't leave your house without spending a fiver minimum.' Clearly London's loss is for now Cardiff's gain. Once a familiar figure at private views and friends' book launches, Abell's life at present now more clearly resembles the former denizens of his current studio. Arriving at work by nine in the morning, he usually gets his eye in by tackling an early morning drypoint on one of the aluminium sheets leaning up against the wall before moving onto more substantial fare as the day progresses. Although still very much favouring the democracy of printmaking, Abell prefers to think of himself today as, 'more of an image-maker in general' rather than the accomplished printmaker he clearly is. Since the summer he has responded to a desire to broaden both his oeuvre and perhaps his appeal by tackling a series of large watercolours, some twenty of which have made their way to Carmarthenshire alongside four giant woodcuts heightened with colour. The different constraints and relative unfamiliarity of this new medium notwithstanding, his most recent work still manages to retain the hallmarks of his more familiar graphic output albeit in a lambent technicolour of which any one of his expressionist antecedents would no doubt find favour.

Jonathan Glasbrook Griffiths is still applying the finishing touches to a biography of the artist Evan Walters



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Shahien Taj

‘What has devolution done for diversity?’

Dylan Moore meets Shahien Taj OBE, founder and executive director of the Henna Foundation, a charity established to advance the needs, concerns and aspirations of Asian and Muslim children and families

Shahien Taj's father came to the UK as a young man from rural Pakistan in the late 1950s. 'There was no necessity for him to leave but he wanted to see the world,' says Taj. 'As a teenager he had run away to Karachi, the equivalent of someone from rural Wales running away to London. When he found out that the British government were looking for workers he came and lived in Liverpool and Sheffield, living in shared accommodation with other Indian and Pakistani men, working shifts and sometimes sharing a bed.' After a few years of itinerant work, he was looking for a place where he felt at home, and found a reminder of home in the rural, rolling hills around Bridgend, and a job in the unlikely field of garden gnome production.

After Taj's parents' marriage – against family wishes – they moved to Roath, Cardiff, 'to ensure we had access to a religious education and halal food,' Taj remembers. 'All of a sudden life got interesting: we had a Chinese family across the road, another Asian family down the street – and it was the first time I had seen black people!'

'Life was okay until I was six. It was 1973, and we were suddenly stopped from playing outside. The National Front would use the Albany pub on our street

as a meeting place, and back then the police weren't particularly bothered about protecting us. I started to become more aware of when people would call you a paki or tell me to go back to my own country. After my brother, at eleven, got pushed into Roath Brook by a gang of white boys, my dad stopped us going any further than the end of the street.'

Taj's father fought racism the long way, 'going the extra mile for his colleagues' and 'staying behind at the steelworks to clean up', gradually earning respect. Promoted to foreman, he became involved in the trade union movement (Taj's sister Shavanah has since become head of the Public and Commercial Services Union). 'Dad was a kind of informal activist within the community and we have inherited that.'

But there is another element that drove Taj toward activism and community work: 'the expectancy of a woman and how a woman behaves.' Taj was married by the time she was 17 and had children at 18 and 21. By 27, she was in the middle of a divorce. On whether the marriage was 'forced' she says: 'it was in that grey area.' Despite all the positive nurturing she had received, being the eldest girl meant that agreeing to the marriage was the 'right' thing to do. On reflection, she feels that as communications

improved, her parents became influenced by relatives in Pakistan.

From her mid-teens, there was suddenly 'pressure around gender and what her parents should be doing with me.' They would 'constantly' be getting marriage proposals for her. 'My dad would reject everything, but the pressure grew, particularly on my mother and I ended up marrying a cousin.' Taj describes the marriage as the biggest mistake of her life and her divorce as 'my greatest achievement. It gave me my life back'.

During the ten years of her marriage, she did have a handful of very good friends who were highly supportive, other Asian girls she had gone to school with. But it took the intervention of an uncle to finally set the ball rolling on a break: 'I can see what's happened to Shahien, he told my father. Can't you see it? I was the complete opposite to who I am today. My mum and dad were in denial, and the stigma of divorce was not something anyone was prepared to take on.'

Despite all this, Taj's teenage sideline 'selling loose fabric to sew up into ready-made outfits' had developed into 'a really successful business.' Given that her husband had 'other priorities', Taj opened a shop on Tewkesbury Street in Cathays.

'The shop was always full of women, and became a social stop after the school run.' While she didn't tell people about what she was going through, they were sharing issues affecting them. 'From issues of gender to sexual preferences, the shop became a safe space for a huge spectrum of women.' Ironically, Taj was living through ten years of real stress but 'because of the way I was raised around family honour and saving face I couldn't talk about it'.

As Taj recovered from the illness her experience had brought on, she made a promise to do everything in her power to make sure it didn't happen to others. When a friend approached her with the idea of applying for some funding from the Millennium Fund to help Asian women, she was very interested. 'While here in Wales we had Bawso, that's all there was. I had been volunteering there to address forced marriage and honour based violence,' Taj remembers, but '[that work] wasn't tackling the root causes. This was 1999-2000 and

people feared being vocal. While Bawso and Women's Aid are great, there also has to be something about social change. If they weren't going to do it, I would - and that's how Henna was initiated.'

The problems Taj was seeking to tackle did not need seeking out; for those in the community, they were omnipresent. A number of Asian women in Cardiff - Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus - used to get together and celebrate each other's festivals. 'All these women wanted to do was to have this safe space,' Taj explains.

'For the time they were out there, they did try their best but there were men in the community hell bent on making sure they put a stop to them.'

Taj attended an Eid celebration where the women had come together. On the poster, it had banned boys over age eleven because some Muslims felt there needed to be segregation between men and women. 'A day or so later, a letter was sent to the husbands of the women who had run it,

accusing them of deviance. One woman had a *fatwa* issued against her.'

'Thankfully,' says Taj, 'her husband supported her - but some of other women got a good beating because of these men. And the letter achieved its objective: shutting down any other work.'

Founding the Henna Foundation was like 'picking up a thread and taking it forward.' Her observations in Cardiff and elsewhere in the UK, visiting different women's organisations, meant that Taj knew that to be effective she had to get the community on board.

'The first time I felt a sense of acceptance from the men in that community was that when we had a case of a 14-year-old girl who had gone missing from her home.' The girl had become involved with a 20-year-old man, and the relationship 'had set Grangetown against Roath'. Henna - then called Saheli - had not even launched, but Taj became involved in the case after receiving a phonecall from the police.



She ended up arranging a meeting between the girl and the man in an empty office, but could not broker an amicable solution to the problems the pair had caused for both their families. After the young man walked away, refusing to marry the girl and essentially abandoning her to her fate at the hands of a family on whom she had brought shame, Taj was able, with the assistance of police and men in the community, to get the family to sign an agreement allowing the girl to return to school, complete her education and not – as was likely – to be taken to Pakistan.

I often say to professionals doing risk assessments to take a 360 approach. Look into the background

‘Sadly, at 17, she was taken to Pakistan and did marry,’ says Taj. ‘She had become highly sexualized and within her cultural norms, the only safe way to solve the issue was for her to be married. I don’t believe she was forced: it was more of an arrangement to suit her and the family. I’m confident that if there was any element of force she knew how to get hold of me.’

This early case was a turning point for the Henna Foundation because it led a local imam (and friend of the girl’s grandfather) to bless the work and offer an open door to the mosque. ‘There are men within the Muslim community who are good men, men of faith who are willing to go all out. This blessing gave us a sense of feeling safe.’

However, despite the good men, there is, Taj says, a ‘lack of discourse and honest discussion about the history involving the Asian community that stretches back, in Wales, to the late 60s and early 70s. Girls have literally disappeared, or have committed suicide, and the reality of what’s happened hasn’t been addressed. There’s denial and people within the community

who wish to turn a blind eye.’

‘I often say to professionals doing risk assessments to take a 360 approach. Look into the background. I’ve spoken to police officers who’ve dealt with cases and they’re shocked at the silence. Why are people not talking about it? It’s about fear of revenge and reprisal. Most of the Asian community still have kinship relations overseas and don’t feel necessarily feel protected by policing and security.’

Taj also continues to be concerned about continuing misogyny, this perception of ‘asking for it or deserving it’. One of her priorities ‘before I hang my boots up, is that that misogyny needs to be booted.’ Taj fits none of the stereotypes widely held about Muslims. ‘My strength comes from my faith,’ she says. ‘My spirituality in terms of justice and equality means I make sure I stand with the LGBT community, I stand with people with disabilities... I don’t expect someone to stand up for me when I’m not standing up for them.’

Taj is concerned about ‘international issues knocking on our door’, and the serious difficulties presented at UK level to community cohesion and national security, but she is equally robust when talking specifically about Wales. ‘While we’ve been blessed with devolution, I’ve arrived at the point where I question what devolution has done for diversity. We’re in the position where we have female elected members of the National Assembly. My question to government is what has health done for diversity? Why is it that professionals carry on making catastrophic mistakes when it comes to safeguarding? The suffering of vulnerable people is horrendous. There’s been a lack of direction from those delivering our legal framework. If diversity isn’t at the start, how can we expect it to be delivered frontline?’

‘What’s interesting from our organisation’s perspective is that when 7/7 happened, all of a sudden Government wanted to know about the Muslim community. There’s clearly a lack of information. I was selected as one of the Muslim women taken to Windsor for a weekend of troubleshooting. What

was clear was that the Home Office and Foreign Office had no plan.’ As a result of this work came the first report around extremism. ‘Welsh Government then asked for a meeting. Jane Hutt and Edwina Hart were very clear that they wanted better engagement with Muslim women in Wales. We were asked to do research so they had a better understanding.’

Taj accepted but emphasised that ‘there’s no point just talking to Muslim women. Talk to non-Muslim professionals working with the community. Without the whole picture, there’s no point.’ This work became the Muslim Women Talk campaign. Central Government were so impressed that they invited the Henna Foundation to apply for funding and asked them to mirror what we’d done in England. ‘Welsh Government never truly appreciated the level of information they are capable of drawing and the value of listening,’ Taj says regretfully. ‘I pray that we never have such devastation again in the UK but realistically it’s inevitable. And we’re going to be back at that page again. There is a myth that Wales is a tolerant nation, but we have had three young men who’ve gone off to Syria. What kind of mindset must these boys have had?’

‘When are people going to wake up and smell the coffee?’ wonders Taj. ‘For such a small city, we’ve had so much controversy. People here do not understand the definition of a hate preacher. We do have an organisation in Wales that the Welsh Government have courted, very much male dominated until recently, but for me it’s not enough to put a sticking plaster on it.’

The day to day work of the Henna Foundation involves ‘picking up the pieces from a much bigger break in society. We need to root out the cancer: misogyny, inequality, lack of justice, Islamophobia. Don’t prop up people who have publicly said things that are hateful. Despite the fact that I’ve had the experiences I’ve had with religion, it’s been my religion that’s given me my life back. There isn’t a religion in the world that is perfect but you take the spiritual element of it and live by good values and protecting people. That is ultimately for me the most important thing.’

Inside Story: Wales Act

Stephen Crabb describes the tumultuous journey of the 'Wales Bill', from 'lofty ambition' to law

Image: David Wilson

Two and a half years after first sitting down with David Cameron to discuss some thoughts I had on how devolution in Wales could progress, we now have a new Bill on the statute book.

The Wales Act 2017 represents the culmination of those early discussions which took place under a different Prime Minister and a different government. It is to the huge credit of the new Prime Minister and of the Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns that they have followed through on the commitments made, and have brought the Bill to fruition.

I set out with lofty ambitions. I wanted to see if we could find a way to deal with a number of overhanging Welsh devolution questions in one broad package – the outstanding recommendations of the Silk Commission (i.e. a new suite of powers for Cardiff Bay), a move to a reserved powers model, the implementation of income tax devolution (without a referendum), and the

running sore of (un)fair funding.

There were a number of reasons why I felt the timing was right. Recent Supreme Court rulings had risked altering the existing devolution settlement by suggesting the competencies of the Welsh Assembly were much broader than what was explicitly set out in the legislation.

Furthermore, the Scottish independence referendum, I believed, provided a moment of unique constitutional significance and I felt that it would be a mistake for the government to just focus on Scotland and that a broader look at the UK's devolution arrangements was required. With the support of William Hague and Nick Clegg, I made the case to the PM for attempting to deal with the big devolution issues for Wales.

So began the process that led to the 'St David's Day announcement' in Cardiff in 2015, which committed the government to a new Wales Bill. I had tried to involve



At the heart of the problem was the conundrum of how to maintain the single jurisdiction for England and Wales while enabling the Welsh Assembly to have full law-making powers in a reserved powers model

and bind-in the Welsh political parties to a process of consensus. In the end, as so many had predicted, the measures did not go anywhere near far enough to satisfy Plaid Cymru and Welsh Labour could only give a grudging welcome.

I tried to persuade the First Minister to join David Cameron and Nick Clegg at the Millennium Stadium for the announcement but, without a clear commitment on devolving Air Passenger Duty, he resisted and flew off to New York instead. He was also under a lot of pressure from within the Labour Party not to make any commitments on income tax. The marked difference in views between Carwyn Jones and Owen Smith made some of those early discussions deeply frustrating.

On my own side, I had a deeply sceptical Treasury who did not like the idea of a 'funding floor' for Wales one bit, and some clear divisions among Conservative backbenchers and candidates about any further devolution steps especially over income tax.

In terms of new powers for Wales, the clear sticking points were always going to be the Silk recommendations for devolving policing, justice and a separate jurisdiction. The lack of consensus (Conservatives and some Welsh Labour MPs were strongly opposed) meant that we could reject these recommendations.

During and following the general election campaign, my officials at the Wales Office

worked hard on scoping and drafting the Bill. In the early weeks after the election we came in for some criticism for not having a Bill ready to go immediately. Some of the critics would soon reverse their position and claim that the entire project was being rushed.

The truth was that we followed a plan agreed long in advance - to publish a draft Bill, test the reaction, and come back with a final version that could command support.

But the reaction to the draft Wales Bill was very sharp indeed. The noisy and, at times, extreme rhetoric that came from Cardiff Bay against such things as the 'necessity test' legal device that appeared in the first drafting took many in Whitehall by surprise.

At the heart of the problem was the conundrum of how to maintain the single jurisdiction for England and Wales while enabling the Welsh Assembly to have full law-making powers in a reserved powers model.

I was lobbied on both sides of the argument by various figures in the legal profession in Wales - by QCs who were keen to press ahead and achieve a separate jurisdiction for Wales, and by solicitors who earned fees throughout England and Wales and were hostile to any move to weaken the single jurisdiction.

I sought some advice and thoughts from the Lord Chief Justice and other judges who studiously avoided any political arguments but were extremely helpful in clarifying the

legal and constitutional issues at stake.

It was never the intention to create new red tape to prevent the Assembly from exercising its powers and so, after a number of meetings with Justice Ministers who were instinctively cautious, we agreed that the much-maligned necessity test needed to go.

In February 2016 I announced a reset of the Bill with a number of measures to respond to the concerns raised. This put the Bill broadly in a place where we could embark on its parliamentary process with a realistic chance of success.

The following month I was moved to the Department of Work and Pensions, with the new Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns taking over leadership of the Bill. Alun has done a superb job in carefully piloting the Bill through Parliament and reaching a point of agreement with Welsh Government.

The deal on the Fiscal Framework was a particularly important moment and largely fulfils the hopes I had back in 2014 for embedding a fair funding settlement for Wales and removing a key obstacle to income tax devolution.

Although I had set out with the hope of ending the continuous rows about devolution in Wales (which excite precisely no-one on the doorsteps), the world has changed in remarkable ways since 2014. Brexit now casts a looming shadow over the new settlement even before the ink has dried.

The devolution argument has moved on to what role the Welsh Assembly should play in the Brexit process and where the balance of competence should lie for those policies being repatriated to the UK. This could prove incredibly complicated and will mean that for those politicians, academics and lawyers who enjoyed the Wales Bill arguments there will be plenty more to get their teeth into once Brexit has been triggered.



Stephen Crabb is MP for Preseli Pembrokeshire, and former Secretary of State for Wales.

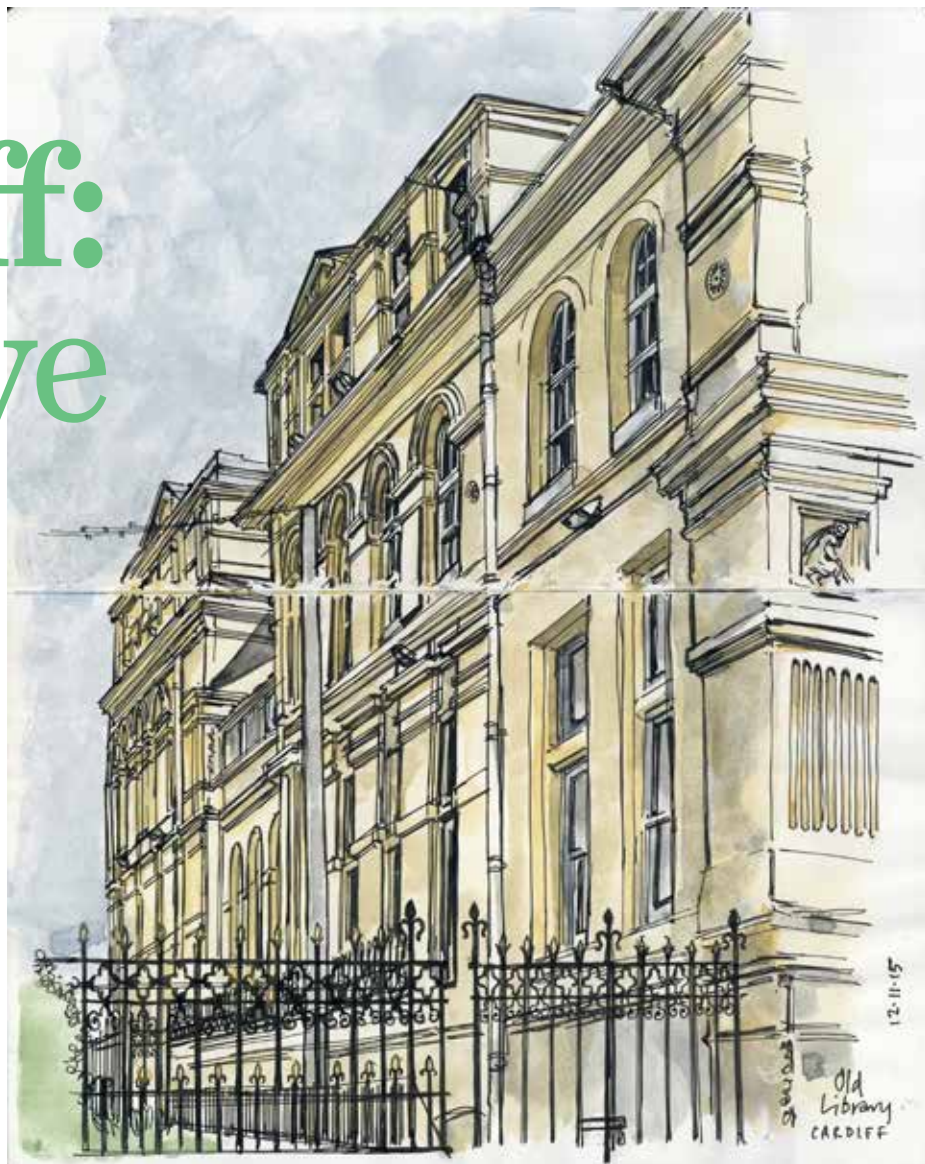
Cardiff: Creative City

Ana Gonçalves argues that culture and creativity form the heart of urban liveability

Franco Bianchini and Charles Landry, the leading theorists of the concept of the 'Creative City', once stated that whereas cultural resources are 'the raw materials of a city', creativity, the buzzword that bridges culture and the economy today, can be understood as a form of nurturing and maximising those resources. Indeed, the growth, both in numbers and breadth, of the creative economy has been exceptional in recent decades and cannot be neglected by public authorities, the private sector and even organisations emerging from civil society.

According to the *Creative Industries Economic Estimates*, published by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) in January 2016, the creative economy as a whole accounted for 8.2 per cent of the UK's GVA in 2014, with the creative industries representing 5.2 per cent of the UK economy. Indeed, the GVA for these industries increased 8.9 per cent between 2013 and 2014 alone. Between 1997 and 2014, the annual average increase in GVA for the creative industries represented 6 per cent, whereas the UK economy as a whole registered on average 4 per cent, although we need to be reminded that the definition and scope of these industries has changed over time.

In Wales, the creative industries have been identified as one of the nine priority sectors for the national economy. According to the Welsh Government, the creative economy employed 84,000



Images: Dan Peterson

people in 2015, with 53,000 in the creative industries and 31,000 in other creative occupations outside these industries. With regard to the Welsh capital, the Creative Cardiff Network, created in October 2015, has recently published *Cardiff: Creative Capital - Mapping Cardiff's Creative Economy 2016*, a long-due and crucial report that focuses on the role and impact of the creative economy in Cardiff and which has managed to map the creative industries in all city wards and some of Cardiff's neighbouring areas (Penarth, Llandough, Dinas Powys and Sully).

This report identified 2,788 creative companies/organisations and freelancers in Cardiff who are developing their work in four main sectors, out of the nine creative sectors identified by DCMS in the UK: Music, Performing and Visual arts; Film, TV, Video, Radio & Photography; Design: Product,

2,788 creative companies and freelancers in Cardiff... develop their work in four main sectors

Graphic and Fashion; and Crafts. There seems to be a tendency for these sectors to cluster according to the specificity of their activities and to concentrate in specific neighbourhoods close to the city centre and Cardiff Bay, namely Cathays, Butetown, Riverside and Canton.

The report also shows, in line with Richard Florida's characterisation of the 'creative class' (2005), that the critical mass and workforce that fuels these industries - the so-called *creative people* - often locate in areas that are within

easy access to other companies, shared facilities such as creative working hubs, public transportation and good quality broadband and that working patterns are now diversified with an increasing number of freelancers, part-timers, microbusinesses and volunteers.

Although this study is constrained by the definition of the creative industries adopted in the UK that does not always apply to specific local contexts in a

Cardiff was identified as the number one city in the UK for quality of life, according to residents

suitable manner and, as it is accurately acknowledged in the report, no mapping of the creative economy is ever comprehensive enough or complete given the dynamism of this sector, this report has the quality and merit of presenting an extensive collection of companies, organisations and freelancers and of compiling this information to show the representativeness of these industries in Cardiff. In addition, it informs public authorities and businesses about the wards where these creative people can be found, which facilitates planning of future service provision, but also decision-making processes in terms of location of office space and certain cultural and entertainment venues and the creation of specific urban areas, including shared public spaces and housing. This is especially important given the city's expected population growth of 26 per cent within the next twenty-five years and the pressing need to create family and affordable housing to accommodate more residents.

Other future considerations about these industries and their influence in the Welsh capital will necessarily include the impact that Brexit will have on available funding, on exports, on national and local policies, on foreign companies based in Cardiff and on foreign professionals living and working in the city.

Furthermore, additional research needs to be conducted in order to understand the actual number of people employed by these industries in Cardiff and the real impact this sector has on the city's culture and



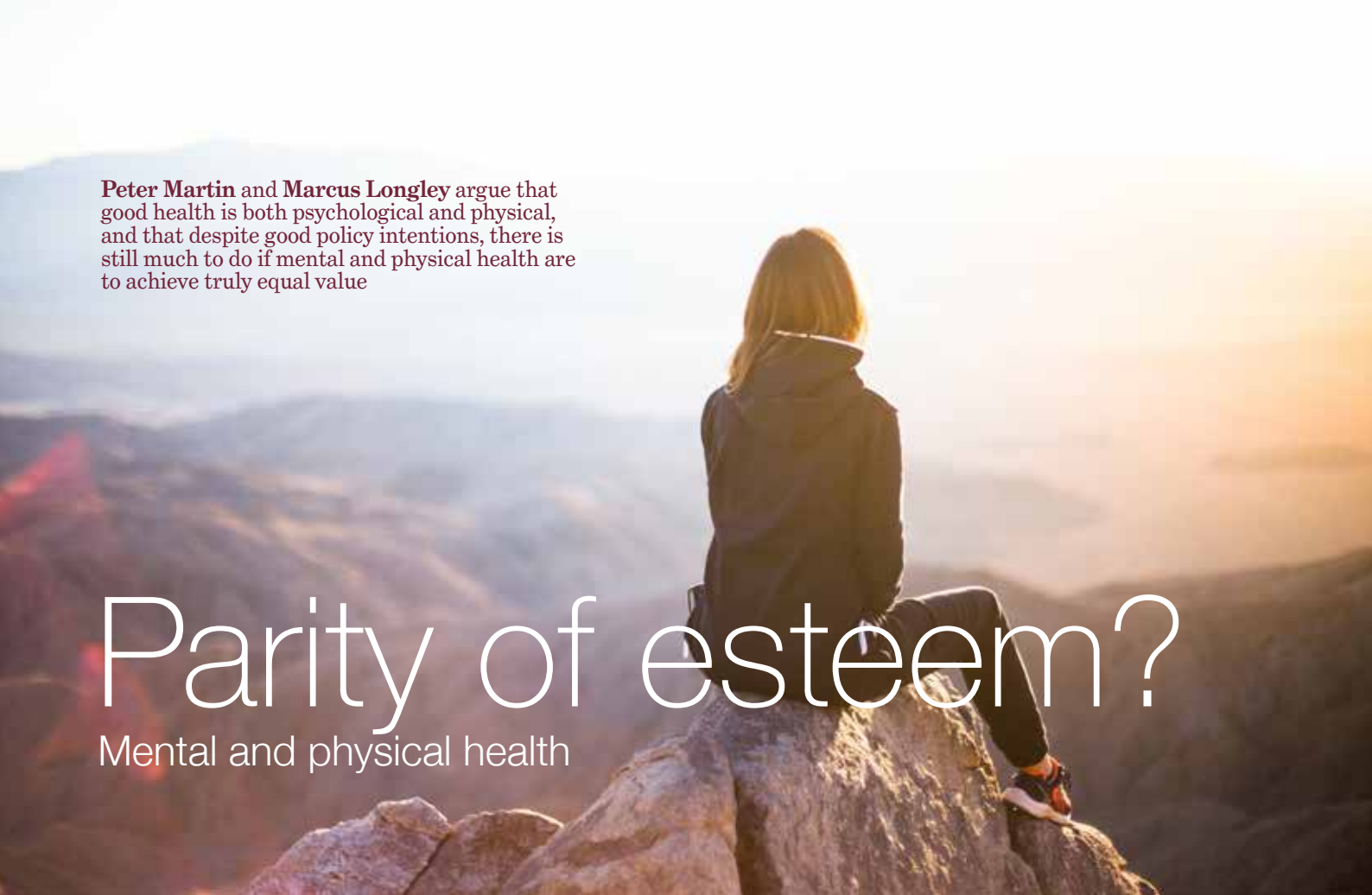
economy. The profile of those who work in this sector in Cardiff, in terms of origin, age, qualifications, social background and cultural practices, housing and mobility patterns, household size and composition, to mention but a few, also needs to be identified so as to understand the impact of this growing number of professionals in the everyday life of the city and to cater for them and their preferences. Additionally, it would be interesting to see if and how much of Cardiff's characteristics, namely its liveability and quality of life, play a role in these people's choice to locate in the city.

From a heuristic point of view, a liveable city presents itself as an holistic understanding of urban spaces with a well-balanced distribution of green areas, housing, attractive urban spaces that facilitate mobility and social interaction, commercial and office areas, a varied array of cultural and entertainment venues, different economic opportunities and environmentally-friendly forms of mobility that privilege walking, cycling and the use of public transportation. On the other hand, from a sociological perspective, it nurtures the appropriation of urban spaces by people from different generations, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In the 2013 EU Urban Audit Perception Survey, Cardiff was identified as the number one city in the UK for their quality of life, according to residents, the same applying to sports facilities, quality of public space and retail. This study also placed Cardiff in the fifth-highest place of European capitals where residents are satisfied with quality of life, ranking behind other renowned cities such as Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Vienna and Stockholm. The 2016 edition of the survey showed that Cardiff now occupies third position of the European capital cities where residents are most satisfied to live,

together with Copenhagen and Stockholm, having overtaken Oslo and Belfast. This has strengthened public authorities' intentions to turn Cardiff into 'Europe's most liveable capital city' and the draft version of the *Cardiff Liveable City Report* published earlier this year has been made available for public consultation.

To succeed in this ambitious goal, the 'liveable city' and the 'creative city' have to go hand in hand and inform the future £1.2 billion Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and the South East Wales Cardiff Metro, which need to coincide to reinforce, rather than undermine, these ideals. Therefore, it is essential that the Welsh capital does not lose sight of what are its distinctive assets and what makes it an attractive city: its small size and scale, its spaces and its people. It's hard to find another European city that beats the general tranquillity and friendly atmosphere that Cardiff boasts, enhanced by its small and compact size. It illustrates the best of Europe in terms of culture and creativity.

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Peter Martin and Marcus Longley argue that good health is both psychological and physical, and that despite good policy intentions, there is still much to do if mental and physical health are to achieve truly equal value

Parity of esteem?

Mental and physical health

The economic and humanitarian case for giving proper priority to mental health services may be preached by Welsh politicians of all shades, but do mental health services have the same priority afforded to physical conditions? With unique mental health legislation in Wales and all-embracing NHS bodies serving all aspects of health need, are mental health services getting any better? What's the problem? And will we ever solve it?

Much has been written recently about the concept of 'parity of esteem' between mental health and physical health, particularly in England. It is described by the Royal College of Psychiatrists as meaning '*valuing mental health equally with physical health*'. In other words, you would have equal access to the most effective and safest care and treatment, whether your diagnosis is 'physical' or 'mental', there would be equal status within healthcare education and practice, equal status in the measurement of health outcomes, and the allocation of time, effort and resources would be on a basis

commensurate with need.

But does mental health have 'parity of esteem' with physical health in Wales? Perhaps a better way of posing this question is: are mental health services given the same priority as, say, cancer or stroke services? How do policy intent and expenditure compare? What about outcomes? And is future progress equally likely?

The policy intention is clear. We have unique and pioneering mental health legislation in place in Wales – The Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010 – and we have a very good 'all age inclusive, Cross Government Strategy': 'Together for Mental Health – A Strategy for Mental Health and Wellbeing in Wales'. Welsh Governments have consistently asserted that mental health is a priority, exemplified by ring-fencing mental health expenditure and ensuring that Health Board Vice-Chairs have a specific mental health remit.

On expenditure, mental health is the largest of all the programme budgets in NHS Wales (just over 11%), and is 'ring fenced'.

Successive Welsh Governments have been committed to 'reducing inequalities amongst people experiencing mental illness and mental health problems'.

As far as outcomes are concerned, part of the problem when comparing mental health services with cancer or stroke services is that mental health problems or mental illnesses are not homogeneous. They can be any one of numerous conditions, ranging from emotional and behavioural disorders experienced by teenagers to dementia experienced by older people. It can mean having mild to moderate depression or it can mean being diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. It is not a single condition, and this makes establishing meaningful performance indicators for mental health, or setting standards for mental health services, problematic.

The extent of mental health problems is difficult to measure as information on the incidence and prevalence of psychiatric illness is limited. However, we do know that people with a diagnosed psychiatric condition such as schizophrenia or bipolar

affective disorder die an estimated 15-25 years earlier on average, and that this is mainly due to preventable physical health problems, such as cardiovascular disease or diabetes.

From the limited research that has been undertaken, we know that people who have a mental illness are around three times more likely to be in debt and have financial problems, and are over five times more likely to cut down on the use of the telephone, gas, electricity and water than the general population. We know that personal finances are regularly cited as a major cause of difficulty and distress, and that people are far more likely to lose their job because of their condition.

The scale of inequality for people with a diagnosed psychiatric condition is huge. People with mental illness have the lowest employment rate for any main group of disabled people, endure greater poverty, have poorer housing, have fewer training and educational opportunities and experience greater social isolation. The list goes on. So there is much still to do.

The question of whether mental health services in Wales are getting any better is a difficult one to answer. One reason for this is the lack of any meaningful success indicators. We should be able to measure whether people's needs are being met, whether successful outcomes are being achieved, and whether more people who use mental health services are getting back into

We need to dissolve the silo mentality that pervades many of our health and social care services in Wales

education or training, volunteering or work.

But these types of success indicators are not published in Wales. We know how many people have a valid Care and Treatment Plan; we know how many people are accessing services and are being assessed; and we know how many people are receiving treatment within 28 days of referral. But we struggle to provide the data to show how many people are getting any better as a result of the care and treatment they receive.

People who have a severe and enduring mental illness often need support from a broad range of services such as health, social care, housing and employment, and so it is particularly important for these services to work together in a seamless and coordinated way. This is precisely what Part 2 of the Mental Health Measure - Wales' own mental health legislation - is all about: delivering effective, coordinated care, treatment and support.

But service providers don't always work

in a fully integrated way. Organisational interests and budget constraints can outweigh working together for the common good or in the best interest of the individual. Costs that may be saved by a local authority are often picked up later by the NHS, and vice versa. People with mental health problems routinely have their physical health ignored.

All too often, our default position is to think about our organisational silo first, and people's outcomes second. Organisations can more easily measure progress by way of changes to structures, systems, processes and budgets, rather than by how many people are now enjoying better lives. There is still a long way to go in tackling people's expectations and behaviours - including those of staff, of service users, and of us all.

So there's a lot still to do. We need to dissolve the silo mentality that pervades many of our health and social care services in Wales. We need to recognise that mental and physical health are intrinsically linked, and design services accordingly. We need to ensure that young people who have their education interrupted through poor mental health or mental illness return back into education as soon as possible. We need to ensure that people who experience poor mental health or mental illness receive care and treatment as soon as possible and return to employment, or training, or education, or volunteering. We need to improve the quality of life of those with dementia, and those who support them. We need to focus on the ultimate objective: our health and wellbeing. In this way, hopefully, we will see that that having good health means both psychological and physical health. We will genuinely have 'parity of esteem'.



Peter Martin is Senior Policy Advisor at Hafal, the Mental Health Charity. **Professor Marcus Longley** is Professor of Applied Health Policy at the University of South Wales and Director of the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care. He is also Vice Chair of Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, but writes here in a personal capacity.

The Buzzard & The Chicken is a new series for *the welsh agenda* in which the views of policymakers are presented alongside those of practitioners. By providing a platform for the views of those in the frontline of delivery, we hope that ‘on the ground’ perspectives can combine with those of relevant experts to make Wales better for buzzards and chickens alike

A Puzzling Picture

Professor Gary Beauchamp and Professor Tom Crick consider the variance of vantage points from which Wales’ new curriculum is being constructed

When the editor first suggested this piece, he was looking for an overview of the process of the introduction of the new Digital Competence Framework (DCF) and suggested a buzzard was a possible analogy. There followed a light-hearted exchange pointing out that the predatory nature of a bird of prey may not be the best analogy, but it made us think about our own viewpoint and role as independent experts providing the evidence base and identifying international best practice for the DCF. Furthermore, it also caused us to reflect upon the viewpoint adopted by the Welsh Government in developing the DCF and the whole of the new curriculum, adopted after the review – *Successful Futures: Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales* – conducted by Professor Graham Donaldson in 2015.

When Huw Lewis, the Minister for Education and Skills at the time, accepted the recommendations of *Successful Futures* in full, he fulfilled a prediction that he would become ‘the great reformer’ (Beauchamp and Jephcote, 2016). At a stroke, he changed the way that education would look, and, thus, how it would be taught from the ages of 3-16. Previous Ministers had used devolved powers to develop a distinct Welsh identity for education – such as the Foundation Phase for younger learners – but

the proposal to move away from individual subjects and the traditional key stages in favour of six thematic Areas of Learning & Experience (AoLE), with literacy, numeracy and digital competence as cross-cutting responsibilities of equal importance, was a major transformation. Donaldson recommended that four purposes should ‘guide all future decisions about national and local educational priorities and underpin all teaching and learning in Wales’. (Donaldson, 2015, p.30) Thus, all children and young people will be:

- **Ambitious, capable learners** who are ready to learn throughout their lives
- **Enterprising, creative contributors** who are ready to play a full part in life and work
- **Ethical, informed citizens** who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
- **Healthy, confident individuals** who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The Donaldson review further recommended a ‘Pioneer’ model of developing the new curriculum to achieve these four purposes. This was a clear departure from how education reform has been done in Wales, aligning to emerging international best practice and research. Instead of civil servants – with input from selected stakeholders – ultimately developing the overall structure and content of the new curriculum, it was delegated to these ‘pioneers’: teachers selected for their expertise and proven high-quality practice. This practitioner-led curriculum development model, with expert guidance

from academic and other key stakeholders, provided opportunity and challenge in equal measure. Unsurprisingly, one of the key challenges has been, and remains, time. This is exemplified by the first test of the pioneer model, the development of the Digital Competence Framework (DCF). While we were encouraged that the announcement of the DCF was the first tangible deliverable of the Donaldson review, we were very aware of the challenges presented by the timescales: from Ministerial statement (June 2015), to initial meeting of the Digital Pioneers (October 2015), to it being made available to all schools (September 2016).

In our own dealings with colleagues at the initial meeting of the pioneers to develop the DCF, it became evident that, although empowering, the sheer scale of starting from scratch was daunting for some practitioners. Previous iterations of the curriculum have all been ‘top-down’, often with politicians and civil servants influencing key decisions. The introduction of a National Curriculum in England and Wales through the 1988 Education Reform Act was a clear example of this. Despite the existence of expert groups advising the government, there was a strong political influence not only on the choice of subjects to be included, but also the actual content of the curriculum. An important debate at the time centred around the importance of facts and ‘knowledge’ versus skills, for example, in the history curriculum. This also resonated in the development of the DCF – and will also feature in the development of the AoLEs by the other pioneer groups – but this time without overt

The first challenge for the digital pioneers was to consider what a five-year-old child entering school that year – who is growing up in a digital world – should be able to do (skills), rather than only what they should know (knowledge) when they left school aged 16 or 18

political interference. With the exception of the Foundation Phase teachers (who currently work with three-year-olds in seven ‘areas of learning’), most teachers were used to a curriculum divided into traditional subject areas (such as English, science and music). A key challenge for all involved was to move away from this potentially compartmentalised subject thinking towards a more integrated, ‘cross-curricular’ approach, focusing on skills rather than knowledge. But this began with a blank page.

The first challenge for the digital pioneers was to consider what a five-year-old child entering school that year – who is growing up in a digital world – should be able to *do* (skills), rather than only what they should *know* (knowledge) when they left school aged 16 or 18. This was not perpetuating the myth of the ‘digital native’, but understanding how we can best equip our young people to be confident and capable consumers and creators of technology – enabling ‘makers’ as well as ‘users’. These skills then had to be organised in a progression (more challenging and building on existing skills as they grow older), which was related not only to the other digital skills, but also to how they could work across the other, yet to be developed, AoLEs. Given the breadth of digital skills of many five-year-olds today, this presented a significant challenge to see what schools could add over a more than a decade in education.

The Minister had appointed an ‘expert’ advisory group (including academics and other stakeholders) to provide guidance, quality assurance and the international research and evidence base – of which we were both members. However, time was again a factor, as this group only formally met three times, with their impact potentially limited and often reactive – for instance, commenting on early iterations of the DCF that the pioneers had developed – rather than being more proactive (although Crick, as chair of this group, regularly engaged with the pioneers). In this context, individual leaders emerged from the pioneer group, but the key challenge remained about all of them taking ownership of the process and not expecting the government (via civil servants or otherwise) to provide the answers. Hence, although supported by civil servants, the pioneers may remain largely on their own in driving the development of the new curriculum. While this is the intention of the model adopted by the Welsh Government – and true to the spirit of Donaldson’s recommendation – the key challenge that remains for the pioneer groups can be summed up in evidence provided recently to the National Assembly for Wales’ Children, Young People and Education Committee by Neil Foden (NUT Cymru Executive Member): ‘the pioneer model seems to be: a whole host of schools being told there’s going to be a jigsaw, and you’re going to be able to design your pieces in the jigsaw — we don’t know what the picture on the box

is, and we’ve no idea what jigsaw pieces the other schools are developing... and I have a real worry that you’re not going to have a curriculum in place to offer to schools in 2018, and you’re going to miss the 2019 statutory deadline as well.’

This leads us to return to our overview analogy. There is indeed a benign government bird circling high above everyone looking down (attempting to keep an eye on all that is happening below), waiting to swoop down on any potentially problematic issues. On the ground, there are busy pioneer professionals scurrying around working hard to fulfil the remit they have been given, but perhaps still developing new communities of practice: looking for signposts to tell them who their peers are, what they are doing and how it ties in with their own work. Somewhere in between are others looking down, including the civil servants and expert panels – as well as other groups such as universities providing initial teaching education and training – but it is still not clear that they, or the government ‘above’ them, can yet see how all the pieces of the jigsaw being created on the ground fit together and precisely when this jigsaw needs to be complete. When it is, there is potential for Wales to have an innovative – and internationally-leading – curriculum made in Wales, for Wales.



Professor Gary Beauchamp is Professor of Education and Associate Dean (Research) for the Cardiff School of Education and **Professor Tom Crick** is Professor of Computer Science & Public Policy and Deputy Director of Enterprise; both at Cardiff Metropolitan University. Prof Crick co-chaired the 2013 review of the ICT curriculum and chaired the expert advisory panel for the DCF, of which Prof Beauchamp was a member, and both are past or present members of the Welsh Government’s National Digital Learning Council (NDLC).

Delivering Change

Alan Lewis gives an on-the-ground perspective on the challenges of rolling out the Digital Competency Framework to digital natives

This is a time of great change for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Computer Science teaching, in terms of both provision and framework changes. However, this transition period presents an opportunity to redefine the role ICT and Computer Science plays in the curriculum and learning culture of students. The Digital Competency Framework (DCF) paves the way for digital literacy skills to be developed and integrated across the curriculum in a seamless and natural manner. Well, that's the official line, anyway.

ICT is a demanding subject to teach; it's constantly evolving, and covers a wide range of disciplines. Unlike other subjects, teachers can often find their skills lacking and behind the curve on what's being used by pupils; sentenced to being terminally un-hip. Pupils' skills often outstrip our own; they are the keepers of the flame, which is exactly how they like it. By the time we, as teachers or parents, get wind of what the new thing is, it's usually far too late and the horde will have moved onto the next new thing. Our window of opportunity to appear 'with it' has closed. ICT teachers often feel like we are chasing our own tails, and whilst that might make for a fun Vine video (some new video sharing app I just found out about, I predict a bright future for it), it is a thankless and frustrating task. Who'd be an ICT teacher, eh? But then, every teacher would make a strong and impassioned case that their subject has it even harder. Nobody knows how tough it is to teach X.

What we all have in common though is that we all must work incredibly hard to keep afloat. Hitting our targets (ours, not the pupils' of course – education is something that pupils are passively subjected to), the massive workload, the paperwork, the marking, the planning and strategising all lead to a screwed-up work/life imbalance,

high stress levels and the profession being at an all-time low. So, what better time for the DCF to come along?

I've recently been appointed as the Head of ICT, Computer Science and DCF at Crickhowell High School, one of the Welsh Government's 120 Pioneer Schools charged with overhauling the country's curriculum and professional development provision in the wake of the Donaldson Report. To implement the DCF is a daunting task; even more so at a new school. Ensuring the success of an initiative of this magnitude means leaning on, and taking advantage of, a huge amount of patience, indulgence and support from colleagues. This is a big ask of mature professional and personal relationships, but to expect it from fledgling relationships is positively rude of me. 'You know how you put blood, sweat and tears into what you do? Well, I'm here to ask for *more* from you.'

The DCF is going to have a huge impact on teachers' workload, and make them change how they practice. For some, it will mean them having to abandon their rut. We all like our ruts; they're comfy, safe, hard-earned and we don't give them up without a fight. We've all been at INSET sessions where the poor trainer is treated like a supply teacher on a rainy day. But surely, the one thing worse than having to actualise change is to be the one that's *telling* you (however nicely) to change. Don't hate the player, hate the game, son. Change is seldom easy, and even more rarely welcome. My grandmother always used to say to me, 'If you want to make enemies, try to change something'. And whilst I never understood the relevance of it as a child, it seems apt now.

What is giving me cause for optimism is that I left a job where I had professionally stagnated, to take up a post that allows me to express myself, get my mojo back and make a difference. You know how when you're on an interview, and you just *know*

you want this job more than anything else? As soon as I set foot in the school, I had that feeling. The feeling only grew stronger during the interview, as it was so clear that the Headteacher and her leadership team completely *get* the role ICT plays in the development of pupils' learning skills. On the first whole-school ICT policy I wrote, my vision statement included the sentence: 'Competence in ICT is... as important as numeracy and literacy'. Truthfully, I'm not entirely sure I believed it and I took it off later drafts. When, during my interview, with utter conviction the Headteacher said to me that she saw ICT as being every bit as important as literacy and numeracy, I knew I was home.

So, how will I deliver on the promise I once wrote, which even I didn't believe at the time? Firstly, I need to get other people to share that vision. The battle for hearts and minds begins. In every department there will be people who get it. I need like-minded people to evangelise, take risks, enthuse and inspire. Then, as a team, we'll need to start creating moments and hooks; to manufacture those *holy crap, that is so cool* instances where the technology comes to life and people see ICT like I do. That's my in. Once they've experienced that eureka moment, the rest will take care of itself. Then, like ripples across a pond, more and more people will be drawn in... staff, pupils and the community, and living in an educational DCF-fuelled utopia.

Well, that's how I want to see this playing out, but Mrs Lewis didn't raise any fools. I know not everyone will get onboard; some people, perhaps wilfully, won't get it; not everyone will be open to the plethora of ways in which ICT is revolutionising teaching and learning. And if they don't, well that says more about them than it does me. But, if we only do what we've always done, we'll only get what we've always had. If you're content with your lot in such a way, why are you still teaching?



Alan Lewis is Head of ICT, Computer Science and DCF at Crickhowell High School



'A commitment to truth-telling'

Joanna Penberthy

Dylan Moore meets the new Bishop of St Davids, Joanna Penberthy

'We with collars are like the backroom boys,' says Joanna Penberthy concluding our discussion, 'our job is to resource and encourage those without collars to be salt and light.'

'Backroom boys *and girls*,' I correct her, and she laughs.

'Yes, of course,' says the First Woman Bishop in Wales.

We have long since cleared up the fact that Penberthy is more than comfortable with the publicity that has inevitably accompanied her election, consecration and enthronement. 'Well, I was one of the first seventy women priests and so on,' she says in a manner that suggests she is used to being a trailblazer.

It isn't that joining a line of 129 bishops stretching right back to the patron saint of Wales himself sits lightly with Penberthy, it's the fact that it's abundantly clear

that her gender is completely irrelevant. Describing her promotion as 'very humbling', it is the 'great responsibility to live out [her] faith' that sits heavily on her shoulders, not the fact she is a woman.

Two days before her enthronement in the very place where St David prayed, she is resolutely focused on 'a commitment to truth telling' that she believes should be at the heart of what Christianity offers. 'I think, actually, we're lucky with our politicians in the Senedd,' she says, 'but at Westminster it seems to be all about spin, and then there's Brexit – and Trump.'

I challenge her conflation of the latter two phenomena and observe that many Christians will have voted to leave the EU, and for Donald Trump. 'Here's why I think Trump and Brexit are exactly the same,' Penberthy argues, 'and what is problematic about the debate: people are not speaking truthfully. I happen to have voted to remain, and maybe there are some good reasons to leave the EU, but they weren't part of the debate. The problem the government had in making the case to remain was that

they couldn't adequately deal with people's genuine questions. To explain that the EU is not to blame for some problems would be to admit that, actually, they have everything to do with their own austerity agenda'.

Strong words. But church intervention in the public square is entirely appropriate, says Penberthy; to say that Christians should only be focused on the eternal is to completely misunderstand the faith. 'The central thing about Christianity is that the Word became flesh. Jesus was a real person who lived under a specific regime. The Hebrew scriptures are a manual about how to live with others. Our job is to remind those in power what life is like for the weakest and most vulnerable, and that we need to create a society where everybody can thrive and flourish.'

Penberthy grew up in Rhyd-y-penau, Cardiff, where she attended the local primary and Cardiff High School: 'I had a good set of friends and was part of the choir'. Baptised as a baby and sent to Sunday school at Park End Presbyterian Church, it was not until she was a teenager

The problem the government had in making the case to remain was that they couldn't adequately deal with people's genuine questions. To explain that the EU is not to blame for some problems would be to admit that, actually, they have everything to do with their own austerity agenda

that Penberthy asked herself, 'what does this mean for me?'

In Penberthy's childhood there was palpable sense of Wales' Christian heritage in the daily world: 'assemblies in school, most adults seemed to profess Christianity.' But this did not become 'personal' for her until she decided to seek God for herself. 'If you're real, I prayed, make yourself known,' she says, and although there was no 'flash bang moment', at one particular Evensong service, Penberthy felt 'a sense of God's peace descended.'

'I decided to follow Jesus for myself,' she says. Confirmation followed, and then, during a visit to Winchester Cathedral, Penberthy found herself 'absolutely poleaxed' by a feeling that God was calling her to the ministry, aged just 16.

After completing studies at Newnham College, Cambridge, she spoke to her local vicar about attending theological college. At St John's, Nottingham, she was part of 'a vibrant community' and despite a small amount of opposition to her being a woman going into the ministry, the male-dominated college overwhelmingly accepted her. Two thirds of the way through her time there, Penberthy married a man in the year above her, and followed Adrian Legg to his first curacy in Doncaster, completing her studies at nearby Cranmer Hall. Then, at 24, she fell pregnant.

'I had no idea how to be a wife, no idea how to be a mother, and no idea how to be a minister,' she laughs. Penberthy spent the next ten years learning all three roles on the job, working as a non-stipendiary minister between raising four children. 'As soon as the youngest started school, I went into the ministry full time as Parish Development and Renewal Officer for the Church in Wales.' This job was based in Penarth, and in the ensuing decades Penberthy has built a CV of parish priesthood in communities

the length and breadth of Wales – St Asaph, Cayo, Llansawel, Tal-y-llychau – giving her a sense of 'just how diverse Wales is... how rich and varied we are as a nation.'

Having grown up in Cardiff, her experiences in rural communities 'where smallholders farm difficult terrain' have given her 'great respect for Christians in small, rural churches, where there's no flashy music and Sunday by Sunday you meet and pray and look after a sacred place.' Her congregations have ranged from three to fifteen to twenty, twenty-five, 'nothing like the hundred or so you get at Holy Trinity, Llandrindod,' from where Penberthy is making the transition to Llys Esgob, the very modest Bishop's 'Palace' outside Carmarthen.

Given that she's been elected because of talent not tokenism, I ask what others have seen in her to trust her with the position vacated by Wyn Evans. 'I've worked in the diocese,' says Penberthy, 'so I know the strategy: ministry not by the few but by the many; I'm respectful of other people and their gifts. And those that know me know that I'll bring energy and enthusiasm.' On priorities, Penberthy talks of prayer, 'where the reality of people's lives meet with the eternal God. We need to pray in our own lives, and also meet to pray.'

As one might expect, Penberthy's conversation is shot through with references to the Bible. She quotes 'one of Peter's letters' to explain the 'courage to act' she hopes to engender, 'not to bludgeon our neighbours, but to bear a gentle witness: *be prepared to give an account of the hope that is within you.*' She is quick to admit that 'as Christians, we are pretty bad at saying we have the answer and here it is'. Instead of proselytising, she encourages Christians to 'draw on the love and life and passion of a God committed to the world.'

'Jesus lived out his life in very difficult

political circumstances,' she says. 'In post-industrial Wales, where the need is obvious, or in post-Brexit Wales, where life will become very tough for farmers... God uses frail, strange humans to make a difference. We're not trying to convince people of an ideology... we're not selling a package that works... we're about honesty and truth.'

She cites an example from the Gospel of Mark where 'even Jesus learned by God speaking to him through someone else, someone who to him would have been a foreigner, the Syrophenician woman.'

Asked whether those Welsh Christians attempting to 'keep alive the flame of faith that St David handed to us' can learn from the communities who have changed the face of Britain in the last fifty years, particularly those from other faiths, Penberthy is clear: 'Most people, of whatever race, religion, ethnicity, all they want is to live peaceably with their families. There are actually very few people in any community who are extreme and want everybody to be like them. Like the prophet Isaiah said: every family will be able to sit under their own fig tree, and no-one will be afraid.'

It is an attractive vision, but is anybody listening? I put it to the Bishop that for many in Wales, the chance to connect, as she did as a teenager, with the nation's Christian heritage, simply isn't there. 'We have to start by being honest,' she agrees. 'There are families where there are four or five generations of disconnection with the church. And as Christians, we need not come too quickly with answers. We're called to be salt and light. And when salt is clumped together it's disgusting. So no holy huddles. As ministers, we have to listen to the experiences of people on the ground – businesspeople, carers, the unemployed – and equip them to live their faith. It's all very well saying the church is thriving in Africa and elsewhere. We have some unique challenges, because nowhere has ever been "post-Christian" before. And it's not about dragging people back to what was, it's about working out what Christianity means in the 21st century.'



Dylan Moore is Editor of
the welsh agenda

A wyddoch chi gallwch gysylltu â BT yn Gymraeg?

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


A Welsh Brexit

As the UK begins its withdrawal from the European Union, Jo Hunt runs the rule over the opportunities, threats and legal complexities

On June 23 2016, the people of Wales voted for the UK to leave the European Union. With its majority Leave vote of 52.5%, Wales has positioned itself apart from the other devolved nations where the majority vote had been to Remain. The Welsh vote may have come as something of a surprise. Wales, after all, has long been seen as pro-European, a left-leaning, small nation which, unlike the rest of the UK, is a net beneficiary of EU funding. Whilst membership of the EU comes with a price tag, the return on that for Wales has been some £3bn during the current funding period (2014-2020), particularly through the structural and investment funds for regional economic development, and through funding to agriculture. But public opinion in Wales was also closer to that in England on critical issues such as immigration, despite Wales having some of the lowest levels of immigration in the UK.

Wales's vote to leave also put the voting public out of step with the Welsh political establishment which (Welsh Conservative leader aside) overwhelmingly saw Wales's future as being part of the EU and part of the Single

Market. This Single Market is defined in the EU Treaties as 'an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, services, people and capital is guaranteed'. It is designed to replicate across 28 Member States, with its 500 million people, the trading conditions of one country. Trade within the Single Market should be free from tariffs and from protectionism and discrimination. The burden that may be felt by the same product encountering differences in laws across the different member states, is addressed through common EU wide rules, or in the States recognising each others' rules as equivalent. In January, the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru together presented the White Paper 'Securing Wales' Future', which spells out a first priority of retaining access to the Single Market for businesses in Wales. The benefits of tariff free trade and a common regulatory structure is seen as critical for the success of Welsh based industries, such as agri-food, and steel, as well as presenting Wales as an attractive target base for companies outside the EU looking to invest.



The Welsh vote may have come as something of a surprise. Wales, after all, has long been seen as pro-European, a left-leaning, small nation which, unlike the rest of the UK, is a net beneficiary of EU funding

But as has been made clear by the Prime Minister, the continued participation in the single market on these terms is not the outcome favoured by the UK Government. The expectation is that the UK will be leaving the Single Market and the customs union – the first because the four elements, free movement of goods, capital, services and people are seen by the EU as an indivisible whole, leaving the UK without the desired degree of control over immigration. Membership of the customs union meanwhile restricts the country's legal ability to negotiate trade deals unilaterally – preventing the UK from striking its own global trade deals. Looking North, and like Wales, Scotland favours a 'soft' Brexit, rather than the 'hard' Brexit currently on the cards. Both Wales and Scotland have stated that they would like to see the UK continue within the

agriculture and environment – grows on Brexit. This is because the ongoing process of the devolution of powers away from London to Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast has to date taken place in the context of the UK's membership of the EU. EU law has set important parameters for how devolved nations exercise their powers. The Government of Wales Act makes it clear that Wales cannot introduce any measures which breach EU law, for example, by standing in the way of the achievement of the single market. Additionally, in some heavily Europeanised areas which are also devolved areas, particularly agriculture and environment, Wales has been effectively implementing decisions taken elsewhere. So, the return of these powers from Brussels on Brexit may see an expansion in the policy making powers based in Cardiff. A distinctive

of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland'; however, this may carry a narrow reading for what comes back to Wales. And even if all powers are returned, it is clear that there may be new controls over how those powers are exercised, for as the Prime Minister has also said, there are, post Brexit, to be no new barriers created to living and doing business within the United Kingdom. The UK's own economic union, and internal market are currently sustained by the operation of EU law. Take the EU framework away, and the exercise of devolved powers across the UK may result in a patchwork of regulatory responses, making trade across the UK more burdensome and costly than it need be. So it may well be appropriate to restate a national level internal market principle for the UK, which will need to have the institutional machinery to support it. Some of this may see the use of the institutions which have to date managed relations across the UK, and which have been called into service in the Brexit negotiation planning process. The Sewel Convention, which says the Westminster Parliament will not legislate on devolved matters without devolved consent has, following the final decision on the new Wales Act 2017, now been put into legislation. However, it has only limited ability to 'protect' Welsh powers, as confirmed by the Supreme Court ruled in the Miller Article 50 case, where it was stated that putting the convention into legislation made absolutely no difference to its enforceability – it has political force alone and cannot be enforced by the Courts. There is certainly no legal veto for Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland over the Article 50 trigger, for the final deal, or the legislation that will repeal the European Communities Act 1972 that took the UK into the EU, the Great Repeal Bill. All rests in the realm of politics.

Whilst a separate Welsh membership of the single market and customs union is not on the cards, the potential for differentiation – for different rules across the UK in devolved policy areas such as agriculture and environment – grows on Brexit

single market through membership of the looser European Free Trade Association, and through that, the broader European Economic Area. Scotland has gone further yet, and has called for a differentiated solution for Scotland to be a part of the EEA on its own if the UK leaves. The UK Government position certainly doesn't foresee any such differentiated settlement with some parts of the UK in the single market, and some parts out. Instead, a whole UK approach is being pursued, with opportunities for the devolved views to be fed in through the intergovernmental Joint Ministerial Committees, though these are centrally driven and not the fora for joint decision making.

Whilst a separate Welsh membership of the single market and customs union is not on the cards, the potential for differentiation – for different rules across the UK in devolved policy areas such as

Welsh approach to environmental protection may be able to be pursued further, for example, and different choices on agricultural policy taken across the UK.

Of course, unless Wales also gets the financial resources to run these policies, the return of competence to the devolved level may be rather less attractive a proposition that first perceived. Any capacity issues currently being felt across Welsh political life will only be exacerbated by an increase in responsibilities. Further, there is no guarantee that the powers will indeed come to the devolved level, in accordance with the distribution of powers under the current Wales Act. Attempts may be made to recentralise policy, and return powers to London. The Prime Minister may have foreseen that on Brexit, 'the right powers are returned to Westminster, and the right powers are passed to the devolved administrations



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‘Never Waste a Good Crisis’:

plugging the infrastructure funding gap in a post-Brexit Wales

As the UK Government sets out its approach to Brexit, **Ed Evans** examines the potential impacts on infrastructure in Wales

The day to day conversations people are having on the subject of Brexit are set to continue for many weeks, months and, probably, years. Everyone is considering the impacts these dramatic changes will have on their lives, their families, their communities and future generations. The infrastructure community is no different. What will happen to funding? Will we be able to source the expertise we need? What about a rising cost of imported materials? Will we be able to afford to upgrade our infrastructure? Of course these concerns don't just matter to those involved in the industry, they matter to everyone who depends on our infrastructure to live their lives and businesses. The main concern is cash. Without it, we can't deliver anything, no matter how great our need or how high our aspirations.

So, when it comes to Brexit's impact on infrastructure in Wales, plugging the funding gap is probably a good place to start. The UK's impending exit from the EU has a number of implications which

are more pronounced in Wales than much of the UK given the degree to which we have benefitted from redistributive funds. Three of the main potential consequences for future infrastructure projects are:

- A reduction in the amount of funding available for infrastructure projects, if EU funding is not fully replaced by UK government funding – and there is no guarantee that a UK Government will approach redistribution in the same way, particularly if you throw in a little politics!
- Fewer options/sources for the Welsh government and Welsh local authorities to obtain funding and/or financing
- UK-controlled funding being allocated according to UK goals and priorities, which may be different from Welsh and EU goals and priorities.

So how do we currently get funding and finance?

The main sources of EU funding for infrastructure are:

- Connecting Europe Facility (CEF): the fund supports the development of interconnected trans-European networks in the fields of transport, energy and digital services
- European Regional Development Fund

(ERDF): investment in infrastructure is one of the key activities supported by the ERDF

- Horizon 2020: the EU's research and innovation programme. Some of the funds are for developments in infrastructure, such as improvements to transport.

In addition to funding, European financing is also available for infrastructure projects via the European Investment Bank (EIB) which lends money, on favourable terms, to projects that support EU objectives. It is a significant source of finance for UK infrastructure projects, lending €7.7 billion to the UK in 2015 of which two thirds (€5.5 billion) was provided to infrastructure. But the EIB's capital comes directly from its shareholders, not EU budgets. And these are the 28 Member States of the European Union – soon to become 27!

So, what happens post-Brexit? Are there any guarantees? Remember the pledge of £350m a day for the NHS post-Brexit? Did anyone really believe that? An alternative fact maybe?

The UK will continue to receive funding from the EU as long as it's a member state – this will still be the case after Article 50 has been triggered and negotiations are ongoing – for however long that may be. Legally binding

contracts and agreements will be in place which will need to be honoured. So that's the EU guarantee – time limited.

In terms of UK Government guarantees the picture is a little less convincing. After the Referendum, the Chancellor gave a number of assurances relating to the replacement of any lost EU funding. So, there is some confidence. However, in his Conference speech, the Chancellor announced that beyond the Autumn Statement, the Treasury will offer a guarantee to bidders whose projects 'meet UK priorities and value for money criteria'. This could mean many things to many people. The Chancellor has since announced that the Treasury will provide a guarantee for all new structural and investment fund projects, signed after the Autumn Statement, and before we leave the EU, 'where they provide value for money and support domestic strategic priorities'. So much clearer!

The UK's access to EU funding programmes will be subject to negotiations during the EU withdrawal process. The UK may still receive funding from certain EU programmes even after it has left the Union. Some of the funds directly managed by the Commission, such as Horizon 2020, already include countries that are not EU member states. In addition, Norway and Switzerland take part in European Territorial Cooperation programmes (also known as INTERREG programmes) that are designed to promote cooperation between member states on shared challenges and opportunities. However, these funds are relatively small and both Norway and Switzerland are net contributors to them.

Discussions over the future participation of the UK (and Wales) in the Single Market could be of particular relevance here, as the transport, telecoms and energy networks are seen as key infrastructure sectors to be developed to support the functioning of the Single Market.

The EU Treaties provide for the creation of Trans-European Networks (TENs) across the EU in the areas of transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructures but the Welsh and UK Governments may no longer be bound by

It is unclear what approach the UK Government will take to fill any gaps left by any post-Brexit withdrawal of EIB funding

these obligations in the areas for which they are responsible. These obligations include a requirement for the UK Government to electrify both the north and south Wales main railway lines by 2030. Both projects are hugely significant to Wales.

So, could the EIB still lend to the UK after 'Brexit'? In 2011-2015, 89% of the EIB's €339 billion in total investment was invested in EU member states. The remaining 11% was spent outside the EU. However, as a result, any continued lending to the United Kingdom would have to be unanimously agreed by the EIB's board of governors (the finance ministers) and so the UK's future relationship with the EIB is likely to be a feature of exit negotiations.

It is unclear what approach the UK Government will take to fill any gaps left by any post-Brexit withdrawal of EIB funding. They may consider issuing 'infrastructure bonds' (a way to match private investors and pension funds with new transport and energy schemes) or the launch of a UK investment bank. Could there be a role for a Development Bank for Wales?

However, regardless of Brexit, most in the business community, especially the construction sector, and increasingly those in politics, are of the view that it's time to get our infrastructure proposals in a better state and aligned with economic drivers so we gain maximum benefit. This is where the Welsh Government's proposals for a National Infrastructure Commission for Wales come into the discussion. The Commission gives us a golden opportunity to get our affairs in order, to set out what infrastructure we need to grow our economy and why we need it. This should be followed by the how – how we deliver this infrastructure, how we plan the skills and resource we need and, critically, how we source the funds we need to deliver it. A clear infrastructure strategy will give us the clarity needed to attract more investment – from whatever source.

A reform of public sector procurement in Wales and the UK is desperately needed.

Governments in Cardiff, Westminster and beyond have long tinkered with this but have consistently failed to tackle the cultural resistance of bureaucrats in the public sector to simplify, streamline, speed up and reduce the cost of procurement. Far too often they've hidden behind EU directives blaming cumbersome procedures on Europe. Arguably, leaving the EU may do nothing to improve this situation unless these same bureaucrats change their spots. This must be addressed as a priority – and not just for the construction sector.

The Wales Act transfers significant additional powers to the National Assembly for Wales (although it takes a few back too!), including increasing its borrowing powers from £500m to £1bn. Whilst this is still a relatively modest amount, particularly when compared to Scotland and considering the investment needed in Wales, it is still a major step forward. The catch, however, is that borrowing needs to be repaid, which will impact on revenue and therefore spending on health, education and the rest. This means that, if we use these powers, we need assurance that the return on investment is real – another consideration for the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales.

Brexit uncertainty is certainly not good for business and it could be potentially disastrous if EU funding gaps are not plugged. However, arguably, many of the potential solutions should have been pursued regardless of Brexit – perhaps it's fundamental changes like this which force the cultural shifts needed to do things better. As the saying goes, Never Waste a Good Crisis.



Ed Evans is Director of the Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA) Cymru.



Swansea: time to deliver

Dai Lloyd is optimistic that the Tidal Lagoon Project and City Deal for Swansea Bay can revitalise South West Wales, but urges that opportunities must be 'grasped with both hands'

Ever since the decline in heavy industry and the heady days of 'Copperopolis', Swansea has been searching valiantly, yet mainly unsuccessfully, for the next 'big thing'.

Often perceived as the 'Cinderella' on the Welsh map, local inhabitants over the past couple of decades have witnessed impressive growth in the neighbouring city to the East, yet growth within the land of the 'Jack Army' has been frustratingly slow, and there are many reasons for that, far too many in fact to mention here.

But what of the future? Can those of us who reside on the banks of the Tawe look forward to a change in our economic fortunes? Well I believe that we can, but we do need a few key decisions to go our way over the next few months. There can be no doubt that the city faces an unprecedented window of opportunity in 2017, and it needs to be grasped with both hands.

Importantly, there are signs that the Welsh Government is finally recognising

Swansea as a truly regional capital for South West Wales, and is starting to back major schemes which can create the economic boost that is so desperately needed.

One of the most positive developments in recent years is the recognition amongst traditional counties in South West Wales that cooperation rather than competition gives us the best chance of economic success.

The work that has taken place between Swansea Council, along with neighbouring Neath Port Talbot, Carmarthenshire and

Pembrokeshire in developing the Swansea Bay City Region Board and the subsequent City Deal bid is heartening and shows a maturity, and a regional vision, which has historically been lacking.

Traditional economic development strategies simply haven't delivered the required uplift, so a fresh vision of the city region based on new technologies within highly targeted sectors is a positive step forward.

With a possible combined investment

Swansea has a wonderful opportunity, simply by virtue of its geography and tidal range, to once again take its place on the world stage

of £1.3bn, the City Deal has the potential to provide the springboard for further growth and clustering around these sectors. Clearly it is not without risk, and the key challenge for the City Deal team will be to actually deliver on the private sector interest which forms part of the current 'pitch'. Having secured the support of the Welsh Government for the City Deal, it is imperative that the UK Government now follows suit.

In singing the praises of the local authorities for their part in developing a focused City Deal bid, we must not ignore the increasing role that research institutions are playing in the area. The work that Swansea University is undertaking in conjunction with Tata Steel in developing a Steel Sciences Centre is a positive signal that the area is serious about not just defending the steel industry, but developing and taking a lead in steel manufacturing processes. As this past year has reminded us, steel making can be a volatile business operating on a global stage, but this research centre, coupled with the new capital investment

A key learning point for the city has been that we cannot simply try to replicate Cardiff

package currently proposed by Tata in Port Talbot, is a source of positivity.

Both Swansea University and the University of Wales Trinity St David are stepping up to the plate to help engender a culture of research and innovation. What we will need to see are more ideas being brought to market, and creating local jobs as part of that process. The wellbeing and life sciences centres planned as part of the City Deal provides us with an opportunity to do just that. The health research and

[The tidal lagoon] would place Swansea and the rest of Wales at the forefront of sustainable energy production, research and innovation

development sector is a crowded field, but the private sector interest shown so far in the life science project provides a level of confidence. There is no reason to say that Swansea Bay cannot play a key role in this area going forward.

So while we will hope to see significant clustering of research and innovation in Health over the next few years, the scope for innovation and growth in other key sectors is equally exciting. The need to develop sustainable energy solutions is one of the major issues facing the world. Let's make no bones about it: Swansea has a wonderful opportunity, simply by virtue of its geography and tidal range, to once again take its place on the world stage. The tidal lagoon proposal, which has been debated and argued for over ten years, really is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the city region. It provides a unique opportunity to not only play a part in developing and refining sustainable energy solutions, but also provides the area with an opportunity to become a leader in the field.

Quite apart from the immediate economic benefits through construction jobs, it would place Swansea and the rest of Wales at the forefront of sustainable energy production, research and innovation. I have never seen a project in this part of the world which has managed to garner such a depth of support across public, private and political boundaries. The case has been argued, and it has been won, unequivocally, culminating in the publication of the recent Hendry Review on behalf of the UK Government. This is a game changer of a project, and the UK Government needs to back it.

The City Deal and tidal lagoon projects are symptomatic of a change in culture

among political leaders, businesses and research institutions across the Swansea Bay area which essentially says 'we've had enough of being second best'. This change in ambition is vital, some have said 'critical', but the city needs to keep up the momentum.

Even if the City Deal and tidal lagoon project find favour, as they should with the UK Government, the area needs to keep thinking about the next 'big thing'.

A key learning point for the city has been that we cannot simply try to replicate Cardiff. On that basis, we will fail. We need to be different, and we need to be ready to create, and take, our opportunities. For example, with a growing body of Welsh Law now in existence, many argue that the devolution of justice to Wales will inevitably follow. In this instance, I would like to see Swansea establishing itself as Wales' judicial capital – similar to the role that Bloemfontein undertakes in South Africa, and it is this type of thinking that I would like see the Welsh Government commit to as the Welsh devolution project progresses.

There can be no doubt that there are many reasons to be optimistic about our city's future – more than at any other stage of recent history some might argue, but we need decisions to go our way over the next few months. The arguments have been won – it's now time to deliver.



Dai Lloyd is a Plaid Cymru Assembly Member for South Wales West.

Kirsty Williams

Picking Things Apart



Owen Hathway meets the Cabinet Secretary for Education to discuss the challenges of the role, the experience of opposition she is bringing to the department and what it's like being the Assembly's sole Liberal Democrat

In the midst of a year that turned the idea of political shock into cliché, it is easy to forget just how unexpected some of the events of 2016 were in Welsh politics. As the international fallout continues around the Brexit and Trump revolutions, it is worth reflecting on the fact that, but for the final voice in a roll call of AMs nominating a new First Minister for Wales saying his name, Carwyn Jones would have lost Labour's grip on the Government. That voice of course belonged to the sole remaining Welsh Liberal Democrat, Kirsty Williams, who not only bucked the trend of her party in returning a winning election result, but within two weeks of the last ballot being counted became the first non-Labour politician to hold the education portfolio in the devolution era.

As I ask the Cabinet Secretary for Education to reflect on that outcome, she confesses that it's not something she would have imagined being a credible proposition on the evening the results were announced. Indeed, as she recalls the events leading up to her appointment, it is easy to understand

what a whirlwind that period was. Hardly a week passed between her explanation to her family that she was standing down as the Welsh Lib Dem leader and outlining to them that she was now to head up one of the biggest portfolios in Welsh democracy.

To some she had no choice but to join the Government when that opportunity arose. What impact, aside from now famously sparing Carwyn Jones the blushes of losing Labour's last national government, can one individual have made in this Assembly term by sitting on the outside in political limbo? Perhaps in a few months' or years' time Lord Elis Thomas or Nathan Gill will provide an answer to that one for us. However, that is not to disguise the political gamble she has taken. A Lib Dem politician who took on the decision on tuition fees alone is a braver person than most. 'The irony was not lost on me,' Williams admits. However, to have also to shoulder the burden of PISA rankings, curriculum and qualification reforms and a host of other historic concerns in what is arguably the most high profile cabinet position outside the office of First Minister, is hardly opting for an easy life. Doing all this while entering a Labour government she has so vocally, and at times brutally, criticised and exposed over the years, is not a move for the fainthearted.

Perhaps what most compelled her to take the role is that very criticism. 'That was the challenge from the First Minister to me,' she explains. 'You've banged on about

this enough, you've talked to me, you've challenged me enough about this particular subject; well, let's see.' Accompanying that challenge is the reality of being the person in the firing line. Since taking up the position, there have been criticisms by politicians over certain decisions; the most high profile centred on the flagship class sizes policy, a key issue for the Liberal Democrats during the Assembly election. These have naturally come from opposition Assembly Members, but also those on the government backbenches.

I wondered if there's a pressure in being the sole Lib Dem in government that her predecessors did not have to endure, but Kirsty Williams does not see it that way. 'That pressure comes directly from myself. I have high expectations of myself and the department in terms of delivery.' In fact, the isolation is what the Cabinet Secretary says drives her to be focused on delivery. 'I welcome scrutiny from all sides of the chamber, as that keeps me on my toes... I can't guarantee some kind of whipped party line. I have to win the arguments.' This notion of scrutiny is an interesting one. Kirsty Williams is unique in a number of ways in heading up the education portfolio, no less so than in being the first individual to do so with prior experience of being in opposition in Cardiff Bay. You sense it is something she wears with pride. 'I'm always judging myself on what I would ask the Education Minister today. I am

constantly asking myself those questions. I've had 16 years of picking things apart and I come to this brief still doing that.'

Approaching a year in post and, whisper it, things have gone quite well. The big stumbling blocks of the Diamond review and PISA have come and gone and the sector is relatively settled. Undoubtedly, as major reports on the supply sector and curriculum reform start landing on her desk, the Cabinet Secretary will have further hurdles to overcome, and certainly those initial wins will have to come back around. I put it to her that things have been far less volatile than anticipated and she's still standing after those difficult bridges have been crossed. 'There are significant challenges in the portfolio. I went into it with my eyes open. I wasn't under any illusions of the scale of the challenge, but what I've been determined to do is make those big decisions. Not try and put them off, not try and kick them into the long grass. Face

up to things the way they are, not try and sugarcoat them and pretend that things are any different, as I don't think that does anybody any favours. It's gone incredibly quickly and, yeah, I'm still standing.'

You could forgive any Cabinet Secretary for taking the time to breathe but there's a real sense in talking with Kirsty Williams that this is not the space for personal reflection. On average, an Education Minister in Wales has enjoyed around a 30 month period in post since Rosemary Butler became the first to take on the role. On that schedule we're a quarter of the way through this particular reign. 'Time has flown and that reminds me how potentially short an opportunity you have to make a difference, and I intend to make sure every single day of that is used to good effect.' The truth about education reform, as we have seen from looking at international examples, is that their success or failures are often not appreciated for many years. This is the poisoned chalice for any

education minister. They are living by the results of other people's actions. So if she is not setting aside time to look back just yet what will she want that legacy to be when she does eventually do so? 'A relentless focus on the child first and always, and creating a system which will allow each child to reach their full potential, regardless of what that potential is for that individual. If in 10, 15, 20 years' time our poorest children are performing to their potential rather than to the legacy in which they are born into, I'd settle for that.'

Owen Hathway is Wales Policy Officer at the National Union of Teachers.



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'Things to think about this year' *Hay Festival at 30*

Dylan Moore talks to Hay director Peter Florence about the festival's audience, its thirtieth year, and how to 'reboot liberalism'

'What have we got in Wales that's truly world class?' asks Peter Florence. He lets the question hang just long enough to imply the exercise won't take us long before making some tentative suggestions. 'The rugby stadium... Bryn...'

'Hay Festival,' I say. Like the IWA, Hay Festival enters its fourth decade this year, and there is no doubt that what Florence calls 'one of the biggest liberal platforms in the world' belongs on our paper napkin list.

Quickly outgrowing its humble origins in the tiny mid Wales border town of Hay-on-Wye, the festival is now an established international brand, guaranteeing high quality events, intellectual rigour and no small amount of *joie de vivre*.

What shines through my conversation with Florence is the degree to which the Hay audience are esteemed. It would be easy for the festival to simply pin its 'world class' credentials to the stellar list of speakers it attracts to the ten-day early summer extravaganza in the Black Mountains or its year-round programme of events from Aarhus in Denmark to Arequipa in Peru and from Kells in Ireland to Kerala in south India.

Toni Morrison, Arthur Miller, Jimmy Carter, Salman Rushdie, Mario Vargas Llosa and, of course, Bill Clinton, have all received the famous white rose given to Hay's guests

at the end of each event. But Florence is not a namedropper. Instead he points me to a tweet in which a visitor to Hay described the festival as 'where I get my fix of things to think about for the next year'. It is in these things that Florence takes pride, and comfort that the event is doing its job. He tells me that much work has been done on finding out just who the Hay crowd are.

Astonished, he tells me that fourth on the list of publications read by the Hay audience – after *The Economist*, *The Spectator* and another publication he deems 'too embarrassing' to reveal – is *Nursing Times*. Medicine is first on the list of professions. Higher education is second. What Florence wants me to understand is that 'our audience are influencers, they are activists of various kinds; they have their own audiences – and are out there

'Our audience are influencers, they are activists of various kinds; they have their own audiences – and are out there having an impact on the world'

having an impact on the world.' Hay, by implication, is where these people charge their batteries. 'They come not for answers but for questions... how to keep moving forward.' And, of course, to read books, drink wine, and talk long into the night.

Among lots of other things, of course, Hay has always been a party. Famously conceived around the Florence kitchen table, despite its exponential growth the festival has never lost that feeling of being a fantasy dinner party, with the smartest and most charming guests you can imagine. But this year, Florence sounds a note of caution. 'We were getting ready to have a party,' he says of the 30th anniversary. 'But with what's going on in the world, it's going to be really important to ask ourselves the question of how we reboot liberalism.'

'It's not just Trump,' he says. 'It's about how we engage with the 100 million people who voted for him. Even if you can dismiss a half of them as just too *stupid* to understand what they were doing, there are an awful lot of smart people who voted for him, and when you look – just at his character – you have to ask yourself, was there really *nothing* that set the alarm bells ringing? *Really? Nothing?*'

So, how will this year's Hay programme reflect these concerns, and begin to 'reboot



liberalism? 'Well, there'll be a very European flavour this year,' promises Florence, 'so you can take that as you will.' To mark the thirtieth anniversary, Hay will release a number of lists, fun exercises in celebrating 'things like the best thirty books from the last thirty years.'

Hay's shared birthday with the IWA also coincides with a massive anniversary in the history of Western thought. It is 500 years since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenburg Cathedral, sparking the Protestant Reformation. 'We thought 95 was quite a lot,' Florence laughs, 'so we've just stuck to the 30, and have commissioned 30 thinkers to come up with theses to reform aspects of culture.'

Each thinker will be allowed a 30-minute lecture to deliver their reforming ideas to an audience before having a 30-minute interlocution. This fairly familiar Hay format will then be followed by a further 30 minutes during which a panel of four – a writer, a scientist, a philosopher and a lawyer – will be allowed to discuss, and pick apart, the ideas put forward. Like all Hay events, it is an unfussy format that promises much simply because it provides a platform for some of the world's sharpest minds to collide, clash and cohere in a public forum.

The anniversary has also prompted

Florence to reflect on changes in the wider world over the three decades that Hay has been running. Quite apart from world events, some developments were 'inconceivable' in 1987. 'Someone showed me a photograph of myself the other day,' says Florence, 'holding one of those giant brick mobile phones. It was a different world.' Given Hay's propensity to keep moving forward, it comes as no surprise to learn that Florence's 'favourite statistic' is this: '70% of this year's university graduates will end up doing jobs that don't exist yet. I mean, in 1987, who would have thought that a web designer was a thing?'

Talk of the past brings us to an inevitable final question: 'Will you still be doing this in another thirty years? What does the future hold for Hay?' Florence admits to being 'exhausted – and it's only February'. He can only think of the next three years, not thirty, but there seems no danger of Wales losing one of its world-class jewels any time soon. 'Someone with more energy and a greater range of skills than me will take it on,' says Florence, self-deprecatingly, 'so if you know anyone, let me know.'



Dylan Moore is editor of the *welsh agenda*

I first met a very fresh-faced Peter Florence exactly thirty years ago when he was setting about his Impossible Dream of founding a Literary Festival in Hay, and so came for an interview on *Firsthand*, the Radio Wales arts programme I then presented. The ambition, the passion and the determination were all evident from the beginning, and how he, his family, and now his team have delivered, from the early days at the riverside, on to the schoolrooms, and finally at the all bells-and-whistles site which proclaims Hay to the world each and every May, come hail (often) or (occasionally) shine.

To go to Hay, as artist or audience, is to participate in one of the wonders of Modern Wales: a capsule for worldwide literature to land amongst us, a showcase for Welsh writers to reach out, a place which never stints on excellence of intent or the celebration of fun and provocation both. I sometimes think that if we could capture, all year round, the DNA of the Hay International Literature Festival and let it infuse the shrivelled veins of our cultural complacency, then what Wales might yet be could yet happen, not as the passing dream of summer but as the living heartbeat of a country of fresh and daily purpose.

Dai Smith

Hedd Wyn at 100

Ellis Humphrey Evans was killed at the Battle of Passchendaele on 31 July 1917. At that year's National Eisteddfod, Evans, who had been awarded several chairs for his poetry at local eisteddfodau in previous years, was inspired to take the bardic name *Hedd Wyn* (blessed peace) from the way sunlight penetrated the mist in the valleys of Meirionydd where he had been born and raised. Famously, Hedd Wyn was awarded the bardic chair, which was draped in a black sheet.

The poet's bardic chair remains on display at Yr Ysgwrn, Evans' Trawsfynydd home, preserved by the poet's nephew, Gerald Williams. In August 2014, the Welsh Memorial Park was unveiled at Pilckem Ridge near Ypres, close to the spot where Hedd Wyn was wounded. To mark the 100th anniversary of his death, a new Bardic chair has been designed by students in Flanders, and will be presented to the Welsh Government as a gift from the Flemish Hedd Wyn Society at a special service in Birkenhead Park in September.

We pay our own tribute to Hedd Wyn by publishing these two poems, translated from the Welsh by **Menna Elfyn**.



Gwenfron

One time, I walked with my love, hand in hand
To the wind's laughter through boughs of the land,
A moon in the sky and a moon in the lake
A nightingale's song exalting the vale.
Never was loving more lovely than this
Between the murmur of sea and the hum of breeze
Our vows, we affirmed, between my dearest and me.

Many years later in woodland and grove
Bereft of leaf, breeze, amid drifts of snow,
Those carefree days when young – faraway
From a myriad woes, anguish and rage,
A gale wind howling in woods in their wake.
Yet, through cruel winters and the roar of the sea
Nothing could sever the love of my dearest and me.

And my darling and I have now grown old
Our hair is white, evenings dark and cold,
Our eyes too are hazy as days seem to fade
With our bones so fragile, as our flesh gives way.
But love everlasting is forever strong
An eternal realm where we'll soon belong.
We'll leave with grace on the wave,
Fanwylid *and me.

Notes: *my dearest

This translation was commissioned to commemorate WW1 by Salford Quays and funded by the Arts Council of Wales and the Arts Council of England.

Atgo: Reminiscence

Only a purple moonlight
Bruising the hill – its tale
In the sound of afon Prysor
Singing in the vale.

Dim ond lleuad borffor
Ar fin y mynydd llwm;
A swm hen afon Prysor
Yn canu yn y Cwm.



Menna Elfyn is an award-winning poet and playwright who writes with passion of the Welsh language and identity. She is the best known and most translated of all modern Welsh-language poets, and is President of Wales PEN Cymru

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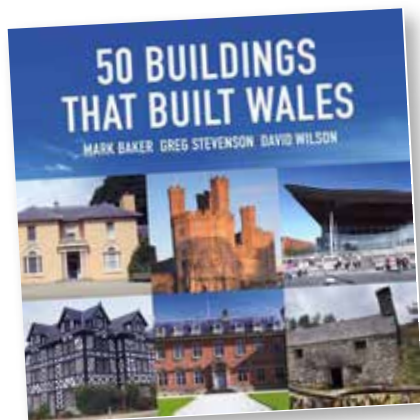
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Reviews

50 Buildings that Built Wales | All That Lies Beneath/What I Know I Cannot Say | Testing Times | Our Holy Ground | Cove | Farewell Innocence/Ride the White Stallion | Reinventing a Small, Worldly City: The Cultural and Social Transformation of Cardiff



50 Buildings that Built Wales

Mark Baker, Greg Stevenson,
David Wilson
Graffeg, 2016

Jonathan Adams

In the late 1990s, every book that had been published on the architecture of Wales could be fitted into a shoebox. Today a couple of sturdy shelves are required. The Graffeg publishing house deserves great credit for the part it has played in this mini boom. Their books are cleverly pitched at a non-specialist readership. The formula combines high quality photography with sparse text. The odd, unpunctuated phrase is taken from the text and splashed over the headline images in large type: a graphical idiom we recognise from the pages of magazines and websites. Their books are attractive, accessible and reasonably priced. The conscientious Welsh coffee table is incomplete without at least one of them.

The presentation of this volume is

particularly engaging, with its stout square format, bold lettering and a precisely composed, single point image of the gorgeous frontage of Tredegar House. It could not be more rigidly constructed. This is, perhaps, just as well because the title, *50 Buildings that Built Wales*, immediately places us on a scaffolding of wobbly metaphor, wrapped around a crumbling buttress of historical erudition. It's always discouraging when you can't tell which is supporting which.

In their preface the two writers, both architectural historians, define their terms of reference: 'These are the buildings that built the modern Welsh nation; the structures that formed our sense of what Wales means and what the country and her people are.' I do like this: I am easily persuaded that the relative permanence and physical presence of buildings can embody significance that, in some cases, is equal to the power of the landscape. But well before the end of the short preface, they have given up the ghost: 'Ultimately this is a personal selection. We each know the buildings that make our own Wales.' By qualifying their selection as 'personal', the two historians sidestep the very debate that they supposedly seek to initiate.

So what exactly is the book intended to be? At the least it should encourage the reader to visit the various locations - but there is no help in this direction: nothing about precise locations, accessibility or opening hours. In its more superficial passages it resembles one of those in-flight magazines that you find down the back of the seat on a budget airline. On other pages you find yourself reading what seems to be a chunk of a doctoral thesis, dwelling on the irrelevant detail of the dimensions of a shrub that once

'These are the buildings that built the modern Welsh nation; the structures that formed our sense of what Wales means and what the country and her people are'

grew on the terrace of a stately home.

While it is a pleasure to leaf through the book's many dozens of lovely photographs - the majority produced by David Wilson (who is credited as one of the three authors) - the text is a headache. It veers alarmingly in style and quality, and more frustratingly, in its application of the titular metaphor. How, for example, could Parys Mountain, the site of an open cast copper mine, ever be considered a building - let alone a 'building that built Wales'? Similarly Pont Trefechan, which is included not because of what it is, but because it was the site of the influential Welsh language protest of February 1963. In the authors' account of the event the 'building' is clearly insignificant. Few would argue that the Welsh language is not the most vital of our cultural assets, but its endurance is due to words, spoken and written, not to buildings. This is not to say that significant events and

places cannot be intertwined: in the case of Tryweryn, rightly included here, the presence of the dam and the reservoir conveys the full callousness of the injustice, and will do so as long as they exist.

The economy of their production is no less significant to the success of Graffeg than its refreshing approach to graphic design. On the evidence of *50 Buildings...* the budget could not run to employing an editor, or even a proof reader. The text is rich with grammatical and syntactical errors, and even malapropisms which should never have made it into print. For example Caernarfon Castle was 'an attempt to assimilate royal authority over a local population'; or Owain Glyndwr, '...whose legacy is both inspiring yet controversial.' Neuadd Pantycelyn, newly built in the 1950s is '...an evocative and palimpsest building.' There are many more such to endure, or to enjoy.

Something more of the sense of the project has been sacrificed to achieve a geographical spread. 'Buildings' in the north

outnumber those in the south, and there is a robust revisionism in such statements as 'The Llangollen Canal... represents the aspirations of an industrialising nation, whose manipulation of landscape and its resources reached its peak in north-east Wales.'

The more substantial and informative parts of the book are the accounts of stately homes. This reflects the specialism of at least one of the authors, but does little to make the case that any of them has played a part in 'building the modern Welsh nation'.

I have enough prior knowledge of some of the more modern buildings to recognise in the text many errors of technical and stylistic nomenclature and of historic fact. To list them all would be tedious, and perhaps they don't matter when the text so often seems like an optional extra, filling the spaces between the images.

After all that negativity, it is important to say that this is a book to be welcomed and even embraced. It has tried to do something

difficult and very worthwhile with what were evidently limited resources. It is, at least, thought provoking and at its heart is the admirable proposition that buildings, whether they are special or quotidian, can be vessels for a sense of nationhood, and that we should care for them better than we often do for that reason alone.

I would like to see it done again. A second edition, capitalising on the success of the first, with the benefit of an editor, a sense-checker, a fact-checker, and with the same authors given the time and space they clearly need to adhere to their own metaphorical thesis.

Jonathan Adams is Principal of Jonathan Adams + Partners Architects, working on current Welsh projects that range in scale from sculptural monuments to small towns. He is the architect of the Wales Millennium Centre



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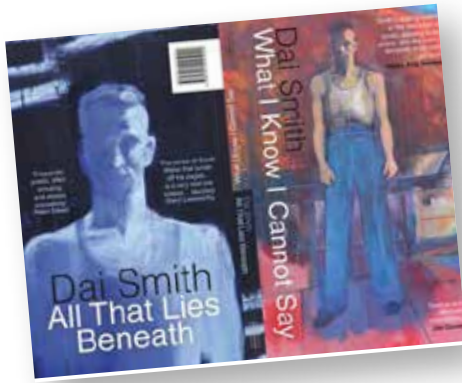
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What I Know I Cannot Say/ All That Lies Beneath

Dai Smith
Parthian, 2016

Peter Stead

In a recent Learned Society of Wales lecture Wynn Thomas spoke of how a generation ago it was historians who seemed to dominate the cultural debate and determine the agenda in Wales. Scholars such as Glanmor Williams, Gwyn A. Williams and Dai Smith certainly provided a context in which a popular political confidence could buttress the drift to Devolution. Today there is far less political confidence, even less a sense of direction, and the mantle has passed from the firm narrative and values of historians to the subjective voices of a new generation of artists, poets and novelists. We live in a Wales that has come to expect style, challenge, coherence and relevance from its arts practitioners to a degree that eludes our politicians.

As it happens that cultural sea-change can be traced in the career of Dai Smith, a historian whose PhD had been on the Stay-Down strikes of the 1930s and whose first book was an edited volume entitled 'A People and a Proletariat'. From the outset some of his readers noted that for Smith 'his adjectives were as important as his nouns' and that metaphors were asked to carry a lot of weight in clinching his argument. Some thought this indulgence, others argued that Welsh history was being enriched by a scholar who first and foremost thought of himself as a writer. Now having chartered a

richly rewarding path through both biography and cultural autobiography this writer has begun to claim his place on the annual list of new fiction from Wales.

His latest volume, entitled either *All That Lies Beneath* or *What I Know I Cannot Say* depending on how you pick it up, is in a way designed to showcase literary confidence and versatility. The *Lies Beneath* section essentially consists of six short stories, three concerning Betrayal and three Avenging, all of which stand alone and in the best traditions of the genre immediately hook you into rich detail and ingenious themes. The *Cannot Say* section is essentially a novella and concerns characters that we had been introduced to in Smith's earlier volume *Dream On*. This story is more easily paced than the other six, covers wider biographical themes and gives the reader the comfort that comes from having been satisfactorily transported into a novel that is in the process of being written. Has Smith, we wonder, reintroduced the serialised novel?

The stories remind us of Smith's earlier preoccupation with the history of the South Wales Coalfield. In 'Soixante Huitards, all', the first story of Betrayal, a young Welsh student visiting a prominent Radical dignitary in the USA finds it convenient in conversation to exaggerate his own father's background as a Communist coal miner. On this occasion the student appreciated that his non-militant father had essentially 'paid his dues for him': he felt ashamed but knew that 'his father would have forgiven him his lapse'. What is important, of course, in that situation is the appreciation both by the student and ourselves of the varying yet vital roles of context, values, loyalties and identity.

All of Smith's stories are either authentically set in or related to the South Wales Valleys but it is in the two parts of 'The Bailey Report' story that the Valleys move into centre-stage. Here Smith uses the conventions of television news reporting to analyse the matter of how the Valleys are projected by both reporters and their interviewees and how our politics are shaped by that nexus. There is a reference to those in Wales who have developed 'a country busily creating a living out of itself as a cultural artefact', a process Smith has elsewhere referred to as 'the making and faking of Wales'. In this

story the need is made for a clear sweeping away of stereotypes and for a reassertion of innate values. 'Here in this Valley', argues one broadcaster, 'indeed in all our industrial valleys, there have lived people of quality'. It is suggested that perhaps it is this realisation that should inspire our identity, loyalty and politics. It has certainly provided the inspiration of all Smith's writings whatever the genre.

As intriguing and inventive as the stories are, one suspects that it is in the novella that Smith is most fully emotionally and culturally engaged. The old miner, Dai Maddox, has been invited to record his life-story and the broadcaster (his son's former partner) has provided a list of questions as a guide. Most readers who know Dai Smith will have thought 'Cue, history of the South Wales Miners'. What actually follows is certainly History but not of the sort expected. What Dai Maddox proceeds to convey is his own experience of semi-rural poverty, of the sheer draining sameness of mining as a job, of military service of the bloodiest sort at Monte Cassino and of the role of art in both his own and his married life. In every page of this reminiscence the reality of a life lived in the South Wales Valleys of the twentieth century is lovingly evoked. In delineating the complexity of this life in a specific yet universal culture Smith is measuring up to the challenges that characters confronted in the stories tucked away in the other half of the book.

Dai Maddox sums it all up for us as he relives his years as a miner: 'but remembering it, truly remembering it, is not, though I can put it no other way, in the detail of it - not really. It is in the beat, in the pulse of its memory, unbidden and unwanted in your blood'. We certainly needed to be told the story of the People who became a Proletariat: we needed a different sensitivity and set of skills to expose the huge emotional, physical and aesthetic forces that always underlay that History. Our dues have been paid for us, paid, as one of Dai's old miners explains, so that 'we can be free', if only we had the wit to realise that.

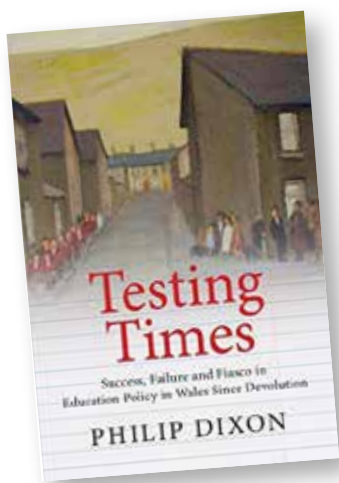
Peter Stead is a writer,
broadcaster and historian

Testing Times: Success, Failure and Fiasco in Education Policy in Wales Since Devolution

Philip Dixon

Welsh Academic Press

Rajvi Glasbrook Griffiths



Testing Times: Success, Failure and Fiasco in Education Policy in Wales Since Devolution is not a title that toes the official line. Having heard Dr Philip Dixon in the Welsh media in the run-up to the release of the 2016 PISA results, I had not expected that it would. If the messages shock, Dixon would argue, it is a reflection of the extent to which debate is shut down in the top echelons of the Welsh Government, and how this culture of consensus has percolated down through the levels.

The introduction has Dixon nailing his colours to the mast. To be pro-devolution is not to hold devolved policy above criticism. Criticism is not to 'talk Wales down'. Attribution of blame is not a simple exercise.

Dixon charts the path from Jane Davidson's *The Learning Country* to Jane Hutt's consensualism over decision-making, Leighton Andrews' standards over structures and Huw Lewis' diffidence and 'soft spot for Scotland' to the current, inherited, Scottish-inspired Curriculum Reform under Kirsty Williams. In Andrews' 2011 speech, *Teaching Makes a Difference*, a radical departure was

marked from previous woolly rhetoric, schools categorisation introduced alongside a return of national testing, and key priorities outlined: raising standards in literacy and numeracy, and a reduction of the deprivation gap.

Factually, Dixon is incorrect that this speech was '[w]ithin months' of Andrews taking office; it was actually over a year afterwards. However, the key summary rings true.

For those who do not acknowledge the Welsh Government's education failures, the criticisms, of both policies and personalities, will be unwelcome. Dixon promises in his introduction to focus on the former rather than the latter. However, possibly the two are too intertwined and so anecdote is not sufficiently minimised. Jane Davidson, or 'Lady Jane' as Dixon suggests some colleagues called her for her patrician air, fares the worst. Whilst Dixon's opinion of Davidson's legacy as 'toxic' is a comment on policy, the sharing of cabinet cattiness seems unnecessary. Regardless, it is clear that there remain many lessons to be learned from *The Learning Country*, not least because it lacked a coherent plan for delivery. Perhaps its problem was one of language: what do a 'rich range of opportunities and experiences', 'creative and innovative', and 'progressive change' actually mean? This is vital as we enter Professor Graham Donaldson's *Successful Futures*, also very conceptual. Standards and real opportunities for Welsh pupils are not an abstract construct of imagined excellence, but a necessity requiring clear direction and

teachers, however, will be lasting.

Similarities between *The Learning Country* and the current curriculum reforms are unavoidable. Both champion a move away from summative testing, both express concern over primary class sizes and secondary school timetabling, both present, in varying ways, ICT as a 'panacea'; both aim to create a world-leading education system. This is in contradistinction to Andrews who felt that 'this was in reality not a good system aiming to be excellent but a fair system hoping to be good'. In this sense, we need to learn not just from Scotland's pitfalls – namely, assessment – but rather, primarily, from our own past policy errors. Optimistically, there are differences, and these are visible in plans for professional development. The New Deal pioneer schools are boosting school-to-school working and sharing of practice, making effective changes to NQT CPD and, with promising work being done on the revision of professional standards, there is hope for the reprofessionalising of teaching and learning overall.

Like Gareth Evans' *A Class Apart*, this is a book that should be read by all involved in education in Wales. It is a comprehensive summary of the post-devolution narrative for education in Wales and Dixon's perspective is refreshing. He sagely warns against 'policy tourism' too. So far, so sound. Yet, the proposed solutions are untenable.

One comes in form of a proposed 'Recovery Board'. This would comprise 'respected and capable' independent figures from the Welsh educational scene alongside

Like Gareth Evans' *A Class Apart*, this is a book that should be read by all involved in education in Wales. It is a comprehensive summary of the post-devolution narrative for education in Wales and Dixon's perspective is refreshing

definition. As pioneer schools move into 'Strand 2' of formulating the content of the new Curriculum for Wales, this is important. The timeline aim for 'implementation' is currently 2021. By then, many civil servants and ministers currently at the helm will have moved on. The effects on the children and

academics, heads and those with a 'proven record of tackling failure' from both within and without Wales. The benchmarks for a 'proven record' or 'respected' are not defined. Such a board, vastly costly, would be yet another quangocratic bastion, and who sits on it inevitably political. In addition to the

financial cost, Dixon acknowledges the ‘cost to national pride’, with powers of education to be taken out of Welsh control. This is presented as a binary choice, with the only other option as ‘nothing changes’. At a time when the Wales Bill augments devolved power, this suggestion is almost certainly improbable. Moreover, it is proposed that this board should develop a six-year strategy whose ‘overriding aim’ would be to ensure that Wales was performing at least as well as the other UK nations in the PISA Tests of 2021. Although the clue is in the title, this is disappointing. To mobilise this expensive board for such a narrow aim, a test that is not even a qualification, is disproportionate.

In contrast to Professor David Egan’s longstanding perspective, for Dixon it seems that all roads lead to PISA. In holding PISA as the last possible ‘vestige of external scrutiny’, Dixon overrides formative assessment and existing National Tests. He would argue these are victim to moving goalposts, but no tests are above unreliability, not even PISA.

‘Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results’, quotes Dixon. The Donaldson implementation section is pessimistic. There is fear, as a result of such open underpinning core purposes, of a ‘parochial curriculum’. This is reminiscent of the 1989 ‘*loi Jospin*’, which in essence dismantled the French education system. Dixon also warns of slippage in delivery dates and indeed, this is already appearing to be on the cards. Whether adherence to an arbitrary timeline set by Huw Lewis actually matters is a different consideration.

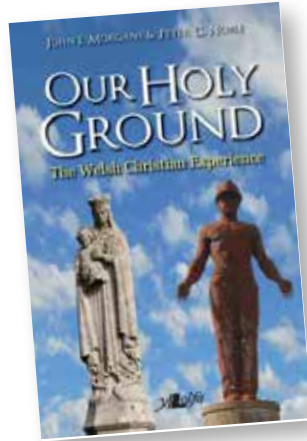
There is a nod to ‘heretics’. ‘There is a world of difference between a heretic and old curmudgeon who simply doesn’t like change,’ remarks Dixon, in the spirit of the book. If it is to ‘ensure that education remains a contested discipline’, I agree. It is disagreement that furthers and if we gush and group-hug in consensus all the time, how can we move forward?’

Rajvi Glasbrook Griffiths is Literacy Leader at Glan Usk Primary School, Newport

Our Holy Ground

John I. Morgans and Peter C. Noble
Y Lolfa, 2016

Andrew Sully



In this 500th anniversary year of the start of the Protestant Reformation, when in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenburg, *Our Holy Ground* is a timely survey of the Welsh Christian experience, as seen through the eyes of two wise and experienced pastors, raised and nurtured in the Welsh Reformed tradition.

Their historic survey is combined with the description of a physical pilgrimage around sites and places of interest in Wales undertaken over a period of years. It is topped and tailed by the iconic statues of Mary at Penrhys and of the Nameless One of Six Bells; the Guardian of the Valleys. Beautifully reproduced photographs taken by Noble provide a visual record of the extraordinarily rich variety of holy places and locations connected with those personalities that have contributed to the tapestry of experiences and voices that makes up the history of Christianity in this small but precious part of God’s kingdom.

Their commitment to the Gospel, to mission and in particular to the Ecumenical Movement as well as to a more progressive, inclusive form of Christianity is clear, grounded as it was in the politically liberal non-conformity of the nineteenth century and gutsy, radical socialism that made the Valleys such a ‘hotbed’ of dissent a century ago.

Something has clearly gone awry in this past century; the institutional churches, and with them non-conformity, seem lost and visionless. The vision which once inspired these two veteran ecumenists and missionaries to work for organic unity between the churches back in the 1960s in order to usher in the Kingdom of God has, to some extent at least, withered on the vine to be replaced instead by a more entrenched, conservative, UKIP-style tribalism on the part of the leading denominations, as witnessed by the last ditch attempt of Enfyf (the five Covenanting churches of Wales) to establish some new direction in their gathering in Aberystwyth in 2012. The authors are forced to conclude as much:

A challenge facing Welsh Christianity is whether its leadership and the dwindling and ageing memberships of the mainline churches will grasp the vision and provide the determination and stamina to create a new form of united Christian community. Only then will the vision break out of its imprisonment within denominationalism and become a practical programme which could help transform the Christian presence throughout Wales. (p.187)

So is all lost, or are there any signs of new shoots breaking through this ‘Holy Ground’? I think there are but the authors seem to have been looking at times in the wrong places so that new signs of hope have gone largely undetected in this particular span of recent Christian experience, perhaps because the book is so institutionally-focused. Have the writers made too little of the poetic and visual arts and other cultural factors in shaping the Christian sensibilities of contemporary Wales?

R. S Thomas’ assessment of post-war Welsh non-conformity in his 1952 radio play, ‘The Minister’ is unflattering:

Protestantism – the adroit castrator of art; the bitter negation Of song and dance and the heart’s innocent joy – You have botched our flesh and left us only the soul’s Terrible innocence in a warm world.

For Thomas, the soul of Wales was forged as far back as the fifth and sixth centuries A.D when the so-called Celtic saints established communities of learning throughout Wales which evolved into major centres of prayer, study and hospitality. Throughout these early years, it was the life-affirming, praise poetry and creation-centred devotion that was particularly noteworthy. Some recent scholars of Welsh spirituality and theology, perhaps Donald Allchin above all, have sought to argue that in spite of the more Calvinistic influences in Welsh spirituality since the Reformation, the Catholic praise tradition never disappeared, though it did go underground for some centuries, only to re-emerge in the twentieth century through the poetry of Saunders Lewis, Gwenallt, Waldo Williams and Euros Bowen.

The authors of *Our Holy Ground* certainly concede that helping people reconnect with divine love has to be the way for the church to 'teach the Gospel' to today's generation, but they seem at a loss to see how and

Maybe the key to the future is sticking more loosely to the past if one is to offer a post-Brexit, catholic (Celtic) Christianity for today's Wales

where their own non-conformist heritage might offer clues to the future:

The world has been confused and angered by the way Christians have not loved one another, and the world has walked its own way. (p.184)

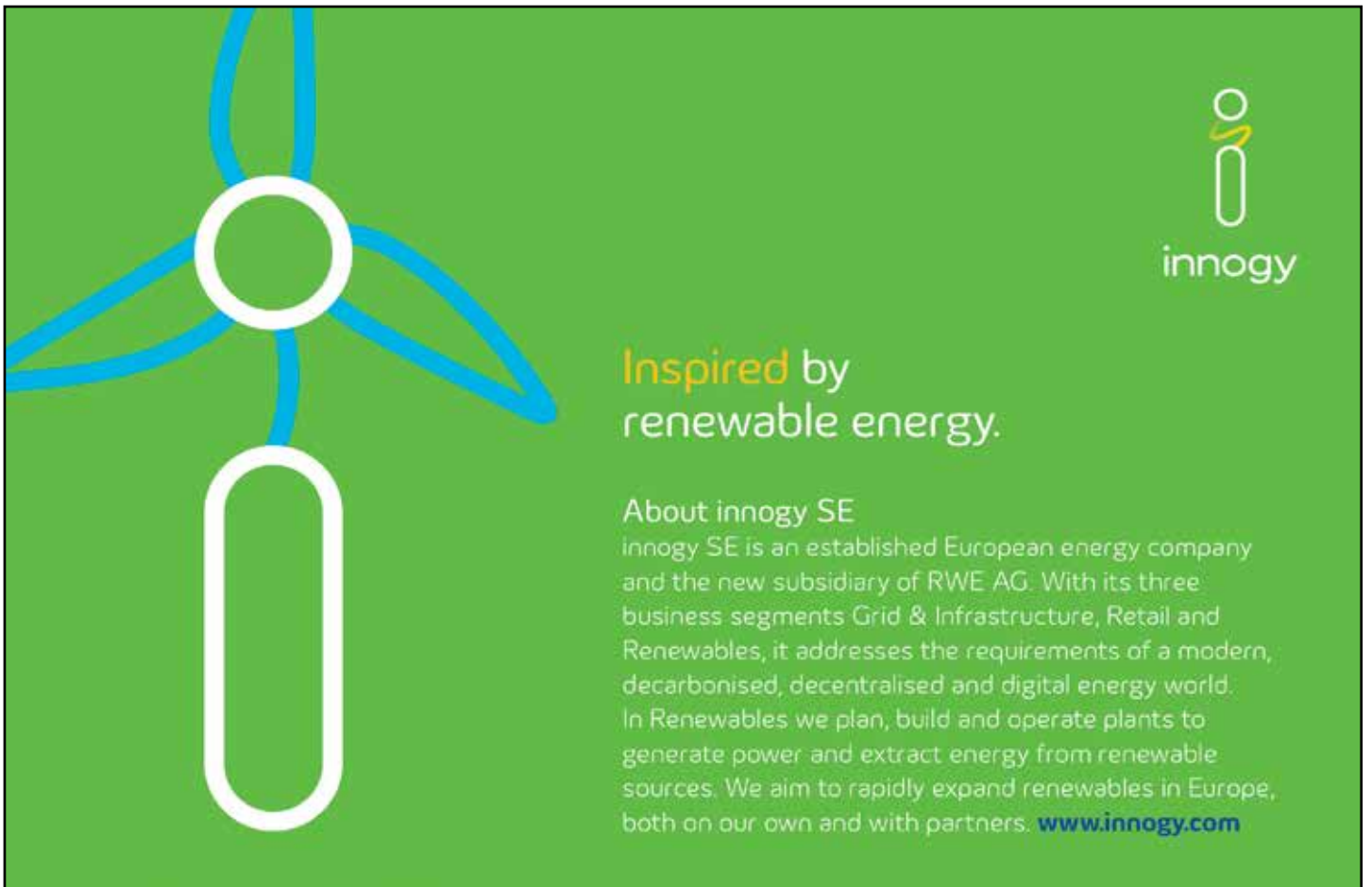
Despite this, the call to love remains urgent for them:


You are to love. You must love...Duw cariad yw. God is love. Our journey had ended, or had it only just begun? (p.201)

Perhaps it had. Maybe the key to the future is sticking more loosely to the past if one is to offer a post-Brexit, catholic (Celtic) Christianity for today's Wales. Rowan Williams certainly endorsed such a vision in his writings and spiritually rich theological landscape. Amazingly, he is mentioned in the book not once. Neither is Barry Morgan, the outgoing Archbishop of Wales or the late Gethin Abraham-Williams, former General Secretary of Cytun (Churches Together in Wales) both men seeking to engage imaginatively and constructively with today's spirituality-thirsty seekers.

Let love be enough.

Rev Andrew Sully is the Vicar of Llangollen and was for a time the North Wales Field Officer for Cytun (Churches Together in Wales)





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Cove

Cynan Jones
Granta, 2016

Katie Munnik



'To reduce the novella to nothing more than a short novel is like saying a pony is a baby horse.'
George Fetherling, poet and novelist

Cove is a slender story with compelling strength. Minimalist and meditative, it is skilfully and vividly crafted – a fully-formed fable at just shy of 100 pages, and frighteningly grown-up.

Cynan Jones tells a simple story: a man is struck by lightning whilst kayaking along on the sea. Waking with no memory of who he is or why he is at sea, and with only meagre supplies on hand, he struggles to cope with his injuries and find a way to return to the shore.

In some ways, this is a traditional tale of survival and Jones' detailing gives this story a mythic, timeless quality. The isolated hero struggles against the indifferent natural world, and is guided by the voice of his dead father whilst a pregnant wife waits for him from the lonely safety of the land. Although set on the west Wales coast, this story might be imagined anywhere. Jones even plays with his readers' expectations of myth by introducing unlikely animal companions and folkloric talismans. A butterfly. A wren's feather. A boat-sized fish. A dolphin calf. Each of these could easily come from Homer or the Norse sagas.

Despite this, the story is also firmly rooted in our contemporary world. The man worries about his water-logged phone and keeps his car keys among his necessary tools of survival. Much time is spent on the details of the kayak's supplies and how they might be used and or adapted to give the man a chance at survival.

Jones's writing is sparse, precise and as crafted as poetry. The distant land is described as 'pale' and 'wood-coloured' and the water before the lightning has 'a metallic sheen... like cutlery.' When he catches a fish, he observes how its colour changed: 'the metal of it dulling immediately to cloth in his hands.' These observations, layered on early in the story, open the man's mind to us and we begin to see the ocean through his eyes.

The violence, when it comes, is raw and shocking, and the horror of both injury and

its footing. Two or three times, he includes observations in either a narrating voice or that of an extraneous character and, while these sections are interesting and well imagined, they break the tone.

The strength in this novella lies in the experience of reading it. Its brevity gives it a sense of urgency and compels you to engage. It is not a story to be set aside part way through. Each sparse page demands your attention. Yet, appropriately, you feel as if the beautiful prose must be rationed like water and read gently as if you, like the kayaker, move within burned skin. Just as the timeless sea transforms all things – softening some, shattering others – so, too, do we find ourselves challenged and changed by this tale of human struggle.

In these strange days of urgency when truth is uncertain and questions of identity

Cynan Jones tells a simple story: a man is struck by lightning whilst kayaking along on the sea. Waking with no memory of who he is or why he is at sea, and with only meagre supplies on hand, he struggles to cope with his injuries and find a way to return to the shore

endurance are minutely described. Jones balances the jolt of pain and its aftermath with the necessary abstraction.

The man's failure to remember is also deftly rendered, our own resonating memories making the man's emptiness poignant. 'The smell of the jumper triggers something, but it is like a piano key hitting strings that are gone.' We know that jumper smell and the sound of a dead piano key, but our knowledge does nothing for his inability to connect. Yet again, we feel his isolation, uncertainty and grief.

Despite this elegant immediacy, there are a few jarring tense shifts without clear purpose and times when Jones steps too far from his protagonist's compelling perspective, seeking, perhaps, a wider point of view. Unfortunately, these are the moments when the book seems to lose

and belonging crowd our public spaces, a book like Cove feels important. This slim novella gives us time to step out of time. Not to escape into a full-blown fantasy or to be swept away by highly produced drama, but to slip out into an open space where threat and freedom are intriguingly mixed.

Like Fetherling's pony, the small nature of Cynan Jones's novella sets limits which define it and give it unique power, reminding us again that the form of a work of art can be just as telling as its content. Life is brief, fragile and filled with beauty.

Katie Munnik is a Canadian writer living in Cardiff and her prose, poetry and creative nonfiction have been published internationally



In a barely disguised autobiographical description of Llanelli in the twenties and thirties, these books portray Glynne-Jones's upbringing as a young boy of 14 entering the unfamiliar world of work as a steel foundry 'moulder' at the 'Glanmor' Foundry

Farewell Innocence and Ride the White Stallion

William Glynne-Jones
Parthian, 2016

Aled Eirug

This pair of books are reissued as part of the Welsh Government's Library of Wales series, having been first published in 1950-1. The author William Glynne-Jones is a 'lamentably forgotten author' whose memory for our generation is saved by these publications. His writing is less showy than the better known Gwyn Thomas but nevertheless displays a gritty authenticity that combines good storytelling with an affecting portrayal of a people struggling and rising above their surroundings. Born and brought up in Llanelli, Jones became an Anglo-Welsh novelist, short story writer, broadcaster and journalist. His love of literature and his stories for children and adults were broadcast weekly on Children's Hour and regularly on the mid morning story hour by the BBC in the 1950s. He was a fluent Welsh speaker, and coped with the physical handicap of a cleft palate and hare lip and overcame a speech impediment all his life.

In 1943, he was released from the foundry on medical grounds while his wife and son remained initially in Wales. He went to pursue his ambition to earn his living as a freelance writer and novelist in London,

and in 1946 won the renowned Rockefeller Foundation Atlantic Award for Literature. The republication of these novels typify the Welsh Government's project to make available, through the Library of Wales series, the rich and extensive literature of Wales, and to 'bring back into play the voices and actions of the human experience that has made us, in all our complexity, a Welsh people'.

In a barely disguised autobiographical description of Llanelli in the twenties and thirties, these books portray Glynne-Jones's upbringing as a young boy of 14 entering the unfamiliar world of work as a steel foundry 'moulder' at the 'Glanmor' Foundry. We experience the dismal experience of the workplace, the abject poverty that continuously blights home life and the tense relationships between the hero, Ieuan Morgan, his mother afflicted by her fear of poverty, and latterly his mother-in-law, whose religious zealotry undermines his marriage.

Rather than celebrating the nobility of work, these two novels capture its depressive monotony and de-sentimentalise the workplace. The workers are riven by petty jealousies, and unity is a rare commodity. The hero, Ieuan Morgan, in common with the author, gradually finds solace and fulfillment in writing and after his tin bath and tea, taps away in the evenings at his typewriter.

Glynne-Jones succeeds in reflecting the robust, tempestuous environment of this one-industry town where the precariousness of employment and the impact of piece-time working pits people against one another. The conflict of the workplace is mirrored in the

home and the relationship between Ieuan and his mother is poisoned by her dread of penury and her experience of economic depression. It is her fear of poverty that drives her to insist that Ieuan goes to work in the foundry at the age of 14, rather than stay in school, and this underlying resentment eventually drives Ieuan to seek a new life in writing.

Glynne-Jones's approach is neither one of contempt towards the grind of working class life in Abermor, nor a starry-eyed paean to an imagined nirvana of working-class solidarity. He captures the spirit of this industrial town and its people with fidelity and empathy, and does so with a sense that he is part of the landscape, rather than as a distanced observer. These two novels captures a young man's creative awakening in a climate of domestic penury and hard graft, and captivates the reader with its truth, honesty, pathos and imagination, and are handsome additions to the Library of Wales collection.

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

'I first fell in love with words, like most writers, when I was a kid.'

Last word Rhian Elizabeth

I grew up in the Rhondda Valley and I wanted to be a writer way back then, even though I didn't really know what a writer was. I'd never seen one or read one in my life. I didn't have any books. Not because my family were particularly poor or uneducated, just because words weren't a big thing in my house. My father liked sports (rugby) and my mother like numbers (bingo).

I remember one afternoon picking up a pen and a piece of paper and writing a story for a competition in school, a competition I went on to win. I was a shy, ginger kid and I don't think anyone in school really knew who I was until that afternoon I stood up on the stage and read out my winning story. Those kids who'd previously passed me in the corridor and left me until last when it came to selection time for the netball team in PE sat there in the audience and listened intently. Those kids even clapped and cheered me and afterwards, if just for a little while at least, I was the most popular kid in school. It felt good.

And that's when I first realised the power of words.

As an adult, words have had a similar, life-changing effect. My father died when I was twelve. I had a baby when I was sixteen. I dropped out of university without even finishing my first year. Because of mostly my

own destructive choices, things were pretty poor for me. It was only when, through pure luck and perhaps a little bit of talent, the semi-autobiographical book I'd been working on between watching episodes of the Tweenies with my daughter and drinking too many shots at the University bar instead of studying, got accepted for publication by a wonderful editor called Penny Thomas at Seren Books that things started to pick up for me.

Those words in that book I wrote opened up so many doors for me. I got asked to speak at the Hay Festival. There, my book sat on a shelf next to one by Dame Judy Dench (I may have strategically placed it there but that's besides the point). I even sat next to Judy in the green room. My book got shortlisted for an international book award and I won another writers' award here in Wales for my short fiction. I read at lots of interesting places and saw my words in print many more times. I met lots of real writers, too. They existed and this is what they looked like. I was one of them now, like I'd always wanted to be. It was like I was that ginger kid again, standing on that stage in front of all those other kids who I really wanted to like me, and them actually noticing me. It was the attention I craved, and for all the right reasons this time instead of destructive ones.

Words saved me again last year. This time it wasn't my own destructiveness that called upon them for assistance. When I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, there words were again. I started writing poems about being sick: my way of trying to make

something positive out of it all, rather than wallowing in self-pity, or cursing myself that this was some kind of karma for all those bad choices I'd made in the past. I'm working on a collection of those poems now that I hope to get published sometime soon.

Words are always there, like a parachute I open when I'm just about to smash into the concrete.

I believe words are the most important things we have at our disposal as human beings. I recently attended the march in Cardiff, one of the many marches around the world, in protest against the policies of Donald Trump. We all know about him, so I won't go into detail, just to politely say that I think the man is a dangerous joke. On Queen Street that evening, ordinary people held up banners and placards with words on. Those words were angry and defiant, humorous and poetic, thoughtful and hopeful, intelligent and kind. And when there are so many nasty and divisive words coming out of the White House and Downing Street and from the mouths of people in positions of great power, when those very people representing and speaking for us aren't actually representing or speaking the words and values we as ordinary people think or have, our words are more important now than ever. Our words on banners. Our words on petitions. Our words in magazines. Our words in poems. And it's important that we get them heard.

Rhian Elizabeth was born in 1988 in the Rhondda Valley, South Wales. Her first novel, *Six Pounds Eight Ounces* (Seren, 2014), was set in that valley and shortlisted for The International Rubery Book Award. In 2016 she was a winner of The Terry Hetherington Young Writers Award. She is currently working on a collection of poetry titled *the last polar bear on earth*.

Words are always there, like a parachute I open when I'm just about to smash into the concrete.

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