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History and the making
and remaking of Wales

In 1907 Mr L. J. Roberts, a government education inspector, claimed:

> There are special reasons why Welsh children should learn the history of
> Wales. Welshmen in the past have felt ashamed that they were a conquered
> nation but a knowledge of history teaches them that the prolonged resistance
> for many hundreds of years of their small country, abutting as it does for its
> whole length on England, is one of the most remarkable stories in history. It is
> a duty to give children a sympathetic knowledge of their environment.[1]

In contrast, nearly a century later, Sir Glanmor Williams, one of the founding fathers
of academic Welsh history, wrote in his autobiography:

> The justification for Welsh history was not that it bolstered patriotism or
> national consciousness. It was the sober historical fact that the Welsh had a
> history of their own which, despite its close links with that of other British
> peoples, was in marked respects different. It could not be understood as a
> regional fag end of the history of England.[2]

Yet why Welsh history was different, and why there was a national consciousness at
all in Wales, owed much to the fact that history - both in the sense of the past itself
and representations of that past - has been employed over the centuries to assert
Welsh identity, just as Mr Roberts wanted. In other words, the repeated and sustained
use of history had incrementally made Wales different and thus shaped events that
followed. Indeed, with nothing resembling a nation state until 1999, and a culture and
economy that was intricately linked to and overshadowed by England, the past could
often seem to be the only justification for the existence of a Welsh nation. As the poet

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[1] *Rhyl Journal,* 7 September 1907.
[2] Glanmor Williams, *A Life* (Cardiff, 2002), p. 112.

R. S. Thomas wrote in 1955, 'There is no present in Wales, And no future; There is only the past'.[3]

There was nothing particularly unusual about such a use of history. During the nineteenth century, the past was the '*raison d'être* of nationalism'.[4] It offered a powerful sense of justification for national unification in Italy and Germany, by connecting people divided by political borders through pointing to a common cultural heritage. History was also utilised in existing states. In Britain, it helped justify the empire; in the USA it gave people a sense of national destiny.[5] Inevitably, there was a great deal of selective reading in how the past was employed and traditions were invented where suitably malleable ones did not exist. But, whatever its fictions, history became a defining constituent of nationalism.[6]

In late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Wales, romantics searched the past to find things they could use for their own purposes of sustaining Wales. The Celts and druids were employed to build a picture of the Welsh as a mysterious and poetic people, the true ancient Britons. This involved the collection, publication or even creation of legends and folktales. Iolo Morgannwg went as far as forging documents about Welsh-speaking Indians to claim a Welsh prince had discovered America in the twelfth century. This revival in Welsh history may have often been little more than wishful thinking but it did feed into a more general Welsh identity. Yet, by the late Victorian period, romanticism seemed out of place in an era of modernity, and history was rewritten to stress the devoutness and cultural achievements of the Welsh.[7] As the mock-medieval investiture of the future Edward VIII as Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle in 1911 showed, even the symbols of conquest were recast to declare Wales as a partner rather than a subject of England.[8] Academics too got in on the game and the first significant book on Welsh history – J.

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[3] R.S. Thomas, 'Welsh Landscape' in *Collected Poems 1945-1990* (London, 2000), p. 37.
[4] John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 43.
[5] For the use of history in nation building Stefan Berger (ed.), *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* (Basingstoke, 2007).
[6] A. D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford, 1999).
[7] Prys Morgan, 'From death to a view: the hunt for the Welsh past in the romantic period' in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 43-100. Prys Morgan, 'Keeping the legends alive', in Tony Curtis (ed), *Wales: The Imagined Nation: Essays in Cultural and National Identity* (Bridgend: Poetry Press Wales, 1986), 19-41.
[8] John S. Ellis, 'Reconciling the Celt: British national identity, empire, and the 1911 investiture of the Prince of Wales', *Journal of British Studies*, 37 (1998), 391-418.

E. Lloyd's *A History from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (1911) - was a conscious part of and attempt to influence the 'rebirth' of the Welsh nation.[9]

What people in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Wales knew about their collective past was a different matter. Matthew Arnold, a Victorian professor of poetry at Oxford, claimed that everywhere in Wales had its own traditions and that the Welsh people knew and clung to this living past.[10] That attachment seemed to have been based on oral traditions of family and community but, as the twentieth century progressed, the potential for a collective Welsh national memory developed with the growth of education, museums and depictions of the past in popular culture. This collective memory was neither static nor based on any straightforward factual base. Nor did it create a straightforward sense of national awareness. Moreover, it competed with a multitude of representations and manifestations of British history in everyday culture in Wales. Thus it was not surprising that in the middle of the twentieth century, many people, especially in industrial areas, were ambivalent, and sometimes even embarrassed, about their Welshness. For every patriotic Welshman or woman there was another who saw his or her nation as a stigma, an unwanted hangover from the past that should be cast aside.[11] This article examines the influences history has had on this situation in Welsh culture after the Second World War. The first section explores some of the ways people learnt about the past and how that interacted with Welsh national identity. The second section examines the continued misconceptions about the history of Welsh identity and argues that rather than sustaining Welsh identity these misconceptions are now shackling the development of Wales.

People's understanding of the past comes from a variety of sources but it is rarely acquired in any systematic way. Instead, historical knowledge tends to be acquired in an ad hoc fashion, in dribs and drabs from oral traditions, from fictional portrayals on television and in cinema, from discussions with family and friends, from half-remembered school lessons and from trips to museums. The result is usually a fragmented and distorted view of the past, centred on a few key events, people and

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[9] Huw Pryce, *J. E. Lloyd and the Creation of Welsh History: Renewing a Nation's Past* (Cardiff, 2011). Neil Evans and Huw Pryce (eds), *Writing a Small Nation's Past: Wales in Comparative Perspective, 1850-1950* (Farnham, 2013).

[10] Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London, 1867), p. 2.

[11] For an exploration of Welsh identity in the middle of the century see Martin Johnes, *Wales since 1939* (Manchester, 2012), ch. 7.

trends.[12] But that does not mean that this knowledge is insignificant. Just as understandings of the past had fed national identity across Europe in the nineteenth century, they also continued to have an influence on how people in Wales thought about their nationality.

However they acquired it, the most obvious influence of a sense of history upon Welsh culture has been in how it fed political nationalism. History was, of course, not the only motivation for nationalists - people acted by what they saw in the present as much as in the past - but it could undoubtedly be inspirational. Indeed, some were in awe at the survival of Wales and its sense of identity. As the nationalist writer Islwyn Ffowc Elis put it,

> It is incomprehensible to me how Wales has survived. There's no sense in the fact that a number of tribes so mixed in blood and so ambivalent in their outlook should have gone on being a nation over fifteen long centuries, despite relentless attacks from without and constant schism within.

To him, Wales was a cat with nine lives and its survival was perhaps destiny.[13] Ned Thomas, another nationalist writer, claimed of such perspectives on the past:

> This is not an antiquarian sort of remembering; it is remembering who you are, where you come from, what has happened to you and your people. In a country where so few outwards things tell you that you are Welsh it adds a quality of depth to the consciousness, a pool of resistance to the constant suggestion that we should forget and be content, above all, consume.[14]

Nationalists at this time were well aware of history's potential to mobilize national sentiment and thus sought to bring a nationalist vision of the Welsh past to a wider audience. In 1971, Gwynfor Evans, president of Plaid Cymru from 1945 to 1981, published *Aros Mae*, an account of Welsh history from the earliest times to the

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[12] The best consideration of public history remains Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994). For a more recent contribution see Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[13] Islwyn Ffowc Elis, *Fy Nghymru I* [1961]. Reproduced in translation in Meic Stephens (trans.), *Illuminations: An Anthology of Welsh Short Prose* (Cardiff, 1998), p. 88.

[14] Ned Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist: Modern Welsh Politics, Literature and Society* (Talybont, [1973], 1991), p. 72.

present day. It was republished in English as *Land of my Fathers* in 1974. His instrumental version of the Welsh past was one of a glorious heritage and English oppression that was not always too concerned with the complexities of what had happened.[15] His biographer called it, 'pure propaganda' and a 'crude exercise in missionary work'.[16] But it sold well and was not entirely unsuccessful. As one man, rather put out at the biographer's criticism of the book, noted, 'For me – and I am sure I speak for many – Gwynfor's *Aros Mae*, or the translation *Land of my Fathers*, transformed a felt nationalism into an informed and confident stance.'[17] After Evans' tenure as leader of Plaid Cymru came to an end, the party went through a period of modernization and it attempted to distance itself from the romantic nationalism Evans was often accused of. Instead, it tried to appeal to non-Welsh speakers by demonstrating that nationalism was both practical and able to work in the realities of a fragmented Welsh culture and weak economy. But the past remained a motivation for political action and a tool to be utilized in campaigning; in 1997 a Plaid Cymru manifesto declared 'Our principles do not arise from a history of imperialist exploitation of other nations, nor from any Welsh tradition of conquest and domination of other peoples ... We gain our inspiration from the experiences of the communities of Wales, which survived long years of oppression, neglect and scorn.'[18]

One central reason why Plaid Cymru struggled to make electoral advances outside the Welsh-speaking rural heartlands was that much, probably most, of the Welsh population did not understand their nationality as something based on a history of oppression. Their nationality was something less certain, a slippery sentiment that at times was deeply important to individuals but at other time irrelevant.[19] It was shaped by family, community and more immediate circumstances rather than medieval history. Thus, in 1969, the *South Wales Echo* said of protests against the investiture of the Prince of Wales:

> The opposition is understandable if you have a sense of history, for the
> investiture can then be seen as a symbol of subjection … Yet these objections
> cut little ice with the majority of the Welsh people, who have no interest

[15] Gwynfor Evans, *Aros Mae* (Swansea, 1971). Published in English as *Land of my Fathers : 2000 Years of Welsh History* (Swansea, 1974).
[16] Rhys Evans, *Gwynfor: Portrait of a Patriot* (Talybont, 2008), p. 323.
[17] Letter from Ralph Maud, *Planet*, 192 (2008-9).
[18] Plaid Cymru, *The Best for Wales: Plaid Cymru's Programme for the New Millennium*, 1997.
[19] Johnes, *Wales since 1939*, chs. 7 and 10.

whatsoever in the quarrel of ancient princes. And, indeed, it's only fair to ask whether the 20th century should be dragged kicking and screaming into the morass of medieval politics. ... We should be aware of our history without becoming prisoners of the past … You can't rub out 700 years of history by shouting insults at Prince Charles, and the majority of Welsh men and women undoubtedly feel more attachment to the House of Windsor than the Princes of Gwynedd and Powys.[20]

Indeed, the associations between nationalism and history were in danger of turning people away from their nationality altogether. In the 1950s and 60s, there was a widespread perception that Welshness in general was old fashioned and rooted in the past rather than present. This was a product not of looking backwards but at the present, a present which seemed to be lacking in modern technologies and attitudes. For visitors from England, Wales could thus seem quaint, 'a storehouse of the past' as one travel book put it.[21] People in Wales felt this too, especially in urban areas. In 1966, a columnist in the *New Statesman* argued that for most working-class Welshmen Plaid Cymru was associated with 'the Wales that their ancestors left behind 150 years ago – with coracles, harps, women and tall hats, and sturdily independent small farmers.'[22] He noted that most urban Welshmen still viewed this Wales with affection but that did not change the fact that Welshness was often seen as a relic from the past with little real relevance for daily life. Moreover, Welshness could also be viewed as regressive and associated with a chapel-based 'way of life' that restricted personal liberties, even in urban areas. Such feelings did ease in the 1960s, as the retreat of that old way of life undermined the idea that Welshness presented a threat to freedom and standards of living.[23] This facilitated a more positive view of nationality but the old suspicions did not disappear. A 1971 survey suggested that even in rural Cardiganshire 36 percent of people thought there was too much respect for the past.[24]

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[20] *South Wales Echo*, 4 January 1969. Quoted in John S. Ellis, *Investiture: Royal Ceremony and National Identity in Wales, 1911-1969* (Cardiff, 2008), pp. 286-7.
[21] Peter Lewis, *The Land of Wales* (London, 3rd edn., 1949), pp. 1-2.
[22] *New Statesman*, 22 July 1966.
[23] Johnes, *Wales since 1939*, chs. 6 and 7.
[24] P. J. Madgwick, Non Griffiths and Valerie Walker, *The Politics of Rural Wales: A Study of Cardiganshire* (London, 1973), p. 132.

Nationalists were prone to blame the education system for the apathy of Welsh people to their cause. In their view, education had been a tool of a foreign state, designed to destroy Welsh culture. They dated this back to the 1847 Blue Books, an education report that claimed that the Welsh language was uncivilized and holding Wales back. However, such views were not entirely fair given how decentralized education in England and Wales was before the Second World War. With teachers fairly free to teach what they liked, a patriotic master could easily pass on his or her enthusiasm for Welsh history. Moreover, there were a number of very popular and very patriotic school texts on Welsh history for them to draw upon.[25] Even in Anglicized Cardiff, the School Board explicitly saw teaching Welsh history as a way of making 'all the inhabitants of Wales loyal to Wales'.[26] Dannie Abse, born in 1923, remembered:

> At my elementary school in Cardiff I was taught to sing Welsh songs and revere Welsh heroes. I see myself now, ten years old, sitting at a desk listening to our teacher Mr Williams: 'The grave of our own Owain Glyndwr, princely Owain, who took up his sword in defence of justice and liberty, is not one visible, boys, but it's known. *Known*. Oh aye, you'll not find it in any old churchyard, no old tomb of his under the shadow of a yew. No stone tablet do bear his name. So where is it? I'll tell you where it is – in the heart and in the noble soul of every true Cymro.[27]

This was a reference to a passage from Owen Rhoscomyl's *Flame Bearers of Welsh History* (1905).[28] Rhoscomyl was perhaps the most over the top of writers of such texts but more sober books shared that ability to explicitly draw connections between past and present. G. P. Ambrose's *The History of Wales* (1947), for example, finished by declaring 'The survival of her national life through the crises of centuries is due to efforts of her best men and women to cherish a worthy heritage. Only by similar efforts will this be preserved in the future.'[29]

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[25] For more on these writers and their approaches see Katie Gramich, 'Narrating the nation: telling the stories of Wales', *North American Journal of Welsh Studies,* 6, 1 (2011) http://welshstudiesjournal.org/article/view/12/8

[26] Vice-chairman of Cardiff School Board in *North Wales Express*, 26 January 1900.

[27] Dannie Abse, *Goodbye, Twentieth Century: An Autobiography* (London, 2001), p. 205.

[28] *Flame Bearers of Welsh History* (Merthyr Tydfil, 1905), p. 228.

[29] G. P. Ambrose, *The History of Wales* (Leeds, 1947), p. 120.

Such lessons were not always popular and the existence of patriotic textbooks is no guide to how widely they were used. One Wrexham man remembered being 'force-fed' Welsh history at his grammar school in the late 1940s and early 1950s: 'it had seemed so impossible to disentangle, so difficult to absorb, what with all those names of squabbling Welsh princes, long-vanished principalities, and odd cantrefs.'[30] In 1952, the Welsh department of the Ministry of Education issued a report which argued that in secondary schools 'Too frequently ... the history of Wales is relegated to the background, and local history, if it is included at all, is treated cursorily and inadequately.' It thus called for 'radical revision', suggesting 'a knowledge of the history of Wales is the birthright of the children of Wales … the future of the nation – of the community inhabiting the country, both those who speak Welsh and those who do not – depends to no small degree upon the extent to which the children are rooted in their native soil and are made aware of their national heritage'.[31] Although knowing exactly how history was taught and what influence it had is impossible, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the lack of Welsh history in schools contributed to the weaknesses in Welsh identity at the start of the post-war period.

In response to the 1952 report, and allied to the slow strengthening of Welsh identity in general, the teaching of Welsh history did grow in the 1950s and 60s. The editorial of the first ever issue of the *Welsh History Review* noted in 1960 that Welsh history was 'given considerable attention' in A Level work in grammar schools.[32] In Flintshire, the Director of Education was very forthright in promoting Welsh history. He told *The Observer* in 1959: 'I don't see any merit at all in the kings and queens of England.' But his policy was subject to criticism and he claimed 'They fear that you are creating in the mind of a child an awareness that there is such a concept as the Welsh nation.'[33] Thus the teaching of Welsh history remained limited and in 1967 another report on primary education found that teachers often disregarded it in favour of English history.[34] Yet, the hopes that history that could inspire the young remained explicit in the new books being written to support Welsh history. Children who read a 1960 secondary-schools textbook were told: 'if Welsh culture is to perish, it will be

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[30] Keith Nurse, *Footsteps to the Past: A Welsh Quest* (Orpington, 1998), p. 60.
[31] Welsh Department, Ministry of Education, *The Curriculum and the Community in Wales* (London, 1952), pp. 38, 43.
[32] Glanmor Williams, 'Editorial', *Welsh History Review*, 1 (1960), i-ii.
[33] *The Observer*, 7 June 1959.
[34] Central Advisory Council for Education (Wales), *Primary Education in Wales* (London, 1967), p. 304.

through the apathy and indifference of her own people. But the future is big with possibilities provided there is the will to maintain and to further all that is best in Welsh national life.'[35]

Welsh history in schools was also boosted by its growth in universities from the 1960s onwards. This produced a new generation of teachers better able and more likely to go on to teach Welsh history. The growth was slow and incremental and an Anglo-centric from of British history still dominated. By the 1980s, Welsh history was still unusual in primary schools, while at secondary level it could be avoided altogether in O Level history. There was a compulsory Welsh question on the Welsh Joint Education Committee's British history course but this was sometimes badly taught and reliant on 1950s textbooks.[36] Nor had the critics disappeared. In 1984, one Cardiff teacher complained those against 'compulsory Welsh History are anti-Welsh, anglicised rascals'.[37] Criticism was not surprising given that the increasingly vocal supporters of Welsh history in schools consciously saw it as having a utilitarian purpose. In 1984, the educationalist David Egan wrote, 'For too long Welsh history in our schools has hidden in the shadows. It is now emerging but somewhat pale from lack of light. If it finds the place in the sun it deserves, the whole future of Welsh consciousness and nationality is likely to be radically affected.'[38] That place in the sun was realised with the new national curriculum that was established for all subjects in England and Wales. Thanks to lobbying from teachers and others, history was the only subject (apart from Welsh) with a separate committee to advise the Welsh Office on curriculum content and its recommendations led to Welsh history becoming a core subject for both primary and secondary children.[39] Although it placed Wales firmly within an international context, the new curriculum was designed to foster a sense of a distinct Welsh past which was connected to the present.[40] They were perhaps pushing at something of an open day because in England too there were intentions to use

[35] Idris Jones, *Modern Welsh History: From 1485 to the Present Day* (London, 3rd edn., 1960), p. 303.
[36] HMI Wales, *History in the Secondary Schools of Wales*, Education Survey 8 (London, 1979).
[37] Paul Jeremy, 'The Welsh Knot', *Welsh Historian*, 1 (Spring 1984), 17-8, p. 17.
[38] David Egan 'History, not language, unites us', *Radical Wales*, 3 (Summer 1984), 16-7. Alun Morgan, 'Can we regain our memory?' *Quest: Journal of the Schools Council Committee for Wales* (March, 1982).
[39] For Welsh history and the emergence of the National Curriculum see Paul Jeremy and David Maddox, 'A seamless web: Welsh history in schools', in Geraint H. Jenkins and Gareth Elwyn Jones (eds), *Degrees of Influence: A Memorial Volume for Glanmor Williams* (Cardiff, 2008), pp. 118-41.
[40] Welsh Office, *History in the National Curriculum (Wales)* (Cardiff, 1991).

history to develop a sense of citizenship.[41] Although there was some criticism that it was nostalgic and the medieval conquest of Wales was notable for its absence, unlike in England, this utilization of Welsh history for citizenship was uncontroversial.[42] This in itself was a marker of how far Welsh identity had developed since the Second World War.

The extent to which school history lessons actually foster national identity is not a question for which definitive empirical evidence exists but studies in other parts of Britain do indicate it has an influence.[43] It is thus not unreasonable to suggest that schools must have had some impact on Welsh national identity but the new history curriculum in Wales did not meet the aspirations of its foundation. The preferences of teachers and pupils meant Welsh history was simply never taught as much as the National Curriculum implied it should be. This was enabled by the fact that the curriculum was never as prescriptive as it first seemed and had intended to be but Welsh history's weakness was also fed by attitudes in the classroom. A survey of pupils in the late 1990s suggested that while only a minority actively disliked the idea of studying Welsh history, few seemed enthusiastic about the subject, often perceiving it to be less interesting than 'mainstream' history. The survey also found that schools in Monmouthshire were unenthusiastic about teaching Welsh history because their catchment areas stretched into England and there was little sense of Welsh identity amongst pupils.[44]

The history that was being taught had moved away from an emphasis on medieval topics to modern social and industrial history. This in itself was also product of a growing awareness and pride in Welsh working-class history. The growing de-industrialization of south Wales had led people to look at their industrial heritage differently and it shifted from being perceived as something to escape to something to

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[41] For arguments in favour of using history in this way from someone involved in the English curriculum developments see Nicholas Tate, 'History and national identity', in Martin Roberts (ed.), *After the Wall: History Teaching in Europe since 1989* (Hamburg, 2004), 28-38.

[42] For an overview of what happened in England see Nicola Sheldon, 'Politicians and history: the National Curriculum, national identity and the revival of the national narrative', *History*, 97 (2012), 256-71 and Robert Phillips, *History Teaching, Nationhood and the State: A Study in Educational Politics* (London, 1998). For a wider discussion of Wales see R. Pyrs Gruffudd, David T. Herbert, Angela Piccini, 'Learning to think the past: Heritage, identity and state education in Wales', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 4, 3 & 4 (1998), 154-67.

[43] Keith C. Barton, Alan W. McCully and Margaret Conway, 'History education and national identity in Northern Ireland', *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research*, 3, 1 (2003).

[44] Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'Boaring, boreing or bouring?: Welsh history in KS3 and 4', *Welsh Historian,* 30 (2000), 7-9.

celebrate and treasure. Moreover, the industrial communities that were disappearing were also coming to be seen by those who lived in them as specifically Welsh places. There was a new pride in local traditions, in the Welsh accent and the history of the Welsh language in their communities. The loss of Welsh within families was thus gradually becoming a source of regret rather than a conscious choice. As a consequence, the industrial working class were beginning to regard themselves as an important part of Welsh rather than just British history and the rhetoric of nationality entered industrial disputes in Wales in the 1970 and 80s.[45]

The challenge for those seeking to develop Welsh identity was to unite this Anglophone identity with the Welsh-speaking part of the population. Some saw history as having a role to play here. Educationalist David Egan argued that social history was a bridge that united the two linguistic groups by highlighting the common experiences of working people.[46] Such attitudes meant that working-class history also came to feature more prominently in Wales' national museums. Museums are closely linked to identity; Laurajane Smith has argued that people visit them 'to help us make sense of and understand not only who we "are", but also who we want to be'.[47] Creating a sense of national identity had certainly been a central concern of the National Museum of Wales. This was clear as early as 1946 when a folk museum was established at St Fagan's near Cardiff. Its founder Iorwerth Peate saw the museum as having the role of uniting the Welsh working class with their rural roots in order to inspire in them a certain kind of classless patriotism that would sustain and inspire Wales.[48] Although its arts policies were criticized for not focussing on Welsh collections, over the next decades the National Museum continued to believe it had a role to play in developing the nation but it was not until the 1980s that this meant explicitly looking at the industrial past. Here it was influenced by a wider trend for more industrial heritage and its most significant move was the erection of a row of miners' cottages at St Fagan's in the late 1980s.[49] They proved to be one of the most popular parts of the museum and encouraged other industrial heritage projects across

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[45] Johnes, *Wales since 1939*, chs. 10 and 11. On pride in the Welsh accent see Richard Bourhis and Howard Giles, 'Welsh is beautiful', *New Society*, 4 April 1974, 15-6.

[46] David Egan 'History, not language, unites us', *Radical Wales*, 3 (Summer 1984), 16-7.

[47] Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London, 2002), p. 2.

[48] For a discussion of this see Pyrs Gruffudd, 'Heritage as national identity: histories and prospects of the national pasts', in David T. Herbert (ed), *Heritage, Tourism and Society* (London, 1995), 49-67.

[49] Peter Lord, *The Aesthetics of Relevance* (Gomer, 1992), 31-36. Rhiannon Mason, *Museums, Nations and Identities* (Cardiff, 2007).

Wales. In 2001, the National Museum of Wales took over Big Pit, a former colliery turned into a local mining museum, cementing the place of coal in the official history of Wales.

This new industrial heritage was not without its critics. In both Wales and the wider UK, there were concerns that it marked a culture preoccupied with looking back rather than forward, that the history presented was misleading and that too much economic hope was being placed in the heritage centres. There were also concerns that much of the heritage sector was presenting bogus history.[50] In particular, there were concerns that industrial heritage was sanitized, with the dirt and danger of work and the grinding poverty of its associated communities glossed over.[51] One academic critique points out of Big Pit and the Rhondda Heritage Park's coverage of the interwar period: 'The emphasis is on consensus and community, but it was naked class warfare that dominated these years.'[52] This might distort visitors' view of the past but it also probably fed into their sense of Welshness since community and mining itself were increasingly seen as symbols of Wales in themselves.[53] Research on English museums with a clear focus on the working class has shown that visitors think about their experience and often have their personal identities reinforced, whether these relate to family, class or region.[54] Of course, people did not have to just accept what they were being presented but consuming heritage is certainly not a passive experience and the plurality that emerged in portrayals of the Welsh past in the heritage sector must have contributed to the diversification in understandings of Wales itself.[55]

The plurality that was emerging at the National Museum of Wales was influenced by a wider shift in academic history towards acknowledging the different ways that the past could be read, something exemplified by Dai Smith's argument that Wales is 'a singular noun but a plural experience'.[56] Quite how academic history

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[50] J. Geraint Jenkins, *Getting Yesterday Right: Interpreting the Heritage of Wales* (Stroud, 2nd edn, 2009). Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London, 1987).
[51] Kath Davies, 'Cleaning up the coal- face and doing out the kitchen: the interpretation of work and workers in Wales', in Gaynor Kavanaugh (ed.), *Making Histories in Museums* (London, 1996) and Julie Light, 'Manufacturing the past – the representation of mining communities in history, literature and heritage: "Fantasies of a world that never was"?', *Llafur*, 8, (2000), 19-32.
[52] Sue Bruley, 'The General Strike and miners' lockout in south Wales: oral testimony and public representation', *Welsh History Review*, 26, 2 (2012), 271-96, p. 293.
[53] *Where Wales? The Nationhood Debate* (Cardiff, 1996), p. 33.
[54] Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, pp. 196-236.
[55] Samuels, *Theatres of Memory*, p. 271.
[56] Dai Smith, *Wales! Wales?* (London, 1984), p. 1.

influences public history and popular understandings of the past is a complex issue that is still not properly understood despite the recent trend towards assessing the 'impact' of university outputs. There is an assumption that academic research provides a foundation of knowledge that is then mediated to the public through education, museums, popular books and documentaries. The reach of that mediation is at its height in television. Academics wrote and presented two very successful primetime television history series - *Wales! Wales?* (1984) and *The Dragon has Two Tongues* (1985) – which both increased people's knowledge of the Welsh working-class past and encouraged an understanding of the diversity and contingent nature of history.[57] But the influence of academic history, education and the heritage sector should not be overstated. In the decades after the Second World War, Welsh history may have grown in profile and scope but that did not mean popular perceptions of the past were any less problematic. A number of popular historical misconceptions continued that divided Wales and underlined how people had not accepted the plurality and nuances of Wales that academics promoted. History may have been making and remaking a Welsh national identity but it was not necessarily doing so in a way that reflected that the complexities of the past.

Most significant of the historical simplicities that lived on was how political and cultural nationalists often viewed Wales as a nation that been mistreated by the English. There had been, of course, occasions when that happened but it was a one dimensional version of the past that did not reflect the meandering and shifting complexities of the relationship between the two countries. Such a negative reading was hardly unique; as MacMillan has pointed out, 'It is all too easy to rummage through the past and find nothing but a list of grievances'.[58] But in Wales the lack of a nation state meant that there was not a surfeit of more positive or rounded aspects of the past to highlight, especially as the romantic fictions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were increasingly understood for what they were. Thus instead the tone of public history too easily slipped into one of accumulative wrongs endured.

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[57] Colin Thomas, '"The end of history as we know it": Gwyn A. Williams as a television historian', *Llafur*, 7, 3-4 (1998-9), 5-19. Colin Thomas, 'When was Welsh history? Professor Gwyn Alf Williams and Welsh history on television', in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *Cymru a'r Cymry 2000: Wales and the Welsh 2000* (Aberystwyth, 2001), 141-55.
[58] Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (London, 2009), p. 68.

One example of this was Siân James' novel *A Small Country*, published in 1979 and set in rural Wales during the First World War. One old man complains

> The bloody English … They wanted me to fight once; against the Russians, I think, or the Turks. Not I. My family fight against the bloody English, not for them … My father burnt his ricks in the tithe war, ready to starve rather than pay the tithes … My grandfather was one of 'Becca's maidens in the hungry forties. They were fighters if you like. Pulled down all the bloody toll gates ... Bloody English.[59]

Contemporaries often had a rather hazy idea of what the Great War was about and the sense that it was little to do with ordinary people was certainly not unknown but to voice this in terms of Wales thinking of it as an English rather than British war is not something substantive historical evidence exists for. Similarly, the Rebecca riots and tithe wars were primarily economic rather than national disturbances. History in schools were not helping correct or balance such perspectives and two educational commentators thus argued, 'as far as pupils in both England and Wales are concerned, the only meaningful relationship that Welsh and English people had was based around war and conquest.'[60] There is a danger that encouraging people to see the past in terms of national rivalries alone can make them to see the present in such terms too.

The tendency to read a nationalistic perspective into conflicts that were about quite different things is most obvious in the celebrations of Owain Glyndŵr. He, at least, did claim to have a nationalist cause but it was a mask that ennobled more material grievances.[61] Nonetheless, Glyndŵr was clearly a national hero, and one whose popularity went beyond politicized nationalists. John Cowper Powys, a writer who lived in Corwen in the 1930s and 40s, went as far as describing locals as having a 'passionate cult' for Glyndŵr.[62] Jan Morris, a more recent patriotic commentator wrote of Glyndŵr:

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[59] Siân James, *A Small Country* (Bridgend, [1979] 1989), p. 189.
[60] Alun Morgan and Robert Phillips, 'Wales! Wales? Britain! Britain? Teaching and learning about the history of the British Isles in Secondary Schools in Wales', *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research*, 3, 1 (2003).
[61] R. R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford, 1995).
[62] John Cowper Powys, *Obstinate Cymric: Essays, 1935-47* (Carmarthen, 1947), p. 81.

Hard-headed historians see it in a different light, disparage its motives, deplore its effects, and present it as just another regional disruption in a period of distress and disaffection all over Europe. They are too late, though. Legend is far stronger than academic analysis, and Owain was long ago transmuted into a figure of myth. We see him to this day larger than life, the very image of the Welsh identity, slaughtering the English on bloody battlefields ... we see him followed to the end by the mass of the Welsh people, united in loyalty, triumphant in their own ways, refulgent, far back there in popular memory amidst their own music, poetry and holiness.[63]

At the end of the twentieth century, school lessons about his revolt often did little to refute this picture by teaching it in isolation from the wider events in Britain and France that it was entwined with.[64]

Glyndŵr's romance was added to by the fact that he was never captured and a legend was thus able to grow that one day he would return to save Wales. When at the end of the 1970s a group of arsonists began burning down the holiday homes of English people in rural Wales, they christened themselves Meibion Glyndŵr (the sons of Glyndŵr). He may never have been captured but Glyndŵr was defeated. While Welsh medieval history was easily used to create a sense of oppression, it was more problematic using it to build a sense of pride because ultimately it was a story of defeat and conquest. Sir Frederick Rees was thus right when he wrote in 1950 that Welsh history 'does not afford the basis for uncritical glorification of the past. Those who seek flame-bearers of Welsh nationhood are apt to burn their fingers. Llewelyn ap Gruffydd, the last Prince of Gwynedd, does not wear the romantic halo of William Wallace.'[65]

The difficulty of uncritically glorifying the past was evident in 1982, when the question of the 700th centenary of the English conquest of Wales arose. In Ruthin, plans to celebrate the awarding of the town's 1282 charter by Edward I caused an outcry. One councillor argued that 'A lot of people think we are celebrating the death of a nation'. After a public meeting, it was decided that there should a celebration of

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[63] Jan Morris, *Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country* (London, 1998), pp. 5-6.
[64] Alun Morgan and Robert Phillips, 'Wales! Wales?'.
[65] Sir Frederick Rees, *The Problem of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950), p. 15. For changing views of medieval Wales see Richard Marsden, 'Gerald of Wales and competing interpretations of the Welsh Middle Ages c. 1870-1910', *Welsh History Review* 25 (2011), 18-49.

the town's history rather than the charter.[66] The Welsh Tourist Board did, however, decide to hold a festival to celebrate the anniversary of the building of Edwardian castles around north Wales. The fact that these castles were symbols of the conquest of Wales meant the plans deeply annoyed nationalists, especially when one of the associated logos (apparently added by the British Tourist Authority) was 'Wales is a country worth defending. That's why we have so many castles'.[67] But the anniversary did not have to be about just remembering the defeat and some schools used the occasion to study the survival of Wales and the defiance of the Princes. Gwynedd County Council also made much of the anniversary and its Chief Executive wrote to *The Times* celebrating the last native Prince's 'vision and valour'.[68]

Such debates were not just abstract ideas; they had real political and cultural consequences. Some felt that the history of conquest lay behind a widely-perceived sense of inferiority in Wales. It also generated what some termed postcolonial art, drama, literature and scholarship, cultural outputs that consciously tried to mark a reawakening of a once-suppressed culture.[69] The reach of such writings and performances was relatively limited in a nation more interested in soap operas and sport than politicized plays and poetry. However, the ideas they embodied had a greater reach and across Wales ideas of oppression and resistance could become entangled with contemporary politics. Thus a conscientious objector in the Second World War said he felt he was standing alongside Glyndŵr, Llywellyn the Great and the Llywellyn the Last.[70] Similarly, in the 1960s, the small groups of people involved in both violent and non-violent nationalist action against the British state also drew inspiration from medieval rebellions, while the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon castle in 1969 was condemned as a re-enactment of a historic imperialist subjugation and became a focal point for campaigners for Welsh-language rights.[71] In rural areas, such understandings of the past impacted on the perception of English incomers. One 2001 letter to a north Wales newspaper claimed 'The Welsh have an

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[66] *Free Press and North Wales Times*, 24 September, 10, 24 December 1980.
[67] For newspaper clippings and leaflets on this see welshpatriot.blogspot.com/2009/06/festival-of-castles-1983-revisted-back.html
[68] *The Times*, 3 November 1981.
[69] For a discussion that supports the idea of parts of Welsh culture as postcolonial see Peter Lord, *The Meaning of Pictures: Images of Personal, Social and Political Identity* (Cardiff, 2009). For discussion and use of the concept see Jane Aaron and Chris Williams (eds), *Postcolonial Wales* (Cardiff, 2005).
[70] J. G. Williams, *Maes Mihangel* (Gwasg Gee, 1974).
[71] On violent action in Wales in this period see Wyn Thomas, *Hands off Wales: Nationhood and Militancy* (Llandysul, 2013). For the investiture see Ellis, *Investiture*.

inborn dislike of the English … You see, we suffered so much at their hands through the centuries.'[72] In the industrial south it fostered a sense that people had been denied their ancestral language. As a factory worker in her forties told one investigator at the start of the 1990s: 'Wales at the time they used to speak Welsh was downtrodden by the English. Welsh was barred in schools. The books were burned, everything like that. We got a good history – we got a good culture'.[73]

The root of such beliefs was the Welsh Not, a board placed around children's neck in the nineteenth century if they were heard speaking Welsh at school with the child wearing it at the end of the day being punished. The Welsh Not certainly existed but how widespread it was is uncertain. What is certain is that neither the Welsh Not nor eradicating Welsh from schools were ever official state policies but rather something down to individual teachers.[74] Moreover, such an approach could only work if it operated in a context where other forces reinforced the message and parents also saw English as the language of education and progress.[75] Imagined or otherwise, the Welsh Not has remained a powerful symbol of the oppression of Welsh culture and it continues to feature prominently in identity displays at St Fagan's, now known as the National History Museum. It might also have fed the growing enthusiasm of Welsh people to learn Welsh that emerged in the last quarter or so of the twentieth century. Social surveys certainly demonstrated that a sense of identity and culture were a key motive for adults learning Welsh or sending their children to Welsh-medium schools. People were quite consciously trying to regain something from their collective past, even if that past was not always quite as they thought it was.[76]

Part of the pride in Welsh came from its status as a Celtic language with a longer history in Britain than English. After its eighteenth-century discovery (or perhaps invention), the notion of Wales as a Celtic nation remained a powerful historical idea that continues to exert influence on contemporary Welsh culture, as

[72] Quoted in Angela Drakakis-Smith, Graham Day, and Howard H. Davis, 'Portrait of a locality? The local press at work in north-west Wales, 2000-2005', *Contemporary Wales*, 21, 1 (2008), 25-46, p. 36.
[73] Brian Roberts, 'Welsh identity in a former mining valley: social images and imagined communities', in Ralph Fevre & Andrew Thompson (eds), *Nation, Identity and Social Theory: Perspectives from Wales* (Cardiff, 1999), 111-27, p. 123.
[74] Robert Smith, *Schools, Politics and Society: Elementary Education in Wales, 1870-1902* (Cardiff, 1999).
[75] For a similar point on how the national identity of English schools was then reinforced by propaganda in the wider sphere see Stephen Heathorn, *For Home, Country and Race: Constructing Gender, Class and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914* (Toronto, 2000).
[76] For example, Rhian Siân Hodges, 'Welsh-medium education and parental incentives: the case of the Rhymni Valley, Caerffili', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (2012), 1-19.

well providing a source of inspiration for gifts in Welsh tourist shops. Wales'
Celticness is not straightforward to disentangle but it is most problematic when used
as an ethnic term to describe the Welsh. Both before and since the Iron Age that is
supposed to embody the Celts, there has been so much movement back and forth over
Offa's dyke that the idea that the Welsh are racially different to the English is deeply
problematic. There is also the question of whether there was a Celtic race in the first
place. It is not that Wales does not have links with the people who made circular
artwork and lived in roundhouses; it is just that they probably did not call themselves
Celts and that the art and housing imagined to define the Celts was both often found
across Europe and not always even representative of the Iron Age in places termed
Celtic.[77]

Whatever its historical validity, the notion of Wales as Celtic was not just a
popular notion but one given credence by the heritage industry. Visitors to Celtica, a
Machynlleth heritage centre open from 1996 to 2006, were told 'today the
descendants of those early Celts are still here in Wales, proud of their heritage and
culture, and the survival of their native Welsh language'.[78] To reinforce this they
were played 'Yma O Hyd' (Still Here), a nationalist folk song which also draws links
between the Roman-era Celts and the Wales of today. Castell Henllys, an
archaeological site and Celtic village near Eglwyswrw, also essentially maps
Celticness onto Welshness in a straightforward, unproblematized fashion. The impact
was shown in visitor research that confirmed that people did both reflect on the
connections between the Celts and Wales and think of Wales in racial (Celtic) terms.[79]
Ethnic nationalism has always been distasteful to those on the left who seek more
inclusive forms of nationhood, but when it is based on an ethnicity that is probably
imagined it is even more problematic. At the 2011 census, a quarter of the Welsh
population was born outside Wales and a third did not record their national identity as
Welsh. Basing a Welsh identity on Celtic heritage is thus hardly likely to bind
together the whole of Wales.

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[77] For discussions see N. Merriman, 'Value and motivation in pre-history: the evidence for a Celtic spirit', in Ian Hodder (ed), *The Archaeology of Contextual Meanings* (Cambridge, 1987), 111-6. J. D. Hill and C. G. Cumberpatch, *Different Iron Ages: Studies in the Archaeology of Iron Age Europe* (Oxford, 1995).

[78] Quoted in Angela Piccini, 'Welsh Celts or Celtic Wales? The production and consumption of a (not so) different Iron Age', in Bill Bevan (ed.), *Northern Exposure: Interpretative Devolution and the Iron Ages in Britain* (Leicester, 1999), 51-64, at p. 57.

[79] Pyrs Gruffudd, David T Herbert, Angela Piccini, '"Good to think": social constructions of Celtic heritage in Wales', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 17 (1999), 705-21.

The place of the Celts in Welsh history was not new but at the end of the twentieth century a new trend in emerged in both academic and popular history, a Whiggish sense of the progress of the Welsh nation towards statehood. This was a product of devolution. After decades of national self-doubt, the establishment of Wales's first democratic institution of self government in 1999 encouraged some people to see the past as leading to that moment and beyond. This was a notion very evident in the upbeat and patriotic landmark BBC series *The Story of Wales* (2012). A subtle patriotism might be expected of BBC Wales but the same notion could also be seen in *Horrible Histories*. Its volume on Wales ends by declaring 'By 1999 Wales had its own parliament again – the Welsh Assembly. Maybe, like Owain Glyndwr, it will rise again. After all the horrible history maybe Wales will have a horribly happy ending!'[80] This sense of progress was not just limited to public history. In 1999, former Conservative Welsh Office minister Wyn Roberts wrote in his diary:

> The historians are busy rewriting history. The history of the United Kingdom has become the 'story of the isles' in deference to devolution and closer union with Europe. The Welsh approach to history is also veering so as to make devolution the climax of our achievement in spite of widespread disillusionment with the performance of the Assembly and the quality of its membership. Historians are a mercurial lot, slavishly interpreting the past to please those who dominate the present. History is indeed written by the winners.[81]

Academic historians have indeed had a tendency to see devolution as some form of climax to Welsh history. The fact that devolution is a recent but evolving and growing process rather than a single event encouraged such perspectives. More to the point, seeing devolution as a climax to twentieth-century Welsh history is not an unreasonable interpretation. But it again illustrates how the past is always viewed through the lens of the present and the primacy of national identity in interpretations of the Welsh past. Moreover, this idea of devolution of a historical climax can discourage criticism of the National Assembly. Much of the Welsh establishment are

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[80] Terry Deary, *Horrible Histories: Wales* (London, 2008), p. 155.
[81] Lord Roberts, *Right from the Start: The Memoirs of Sir Wyn Roberts* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 341.

still too pleased to have devolution at all to subject it to critical analysis that every democratic institution needs.

The history of the people of Wales could be told in many different ways. Class or gender would provide an equally valid basis for analysis as the Welsh or British nations. Neither, however, has as widespread pull as national identity and that owes much to the influence of popular understandings of the past. In education, popular culture and family identities, historical imagery and narratives certainly cemented Wales's place within Britain but tellings and understandings of history also helped sustain a sense of Wales's otherness within Britain.[82] How strong that sense was within the working classes from the nineteenth century to the mid twentieth centuries is less clear, especially amongst those who did not speak Welsh and thus lacked the most material of all differences. Their sense of nationality was entangled with a consciousness of class and complicated by their belief that Welshness was rooted in a rural culture that belonged to the past. That feeling faded as their own industrial communities fell into retreat from the 1960s onwards. The working class's growing sense of Welshness was also surely fed by the Welsh public history that was spreading its reach through propaganda, education and the museums. This was not accidental but the deliberate goal of cultural and political nationalists working in politics, schools, universities and the heritage sector.

Although the nation remains the dominant paradigm for both academic and popular history, there have been fears about such uses of history to sustain and promote national identity. The hostile reaction in 2013 to Conservative plans to create a new history curriculum for England in order to promote British national identity is one recent example but it is far from unique. Viewing how nationalism has led to bloody conflict, Stefan Berger concluded 'Given the extremely negative past record of historiographical nationalism, the advice from history to politicians surely must be to shy away from building national identity on a sense of a shared past. It is striking to see how constructions of common national histories have time and again

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[82] For a discussion of Britishness in Welsh history and historiography see Martin Johnes, 'Wales, history, Britishness', *Welsh History Review*, 25, 4 (2011), 596-61

led to exclusion of those who did not belong, for territorial, social, religious or ethnic reasons.'[83]

Nationalism's use of the past has indeed often been exclusive rather than inclusive, not to mention based on myths or a partial understanding of events. But this does not mean that the past should not have a role to play in national identity, assuming national identity is accepted as a legitimate end. As John Tosh has argued, 'In the field of nationalism, the contribution of a responsible public history is not to confirm group loyalties, but to subject them to critical appraisal'.[84] Although nationalists are often afraid of critical appraisal, a nation can come out of such an examination stronger rather than weaker. National histories does not need to encourage a nationalism that is bigoted, superior or violent. Being proud of one's nation does not mean having to be opposed to anyone else's. Deconstructing a nation does not mean denying it exists. If history is taught and told in a fashion that takes into account the past's complexities and pluralities, it can strengthen the cohesion of today's diverse society by pointing to that diversity's long and tangled roots. It can help build a civic national identity based on the here and now, rather than the grievances of yesterday. Understanding the past might also help us understand that nations need not be the only ways to organize societies. As Beverley Southgate has argued, history helps us live with ambiguity.[85] It helps us to accept and work with the complexities of society rather than to complain about and fight them. But whatever the future holds for Wales, it should be based on the needs of that future and not the chains of the past.

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[83] Stefan Berger, 'History and national identity: why they should remain divorced' (2007), http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-66.html
[84] Tosh, *Why History Matters,* p. 21.
[85] Beverley Southgate, *What is History For?* (London, 2005).