

Wales and the British overseas empire

*Interactions and influences,
1650–1830*

EDITED BY H. V. BOWEN



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Charles McKean, Bob Harris and Christopher A. Whatley (eds), *Dundee: Renaissance to Enlightenment* (Dundee, 2009).

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GENERAL EDITOR'S FOREWORD

In 1821, Sir William Lloyd of the East India Company visited Simla. The celebrated hill station (now Shimla), which was to become the summer capital of India, barely existed at this point, but Lloyd felt an immediate attraction to the area. He found the mountain air immensely invigorating and discovered that the landscape made him think of his native Wales:

This day's journey I shall always remember, for it reminded me of home, the days of my boyhood, my mother, and the happiest of varied recollections. It was not, however, the effect of the prospects, for they were unlike those among the Welsh hills, but it was because I recognised a great number of trees and flowers common there; such as the fir, the oak, the apricot, the pear, the cherry, together with wild roses, raspberries, thistles, dandelion, nettles, daisies, and many others. There was, too, an indescribable something in the breeze which brought back a comparative similarity of feeling. I shall never forget this day.¹

Those who have worked on the subject of the Scots overseas will find this reaction familiar. Scots around the world frequently found landscapes or flora that reminded them of their native heath. This invocation of Welsh memories is rarer, but it reflects the extent to which Welsh people, like others from different parts of the United Kingdom, found solace in aspects of environmental familiarity. It also explains why so many of them were keen to retire to Wales and reinvest their incomes from imperial activity in houses, land or further economic opportunity at home.

The notion of a 'four-nation' (Welsh, English, Scottish and Irish) approach to British imperial history is of relatively recent origin, but it is rapidly growing in popularity.² It is clear that the notion that migrants or sojourners could be Welsh (or whatever) at home, but 'British' in the empire does not really fit the case. Like Lloyd, many seem to have retained aspects of their specific ethnicity overseas, perhaps within a layering of multiple identities. Indeed, as I have argued in the past, it may well be that the British Empire ironically served to maintain such identities rather than obscure them. Thus, it is essential to avoid a purely Anglocentric (or even Londinocentric) history of empire if its cultural, religious, educational, environmental and economic forms are to be fully understood. Moreover, it is increasingly important to examine the manner in which each of these identities

GENERAL EDITOR'S FOREWORD

interacted within Britain itself, interactions which often had a significant imperial dimension to them.

As the editor of this volume points out, studies of the Irish and the Scots overseas have almost become commonplace, but in the case of the Welsh (and, to a certain extent, this must also be said of the English) much less so. When I conducted research in South Africa to consider the role of Scots in that region, I examined the censuses for places of birth and encountered the category 'England and Wales'. I remember reflecting on how lucky I was that the Scots had a separate column, unlike the Welsh.

This phenomenon is alluded to several times in this book, but the contributions here reflect the manner in which this collapsing of two ethnicities can be overcome. Moreover, the relative absence of Wales in the historiography is particularly true of the period covered by the chapters in this volume, spanning as they do the years 1650–1830. Thus this book is genuinely pioneering, both in terms of the recognition that there is indeed a significant story of imperial Wales to be told and in respect of its chronological focus.

The innovative studies here cover a historiographical survey of the writing of empire into Welsh history (or not, as the case might be) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Neil Evans); a striking examination of a region bounded by the Irish Sea and the Severn estuary, South Wales, south-west England and the Irish province of Munster (Chris Evans); and the rivalries and interactions between Ireland, Scotland and Wales in Britain, within a significant imperial framework (Martyn Powell). Most would accept that one of the prime formers of Welsh identity lies in religion. Wales has been generally constructed from the seventeenth century as a quintessentially Protestant country, one where revivalism and so-called Nonconformity were always prominent. This receives appropriate attention from David Ceri Jones (and indeed some of the most illuminating recent studies of the Welsh in the empire relate to missionary activity). There is also an intriguing study (by Trevor Burnard) of the notable reinvestment of a West Indian fortune, derived from slave plantations, in industrial developments in North Wales. While not unique, this case is striking for the very considerable sums involved. Andrew Mackillop brings his extensive knowledge of the personnel of the East India Company to bear upon the Welsh contribution, showing that, while Wales was indeed represented in the EIC (as in the case of Lloyd at the beginning of this introduction), it was probably in a proportion somewhat below what should have been the case given the comparative scale of the Welsh population within Britain. Finally, the editor, Huw Bowen, ranges widely over connections among India, the East India Company

GENERAL EDITOR'S FOREWORD

and the Welsh economy. All of this adds up to a realisation that there were indeed significant connections between Wales and empire which need to be explored.

One of the purposes of this book is to stimulate further research. It will certainly do that. Moreover, this volume cries out to be succeeded by one considering Wales and the British Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Work on this is already proceeding and will surely be published in the not-too-distant future.

John M. MacKenzie

Notes

- 1 Sir William Lloyd and Captain Alexander Gerard, *Narrative of a Journey from Caunpoor to the Boorendo Pass* (London, 1840), quoted in Raja Bhasin, *Simla, the Summer Capital of British India* (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 24–5.
- 2 For preliminary statements, see John M. MacKenzie, 'Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English worlds? A four-nation approach to the history of the British Empire', *History Compass*, 6 (2008), 1244–63, and also 'Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English worlds? The historiography of a four nations approach to the history of the British Empire', in Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland (eds), *Race, Nation and Empire: Making Histories, 1750 to the Present* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 133–53.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The essays in this volume are based upon papers that were first presented at a research workshop held at Aberystwyth University in September 2007. The workshop was part of a programme of work on Wales and the British overseas empire funded by a British Academy small research grant (SG-44820), and I would like to acknowledge the Academy's generous support for that project. While the essays in this volume focus on the years between 1650 and 1830, the papers presented at the workshop covered a longer period of time, which extended the analysis of the relationship between Wales and the empire up to 1960. This meant that, in addition to those who have written the essays that follow, the authors of post-1830 papers also played a full part in the proceedings, as well as in the discussions that contributed to the eventual making of this book. Consequently, I am indebted to the following for their stimulating contributions to the workshop: Jane Aaron, Gwyn Campbell, Bill Jones, Paul O'Leary, Chris Williams and Gareth Williams. Others in attendance at the workshop also made very helpful comments, for which I am grateful, but special thanks go to Geraint H. Jenkins who offered a general critique of the papers. As with so many historians of the British Empire, I owe a great debt to John MacKenzie who, as general editor of the 'Studies in Imperialism' series, has provided unwavering support for this exploratory venture into uncharted historical waters. Professor MacKenzie has long been concerned that, by comparison with Ireland and Scotland, Wales is underrepresented in historical writing on the empire, and the patient encouragement he has offered to me during the preparation of the volume has helped to ensure that the balance can now be redressed at least to some small degree.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library, London
IOR	India Office records
NLW	National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
TNA	The National Archives, London
<i>WHR</i>	<i>Welsh History Review</i>

MAP



Map: Welsh counties and towns in 1800

Introduction

H. V. Bowen

Without much fear of contradiction it can be stated that Wales and the Welsh have always been located at the very outer margins of British imperial historiography; and similarly it can be said that the British Empire has never loomed very large in writing on the domestic history of Wales. Several landmark publications on the broad sweep of British imperial history published in the last decade or so barely mention Welsh involvement in the overseas empire,¹ and recent examinations of the impact of empire on Britain have next to nothing to say about Wales.² On the other side of the coin, few general historical studies of Wales have ever devoted much space to the imperial or international dimensions of the Welsh historical experience, and readers will usually search Welsh history book indexes in vain for the words 'empire' or 'British Empire', which is somewhat ironic in view of the fact that it was a London Welshman, the polymath John Dee, who was the first to use the term 'British Empire' in 1577.³

There is in fact nothing at all novel about these opening observations, however, because many such remarks have been made, often by those who have contrasted the lack of work on Wales and the empire with the continuing flow of studies of British imperialism framed with reference to Ireland and Scotland. But, although the situation is slowly changing, there is still no comprehensive account of Welsh engagement with the empire and, as Neil Evans explains in the opening essay in this volume, students seeking to make sense of Welsh imperial relationships still need to piece together some very scattered 'fragments' of writing on the subject. This impoverished state of our knowledge about the Welsh contribution to the British Empire means that any claim about a 'Welsh empire' coexisting with the recently invoked 'empires' of Ireland or Scotland would be absurd;⁴ and it currently seems far beyond the realms of possibility that a volume devoted to Wales will ever stand alongside those on Ireland and Scotland that provide 'companions' to *The Oxford History of the British Empire*.⁵ In short, scant attention has ever been paid to historical connections between Wales and British overseas expansion, and considerable *lacunae* exist in our understanding of the histories of both British imperialism and Wales itself.

What is to be made of the fact that so little has ever been written about Wales and the empire? Are we to conclude that the empire was never of any great significance to Wales and the Welsh, or is it simply the case that the subject is yet to attract sustained attention from historians? Neil Evans explores these issues in detail but in general terms logic dictates that two possible explanations can be offered in response to such questions. The first is that the Welsh were not ever engaged to any great degree with the processes of British overseas expansion and hence, despite their best research efforts, historians have been unable to unearth archival evidence that points to much by way of interest, activity or involvement. If this is indeed so then such a conclusion is itself of some considerable importance because it points to relationships between Wales and the empire that were markedly weaker than those that linked Ireland and Scotland to the wider *imperium*. It could then be inferred that Welsh attitudes towards the empire were quite different from those of the Irish and Scots who have been identified as prominent agents of expansion in all spheres of British overseas activity. The Welsh, it might be concluded, were not an imperial people. A second possible explanation is that historians have not actually attempted to explore links between Wales and the empire, and as result judgement has to be suspended on a whole range of important issues which have been analysed thoroughly in relation to the other constituent parts of the British Isles: the nature and distribution of the overseas presence, participation rates, the establishment of imperial networks, the economic impact of expansion, attitudes towards the wider world and indigenous peoples, the place of empire in identity construction and so on. In other words, it could be argued that the empire has yet to capture the attention of scholars interested in the history of Wales.

There is in fact little to indicate that it is a scarcity of primary sources that lies behind the failure of historians to consider more thoroughly the relationships that might have existed between Wales and the overseas empire, and indeed the essays in this volume attest to the fact that there is an abundance of archival material on the subject to be found in Wales and elsewhere. The National Library of Wales is a rich mine of empire-related records, yet it is only in recent years that researchers have been opening up its 'imperial' seams, and many previously hidden gems are now also being unearthed in local record offices.⁶ It thus becomes necessary to consider why historians have devoted so little attention to Wales and the empire.

There is perhaps no great mystery with regard to historians of the overseas empire, because their limited discussion of the Welsh simply

INTRODUCTION

reflects the fact that those from Wales have often failed to catch the eye. As far as the identification of individuals is concerned, for example, it is sometimes easy for researchers to overlook Welsh people whose surnames were also commonplace in England. The bureaucratic legacy of the early political and administrative assimilation of Wales into England also led to Welsh people sometimes being described as 'English', and Wales was routinely included under the heading of 'England and Wales' in collections of statistics or schemes of classification.⁷ These practical research problems have often made it difficult for historians to spot the Welsh in the historical record or disaggregate their numbers from larger totals. Yet, even so, there is no escaping the hard fact that in comparison with others from Britain there were never many Welsh men or women in the wider world, and it has been well documented that across time and space their overseas presence usually paled into insignificance alongside the English, Irish and Scots. The numbers of the Welsh were seldom sufficient for them to establish and sustain the types of groups, networks, institutions and traditions that were characteristic of the Irish and Scots and thereby gave them the very visible presence in the wider world that has attracted so much attention from scholars. The thin scattering of those from Wales across the empire has prevented them making a similar collective impression on the consciousness of imperial historians and this has led to claims that because the Welsh were 'rarities everywhere' their impact on the colonies was very much a 'story of individuals'.⁸ In fact, detailed research on post-1850 Welsh migrations serves to qualify this notion, but such assessments are unsurprising when offered by historians presenting an overview of movements of Britons into the overseas empire.

Historians with a more specific interest in Wales are presented with the same problems of identifying and quantifying the Welsh overseas presence, and they acknowledge that this makes it difficult for them to be precise about movements of people from Wales into the wider world.⁹ But other reasons also help to explain why only limited examinations have ever been made of the part played by the Welsh in the creation and extension of the British overseas empire, and why there has not yet been any systematic examination of the effects that expansion had upon the economy, society and culture of Wales. It is of course worth remembering that compared with the size of academic communities in Ireland and Scotland the number of professional historians of Wales is actually quite small, which necessarily means that some important subject areas have been neglected as scholarly fashions have waxed and waned. The history of Wales and the empire is by no

means unique in this sense, and thus, to take just two other examples, very little recent research has been conducted on Welsh economic history or early mediaeval Welsh history.

Yet the fact that only a relatively small number of historians engage in the study of Wales does not by itself explain why the empire has been neglected. An important part of the explanation lies in the fact that since the Second World War the very subject matter of Welsh history has been quite narrowly circumscribed, and it is now commonly observed that a disproportionate amount of attention has been focused on the social, labour and political aspects of working-class life during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁰ At the same time, those inclined to view Wales as colony of England have been reluctant to concede that a colonised Welsh people could ever have become active and enthusiastic participants in British imperial enterprise.¹¹ Of course, much the same can be said of Ireland and the Irish, but whereas historians of Ireland have explored fully the complexities of the colonised/coloniser relationship few Welsh historians have taken up the challenge.¹² Instead, a blind eye, or at least a partially blind eye, has been turned to Welsh involvement in the empire, with the result that is not possible for a clear sight to be gained of how, and to what extent, Wales was shaped by the process of imperial expansion. This cutting adrift of a significant part of the nation's past was noted by Gwyn Alf Williams who sketched out a late nineteenth-century 'imperial South Wales', 'the sense and feel and smell of which, no doubt because of the formative experience of Depression, Socialism and Welsh Nationalism, Welsh historiography seems largely to have lost'.¹³

The steering of Welsh historical writing in particular directions has meant that important groups of people are conspicuous by their absence from mainstream studies of Wales, as has been pointed out by Russell Davies in a trenchant overview of modern Welsh history.¹⁴ Until quite recently women were almost entirely ignored, as were the urban middle classes,¹⁵ and certain categories of men have been similarly marginalised or excluded altogether. Hence, little attention has ever been paid to businessmen, industrialists and entrepreneurs by Welsh historians, and scant notice has been granted to those individuals from the middle and upper classes who made their way in the world as adventurers, plantation owners, merchants, sea captains, army and navy officers, doctors or colonial administrators. And next to nothing is known about the Welsh mercenaries, freebooting sailors and foot-soldiers of empire who served and frequently died far from their homeland. This has helped to ensure that Welsh history sometimes has a self-contained and inward-looking feel to it, as befits a subject organised, conceptualised and explained without much reference

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to external influences emanating from British overseas expansion. In other words, the very way in which Welsh historians have collectively defined their subject has served to ensure that the empire has not yet been fully integrated into the history of Wales.

Of course, it would be quite wrong to suggest that the history of Wales has been entirely sealed off from the empire. Migrants and missionaries have always received their fair share of attention, although a focus on their activity has perhaps served to deflect attention away from Welsh engagement with the harder edges of imperialism which found expression in acts of violence, coercion, exploitation and plunder that often characterised British actions in the wider world. And historians have occasionally placed Wales and the Welsh people within terms of analytical reference defined by engagement with the empire. As already noted, Gwyn Alf Williams marked out the existence of a nineteenth-century 'imperial South Wales', arguing that 'industrial Wales – and the Welsh working class within it – were products of an imperial formation located in buoyant export enterprise which gave south Wales a world empire'.¹⁶ More recently, Aled Jones and Bill Jones have explored the relationship between the 'Welsh world' and the British Empire, and although they point to a diversity of experience they suggest that 'similar motivational, linguistic, cultural, and religious impulses were shared by a significant proportion of the actors involved'.¹⁷

These two much-quoted studies focus on the years after 1850 and it is striking that the literature that does exist on Wales and the empire is weighted very heavily in favour of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The dangers inherent in this situation are obvious, especially if historians invoke examples of Welsh interactions with the empire drawn from the years after 1850 and use them as proxies to generalise about imperial relationships in earlier times. This can lead to the creation of a static and one-dimensional picture of Welsh engagement with the empire, which does little justice to change over time. In order to address this problem, relationships between Wales and the empire need to be set in a much longer-term perspective than has hitherto been the case, for only then can conclusions be drawn about the extent to which the contributions that the Welsh made to the empire in, say, 1750 differed from those that existed a hundred years later. As things stand, very little of substance is known about Wales and the empire before 1850, and those modern studies that do exist are very few in number.

In fact, the period covered by this volume, from 1650 to 1830, offers plenty of scope for the detailed exploration of different relationships between Wales and British overseas expansion, and there is much to

suggest that the empire bore rather more heavily upon Wales than one might assume from the paucity of literature on the subject. Indeed, it is surprising that little sustained attention has been paid to Wales and the empire before 1830, not least perhaps because Wales and its emblems were often inscribed into the overseas empire through the names that were given to colonies, settlements and ships. Most notably, what was originally called 'New Wales' became the New South Wales of Australia, and if things had worked out only a little differently Nova Scotia might today be known as Nova Cambrensis. The 'Welsh Tract' of Pennsylvania contained a substantial community of Welsh-speakers in the American colonies; a number of estates or slave plantations in the Caribbean adopted Welsh place names such as Swansea and Denbigh; and the East India Company settlement at Cuddalore on the Coromandel Coast of India was protected by nearby Fort St David. At sea, East Indiamen named *Anglesey*, *Cardigan*, *Carmarthen* and *Monmouth* plied the routes between Britain and Asia, and during the early nineteenth century privately owned trading vessels called *Owen Glendower* and *Upton Castle* operated out of Madras.

The names given to places and ships help to establish the geographical range of the Welsh overseas presence during the eighteenth century, and this has encouraged historians to look at the underlying colonial communities that had their origins in Wales. Over the years, the place of Welsh religious groups in North America has been noted in general studies of early modern migration and colonial identities, and attention has been paid to settlement, especially where it was most concentrated in Pennsylvania.¹⁸ In addition, some detailed works have concentrated on the founding of specific Welsh communities, such as Cardigan established by West Walian migrants in New Brunswick in 1819.¹⁹ Historians have also often noted in passing that Welshmen, or at least men connected with Wales, were capable of making their way in the wider world, some of them with a considerable degree of success. There are the usual suspects such as Henry Morgan, Elihu Yale, David Samwell, Sir Thomas Picton, and the great oriental scholar Sir William Jones, a London Welshman who was from an Anglesey family. And there are prominent figures who are not often thought of as having been Welsh, such as the writer on imperial politics Josiah Tucker and the great Surveyor-General of India, Sir George Everest. But there were also plenty of other lesser-known individuals of the second or third rank who used the opportunities provided by imperial expansion to advance their careers, interests and fortunes. Historians have located them across the empire, ranging from Nova Scotia, which had Richard Philipps as its first long-serving although often absent Governor between 1717 and 1749, to Madras where Sir Henry

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Gwillim, the 'Welshman and a fiery Briton in all senses', served as a controversial judge in the Supreme Court during the early years of the nineteenth century.²⁰ Many other such figures feature in the essays that follow.

It is also the case that historians have occasionally identified signs that some contemporaries believed that, for good or ill, the empire had the capacity to exert influence on the society and economy of Wales during the eighteenth century. It has been noted, for example, that some critics feared that the empire was proving to be too much of an attraction for Welshmen, so that not enough attention was being paid to domestic economic improvement. As early as 1748 Lewis Morris of Anglesey condemned in typically robust fashion those Welsh landlords who went fortune-seeking overseas, thus preferring to 'rummage the East and West Indies for money rather than to go fifty or a hundred yards underground in our own island'.²¹ Evidence such as this offers tantalising glimpses of interactions between Wales and the empire, but studies of groups and individuals remain unconnected, making it difficult to discern any meaningful patterns or trends, and as yet no attempt has been made to draw together different strands of enquiry into one consolidated study of the Welsh dimensions of British imperialism.

In responding to the challenge of filling a considerable gap that exists in Welsh historiography, this collection of essays does not aspire to offer a comprehensive history of Wales and the British Empire between 1650 and 1830. Too many aspects of the subject remain under-researched for such a project to be feasible. Instead, the volume represents a somewhat tentative first step in the exploration of various interactions that occurred between Wales and the many processes of British overseas expansion. And even this step has required some very basic groundwork to be undertaken by the contributors whose essays are founded upon extensive archival research. In some cases, it has been necessary to map out and establish more fully the extent of Welsh participation in imperial activity even though, as noted earlier, this is by no means a straightforward task. Of course, simple head counts and cataloguing of individual achievement can take us only far, as has recently been pointed out.²² And, as Neil Evans notes below, when taken to extremes, the claiming of important imperial figures for Wales can be a rather pointless exercise, which then becomes a very misleading one if it is implied that such men brought something distinctively 'Welsh' to the process of expansion. To take an example already cited, Sir George Everest might (or perhaps might not) have been born near Crickhowell but, although this happy event is now useful for the local tourist board, there is nothing to suggest that Everest