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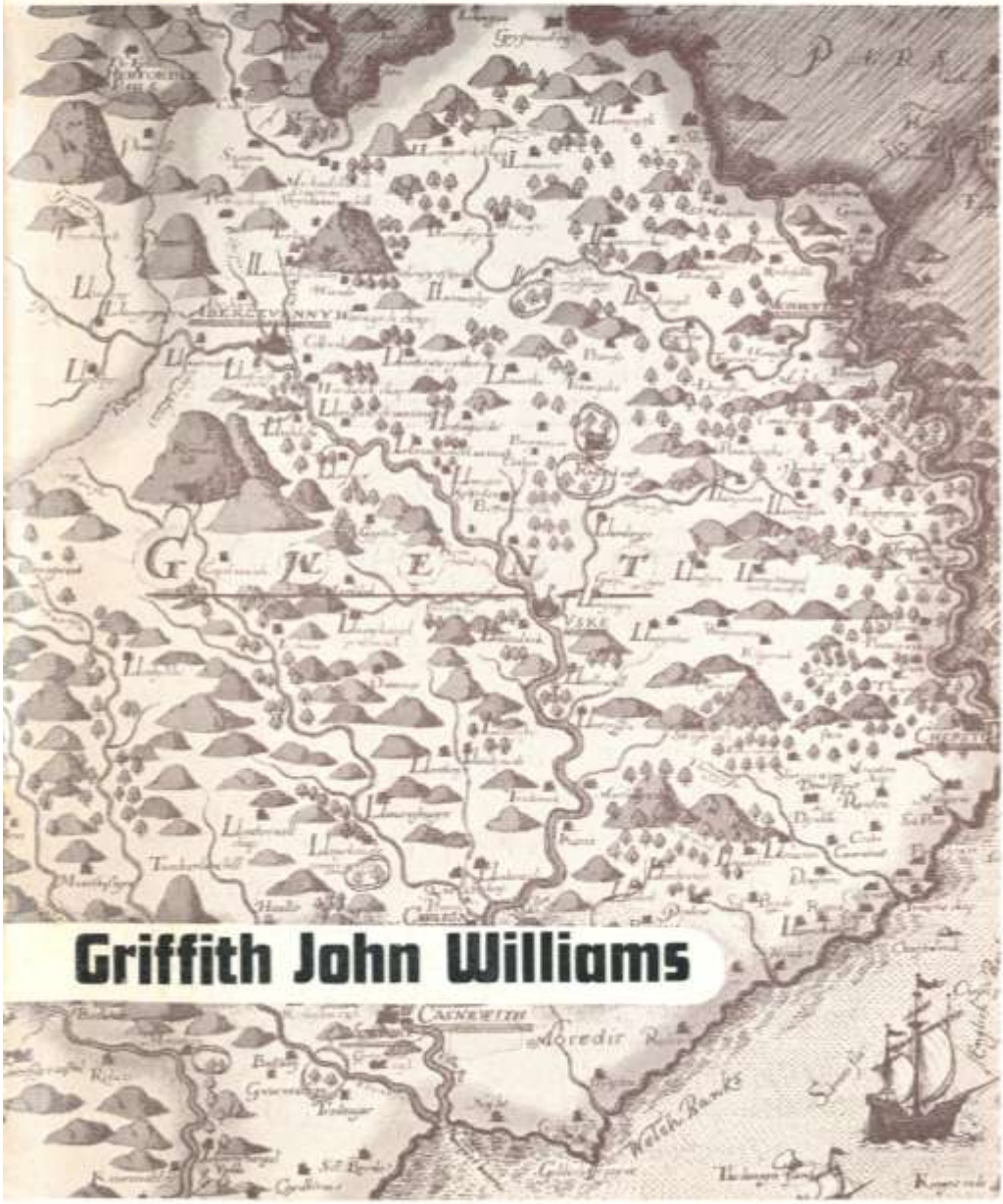
The Welsh Tradition of Gwent



Griffith John Williams

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G. J. WILLIAMS :: *A BIOGRAPHY*

Professor G. J. Williams was Head of the Department of Welsh at University College, Cardiff, from 1946 until his retirement in 1957, and had previously been lecturer in the Department under Professor W. J. Gruffydd since 1921.

A native of Cardiganshire, he had studied at Aberystwyth and Bangor under Edward Anwyl, T. Gwynn Jones, J. H. Davies and John Morris-Jones, and when he came to Cardiff he had just commenced his lifetime's research into the literary tradition of Glamorgan and Gwent and the career and activities of Iolo Morganwg. When he died in 1963 his work on Iolo was unfinished, but his contributions made over a period of forty years to our knowledge of the literary tradition, not only of the south-eastern region but of Wales in general, amounted to a massive body of penetrating scholarship.

Living in Penarth, and later in Gwaelod-y-garth, he identified himself closely with the Welsh life of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire, and in this lecture he gives a popular account of the development of the Welsh cultural tradition of Gwent from early times until the twentieth century.

Although of a retiring disposition, Professor Williams was not in any way a cloistered recluse. The Welsh language and its literature were his predominant interests, but he nevertheless realised that these could only survive and flourish under favourable conditions. And these conditions, he saw clearly, were of a political nature. He was, accordingly, a convinced Welsh Nationalist from his student days at Aberystwyth. It was at his house in Penarth that the historic meeting was held in 1924 when he and Mr. Saunders Lewis and the late Ambrose Bebb decided to take steps to launch a new and independent Welsh political movement. This little group entered into discussions with another group at Caernarfon, led by H. R. Jones, with the result that the Welsh Nationalist Party(*Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru*) was established at the Pwllheli Eisteddfod in 1925.

G. J. Williams was firmly convinced that without the Welsh language and literary tradition Welsh nationality would be meaningless. It was his hope that the language would one day be restored as the normal speech and instrument of culture of the people of Gwent as well as of Glamorgan and the rest of Wales.

The present reprint of a lecture delivered at the Ebbw Vale National Eisteddfod in 1958 shows that the main ground on which this hope rested was the demonstrable fact that '*Monmouthshire has always been an essential part of Wales until the present day*' and '*has played an honourable part in the literary and cultural life of the Welsh nation.*' Let us hope that its present inhabitants will not lightly or heedlessly abandon their ancient tradition. A.O.H.Jarman

The Welsh Tradition of Gwent

FIRST of all, I ought to explain what we mean by the term Gwent. As a common noun, *gwent* meant, in all probability, 'open ground, a plain,' and that applied to the low country bordering the sea, where we find the old Roman settlement in the place which we still know as *Caer-went*, while Chepstow is still known in Welsh as *Cas-gwent*, 'the castle (*castell*) of Gwent'.

But in Welsh history, the name is applied to the district enclosed by the Usk (Wysg), the Wye (Gwy) and Mynwy (or Monnow) and the sea. This formed the old Kingdom of Gwent, and as there was a great forest separating the low country and the upper regions, the Kingdom was divided into two *cantrefi*, Gwent Is-coed (a name which is still retained in Llanfair Discoed, near Caer-went) and *Gwent Uwchcoed*, the upper Gwent. This is the historical Gwent. But under the Act of Union of 1536, the County of Monmouthshire was created, a county which included Gwent Is-coed and Gwent Uwch-coed together with the old cantref of *Gwynllwg*, between the rivers Rhymni and the Usk, which was a part of Morgannwg.

That is the modern county of Monmouthshire, Sir Fynwy in Welsh. I shall, for the purpose of this talk, take Gwent to mean Monmouthshire. That, of course, is common practice. When the *Western Mail*, for instance, wants to emphasize the fact that it is a national newspaper, it always refers to the men of Monmouthshire as the 'men of Gwent'.

It used to be thought by some people that by the Act of Union, Monmouthshire became an English county. I am not a professional historian, but scholars have shown in recent years that the distinction between Monmouthshire and the other Welsh shires had to do simply with the circuit of the judges and the administration of law. It was only a matter of administrative convenience.

It is no part of my duty today to discuss this question but to try to show you that Monmouthshire has always been an

essential part of Wales until the present day, that Welsh remained as the language of the majority of the inhabitants until the end of the last century and that the men of Monmouthshire have taken a most active part in the cultural and religious life of Wales until fairly recent times. These are the matters which I would like to discuss in this talk.

And first of all, the history of the Welsh language in Monmouthshire. I cannot give you an entirely satisfactory account, for more research work has to be done on this subject before any one can give a satisfactory account of the fortunes of the Welsh tongue in this part of Wales. But some things are quite clear.

In mediaeval days, Gwent was as thoroughly Welsh as Gwynedd, Powys and Deheubarth, although it is possible that certain areas in the south and east may have been affected by the influx of the Normans with their English followers. It may be a significant fact that the great abbey of Tintern does not figure in the literary life of Wales, and that in this respect it is quite different from the great abbeys of Margam and Neath, Strata Florida and Valle Crucis.

But Welsh remained as the language of its inhabitants, and in the sixteenth century, when a Welshman, Llywelyn ap Maredydd ap Llelo Gwta made a tour of the thirteen counties of Wales, he could give the Welsh names of all the parishes in this part of Monmouthshire, the names that he had heard—*Dintarn Uchaf* and *Dintarn Isaf; Castell Gwent* (for Casgwent); *Porthsgiwed;* Y *Drenewydd Gelli-farch* (for Shirenewton); *Magwyr* (for *Magor*) ; *Gwndy* (for *Undy*), etc. And the fact that such beautiful place-names as *Llanfihangel Tor-y-Mynydd, Llangatwg Feibion Afel, Llaneuddagwy* (which became *Llandogo*), *Llandewi Rhydderch* and many more have survived until the present day, and the fact that old English names of parishes are few and far between, proves that those areas were predominantly Welsh throughout the centuries. We have only to compare the place-names of Monmouthshire with those of Gower and Southern Pembrokeshire which lost some of their Welsh features in the Middle Ages.

It can be proved that members of the noble families of Eastern and Southern Monmouthshire were Welsh-speaking; for example William Bleddyn (Blethin), Bishop of Llandaff between 1575 and 1590, who was born at Shirenewton Court,

was not only Welsh-speaking, but had mastered the difficult art of Welsh poetry, and could write a good *englyn*. In the central districts and in the Western parts of the County, the position is quite clear. As I shall show later on, Welsh poets from north and south Wales received a great welcome in the homes of the gentry throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and on until the early years of the seventeenth.

When the Independents founded the first gathered church within the borders of Wales at Llanfaches in 1639, a Welsh poet, John Jones of Llan-bedr in Langstone in the same neighbourhood, attacked their doctrines and behaviour, not in English but in a Welsh song which gives us an idea of the kind of Welsh that was spoken in lower Gwent in the sixteenth century. And in the same period, John Edwards, the vicar of Tredynnog, who called himself 'Sion Treredyn', and who was born in Caldicot, near Chepstow, published a translation of an old English theological work. It is significant that he dedicates his Welsh translation to the noble families of Gwent, to the Herberts, and the Kemeys family, to the Williamses of Llangybi, families which had nourished the cultural life of the district. Then, this Welshman from Caldicot makes a violent attack on those Welshmen who betray their native land, Wales, and who despise their language. He says that unfortunately English was beginning to penetrate into Bro Gwent, the lowland of Gwent, on the shore of the Severn Sea. This, in all probability marks the beginning of the penetration of English into Bro Gwent.

But in the other parts of Monmouthshire, right up to the English border, Welsh was a living language until the nineteenth century, although it had disappeared in some parishes near the English border fairly early in that century.

When Griffith Jones established Welsh schools in these areas in the eighteenth century, he sometimes gives the Welsh and English names of the parishes in his annual report *Welsh Piety*. For example, in 1744-5 a school was held in the little secluded village of Wolvesnewton, and in his annual report he refers to it as *Llanwynell*. Everything seems to suggest that this was a thoroughly Welsh area in the eighteenth century. Indeed the language persisted until the second half of the last century. That is the testimony of Sir Joseph Bradney of Tal-y-coed Court, seven miles from Monmouth, a Welsh speaker, and our greatest authority on the history of Monmouthshire.

This is what he says in 1892 of Llangatwg Feibion Afel, on the borders of Herefordshire, about four miles from Monmouth.

> In Llangattock Vibon Avel there are no Welsh-speaking people left, though several of the old ones have a slight knowledge, being able to understand ordinary simple sentences ; but a clergyman tells me that 25 years ago (that is in 1867) when he was curate of Llangattock Vibon Avel, he found that the aged people in the village of Llanfaenor (in the parish of Llangattock Vibon Avel) had an imperfect knowledge of English, and that he went to the trouble of getting some Welsh devotional books for them, which they much appreciated.

This is a really astonishing statement—less than a hundred years ago, the old people in a part of this parish on the borders of Herefordshire were to a very great extent, monoglots. Even in the town of Monmouth some Welsh was spoken in the early years of the last century. Everything seems to suggest that Welsh was a living language throughout Monmouthshire in this period except in Monmouth (although a few people could speak it there), Chepstow and lower Gwent near the Severn Sea.

And that leads me to another astonishing statement made by Iolo Morganwg about the year 1800. He says that Monmouthshire was a thoroughly Welsh county, and that it contained a higher percentage of monoglots than any other county in Wales. He knew his Monmouthshire well, and had resided for a time in Gwynllwg, not far from Rumney and St. Mellons (Tredelerch, Llaneirwg), and we must pay great attention to his statement. He had made a study of the dialect, and had collected the old words and expressions which were still retained, words that were not heard in any other part of Wales. When he made the statement he was probably thinking of the northern and central areas of Monmouthshire, and it is quite possible that what he says about the percentage of monoglots in these areas is correct. The fact that there were old people with an imperfect knowledge of English in Llangatwg Feibion Afel less than a hundred years ago seems to confirm this. This is what he says :

> Monmouthshire is as properly as any other a *Welsh County*, for in no County do the Welsh language and manners more prevail ; no County of Wales has so large a portion of it wherein the English language is not understood :

And this is how he explains it :

> The greater part of South Wales is seperated (*sic*) from England by the severn sea . . . and where from the east it joins English Counties the Towns or Cities of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester are at great distances and no intercourse of trade between them and South Wales.

I believe that there is a great deal of truth in this, and therefore it is not surprising that even in a parish bordering England, like Llangatwg Feibion Afel, there should be old people in the sixties of the last century who had an imperfect knowledge of English. But in the central and eastern areas of Monmouthshire it is almost certain that the great majority of the inhabitants were to all intents and purposes monoglots. The history of the various denominations seems to confirm this.

And this was true for some time after Iolo's death. The industrial developments in the hills in the first half of the last century did not affect the Welsh life of these districts; indeed—as I shall explain later on—it acted as a stimulant, and the new industrial villages and towns took a most active part in the literary life of the period.

But things gradually changed in the second half of the century. This is not so noticeable in the industrial valleys as in the agricultural areas. Sir Joseph Bradney states in 1892 that the language in the agricultural areas was declining and that in many parishes where the language flourished in the first half of the century, only the old people could speak Welsh, and that only occasional services in Welsh were held in the chapels. John E. Southall, the Newport publisher, discusses this in his book, *Wales and her Language* which appeared in 1892. This volume includes a most interesting linguistic map. Monmouthshire is divided into three sections. In the eastern part, there is a band about six or seven miles wide where no native Welsh was understood or spoken, and this is also true of the low country between Chepstow and Newport. But in central Monmouthshire, which includes such places as Abergafenni, Llan-arth, Usk, Pont-y-pwl, Aber-carn, Blaenafon, Abertyleri, Cwmbran, Basaleg, and the low country between Newport and Cardiff, things are different. Here Welsh was spoken or understood by less than 60% of the adult population. Of course the figure varied in different localities. In the Western part, Welsh was spoken or understood by over 60% of the population and this area includes Ebbw Vale (or Pen-y-cae as Southall calls it),

Tredegar, Rhymni, Pontlotyn, Bedwellty, Pengam, Machen, Basaleg, etc. The Vicar of Marshfield (Maerun) in 1900 had to learn Welsh in order to hold Welsh services.

Therefore, West Monmouthshire was as Welsh as Cardiganshire or Caernarfonshire in the life-time of those who are over 65. That is a fact which we must always bear in mind. But some of these areas were thoroughly Welsh for a long time after this, and even today a few districts still remain.

I have myself met old men in most of these areas who could speak excellent Welsh, in places like Caerleon, Machen, Llanedern, Rumney (near Cardiff), St. Mellons, Castleton, and in Peterston Gwynllwg. It is quite clear that there has been a very rapid decay in this area during the last sixty years. And here I ought to refer to an interesting fact. About twenty or thirty years ago, I found small pockets of Welsh speakers in areas which have by now been completely anglicised, and almost without exception, this could be explained by the fact that these Welsh speakers were members of a Welsh Nonconformist chapel. I know of two or three interesting examples of this in the Vale of Glamorgan today—small pockets of Welsh speakers in areas that have been almost completely anglicised.

And secondly, the place of Monmouthshire in the literary and religious life of Wales. Of course, it is quite impossible for me in a short talk to give you a satisfactory account of the literary life of Gwent and Gwynllwg throughout the centuries. I can only refer to a few of its main features.

Undoubtedly there were poets in Gwent in the earliest centuries, singing in the courts of the Kings and Princes of this province, but their works and even their names have disappeared, apart from the King's poet Berddig, who lived in Nether Went in the eleventh century. His name survives. The *cyfarwydd*, the story-teller, was also an important figure in the King's Court, and as every Welshman knows, Teyrnon Twryf Liant, the lord of lower Gwent, Gwent Is-coed, is a prominent figure in the first branch of the Mabinogi.

Many similar stories must have disappeared as they were never written down. And the men of Gwent must remember that one of the most influential books written in the Middle Ages in Western Europe was the legendary *History of the Kings*

of Britain, Historia Regum Britanniae, the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Breton, who was brought up in that town in the early years of the twelfth century. He was intensely aware of the history and legends of this area, and was a patriotic son of Gwent.

It was he who transformed the obscure Roman fort of Caerllion on the borders of Gwent into a glorious British city, the great centre of the Arthurian Romances, and the climax of this fascinating History is the splendid scene of Arthur's Pentecostal crown-wearing at Caerllion, a scene which has captured the imagination of writers and poets from the twelfth century until our own day. The city and its architecture and ecclesiastical greatness are described with more fervour than is to be found in any other part of the Historia. The glorification of Caerllion is one of the best examples we have of local patriotism in Mediaeval Wales.

This mythical history of the British race did more than any other book to condition Welsh thought from Geoffrey's own days until the nineteenth century. We were not barbarians, like the Saxons—we, like the Romans, belonged to the race of Troy ; our traditions could be placed side by side with those of Greece and Rome. It was a son of Gwent who did this.

And now we come to the bardic life of Wales from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth, one of the most brilliant periods in the history of Welsh literature. Bardism was a profession, and no one could secure the rights and privileges of a poet unless he had been trained in a bardic school. The bards were the keepers of the literary language and the custodians of Welsh culture. They were supported by the noble families, who welcomed them in their homes, where they sang the praises of the gentry. They went on circuit, and received statutory fees for their poems, and for preserving the pedigrees of these families. We have thousands of poems written in this period, and they show that the noble families of Gwent and Gwynllwg took their place as patrons of the bards.

Gwent and Morgannwg were famous throughout Wales for their generosity and hospitality. One of these gentry became the most famous of all the patrons of the bards in the Middle Ages—Ifor Hael, 'Ifor the Generous,' of Gwernyclepa in Basaleg, near Newport, in Gwynllwg, on the borders of Gwent. He was the patron of Dafydd ap Gwilym.

The descendants of Ifor in the sixteenth century took great pride in the fact that Dafydd ap Gwilym, the greatest of Welsh poets, was once the family bard of Gwernyclepa. The foundations of the old house of Ifor can still be seen in Clepa Park, near Tredegar Park. And the family of Ifor, the Morgans of Gwent, remained as great patrons of the poets, until the seventeenth century. Poets visited them and sang their praises, in Llantarnam. Tredegyr (near Newport), Machen Pen-y-coed (in Lower Gwent), Llanrhymni, Bedwellty. And then the Herberts, of course, the Herberts of Raglan Castle, St. Julians (near Newport), Coldbrook (Colbrwg) near Abergafenni), etc. When Welshmen visit Raglan Castle, they think of the great period when William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, ruled there in the time of the Wars of the Roses, when great poets, like Guto'r Glyn, came there, and sang their praises in the great hall. And we all know of the famous elegy sung by Guto'r Glyn when the news arrived that the Earl of Pembroke had been executed after the Battle of Banbury in 1469. 'Gwinllan fu Raglan i'r iaith,' he says, 'Rhaglan has been a vineyard for the Welsh Language.' Many other families could be named who were aware of their duties as patrons of the literary life of Wales. The Kemeyses of Cefnmabli, the Williamses of Llangybi, the Rossers of Wern-ddu (in Llandeilo Bertholau), the Lewises of Rhiw'rperrai.

It must be remembered that these gentry, even in Eastern Gwent, were Welsh-speaking until the middle of the seventeenth century. Even the English nobles who settled in Gwent in the sixteenth century became Welshmen, and learnt the language. The Somerset family, the Earl of Worcester for example, settled in Rhaglan after Charles Somerset, the Earl of Worcester, had married the daughter and heiress of William Herbert, the second Earl of Pembroke, in 1492. The great Welsh scholar, Thomas Wiliems of Trefriw in north Wales, states in the introduction to his Latin-Welsh dictionary in 1604 that the Earl of Worcester and Lord Rhaglan did not hesitate to speak Welsh, and that he did his best to foster the ancient tongue for which, as a true Briton, he had a great regard. The old noblemen of Gwent were intensely aware of their Welshness.

There is one thing that the men of Gwent should do today. They should make a complete list of these ancient homes, many of which survive today as farmhouses, so that

the present generation might learn of the old associations. Books have been published in recent years describing many of these old homes, but their authors were not aware that they were once the haunts of some of the great poets of the past, and that they were once the centres of Welsh learning. That, in my opinion, is their chief claim to fame.

But later on, the gentry in Monmouthshire, as in other parts of Wales, became anglicised. But that did not mean the end of the literary life of Gwent. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, we find bards writing religious and devotional poetry, which were called *cwndidau* in the Gwentian dialect, just as Ficer Pritchard did in Carmarthenshire. And when the Puritan movement started, poets in lower Gwent, in places like Llan-bedr near Langstone, wrote virulent songs attacking the Puritans. It is interesting to note that these men of Gwent regarded Puritanism as an English movement, which would, unless checked, destroy the old Welsh way of life. One poet, possibly from the neighbourhood of Monmouth, said :

Duw ddanfono Siarlas eto,
Onid e, 't raid sôn am Gymro.

'May God send Charles back, otherwise there will be no need to talk of a Welshman.' He, like many Welshmen, regarded the Stuarts, the descendants of the Welshman Henry VIII, as protectors of Welsh life, just as they had regarded the Tudors in the 16th century. Everything seems to point to the fact that the literary centre of Gwent in this period was Blaenau Gwent. We have manuscripts written in this area which give us a great deal of help in studying the history of the Gwentian dialect, the Gwenhwyseg, a most important dialect, which contained words and grammatical forms which had disappeared from all the other Welsh dialects except that of East Glamorgan.

There is no need for me to deal with the religious life of Gwent. This is well-known to all of us, how Puritanism spread throughout the country after the Independents had established a church in Llanfaches, and the Baptists in Olchon in Ewias within the borders of Herefordshire.

This, in spite of the prognostications of the seventeenth century poets, strengthened the Welsh life of Monmouthshire as these Nonconformist churches were closely connected with those in the other South Wales counties. That, in my opinion,

is a very important point when dealing with the history of Monmouthshire in recent times.

There is no book that can give us a better idea of the Welshness of Monmouthshire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than *Hanes y Bedyddwyr ymhlith y Cymry* (the History of the Baptists in Wales) published in 1778, and written by the famous Baptist historian, Joshua Thomas, who spent his life as a minister in Leominster. This history is a classic, and makes fascinating reading especially for those of us who are interested in the Welsh life of Gwent. Where were these churches, the centres of great activity, which were visited constantly by Welsh ministers from all parts of Wales and formed an important part of the religious life of the Welsh nation? Joshua Thomas gives a detailed account of the gathered churches in Llanwenarth (in Llanfoist, near Abergafenni), Blaenau Gwent, Pen-y-garn and Trosnant (in Pontypwl), Caerllion, Brynbuga (Usk), Llantrisant. And we should always remember that each church was a centre, and that the members might come from areas eight or nine miles away.

The same picture can be seen in the history of the Welsh Independent Churches of Monmouthshire in the first volume of *Hanes Eglwysi Annibynnol Cymru* by John Thomas and Dr. Thomas Rees, published in 1871. As Dr. Rees had spent 12 years as a minister in Cendl (Beaufort), the account can be relied on. Apart from the Churches founded in the Eastern and Southern areas, they were Welsh in speech almost without exception until the middle of the last century, and some even until this century.

This volume is full of interesting facts concerning the history of the language, and I will refer to some of them to supplement the account which I gave in the earlier part of this talk. Let's take Basaleg, near Newport. In 1832 an optimistic Englishman living in Newport thought of establishing an English cause in Basaleg. He built a chapel, but in two year's time, he had to hand it over to the Welsh Independents.

In the industrial districts, the position was the same in spite of the great influx of population. It is a notable fact that some of the foremost Welsh ministers of the day were attracted to Gwent in this period—for example, Dr. Thomas Rees came to Beaufort, Robert Ellis (Cynddelw) to Sirhywi, William

Roberts (Nefydd) to Blaenau Gwent, and Evan Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd) to Tredegar, etc.

But these ministers, led by Dr. Thomas Rees and others, thought that it was their duty to provide for the English-speaking people who had come to these industrial areas, and to establish 'English causes.' They encouraged those members of the Welsh chapels who could understand English to form the nucleus of these causes. Indeed, it is more than probable that the majority of the members of these new causes were Welsh-speaking, a fact which must be emphasised. Indeed in some of the English causes all the members were Welsh-speaking. This is the policy which Emrys ap Iwan, the famous Methodist preacher, attacked in north Wales at a later date when he had to encounter the great displeasure of Dr. Lewis Edwards.

The first English cause of the Independents in northern Gwent was Tabernacle in Pen-y-cae (Ebbw Vale), established in 1843. Later on, this movement gained momentum. English causes were established in Tredegar in 1858, in Pontypwl (Mount Pleasant Church) in 1862, in Abersychan and Blaenafon in 1863. It is quite clear that the vast majority of the older people in the eastern valleys in the fifties and sixties of the last century were Welsh-speaking, that very many of the old people were monoglots, but that the young people were slowly getting used to the English. The same thing has happened lately in East Glamorgan. And yet, the change was, in its early stages, very gradual. Dr. Thomas Rees states in 1871 that there were twenty-seven English Independent churches in Monmouthshire (and this figure, we must remember, includes the towns of Monmouth, Chepstow and Newport and the anglicised areas of the east and the south), but that there were thirty-five Welsh churches. That was the position in 1871, and this is true of the other non-conformist denominations as well. Even about the years 1915 to 1920 there were a number of Welsh churches in Monmouthshire and even today there are Welsh churches in some districts.

The Industrial Revolution is said to be responsible for this change, but that is not strictly true. Iron works were started between 1778 and 1784 in Sirhywi, Beaufort, Ebbw Vale, Blaenafon and Nant-y-glo, and this started a new period in the history of Gwent. Many of the immigrants who came to these works were thorough Welsh people from north and west Wales, and they strengthened the Welsh life and

language ; so much so that the immigrants from England soon became Welsh-speaking ; and their descendants, many of them, became more fervent supporters of the language than the Welsh people themselves. This immigration started a new period in the history of Gwent, a subject which would make a most interesting book. I can only give you now a short summary of what happened.

Industrial Gwent shared with the rest of Wales that intense interest in our language, in Welsh history and traditions, a movement which spread from the London Welsh Societies to Wales in the early years of the last century. Welsh societies were formed in the industrial towns and villages ; the Eisteddfod became a popular festival ; classes were formed to study Welsh Grammar, the rules of *cynghanedd* and of Welsh metrics; that is why so many grammars and dictionaries were published during that period.

There were bards and literary men in all these industrial centres, and industrial Gwent played a very important part in this literary life of Wales, and produced one of the greatest Welsh poets, Islwyn, who was born in 1832 in Ynys-ddu in the Sirhywi valley.

If we desire a picture of Welsh life in industrial Gwent in the last century, we cannot do better than read that fascinating account of life in Sirhywi and the surrounding districts written by a native of Sirhywi, William Williams (Myfyr Wyn). He published his memoirs in the Welsh newspaper, *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, and after his death they appeared in book form under the title *Cân, Llên a Gwerin*. It was republished in 1951 by the University of Wales Press Board in a volume which bears the title, *Atgofion am Sirhywi a'r Cylch*.

It gives an admirable account of the Welsh way of life in nineteenth century Gwent, the neighbourliness of a Welsh community, its interest in poetry, in books of all kinds, in the affairs of the various denominations, in music, together with portraits of noted characters who lived in Sirhywi, Tredegar, Nant-y-bwch, and of poets who discussed the merits of their *englynion* and the intricacies of *cynghanedd* on the coal face.

The district which he describes was as Welsh in character as Llanfair Mathafarn Eithaf, or Llanbrynmair, or Llanddewibrefi. It is only in recent years that some of the churches in

these districts and many other places in Gwent have given up the Welsh language in their services. This also explains the fact that the M.P. for Ebbw Vale was given the name Aneirin, the same name as a friend of his father, Aneirin Jones, Aneirin Fardd or Aneirin ab Brydydd Gwent as he called himself. He was a native of Bedwas, a poet and a great student of Welsh metrics, who set up a Welsh press in the hamlet of Pont-llan-fraith. He was a product of this Welsh revival, and it is most appropriate that the man who represents this area in Parliament should bear the name Aneirin.

As I said, Aneirin Fardd set up a press in Pont-llan-fraith. There were many presses in this area, a fact which shows the great demand for Welsh books and periodicals that existed in the industrial parts of Gwent. I am proud to say that I have a number of Welsh books printed in Maesycwmer, Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent and Blaenafon. It would be an excellent idea if public libraries in the towns of Monmouthshire should acquire complete sets of these books and periodicals. There are also very important facts concerning the position of the language in the last century in the denominational periodicals and newspapers, and especially the Reports on Education called by the Welsh '*Brad y Llyfrau Gleision*' published in 1847, as well as later Reports on Education. But there is no time to deal with them now.

No account of the Welsh tradition in Gwent would be complete without referring to that great lady, Augusta Waddington (the wife of Sir Benjamin Hall, Baron Llanofer), who has been known to generations of Welshmen as Lady Llanofer, or, to give her her bardic title, Gwenynen Gwent. The life and activities of this extraordinary English lady who became a more enthusiastic advocate of everything Welsh than the Welsh themselves, who transformed her home and the village of Llanofer into the centre of Welsh life in Gwent, who compelled all her servants and family to speak Welsh, who also made the gentry of Monmouthshire take the same interest in Welsh affairs,—all this would make a most interesting biography. Mrs. Edgar Phillips, the wife of Trefin, the late Archdruid of the Eisteddfod, has already published a few excellent articles on Lady and Baron Llanofer, and we hope that she may soon give us a Biography of Lady Llanofer.

Yes, Lady Llanofer would brook no opposition. Even Archbishop Edwards, the first Archbishop of Wales, would not dare to address her in English, a fact which he himself

admits. Her influence was felt in Monmouthshire and in Wales long after her death in 1896, and the Welsh Church which she established and endowed in Aber-carn still survives.

I found a trace of her influence in a very unexpected place three or four years ago. We lost our way in a maze of country lanes near Tryleg, in eastern Monmouthshire, and ultimately one of the lanes led us to a farmyard where we met the farmer. After a short talk about local place names, he said that his mother could speak Welsh. I asked the old lady how on earth she could speak Welsh, living in a district which had been anglicised. 'Oh,' she said, 'I was a maid with Lady Llanofer, and my prospects there would have been pretty dim if I could not speak Welsh.' She had not spoken Welsh for forty years, and yet she always had great joy in listening to the Welsh news and Welsh sermons and singing on the radio. Yes, we had found one of the last surviving disciples of Lady Llanofer.

But the main reason why we should remember Lady Llanofer during the Eisteddfod week in Ebbw Vale is this. She was closely connected with the remarkable series of Eisteddfodau held by the Welsh Society of Abergafenni, 'Cymreigy ŵdion y Fenni,' between 1834 and 1853, a period of nearly twenty years. This marks a most important stage in the history of the Eisteddfod in the last century. The man who guided this movement in Abergafenni was Thomas Price (Carnhuanawc), the Welsh historian, who was the vicar of Cwm-du, near Crugywel (Crickhowell) ; but undoubtedly the driving force behind it all was Lady Llanofer, and this explains the extraordinary character of these great gatherings. She provided the ideas—there is no doubt at all about that. For these eisteddfodau were not only competitive meetings on a grand scale, where substantial prizes were offered for essays and poems, £70 for an essay, £10/10/- for the Awdl, etc., and where Welsh music was a very prominent feature of the proceedings, but they were also pageants of Welsh history and culture.

It is difficult to describe the patriotic fervour which characterised these meetings in Abergafenni. Thousands of people came there from all parts of Gwent, Morgannwg and Brycheiniog and lined the highly decorated streets, to watch these picturesque pageants, the long processions with brass bands and waggons full of harpists and penillion singers, bards

and druids with Welsh banners and displays of Welsh symbols and coats of arms, women in Welsh costumes and a printing press on a waggon, turning out the Welsh address to the President of the festival, and most important of all, the girls from the Welsh school of Llanwenarth. Then followed a great number of carriages with the horses (as the newspapers of the day said) 'richly caparisoned' and decorated with masses of leeks, and in these carriages one would see not only foreign dignitaries and Celtic scholars from Germany, France and Brittany, and the foremost figures in the literary life of Wales, but also all the Gwentian gentry and representatives of the noble families of all the neighbouring counties.

It must have been a magnificent spectacle—even the modern Gorsedd could not compete with Lady Llanofer and her associates in Abergafenni! And in the Eisteddfod itself, they had to listen to speeches on the antiquity and glory of our literary traditions, on the duty of all those present, including the gentry, to foster this literary life and the use of Welsh in their homes and schools ; to support and encourage the traditional Welsh industries, in particular the woollen industry, a subject which received great attention in these Abergafenni festivals.

These pageants and festivals, which would have been impossible in the early years of the century, and which aroused such great enthusiasm in Gwent, did much to foster the growth of national consciousness, which led in a few years to the demand for national institutions, a National Museum, a National Library and a National University. And in 1858, the Eisteddfod itself became a national institution. It is important to note that it was a clergyman from north Wales, John Williams (ab Ithel), a friend of Lady Llanofer, who was present at the Abergafenni pageant and Eisteddfod of 1853, and who had been impressed and thrilled by what he saw there, was mainly responsible for turning the Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858 into a national gathering. The mind of the nation had been prepared for this development. Therefore, in my opinion, it is most appropriate that we should celebrate the centenary of the establishment of a National Eisteddfod by holding the 1958 festival in Gwent, within a few miles of Abergafenni.

I have attempted to give you an account—a very imperfect account, as I have had to pick and choose—of the Welsh life of

Monmouthshire until our own day. I sincerely hope that somebody, some day, will publish a volume on the subject written in English, so that all the sons of Gwent may appreciate the fact that their province has played an honourable part in the literary and cultural life of the Welsh nation, and that they have a heritage which should be a subject taught in all their schools, and that their children should not be deprived of the knowledge of their own language in which the old traditions of their province are enshrined

We are not trying to restore something which disappeared a long time ago, but something which has remained as a living force until our own day. That is what I have endeavoured to illustrate in this talk.

APPENDIX

MONMOUTHSHIRE

LEGALLY PART OF WALES

("**Monmouthshire, Wales : The Facts**," explaining the legal position of the county, was written by Dr. Ceinwen Thomas. Because the treatise is out of print, we append some of the information given in the booklet).

NO-ONE disputes that prior to the Act of Union 1536, Monmouthshire was politically as well as culturally an essential part of Wales.

The Act of 1536 states that the whole "*principality, dominion and country of Wales*" is to be "*incorporated, united and annexed*" to England.

As well as annexing all Wales to England, the Act dealt with the Marcher lordships. It attached some of this land to existing Welsh shires, some to English shires, and made the residue into 5 new shires of Monmouthshire, Brecknock, Radnor, Montgomery, Denbighshire. Section 3, which brought Monmouthshire into being, states explicitly that the shire is being formed out of lands "*in the Country of Wales.*"

Sections 126 and 127 made the county's real position quite clear, showing that, in relations with England, Monmouthshire was located in precisely the same way as the other Welsh shires. They provide for the division of 9 Welsh shires into hundreds, Monmouthshire being named fourth.

The only distinction between Monmouthshire and the other Welsh shires was that Monmouthshire should come under the authority of the king's courts at Westminster "*for convenience sake*" (i.e. travelling convenience for judges). This in no way made Monmouthshire belong to England ; if it did, then the inclusion of Cheshire in the Welsh court system made that county Welsh! The use of the title 'Wales and Monmouthshire' is an illogical absurdity which should cease.

Ministerial pronouncements unequivocally place Monmouthshire in Wales. For example, in 1953 Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, Conservative Minister, described Newport Civil Defence as "*the best in Wales.*" In Dec. 1955, the Government proclaimed Cardiff the "Capital of Wales," and it was then explained that "*in official Whitehall terminology Wales includes Monmouthshire.*"

In religion, sport, industry and politics too, Monmouthshire is and has always been a part of Wales.

No wonder that the Encyclopaedia Britannica, which played its part in the past in spreading the fiction that Monmouthshire was an English county, has, in its latest edition, been compelled to admit the realities of the situation and begin beating a retreat : "The act of 1536 does not expressly separate the county from Wales, and it was only gradually that Monmouthshire came to be regarded as an English county, being included in the Oxford circuit for the first time in the reign of Charles II. In the 20th century, however, the tendency seems to have grown to regard it again as a Welsh county."

Obviously, then, from whatever angle the question of Monmouthshire's position is approached, even that of English law and Government usage, Monmouthshire remains, as it has always been, an integral part of Wales.

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