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"For England, see Wales"

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## Introduction

*Introduction – Pour « Angleterre », se référer à « pays de Galles »*

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- 1 This special edition of the *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* (French journal of British studies, RFCB) was prompted by a CRECIB workshop held at the SAES Congress in June 2022 in Clermont-Ferrand, the general theme of which was “Faultlines”, quite inspiring for Wales, separated from England by Offa’s Dyke, a large linear earthwork named after Offa, the Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia in the 8<sup>th</sup> century who is traditionally believed to have ordered it to be built. As indicated in the framing text of the Congress, “the fault line separates cultures, societies, social groups, citizens, political parties, ideologies, and nations. We find it declined and exploited endlessly to speak of fragmented and fractured societies.” It is indeed this aspect of the “fault line” that was at the heart of this workshop devoted to Wales, and is the main subject of this issue of the *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* dealing with Welsh specificity, not only on the economic, social, and political level, but also on the cultural and literary level. The very title of the issue is directly, and subversively, inspired by the entry that could be found for Wales in the 1888 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: “For Wales, see England”, and this publication fills in a gap in British studies in France since Wales has never been before the main subject of a full issue of the RFCB. This is a country lacking visibility, except maybe for rugby, coalmines, and Diana, Princess of Wales, but desperately trying to showcase its difference. From its annexation by England in the 1530s and legal quasi-disappearance after the voting of the Wales and Berwick Act in 1746 to the enacting of devolution after 1998, Wales has managed to preserve its identity.
- 2 In keeping with the main theme of the Clermont-Ferrand conference – “faultlines” - this issue is an opportunity to consider the extent to which Wales is fractured and divided in relation to its own identity as illustrated by *Wales! Wales?* (Dai Smith, 1984) or *When Was Wales?* (Gwyn Alf Williams, 1985), or to its own destiny. The book *Whose Wales?* (Gwynoro Jones & Alun Gibbard, 2021), in fact, traces the history of "devolution" in Wales and also asks questions about the fractures generated by the independence

movement. These are underlined above all by the ambiguities that characterize the country's desire – or not – for independence, ambiguities that are at once political, cultural, and linguistic, which we will have to identify. Since the transition from Assembly to Parliament, it has been clear that Wales, like its Scottish neighbour, has made choices that illustrate the quest for a different form of governance – especially in relation to its English neighbour – and we will have to ask ourselves what these changes in direction mean. As Professor Richard Wyn Jones, Director of the Wales Governance Centre in Cardiff University, pointed out, “It remains a fact that very little in Welsh society (past or present) can be understood without reference to the close, often uneasy, and always unequal relationship that Wales has enjoyed with its dominant English neighbour. What gives Wales its distinctiveness is, in many ways, the distinctiveness of England.”<sup>1</sup> Is it a question of showing its opposition to Westminster in order to give greater credibility and legitimacy to the demand for independence, or is there a real “difference” beyond Offa’s Dyke, a model of original policies, which only a departure from the United Kingdom, after the departure from Europe, will be able to confirm?

- 3 The publication project attracted authors both from Wales and France, not only academics but also Welsh people actively involved in Wales’ political life and third sector. Considering the diversity of subjects, it was decided to divide the issue into three main thematic parts: society, economy, and politics, after a foreword by Mark Drakeford, the Labour First Minister of Wales at the time of publication, and a long introductory article by Welsh historian professor Lord Kenneth O. Morgan, Baron Morgan of Aberdyfi.
- 4 In his article, which provides readers with an interesting overview of late 19<sup>th</sup> – and early 20<sup>th</sup> – century Wales, Kenneth O. Morgan proposes to study the rebirth of a nation during the Edwardian years, by first considering the deep changes affecting the country – economic, social, and cultural – giving it a new lease of life. Such changes led to a new prominence of the symbols and institutions of Welsh nationhood, and successes, especially in sport. All these areas of dominance owed their essence to politics, notably the Liberal domination, that came to be questioned. All these background elements are essential to better understanding the following articles on contemporary Wales.

## Welsh society

- 5 This first part is made up of three articles dealing with some pillars of Welsh society: religion, women, and working-class people.
- 6 Religion, first, since in the era of rapid industrialisation after the Napoleonic Wars, nonconformity became firmly established in the new industrial settlements of South Wales as migrants from the rural counties brought their religious affiliations with them. In 1851, the first study to specifically deal with the issue of religious affiliation was held separately to the main census. The various nonconformist denominations then accounted for around 70% of the total number of recorded sittings on the day of the census, even if, still, the Established Church remained the largest single denomination by this metric. Following the model of Scotland, the Welsh Church Act was voted in 1914, disestablishing the Welsh Church. It is this pillar of Welsh society that Philippe Brillet (University of Tours) analyses in his article entitled “Le

christianisme gallois entre splendeur encore récente et effondrement rapide” (“How Welsh Christianity is moving from its long-lasting triumph to a quick demise”). He considers how, ever since its conversion to Christianity between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, Wales had developed a remarkably strong and lasting interest for the Faith, which was almost unique in Western Europe. This interest, according to him, only began to weaken in the aftermath of World War I, and resisted rather well until the early 1980s. Yet the decline that has since followed is similarly very strong, even in the European context of a marked weakening of churches. The aim of this paper is to try to understand these two strong successive specificities of Wales.

- 7 Furthermore, the prevailing image of Welsh women, which has dominated the historical imagination of the past two centuries, is that of the Welsh Mam, an invisible workforce in a society underpinned, as seen previously, by strong nonconformist beliefs and in a labour tradition dominated by heavy industries. Yet, as underlined by Cadw, the Welsh Government’s historic environment service, on its website, “there have, of course, always been notable women in Welsh history.”<sup>2</sup> Sarah Jane Rees (1839-1916), the first woman on the list, illustrates very well the subject of the next article since she made history by not just going to sea with her father, but also qualifying to become a master mariner in her own right. She was a headteacher aged just 21, and taught navigation skills to local sailors. Writing under the name ‘Cranogwen’, she became the first female poet to win a prize at the *Eisteddfodd*, a poetry and music festival in Wales, and went on to edit a Welsh language women’s magazine. Indeed, in her article entitled “Welsh women teachers and the women’s movement in South Wales (1870-1928)”, Joëlle Gorno (University of Paris Sorbonne) focuses on the role played by Welsh women teachers in public life to obtain equality. She considers that, for centuries, Wales was subjected to an Anglo-centric narrative, its own history being merged with that of England. Women across Wales have equally been the object of this neglect. Welsh women teachers during the latter half of the nineteenth century through to the early twentieth century, proved themselves to be more than simply educators. Driven by the search for equality, many of these women became activists in the women’s movement. This paper explores the different ways in which these Welsh teachers participated in public life, to achieve this equality, whether it was for equal pay with their male colleagues, the parliamentary vote, or equal education and opportunities for girls in Wales.
- 8 Finally, Wales has long been a Labour stronghold, the Labour Party winning every single election – be it local or national – held in the country since 1922. Working-class people, indeed, have always represented a key feature of Welsh society, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with an economy dominated by heavy industries, particularly the coalfields, once one of the largest coal-producing areas in the world, and the steel industry in Port Talbot, said to have inspired Ridley Scott for the opening sequence of the cityscape in *Blade Runner* (1982). Wales being one of the poorest regions in Europe and the main recipient of European Union funds in the UK and EU, workers have been severely hit by Brexit. That is the background of the works studied by Carys Lewis (University of Bretagne Occidentale) in her article “‘We’re working class. We’re easy meat.’ Brexit and the Working Class in Anthony Cartwright’s *The Cut* (2017) and Rachel Trezise’s *Easy Meat* (2021)”. She sets out to explore contemporary novels from England and Wales in which their authors have stated that Brexit either was a call to action or is the actual backdrop to the writing. Although both nations voted in favour of leaving the EU, the reactions in fiction show both common ground and cultural differences.

The question of class and its impact on the Brexit vote is examined in both books. How have these novelists reflected the debates that took place before and during the Brexit referendum? Where do the writers' sympathies lie? Does the cultural formation of the novelists play a part in their written production? These are some of the questions that are examined to ascertain whether there was a different 'structure of feeling' in England and Wales during the cataclysmic event of June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016.

## Welsh economy

- 9 This second part of the publication is dedicated to the economy of Wales, a Labour stronghold in a United Kingdom governed by the Conservative Party since 2010. It consists in one article by Calvin Jones (Cardiff Business School) entitled "Cymru Yfory: 'Incrementalism or Transformation for the Regional Economy?'". As indicated previously, Wales has economically underperformed its European neighbours for decades. As societies and economies transform in response to key climate, nature and technological pressures, Calvin Jones asks whether Wales will once again be left behind by new waves of innovation, or whether the seeds of past and future radicalism that are visible in its laws and civic debate can flower into an approach to regional development that is more inclusive, resilient, responsible and durable.

## Welsh politics

- 10 After being assimilated to England for centuries, Wales was finally granted devolution in 1998, after a narrow referendum the previous year, when the Government of Wales Act was adopted at Westminster. This Act set up the National Assembly for Wales, transformed ever since into the Welsh Parliament or *Senedd*. The Assembly was the first country in the world to have a statutory duty to take into consideration the principle of sustainable development in all its decisions. The first Assembly Members elected in 1999 tried to implement a model of governance different from Westminster, the mother of Parliaments. This is the main theme of this last part on Welsh politics and governance, composed of four articles.
- 11 The first one was written by Jane Davidson, now Chair of Wales Net Zero 2035, a group of independent experts on net zero set up in January 2023 by the Welsh Government, and former member of the Welsh Government. She was deeply involved in the devising and voting of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, a key legislation adopted by the Senedd in 2015. In "*#futuregen: Lessons from a Small Country*", she recounts what led up to the 2015 Act, examines why Wales was first to do it and then assesses whether it is working and what needs to happen next. She reminds us that this act was the first legislation in the world to enshrine the rights of future generations alongside current ones and require Welsh Government ministers and the organisations they oversee to embed this commitment into everything they do. The creation of the legislation was a brave and wonderful act by the Welsh Government and a vote of confidence by the Welsh legislature for a different, more sustainable future for Wales.
- 12 Furthermore, from their very creation, the Welsh institutions have tried to work in partnership with the third and private sectors. Such partnership with the third sector, very strong in Wales, is the subject of the second article by Amy Sanders (Aberystwyth

University), “A Welsh innovation in inclusive governance: Examining the efficacy of the statutory third sector-government partnership for engaging the third sector in policymaking”. The author employs a discursive institutionalist lens to examine the efficacy of the Welsh statutory third sector-government partnership. This is an innovation associated with devolution, designed to foster inclusive governance. It is set out in legislation and corresponds to a significant divergence from the Westminster model of relations with civil society. This study analyses policy actors’ accounts of partnership efficacy in achieving policy change and in institutional processes for engaging the third sector. It draws on institutional change literature to explore the extent to which the partnership has developed over time. Amy Sanders considers that fractures in perceptions of the partnership as a vehicle for policy change or in terms of its inclusive processes, are countered by discourses about its value and Welsh ways of working.

- 13 In the third article entitled “The Welsh quest for a different model of governance”, Elizabeth Gibson-Morgan (University of Poitiers), a specialist of the UK and Welsh constitutional and legal system, studies Wales’ model of governance, that has evolved considerably since 1998. Between the now more remote prospect of a second referendum on Scotland’s independence and Sinn Féin’s claim for a reunification of the two Irelands, one might wonder where Wales stands. Under the Wales Act 2017, the evolution from a conferred-powers model to a reserved –powers model and the transition from an Assembly to a Welsh parliament – or *Senedd Cymru* – have granted Wales more independence from Westminster. An emboldened, resolutely devolutionist Wales is now working on its own model of governance as a possible alternative to the Westminster model. This is part of a constitution-building process not only for the Welsh people but also as a viable solution to the fragmented British Union. To this effect, a Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales was set up in 2021. While its remit includes examining all options for Wales, including independence, its May 2022 progress report clearly stated that “Wales remains an integral part of the United Kingdom”. The Welsh model of governance could serve as a source of inspiration for England.
- 14 It was not possible to close this issue on Wales without presenting a study of the Welsh independence movement, obviously less strong than in Scotland, but still very much present, especially since Brexit. Independence for Wales is called for by Plaid Cymru, the nationalist party – which has not managed so far to form a government in Wales, except in a coalition, contrary to the Scottish National Party since 2007. This policy is also strongly promoted by Welsh associations such as YesCymru. This is what Didier Revest (University Côte d’Azur) deals with in his article “For Wales, see independence”. Devolution has characterised Welsh political life for about a quarter of a century now. While it has undoubtedly embedded itself in Wales and been strengthened over time, Welsh society is still wrestling with a series of entrenched problems, such as child poverty or high unemployment. To many, this is the sign that devolution is not working, and, to an increasing minority, that it can in fact never work. The latter are therefore calling for independence from the unequal United Kingdom in an attempt to turn Wales around for good. The logic undergirding their criticisms and policy proposals, however, does not always seem unassailable. For example, Ireland is often held up as an example although its economy is as liberalised as that of the UK, while the

constant focus on London and the British state may well divert attention from far more worrying difficulties.

- 15 To conclude, all the articles presented here aim to give readers a glimpse of past and modern Wales, hence meeting the same objective as that of Gerald Cambrensis or Gerald of Wales who accompanied the Archbishop of Canterbury on a tour of Wales in 1188 and published *The Description of Wales* when he came back. In his introduction to the English translation of the works Lewis Thorpe explained that “*The Description of Wales* was written to describe the Welsh people and Wales itself, his own country, to reveal in full the secrets of his native land, to rescue from oblivion recent happenings which had not been fully recorded elsewhere.”<sup>3</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Richard Wyn Jones, “In the Shadow of the First-born: The Colonial Legacy in Welsh Politics”, in Jane Aaron & Chris Williams, *Postcolonial Wales*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2005, p. 24.
2. See <https://cadw.gov.wales/learn/wales-rich-and-diverse-heritage/women-welsh-history>; accessed in December 2023.
3. Lewis Thorpe, introduction to *The Description of Wales*, London, Penguin Classics, (12<sup>th</sup> century) 1978 edition, p. 46.