

WELSH-LANGUAGE PUBLISHING IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY VICTORIA

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THE WELSH ARE AMONG THE LEAST NUMEROUS of the Celtic peoples to settle in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Australia, and in many ways they had the least impact. By 1861, Welsh-born Australians represented little more than 1% of the non-Australian-born population, and they were outnumbered ten to one by Scottish-born and almost nineteen to one by Irish-born Australians.¹ Furthermore, popular notions of Celticity in Australia today are all bound up with well-known Scottish institutions and the putative 'Irish character'. However, there is one area in which the Welsh legacy is paramount: the number of printed and manuscript sources in the Welsh language relating to Australia before about 1900 runs easily into three figures, far outstripping the combined Gaelic total for Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man. This is not the place to explore the reasons for this in some ways extraordinary imbalance, but it does mean that a number of valuable primary sources relating to Australia, which exist in the Welsh language, have yet to be made accessible to non-Welsh-reading scholars. Welsh printed sources also represent an aspect of Australian publishing history which has not been fully assessed. Indeed, in many cases it has not even been fully documented, as a number of the printed sources are not listed in Ferguson, even though they fulfil the criteria for inclusion.²

Most of the Welsh printed sources relating to Australia were published in Wales — the main reason, no doubt, why they are now so scarce in Australia — but there are some notable exceptions, so in this paper I will leave aside for the time being all the material published in Wales (and indeed all the manuscript material) and give a brief description of three Welsh sources known to have been published in Victoria between 1860 and 1890.

The first of these breaches my own rule about being written in the Welsh language and so may reluctantly be excluded from the eventual list of Australian sources in Welsh. However, it contains an unusual amount of Welsh quotation, much of which appears without a gloss, and it deserves to be mentioned here:

Thomas, John Jones. *Britannia Antiquissima; or, A Key to the Philology of History (Sacred and Profane)*. Melbourne: Henry Tolman Dwight, 1860. xxii + 216pp.³

The book was printed by Clarkson, Shallard and Company, 85 Bourke Street East, Melbourne, and of the two copies not collated by Kirsop which I have seen only one has the two-leaf catalogue headed 'H.T. Dwight's Catalogue of Books' inserted between N4 and the plain yellow endpaper.⁴ A re-issue, styled the 'Second Edition' on the cancelled title page, was issued in 1866 'in consequence of the first Edition being exhausted' and the continuing demand for copies from 'friends, not only in Victoria but also in New South Wales'.⁵ However, the 1866

'edition' appears to be a re-issue of the 1860 sheets with the cancelled title page and a resetting of the two plates and of gatherings A and B.⁶ Ferguson does not list the 1860 edition, although he does include the 1866 re-issue.⁷ However, the 1860 edition is noted as number 586 in the Monash University supplement, where it is designated 'NIF'.⁸

This extraordinary book attempts to describe the 'philological, ethnological, as well as the political history of the Cimmericians, and of their descendants, the Cymry [Welsh] or Ancient Britons, the primitive and heroic inhabitants of Ynys Prydain [the Island of Britain], or the Hyperborean Isles of the West'.⁹ It is full of Welsh words and phrases ostensibly illustrating the argument about descent on linguistic grounds, and it was published, according to the printed letter which precedes the introduction, at the instigation of the Cymmrodorion Society of Melbourne. J.B. Humphray, on behalf of the society, writes that 'many of your friends, who attended the banquet . . . [on] St. David's Day, [1st March, 1860], have expressed a wish that you should publish your interesting essays on the Language and Early History of the Cimmericians'.¹⁰ The book is clearly based on lectures given to the society by the author, John Jones Thomas, B.A.(Cantab), 'late Her Majesty's Inspector of denominational schools [in Victoria]'.¹¹ Thomas was born in Llanbadarn Fawr, Aberystwyth, Wales, and was the brother of Mesac Thomas, the first Bishop of Goulburn.¹²

Thomas's introduction makes it clear that this is the first of at least four projected volumes, and following the table of contents there is a 'summary of contents' for volumes one to four, in which topics to be covered later include gold coins, victuals and beverages, music, warfare and the mysteries of 'clavis Adami'.¹³

However, the main topic of the first volume (the only one which I have seen) is the full range of mystical, 'druidic' Celticism, with which we are once again so familiar through the appropriation of Celtic terminology and ideas in books of 'New Age' speculation. Thomas talks about the prehistory of the ancient Britons and their passage 'across the Moryntir [sea-land] to Ynys Prydain [the Island of Britain]',¹⁴ about their 'primitive purity of faith'¹⁵ and of the 'arrogance reproved by Cimbric literature'.¹⁶

The book also has much to say about 'druidic' symbols and culture which makes interesting reading, even though we now know that much of what is currently used as such in the modern *eisteddfod* movement was invented, or at least hugely elaborated, by the antiquarian Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams, 1747-1826), who invented and then founded as a modern movement *Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain* [the Gorsedd of Bards of the Island of Britain], which held its first meeting in a London park in the summer of 1792.

The second example of Welsh publishing in Australia is also not a straightforward 'printed source', as it is a series of monthly periodicals, amounting in total to 99 issues, which appeared in various series under two different titles in Victoria between 1866 and 1876. The titles used were *Yr Australydd* [The

Australian] and *Yr Ymwelydd* [The Visitor], and they were produced entirely in Welsh, mostly in Melbourne, and sold by subscription to Welsh people all over Australia as well as in other countries, including New Zealand, Fiji and the United States. We would not expect them to be listed in Ferguson, of course, as the 1851-1900 extension of the original scheme excludes newspapers and journals.¹⁷ However, one of them, *Yr Australydd*, is listed in NUCOS, which gives details of copies held at the National Library and the State Library of Victoria.¹⁸ *Yr Australydd* ran from 1866 to 1872 in four volumes of the original series plus two volumes of the new series. The final issue appears to have been volume two, number six (new series), July 1872. The venture was relaunched, however, by the same editor, using the same format and relying largely on the original list of subscribers, when the first issue of *Yr Ymwelydd* appeared in October 1874. This ran until volume two, number twelve (December 1876) and does not appear to be listed in NUCOS.

Volume one, number one of *Yr Australydd* appeared in July 1866, and the first twelve issues were of sixteen pages, rising thereafter to twenty four. These periodicals contain a large amount of historical information, including memoirs, obituary notices, community news and, most interestingly, trade advertisements, including lists of Welsh books being offered for sale by Benjamin S. Evans of Queen Street, Sebastapol, who had 'newydd dderbyn y gweithiau canlynol o Gymru' [recently received the following works from Wales]. Evans was not the only person known to be dealing in Welsh books in mid-nineteenth-century Victoria, but, nevertheless, his advertisement lists 41 separate titles, changing four months later to a substantially different list of 38 titles.¹⁹

Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a complete set of these periodicals held in an Australian research library. The State Library of Victoria has a particularly good selection, but it does not appear to have any copies of *Yr Ymwelydd*. I have also failed so far to discover anything like a complete set held in private hands. There is a set, however, held at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, which they started to compile in the 1930s and which is now complete, although many of their copies had been bound and therefore lack their original covers, on which any trade advertisements would have been printed. It is also worth mentioning that the Welsh bibliographer and book collector Bob Owen (1885-1962) refers to a third Welsh-Australian periodical called *Yr Ymgeisydd* [*The Candidate*] appearing in Castlemaine in 1865, but no copies are known to have survived.

Before leaving the journals, I would like to note one item of particular bibliographical interest. Two successive issues of *Yr Ymwelydd* contain the following advertisement, printed in Welsh on the rear cover:

Wanted: a young Boy, able to read Welsh, willing to be bound as an apprentice to learn the craft of printing. Enquire at the office of *Yr Ymwelydd*, 9, Wellington Street, St Kilda.²⁰

It is not known whether anyone was appointed, although the journal did not last beyond the following year, when the editor left Melbourne. The reason I quote it, however, is that it forms part of the background to what was until recently a very unexpected gap in the list of known Welsh-Australian publications: no Welsh-language book was known to have been printed in Australia. And yet a number of books containing Australian travel writing had been published in Wales, and, as we have seen, a complete Welsh publishing infrastructure existed in and around Melbourne: a thriving series of periodicals with an enthusiastic Welsh editor who advertised for an apprentice printer, a well-spread and long-established list of Welsh-reading subscribers and an established trade in Welsh books. Yet, despite this, no Welsh-language book printed in Australia had been noted before the following item, which I recently viewed in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. It is a recent accession and was not listed as having been printed in Australia, since it was still in the process of being catalogued:

Tudur ap Hywel. *Bywgraffiad o'r Diweddard Dafydd Morris, Ballarat* [*A Memoir of the Late David Morris, Ballarat*]. Ballarat: W.B. Macdonald, n.d. [circa 1889]. 12pp.²¹

The memoir was printed by W.B. Macdonald of Lydiart Street South, Ballarat, and I have not yet seen a copy in original covers, which might give more indication of the circumstances of publication, or cost, or of whether it was part of an established tradition or series.

Dafydd Morris, who is being commemorated, was an itinerant preacher who made his living as a carpenter. He left Wales for Australia in 1849, arriving on the *Lady Amherst* on 21 May 1849. According to the entry in the *Agent's Immigration Lists*, he was thirty-six years old in 1849, and he, his wife Mary and the eldest of the four children who accompanied them, eleven-year-old Ebenezer, were literate in Welsh only.²² Morris moved to Ballarat in 1866, where the Welsh community was [mwy] eang . . . nag ydoedd yn Neheudir Cymru Newydd²³ [larger . . . than in New South Wales], though he had originally lived in another well-known settlement area for Welsh miners, Newcastle. The memoir says that in his house on 'Honey-Suckle-pt' the first Welsh Sunday school in the area was established, sometime before 1858. He is also credited with building the first Welsh chapel in the Newcastle area.²⁴

Interestingly enough, the book does not appear in Ferguson or the supplement, but its existence, together with the circumstances of textual production outlined above, strongly suggests that there may have been other Welsh-language publications from this period which have not yet been recorded. They may have been memoirs of the same kind as that quoted above, which were produced cheaply for local consumption in a very small print run, or they may have been more elaborate books, designed to be marketed in the established Welsh book trade in Melbourne. Some of the books listed in the Welsh book advertisements I have seen occur in an ambiguous, short-title form which may indicate an Australian reprint, but at this stage all we have is the certainty that the means of

production and distribution existed and operated successfully in a few known cases. As so often with publishing history, it is only by finding copies of the books themselves that the pattern of Welsh book production and distribution in Australia could be properly established.

As I mentioned earlier, the number of printed sources in the Welsh language relating to Australia which were published in Wales is considerable, and they would always be more likely to reach the safety of an institutional deposit. It may well be, however, that there was more Welsh publishing activity in Australia than we realise and that we are dealing with the tip of an unexplored and intriguing chapter in the history of the book trade in nineteenth-century Australia. If this is the case, it will also be of considerable importance to Welsh publishing history, and we may even return to the enthusiasms of the 1850s, when at least one Welshman was able to write that:

There is more talk these days (in Wales) about Australia than about any other land on the face of the earth.²⁵

Sydney

NOTES

1. The figures for Celtic settlers are troublesome. The proportions quoted here are based on the estimates of birthplace in 1861 as quoted in Wray Vamplew, ed., *Historical Statistics, Australians: A Historical Library*, vol.10 (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, 1987) p.11.
2. John Alexander Ferguson, *Bibliography of Australia*, 7 vols. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1941-69). The criteria for inclusion in the 1784-1850 section are listed in the introduction to vol.1 and restated in the introduction to vol.4. The slightly different criteria for inclusion in the 1851-1900 section are listed in the introduction to vol.3. I am currently working on a complete list of non-Ferguson publications in the Welsh language.
3. For a fuller account of the collation of this edition and of its 1866 re-issue see Wallace Kirsop, 'John Jones Thomas, *Britannia Antiquissima* — Addenda to Ferguson 17023', *BSANZ Bulletin* 1(1970): pp.7-10.
4. Both copies, in Fisher Library, Sydney, are in original publisher's cloth.
5. *Britannia Antiquissima* (Melbourne: Henry Tolman Dwight, 1866) p.iv. I am grateful to Brian Taylor for providing me with access to his own copy of the 1866 edition. This copy's original endpapers consist of display advertisements for seven titles from the Dwight list. The binding has also changed, with different blind-stamping on front and rear and different lettering on the spine.
6. See also Wallace Kirsop, 'A Further Note on John Jones Thomas, *Britannia Antiquissima*', *BSANZ Bulletin* 16(1980): pp.219-221. The only copy I have seen of the second edition is also (like the copy described by Kirsop) inscribed to a Frenchman: 'To Louis Le Plastrier Esq/a souvenir of affection/from his friend/the author/on his departure from/the colony/March 23rd 1869'.
7. Ferguson no.17023, vol.7, p.616.
8. Susan Radvansky, Irene MacDonald, and Eric Archer, *The Monash University Library Supplement to John Alexander Ferguson's Bibliography of Australia* (Clayton: Monash University

- Library, 1980) p.47. The supplement has 'Cyaru' as a misprint for 'Cymru' [Welsh] in the description of contents.
9. *Britannia Antiquissima*, p.vii.
 10. *Britannia Antiquissima*, p.vii.
 11. *Britannia Antiquissima*, p.iii.
 12. *Yr Ymwelydd* [*The Visitor*], vol.1 (1874/1875): p.191. See below for details of the Welsh-Australian periodical *Yr Ymwelydd*.
 13. *Britannia Antiquissima*, p.xxi. There was apparently no progress in this scheme by the time of the 1866 re-issue.
 14. *Britannia Antiquissima*, pp.29-31.
 15. *Britannia Antiquissima*, p.32.
 16. *Britannia Antiquissima*, p.216.
 17. Ferguson, vol.3, p.ix.
 18. *National Union Catalogue of Serials*, microfiche (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1992 ed.).
 19. *Yr Australydd*, vol.4, nos.8 and 12 (August and December 1870). The advertisements appear on the rear of the original paper covers and do not survive in most bound copies, where the paper covers have usually been discarded.
 20. Vol.1, nos.13 and 14 (October and November 1875). My translation.
 21. The National Library of Wales has two copies, both lacking covers, one with complete text.
 22. *Agent's Immigration Lists*, 1838-1896, 4/4786, reel 2135 (Feb.1848-2 September 1849). I am grateful to Lesley Walker for finding this reference.
 23. Tudur ap Hywel, p.5.
 24. Tudur ap Hywel, p.5.
 25. John Glanmor Williams, *Australia a'r Cloddfeydd Aur* [*Australia and the Goldfields*] (Denbigh: Thomas Gee, 1852), p.iii. My translation.

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