Министерство образования и науки Украины

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Реферат на тему: **«The Survival of the Welsh Language»**

Дисциплина «Лингвострановедение»

Специальность 7.030502

«английский и немецкий языки и литература»

курс 4, группа 42

**Симферополь 2001**

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Introduction

It is the eighth wonder of Wales that is the most wondrous of them all, the survival of the Welsh language in the face of almost impossible odds.

Sometime in the seventh century, a Welsh Bishop heard an Englishman's voice on the bank of the River Severn and was filled with foreboding at the sound.. He recorded his unsettling experience thus: "For the kinsman of yonder strange-tongued man whose voice I heard across the river. . . will obtain possession of this place, and it will be theirs, and they will hold it in ownership."

The bishop was wrong. More than twelve centuries have passed since the strange tongue of the Saxon was heard on the borders of Wales, centuries during which the ancient tongue of the Bishop and his fellow Britons had every opportunity to become extinct and yet which has stubbornly refused to die. The survival of the native language is truly one of the great wonders of Wales, to be appreciated and marvelled at far more than any physical feature or man-made object, and far more than the so-called seven wonders of Wales.

It is a something of a shock when visitors travel from England west into Wales, for, almost without warning, he may find himself in areas where not only the dialects become incomprehensible, but where even the language itself has changed. The roadside signs "Croeso i Gymru" (accompanied by the red dragon, the ancient badge of Wales) let it be known that one is now entering a new territory, inhabited by a different people, for the translation is "Welcome to Wales" written in one of the oldest surviving vernaculars in Europe. For amusement with the language, after getting used to names such as Pontcysyllte, Pen y Mynydd , or Glynceiriog, one can take a little detour off the main route through Anglesey to Ireland and visit the village with its much-photographed sign announcing the now-closed railway station:

**Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwrndrobwyllllantisiliogogogoch**

To account for the abrupt linguistic change from English into Welsh, one must journey far, far back into history.

# Part I

It was about 1000 BC that the Celtic languages arrived in Britain, probably introduced by small groups of migrants who became culturally dominant in their new homelands, and whose culture formed part of a great unified Celtic "empire" encompassing many different peoples all over Northern Europe. The Greeks called these people, with their organized culture and developed social structure Keltoi, the Romans called them Celtai.

In spite of the fact that they were perhaps the most powerful people in much of Europe in 300 BC, with lands stretching from Anatolia in the East to Ireland in the West, the Celts were unable to prevent inter tribal warfare; their total lack of political unity, despite their fierceness in battle, ultimately led to their defeat and subjugation by the much-better disciplined armies of Rome. The Celtic languages on Continental Europe eventually gave way to those stemming from Latin.

The Celts had been in Britain a long time before the first Roman invasion of the British Isles under Julius Caesar in 55 BC which did not lead to any significant occupation. The Roman commander, and later Emperor, had some interesting, if biased comments concerning the native inhabitants. "All the Britons," he wrote, “paint themselves with woad, which gives their skin a bluish color and makes them look very dreadful in battle" (De Bello Gallico). It was not until a hundred years later, following an expedition ordered by the Emperor Claudius, that a permanent Roman settlement of the grain-rich eastern territories of Britain begun in earnest.

From their bases in what is now Kent, the Roman armies began a long, arduous and perilous series of battles with the native Celtic tribes, first victorious, next vanquished, but as on the Continent, superior military discipline and leadership, along with a carefully organized system of forts connected by straight roads, led to the triumph of Roman arms. In the western peninsular, in what is now Wales, the Romans were awestruck by their first sight of the druids (the religious leaders and teachers of the British). The historian Tacitus described them as being "ranged in order, with their hands uplifted, invoking the gods and pouring forth horrible imprecations" (Annales)

The terror was only short-lived; Roman arms easily defeated the native tribesmen, and it was not long before a great number of large, prosperous villas were established all over Britain, but especially in the Southeast and Southwest. Despite defeats in pitched battles, the people of mountainous Wales and Scotland were not as easily settled; their scattered settlements remained "the frontier" -- lands where military garrisons were strategically placed to guard the Northern and Western extremities of the Empire. The fierce resistance of the tribes in Cambria meant that two out of the three Roman legions in Britain were stationed on the Welsh borders. Two impressive Roman fortifications remain to be seen in Wales: Isca Silurium (Caerleon) with its fine amphitheatre, in Monmouthshire; and Segontium, (Caernarfon), in Gwynedd.

In Britain, at least for a few hundred years after the Roman victories on mainland Europe, the Celts held on to much of their customs and especially to their distinctive language, which has miraculously survived until today as **Welsh**. The language of most of Britain was derived from a branch of Celtic known as Brythonic: it later gave rise to Welsh, Cornish and Breton (these differ from the Celtic languages derived from Goidelic; namely, Irish, Scots, and Manx Gaelic). Accompanying these languages were the Celtic religions, particularly that of the Druids, the guardians of traditions and learning.

Though the Celtic tongue survived as the medium of everyday speech, Latin being used mainly administrative purposes, many loan words entered the native vocabulary, and these are still found in modern-day Welsh, though many of these have entered at various times since the end of the Roman occupation. Today's visitors to Wales who know some Latin are surprised to find hundreds of place names containing Pont (bridge), while ffenest (window), pysgod (fish), milltir (mile), melys (sweet or honey) cyllell (knife), ceffyl (horse), perygl (danger), eglwys (church), pared (wall or partition), tarw (bull) and many others attest to Roman or Latin influence.

When the city of Rome fell to the invading Goths under Alaric, Roman Britain, which had experienced hundreds of years of comparative peace and prosperity, was left to its own defences under its local Romano-British leaders, one of whom may have been a tribal chieftain named Arthur. It quickly crumbled under the onslaught of Germanic tribes (usually collectively referred to as Anglo-Saxons) themselves under attack from tribes to the east and wishing to settle in the sparsely populated, but agriculturally rich lands across the narrow channel that separated them.

More than two hundred years of fighting between the native Celts, as brave as ever but comparatively disorganized, and the ever-increasing numbers of Germanic tribesmen eventually resulted in Britain sorting itself out into three distinct areas: the Britonic West, the Teutonic East, and the Gaelic North. It was these areas that later came to be identified as Wales, England, and Scotland, all with their very separate cultural and linguistic characteristics (Ireland, of course, remained Gaelic: many of its peoples migrated to Scotland, taking their language with them to replace the native Pictish).

From the momentous year 616, the date of their defeat at the hands of the Saxons in the Battle of Chester, the Welsh people in Wales were on their own. Separated from their fellow Celts in Cornwall and Cumbria, those who lived in the western peninsular gradually began to think of themselves as a distinct nation in spite of the many different rival kingdoms that developed within their borders such as Morgannwg, Powys, Brycheinion, Dyfed and Gwynedd. It is also from this period that we can speak of the Welsh language, as distinct from the older Brythonic.

In a poem dated 633, the word Cymry appears, referring to the country; and it was not too long before the Britons came to be known as the Cymry, by which term they are known today. At this point, we should point out that the word Welsh (from Wealas) is a later word used by the Saxon invaders of the British Isles perhaps to denote people they considered "foreign" or at least to denote people who had been Romanized. It originally had signified a Germanic neighbor, but eventually came to be used for those people who spoke a different language.

The Welsh people themselves still prefer to call themselves Cymry, their country Cymru, and their language Cymraeg. It is also from this time that the Celtic word Llan appears, signifying a church settlement and usually followed by the name of a saint, as in Llandewi (St. David) or Llangurig (St. Curig), but sometimes by the name of a disciple of Christ, such as Llanbedr (St. Peter) or even a holy personage such as Llanfair (St. Mary).

# Part II

It is in Wales, perhaps, that today's cultural separation of the British Isles remains strongest, certainly linguistically, and for that, we must look to the mid 8th Century, when a long ditch was constructed, flanking a high earthen rampart that divided the Celts of the West from the Saxons to the East and which, even today, marks the boundary between those who consider themselves Welsh from those who consider themselves English. The boundary, known as "Offa's Dyke," in memory of its builder Offa, the king of Mercia (the middle kingdom) runs from the northeast of Wales to the southeast coast, a distance of 149 miles.

English-speaking peoples began to cross Offa's Dyke in substantial numbers when settlements were created by Edward 1st in his ambition to unite the whole of the island of Britain under his kingship. After a period of military conquest, the English king forced Welsh prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd to give up most of his lands, keeping only Gwynedd west of the River Conwy.

Edward then followed up his successes by building English strongholds around the perimeter of what remained of Llewelyn's possessions, and strong, easily defended castles were erected at Flint, Rhuddlan, Aberystwyth, and Builth., garrisoned by large detachments of English immigrants and soldiers. Some of these towns have remained stubbornly English ever since. Urban settlement, in any case, was entirely foreign to the Celtic way of life.

In 1294, the Statute of Rhuddlan confirmed Edward's plans regarding the governing of Wales. The statute created the counties of Anglesey, Caernarfon, and Merioneth, to be governed by the Justice of North Wales; Flint, to be placed under the Justice of Chester; and the counties of Carmarthen and Cardigan were left under the Justice of South Wales.

In the year 1300, the situation seemed permanently established, when "King Edward of England made Lord Edward his son [born at Caernarfon Castle], Prince of Wales and Count of Chester," and ever since that date these titles have been automatically conferred upon the first-born son of the English monarch. The Welsh people were not consulted in the matter, although an obviously biased entry in Historia Anglicana for the year 1300 reads:

In this year King Edward of England made Lord Edward, his son and heir, Prince of Wales and Count of Chester. When the Welsh heard this, they were overjoyed, thinking him their lawful master, for he was born in their lands.

Following his successes in Wales, signified by the Statute of Rhuddlan, sometimes referred to as The Statute of Wales, Edward embarked on yet another massive castle-building program, creating such world-heritage sites of today as Caernarfon, Conwy, Harlech, and Beaumaris in addition to the earlier not so-well known (or well-visited) structures at Flint and Rhuddlan. Below their huge, forbidding castle walls, additional English boroughs were created, and English traders were invited to settle, often to the exclusion of the native Welsh, who must have looked on in awe and despair from their lonely hills at the site of so much building activity. Their ancestors must have felt the same sense of dismay as they watched the Roman invaders build their heavily defended forts in strategic points on their lands.

The Welsh were forbidden to inhabit such "boroughs" or to carry arms within their boundaries (even today, there are laws remaining on the statute books of Chester, a border town, that proscribe the activities of the Welsh within the city walls). With the help of the architect Master James of St. George, and with what must have seemed like limitless resources in manpower and materials, Edward showed his determination to place a stranglehold on the Welsh. Occasional rebellions were easily crushed; it was not until the death of Edward III and the arrival of Owain Glyndwr (Shakespeare's Owen Glendower), that the people of Wales felt confident enough to challenge their English overlords.

Owain Glyndwr was Lord of Glyndyfrdwy (the Valley of the Dee). He seized his opportunity in 1400 after being crowned Prince of Wales by a small group of supporters and defying Henry IV's many attempts to dislodge him. The ancient words of Geraldus Cambrensis could have served to inspire his followers:

The English fight for power; the Welsh for liberty; the one to procure gain, the other to avoid loss. The English hirelings for money; the Welsh patriots for their country

The comet that appeared in 1402 was seen by the Welsh as a sign of their forthcoming deliverance from bondage as well as one that proclaimed the appearance of Owain. His magnetic personality electrified and galvanized the people of Wales, strengthening their armies and inspiring their confidence. Even the weather was favorable.

The Welsh leader's early successes released the long-suppressed feelings of thousands of Welshmen who eagerly flocked to his support from all parts of England and the Continent. Before long, it seemed as if the long-awaited dream of independence was fast becoming a reality: three royal expeditions against Glyndwr failed: he held Harlech and Aberystwyth, had extended his influence as far as Glamorgan and Gwent, was receiving support from Ireland and Scotland; and had formed an alliance with France. Following his recognition by the leading Welsh bishops, he summoned a parliament at Machynlleth, in mid-Wales, where he was crowned as Prince of Wales.

It didn't seem too ambitious for Owain to believe that with suitable allies, he could help bring about the dethronement of the English king; thus he entered into a tripartite alliance with the Earl of Northumberland and Henry Mortimer (who married Owain's daughter Caitrin) to divide up England and Wales between them. After all, Henry IV's crown was seen by many Englishmen as having been falsely obtained, and they welcomed armed rebellion against their ruler. Hoping that The Welsh Church be made completely independent from Canterbury, and that appointments to benefices in Wales be given only to those who could speak Welsh, Glyndwr was ready to implement his wish to set up two universities in Wales to train native civil servants and clergymen.

Then the dream died.

# Part III

Owain's parliament was the very last to meet on Welsh soil; the last occasion that the Welsh people had the power of acting independently of English rule. From such a promising beginning to a national revolt came a disappointing conclusion, even more upsetting because of the speed at which Welsh hopes crumbled with the failure of the Tripartite Indenture. Henry Percy (Hotspur) was killed at the Battle of Shrewsbury, and the increasing boldness and military skills of Henry's son, the English prince of Wales and later Henry V, began to turn the tide against Glyndwr. Like so many of his predecessors, Glyndwr was betrayed at home. It is not too comforting for Welsh people of today to read that one of the staunchest allies of the English king and enemy of Glyndwr was a man of Brecon, Dafydd Gam (later killed at Agincourt, fighting for the English).

A sixth expedition into Wales undertaken by Prince Henry retook much of the land captured by Owain, including many strategic castles. The boroughs with their large populations of "settlers," had remained thoroughly English in any case, and by the end of 1409, the Welsh rebellion had dwindled down to a series of guerilla raids led by the mysterious figure of Owain, whose wife and two daughters had been captured at Harlech and taken to London as prisoners. Owain himself went into the mountains, becoming an outlaw. He may have suffered an early death. for nothing is known of him either by the Welsh or the English. He simply vanished from sight. According to an anonymous writer in 1415," Very many say that he [Owain Glyndwr] died; the seers say that he did not" (Annals of Owain Glyndwr). There has been much speculation as to his fate and much guessing as to where he ended his final days and was laid to rest.

There is an expression coined in the nineteenth century that describes a Welshman who pretends to have forgotten his Welsh or who affects the loss of his national identity in order to succeed in English society or who wishes to be thought well of among his friends. Such a man is known as Dic Sion Dafydd, (a term used in a satirical 19th century poem). The term was unknown In fifteenth century Wales, but, owing to the harsh penal legislation imposed upon them, following the abortive rebellion, it became necessary for many Welshmen to petition Parliament to be "made English" so that they could enjoy privileges restricted to Englishmen. These included the right to buy and hold land according to English law.

Such petitions may have been distasteful to the patriotic Welsh, but for the ambitious and socially mobile gentry rapidly emerging in Wales and on the Marches, they were a necessary step for any chance of advancement. In the military. At the same time, Welsh mercenaries, no longer fighting under Glyndwr for an independent Wales, were highly sought after by the new king Henry V for his campaigns in France. The skills of the Welsh archers in such battles as Crecy and Agincourt is legendary.

Such examples of allegiance to their commander, the English sovereign, went a long way in dispelling any latent thoughts of independence and helped paved the way for the overwhelming Welsh allegiance to the Tudors (themselves of Welsh descent) and to general acquiescence to the Acts of Union. The year 1536 produced no great trauma for the Welsh; all the ingredients for its acceptance had been put in place long before.

The so-called Act of Union of that year, and its corrected version of 1543 seemed inevitable. More than one historian has pointed out that union with England had really been achieved by the Statute of Rhuddlan in 1284. Those historians who praise the Acts state that the Welsh people had now achieved full equality before the law with their English counterparts. It opened opportunities for individual advancement in all walks of life, and Welshmen flocked to London to take full advantage of their chances.

The real purpose was to incorporate, finally and for all time, the principality of Wales into the kingdom of England. A major part of this decision was to abolish any legal distinction between the people on either side of the new border. From henceforth, English law would be the only law recognized by the courts of Wales. In addition, for the placing of the administration of Wales in the hands of the Welsh gentry, it was necessary to create a Welsh ruling class not only fluent in English, but who would use it in all legal and civil matters.

Thus inevitably, the Welsh ruling class would be divorced from the language of their country; as pointed out earlier, their eyes were focused on what London or other large cities of England had to offer, not upon what remained as crumbs to be scavenged in Wales itself, without a government of its own, without a capital city, and without even a town large enough to attract an opportunistic urban middle class, and saddled with a language described by Parliament as "nothing like nor consonant to the natural mother tongue used within this realm."

From 1536 on, English was to be the only language of the courts of Wales, and those using the Welsh language were not to receive public office in the territories of the king.

# Part IV

It was the arrival of the Welsh Bible, however, that brought the language back to a respected position.

In 1588, the translation of the whole Bible itself, the climax of the whole movement, made Welsh the language of public worship and thus much more than a generally despised peasant tongue. Perhaps it is to this that much of the present-day strength of the Welsh language is owed, compared to Irish (which did not get its own Bible until 1690) and Scots Gaelic (which had to wait until 1801).

The Welsh Bible, a magnificent achievement, was completed after eight years by William Morgan and a group of fellow scholars. In 1620 Dr John Davies of Mallwyd and Richard Parry, Bishop of St. Asaph, produced a revision of William Morgan's Bible. Most of the nearly one thousand copies of.the earlier book had been lost or worn out, and this revised and corrected edition is the version that countless generations of Welsh people have been thoroughly immersed ever since, it has been as much a part of their lives as the Authorized Version has been to the English-speaking peoples or Luther's Bible to the Germans.

In 1630, the Welsh Bible, in a smaller version (Y Beibl Bach), was introduced into homes in Wales and as the only book affordable to many families, became the one book from which the majority of the people could learn to read and write. Other, poorer families, unable to afford the Bible, were able to share its contents in meetings held at the homes of neighbors or in their churches or chapels. Later on, countless generations of children were taught its contents in Sunday School. It is in this way, therefore, that we can say the Welsh Bible "saved" the language from possible extinction.

It has been touch and go all the way since, however, with determined efforts coming from both sides of Offa's Dyke to stamp out the language for ever. Yet every time the funeral bells have tolled, the language has miraculously revived itself.

For the continued survival of the language, however, there had to be a groundwork laid in the field of general education among the masses. There were still too many people in Wales who could not read or write. As so often in Welsh history, help came from outside the country itself.

In 1674, a charitable organization, the Welsh Trust, was set up in London by Thomas Gouge to establish English schools in Wales and to publish books "in Welsh." Over 500 books were printed in 1718 and 1721 at Trefhedyn and Carmarthen respectively. Many of these were translations of popular English works, Protestant tracts that encouraged private worship and prayers, but along with the six major editions of the Bible that appeared during the same period, they had the unpredicted effect of ensuring the survival of the language in an age where many scholars were predicting its rapid demise. Of equal importance were the cheap catechisms and prayer books.highly prized by rural families who read them (along with the Beibl Cymraegd) in family groups during the long, dark winter nights.

So successful were educators, benefactors and itinerant teachers that perhaps as many as one third or more of the population of Wales could read their scriptures by the time of Griffith Jones' death in 1761. Jones had realized that preaching alone was insufficient to ensure his people's salvation: they needed to read the scriptures for themselves. Though not intended by such as Jones (the rector of Llanddowror and therefore not a Nonconformist minister), his writings created a substantial Welsh reading public primed and ready to receive the appeal of the ever-growing Methodists, whose ability in such preachers as Hywel Harris was matched by their eloquence in the pulpit, and who obviously filled a great need among the masses.

One influential convert was Thomas Charles who joined in 1784, and who set up the successful Sunday School movement in North Wales that had such a profound and lasting influence on the language and culture of that region. Another preacher of great influence was Daniel Rowland, who had converted in 1737 after hearing a sermon by Griffith Jones. With Hywel Harris, he assumed the leadership of the Methodist Revival. Rowland's enthusiasm along with that of his colleagues, attracted thousands of converts, and though their initial intention was to work within the framework of the established church, opposition from their Bishops, all of whom had little real interest in Wales and knew nothing of its language and culture, led finally to the schism of 1811 when an independent union was founded.

This was the Calvinistic Methodist Church (today known as the Presbyterian Church of Wales). Providing the excitement and fervor that the established church had been lacking for so long, it did much to pave the way for the rapid growth of the other non-conformist sects such as the Baptists and Independents. The movement also was responsible for producing two names that are outstanding in the cultural history of Wales: William Williams and Ann Griffiths (dealt with at length in my History of Wales).

# Part V

The result of the coming of heavy industry to south Wales in the 19th century could not have been foreseen, especially its twofold effect on the language and social life of the area. First, with so many Welsh speakers moving into the area in search of jobs, bringing their language (and their chapels) with them, a Welsh culture survived in many fields of valley activity.

Such a heavy toll came to so many areas of the southern valleys. In the counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth, the long, verdant valleys quickly filled up with factories, mills, coal mines, iron smelting works (and later, steel works), roads, railways, canals, and above all, people. Houses began to spread along the narrow hillsides, filling every available space upon which a house could be set, small houses, crammed together in row after row, street after street, town after town all strung together on the valley floor. Houses separated only spasmodically by the grocery store, the somber, grey chapel, or the public house. Above them all loomed the blackened hillsides and the slag heaps of waste coal or industrial refuse. And all this brought about by the discovery of coal.

In the southern valleys, an Anglo-Welsh character came into being; one that came to dominate the political, social and literary life of Wales, and it was here also that a new and particular kind of Welshness was forged, symbolized by the cloth-capped, heavy drinking, strike-prone, English-speaking, rugby fanatic of the Valleys..To such a character, and to a certain extent, to the majority of the three large urban areas of Cardiff, Swansea and Newport, the people of the West and North, the Bible-toting, chapel-going, teetotal, parsimonious, and above all Welsh-speaking were totally alien beings who might have come from another planet. The repercussions are felt strongly today as only one in five of the inhabitants of Wales use Welsh as a language of everyday affairs.

In other areas, the Welsh language had been in decline for over 100 years. In Flintshire, so near to the large urban areas of Merseyside and Cheshire there had long been deliberate attempts to stamp out the Welsh language.

Other areas did not suffer the loss of the language.

Some of the letters published in The Cambrian in the mid 19th Century show an attitude of many Englishmen towards the Welsh language that has persisted until today. In one of them, the writer was amused by the proposal to have the infant Prince of Wales (eldest son of Queen Victoria), instructed in the Welsh language. He wrote that the prince, by trying to pronounce the Welsh "ll" or "ch" would be perceived as having spasmodic affections of the bronchial tubes "that would lead to quinsy or some terrible disease of the lungs and jugulum and would alarm everyone."

# Part VI

By the middle of the 19th century, Victoria's views notwithstanding, the tide was running heavily against Welsh. In 1842, a Royal Commission, looking into the state of education in Wales, noted that some Welsh boys employed at mines in Breconshire were learning to read English at Sunday School, but that they could speak only Welsh. This was intolerable to the commissioners.

It was demanded in Parliament that an inquiry be conducted into the means afforded to the laboring classes of Wales to acquire a knowledge of the English tongue. The report of the Commissioners of Inquiry for South Wales in 1844 lamented the fact that "The people's ignorance of the English language practically prevents the working of the laws and institutions and impedes the administration of justice." It didn't seem to occur to the commissioners that it was their own ignorance of the language that was obstructing justice!

The report led to another Royal Commission, conducted in 1847, which was to have a lasting effect on the cultural and political life of Wales. The report, in three volumes bound in blue covers, has become known as Brad y Llyfrau Gleision (The Treachery of the Blue Books, for the three young and inexperienced lawyers who conducted the report had no understanding of the Welsh language, nor, it seems, did they understand non-conformity in religious matters.

Bright, intelligent and well-read Welsh-speaking children were unable to understand the questions put to them in English, and the surveyors pig-headedly assumed that this was due to their ignorance. Their report lamented what they considered to be the sad state of education in Wales, the too-few schools, their deplorable condition, the unqualified teachers, the lack of supplies and suitable English texts, and the irregular attendance of the children. All these were attributed, along with dirtiness, laziness, ignorance, superstition, promiscuity and immorality: to Nonconformity, but in particular to the Welsh language.

One result, of course, of the publication of such "facts" led to so many of its speakers being made to feel ashamed and embarrassed. The effects of the controversy thus stirred up has lasted up until today; it certainly did much ot bolster the position of those who agreed with much of the report and who saw the language as the biggest drawback to the people of Wales. One drastic remedy, the imposition of English-only Board Schools did much to further has ten the decline of Welsh over a great part of the country. In these schools, as in Flintshire a half century earlier, the "Welsh Not" rule was imposed with severe penalties for speaking Welsh, including the wearing of a wooden board, the old "Welsh lump" around one's neck.

In Caernarfon, Gwynedd, an area still predominantly Welsh-speaking in the 1990's, there is a high school named after Sir Hugh Owen, a pioneer in education in Wales. Owen's untiring efforts to secure a university for Wales led to a commission to promote the idea in 1854, the university itself to be established through voluntary contributions. Owen's pleas to the government for financial help were unheeded, and it was public subscription that brought to fruition the old dream of Owain Glyndwr. In 1872 Aberystwyth University opened its doors to twenty-six students in a very impressive building on the seafront designed as a hotel, but which was fortunately vacant at the time. For the first few years of its existence, the college depended greatly on voluntary contributions from the nonconformist chapels, but it attracted many who would come to have profound influence on the culture of their nation. In so many areas it provided the foundations that led to the national revival of Wales in the late 1890's.

The work of Owen M. Edwards, in a period of language decline, was crucial in this renaissance. A native of Llanuwchllyn on the shores of Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake), Oxford University lecturer and later Chief inspector of Schools of the newly-created Welsh Board of Education, Edwards did much to popularize the use of Welsh as an everyday language. Alarmed by the decline in the language, he published a great number of Welsh books and magazines, with particular interest in works for children. In 1898 he founded Urdd y Delyn, a forerunner of Urdd Gobaith Cymru, the largest youth organization in Wales and one that still conducts its activities through the medium of Welsh.

Despite the success of organizations such as Urdd, one problem has remained for the survival of Welsh ever since the Acts of Union in the middle 1500's. The Welsh language has considered to be a great hindrance to one's feeling of Britishness. Even before the First World War, when British soldiers from all parts of the kingdom marched off under the Union Jack to fight the Boers in South Africa, the feeling took hold that "...side by side with the honourable contribution which the Welsh could make to the British Empire, the Welsh language could be considered an irrelevance..."

This idea was implanted even more firmly in the Welsh mind by the intention of the leaders of the Welsh-speaking community to show that the peculiarities of Welsh culture were not a threat to the unity and tranquility of the kingdom of Britain. When ideas of a separate government for the Welsh people began to take hold in the late 19th century, once again, the idea of a British national identity found itself overwhelming the purely local, isolated, and all too often ridiculed, aspirations of those who wished for a Welsh nationhood.

In mainly English-speaking South Wales in particular, feelings on the matter were sharply expressed. At a crucial meeting in Newport, Monmouthshire, in January 1898 it was firmly stated (by Robert Byrd) that there were thousands of true Liberals who would never submit "to the domination of Welsh ideas." With few exceptions, this seems to sum up the attitude of most Welsh politicians of the next one hundred years. There were too many in Wales whose close ties with English interests made the idea of home rule repugnant and one to be fought against at all costs.

Welsh-speaking Lloyd George, future Prime Minister, who was howled down at the meeting, questioned if the mass of the Welsh nation was willing to be dominated by a coalition of English capitalists who had made their fortunes in Wales. Yet even his motives were held with suspicion as being entirely self-serving. And, as a fluent Welsh speaker, he was mistrusted by many in the audience who looked with suspicion upon those who could speak a language that they could not.

In 1881, the Aberdare Commission's report showed that provisions for intermediate and higher education in Wales lagged behind those in the other parts of Britain; it suggested that there should be two new Welsh universities, Cardiff and Bangor. It was found, however, that there was a lack of adequately trained students for these new colleges and thus, in 1899 the Welsh Intermediate Act came into being that gave the new county councils the power to raise a levy (to be matched by the Government) for the provision of secondary schools.In 1896 came the Central Welsh Board to oversee these schools.

The result was that thousands of Welsh children from all levels of society were able to continue their education at a secondary level. Another result, however, was the continued decline of the status accorded the Welsh language, for the new secondary schools were thoroughly English, only very few even bothering to offer Welsh lessons. An educated class of Welsh people was thus created that fostered the cultural traditions of their country in the language of England.

## Part VII

In the meantime, in an age where radio and movies began to play important roles in the regular everyday life of the people of Wales, the language continued its precipitous decline. North Wales got its news from and followed the events in Liverpool; South Wales was more tied to happenings in Bristol or even London. Links between the two areas of Wales were practically non-existent; roads and rails went West to East, not North to South, and the flow of ideas and language went in the same directions. Any sense of a national Welsh identity was disappearing rapidly along with the language.

In an attempt to stop the rot, a new party came into being in 1925, Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru (The National Party of Wales) that was fiercely devoted to purely Welsh causes such as preservation of the language and culture. In 1926, Saunders Lewis took over the presidency, but the party received very little general support and, in some areas of Wales, was the object of ridicule. It was to take forty years before Plaid Cymru was taken seriously and gained its first seat in Parliament. Much had been happening until then to further erode Welsh as a common language and the idea of the Welsh as a common, united people worthy of their own government as part of a greater Britain.

The views of Henderson and Lewis, as imaginative and forward-looking as they were, did not appeal to the majority of the Welsh people' at the time, those who thought the politician and the poet were those of a very small minority indeed. In the meantime, the process of anglicization continued unabated; more people living in Wales considered themselves Anglo-Welsh than Welsh. Much of the blame (or for some,the praise), can be placed on the educational system that, even before the outset of the Second World War was geared to producing loyal Britons.

When World War ll finally arrived, there was much more unanimity of support throughout Britain than there had been for the First World War. And there was less trauma inflicted upon the people of Wales, for this was a crusade against Fascism and Nazism and Hitler that almost everyone could subscribe to. It was also a fight to preserve the Empire. The heavy bombing meant a large exodus of children from the targeted larger English cities into the more rural areas. In Wales, thousands of refugees learned Welsh, but in many areas their English language overwhelmed the local speech.or tipped the scales against its survival.

To counter the linguistic threat to the Welsh culture at Aberystwyth, a private Welsh-medium school was established.by Ifan ab Owen Edwards, the son of the famous educator. Apart from this little school, however, it wasn't until Llanelli Welsh School began in 1947 that the idea of teaching children through the medium of Welsh began to take hold in earnest. Other schools followed, so that by 1970, even Cardiff had its Ysgol Dewi Sant (St. David's School) one of the largest primary schools in Wales, teaching through the medium of Welsh. The increase in the Welsh primary schools was accompanied by a demand for a Welsh secondary education, and the first such schools opened in Flintshire, Ysgol Gyfun Glan Clwyd and Ysgol Maes Garmon in areas in which the great majority of the parents were monolingual English. The success of these schools were followed by Ysgol Rhydfelen in Glamorganshire in 1962 and by many others by the 1980's.

It may have taken a long while, and for many, it might have been too late, but the change in the attitude of the Welsh people toward their language has been dramatic since 1962. Not only that, but great strides have been made in convincing immigrants to Wales that their children would not suffer the loss of their English language if they were to be taught through the medium of Welsh, and that a bilingual education may well be superior to one that confines them to a single language. Many a non-Welsh speaking parent is now anxious to point with pride at the achievement of their children in the Welsh language. It is no longer fashionable in Wales to refer to the language as "dying," and the activities of the Eisteddfod as "the kicks of a dying nation," sentiments the author heard at Swansea in 1964. What caused the sea-change?

One place we can start to look for the answer is the media, especially public radio. Beginning in 1922, the BBC broadcasts in Wales were eagerly awaited. Its voice, however, was one that gave prestige and authority to its views, the voice of a public-school-educated upper-class Englishman. In addition, the majority of broadcasts led a majority of British people to believe that a BBC accent was not only desirable, but was the correct one, and that their own accent, dialect, or in the case of much of Wales, their language, was inferior. It was Radio Eireann, the voice of the Irish Republic, that broadcast the only regular Welsh language material, beginning in 1927.

At time, and for a long period afterward, incredible as it now seems, the head of the BBC station in Cardiff ignored protests from devotees of the Welsh language who wished to hear Welsh language programs. There were then almost one million speakers of Welsh. But aided by such attitudes of those in authority, a rapid decline was about to begin. This was not inevitable. Perhaps the language would have even advanced, given sufficient air time in the late 1920's and early 30's. The problem was that most Welsh listeners enjoyed their English language programs; it was only the few who realized that their enjoyment was coming at the expense of their cherished, native tongue.

## Part VIII

## One who did take notice, and one who provided the second place to look for the answer was Ifan ab Owen Edwards, whose father Owen M. Edwards had founded Urdd y Delyn in 1898. The son, in his turn, established the most influential of all youth movements in Wales, Urdd Gobaith Cymru in 1922; the movement has involved countless thousands of Welsh boys and girls ever since, conducting their camps, sports activities, singing festivals, eisteddfodau, etc. all through the medium of Welsh and proving that the language was not one that should be confined to an older, chapel-going, puritanical generation. Continued protests against the policies of the BBC, unable and in most cases unwilling to cater to the new, younger generation eventually led to the BBC studio at Bangor broadcasting Welsh language programs. In 1935, and in July of 1937 the Welsh Region of the BBC finally began to broadcast on a separate wavelength. Radio Cymru, however, had to wait until 1977.

Another pivotal figure in the fight for survival of the Welsh language, and one who made good use of the power of the radio broadcast was the poet and dramatist Saunders Lewis. Like Ifan ab Owen Edwards, Lewis was greatly concerned that, unless something was done, and done quickly, the Welsh language as a living entity would disappear before the end of the century. Lewis, a major Welsh poet and dramatist, generally considered as the greatest literary figure in the Welsh language of this century, was born in Cheshire into a Welsh family; he later became a lecturer at the newly established University College, Swansea. Heavily influenced by events in Ireland and the struggle for national identity in that country that took place in the political sphere, he was one of the founders of Plaid Cymru in 1925 at the Pwllheli National Eisteddfod, becoming its president in 1926.

Lewis envisioned a new role for the people of Wales that would transform their position as a member of the British Empire into one in which they could see themselves as one of the nations that helped found European civilization. As he viewed it:

What then is our nationalism?...To fight not for Welsh independence but for the civilization of Wales. To claim for Wales not independence but freedom. (Egwyddorion Cenedlaetholdeb, 1926)

Ten years later, with two companions, D.J. Williams and Lewis Valentine, Lewis deliberately set a fire at Penyberth in the Llyn Peninsular, North Wales, a site that the military wished to use for construction of a bombing school. The three then turned themselves in to the authorities and were duly indicted and summoned to appear in court. The failure of the court to agree on a verdict at Caernarfon, a town sympathetic to their cause, meant the removal of their trial to London, where they were each sentenced to nine months imprisonment. Lewis was dismissed from his teaching post at Swansea even before the arrival of the guilty verdict at the Old Bailey.

Leading Welsh historians agree that The fire at Penyberth should be regarded as a cause celebre in the struggle for Welsh identity; it certainly had its impact on Welsh thinking, an impact that was not wholly dampened by the onset of Word War ll which again focused the people of Britain on their shared identity in the face of an enemy that threatened their survival as a nation. The pacificism of Lewis was an affront to many, even within Plaid Cymru who saw the need to defeat as overriding any other concern.

## Part IX

The improvements in the road system meant that many areas in Wales were easy to get to. Their beauty and tranquility became an irresistible magnet to thousands ready to retire from the squalor and overcrowding of the big industrial cities of northern and middle England. Welsh communities, especially along the North Wales coast, found themselves inundated with a flood of newcomers who were either too old to learn the language or couldn't be bothered. Many of the younger couples had no idea that Wales had a language of its own, or when they did find out were adamant that their children be educated through the medium of English. Far more significant was the fact that it was far too easy to get by perfectly well in Wales without knowing a word of its language.

The whole north Wales coast, known as "the Welsh Riviera" became first a weekend playground for, and then an extension of, Merseyside. The mid-Wales coast, similarly was transformed by a huge influx of people from the Midlands. LIverpool accents were more common in Llandudno than Welsh; Birmingham accents common in Borth, or even Aberystwyth. The author vividly remembers visiting a pub in Bangor where every customer but one could speak Welsh, but all of whom used English to defer to a monolingual Englishman (who had been in the area forty years without learning a single word of Welsh). The same situation was found throughout much of North Wales.

The result of such massive invasions, often by retirees, certainly by those with little incentive to learn Welsh was drastic. From almost a million Welsh speakers in 1931, the number fell to just over 500,000 in less than fifty years.despite the large increase in population. Strongholds of the language and its attendant culture were crumbling fast, and it seemed that nothing could be done to stem the tide. In 1957 occurred an event that exemplified the situation: the Liverpool Corporation got the go-ahead from Parliament to drown a valley in Meirionydd (Merionethshire) called Tryweryn, which housed a strong and vibrant Welsh-speaking community. The removal of the people of Tryweryn to make way for a source of water for an English city convinced many in Wales that the nation was on its way to extinction. The survival of the Welsh language seemed irreversibly doomed, and no-one seemed to care.

Then something happened; someone seemed to care after all. At Pontarddulais in 1962, at the summer school of Plaid Cymru, a new movement began. Mainly involving a younger active post-war Welsh generation, many of them college students, the Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (Welsh Language Society) decided to take matters in their own hands to try to halt the decline of the language by forcing the hand of the government. Saviors to many, scoundrels and troublemakers to others, frustrated members of the Society had been galvanized into action by a talk given on the BBC by Saunders Lewis in February, 1962.

In his talk, entitled Tynged yr Iaith (Fate of the language) Lewis asked his listeners to make it impossible for local or central government business to be conducted without the use of the Welsh language. This was the only way, he felt, to ensure its survival. Plaid Cymru could not help, as it was a political party, so the banner was taken up by Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg. At narrow Trefechan Bridge, Aberystwyth in February, 1963, members of the society sat down in the road and stopped all traffic trying to get into town over the bridge, or trying to leave town on the same route.

Undeterred by prison sentences for disturbing the peace and for their subsequent destruction of government property (mostly road signs), and led by such activists as Fred Fransis, and folk-singer Dafydd Iwan, the society began a serious campaign. In the face of much hostility from passivist locals and prosecution from the authorities, Cymdeithas pressed for the right to use Welsh on all government documents, from Post Office forms to television licenses, from driving licenses to tax forms. In particular, the society engaged in surreptitious night time activities, removing English-only sign posts and directional instructions from the highways or daubing them with green paint. All over Wales, in early morning, motorists were faced with the green paint and daubed slogan that mysteriously had appeared overnight. It became frustrating and expensive for local authorities and the Ministry of Transport to keep replacing road signs.

Eventually, in 1963, faced with an ever-growing campaign, increased police and court costs, destruction of government property, and the vociferous demands for action by an increasingly angry and frustrated national movement, the central government decided to establish a committee to look at the legal status of Welsh. Its report, issued two years later, recommended that the language be given "equal validity" with English, a diluted version of which was placed into the Welsh Language Act of 1967.

There came about a new feeling in the land. The young people of Wales were answering the call of Saunders Lewis; the older generation began to reconsider their passiveness. Dafydd Iwan and many of his contemporaries inaugurated a whole new movement in popular Welsh music, translating English and American pops into Welsh, or writing stirring new lyrics and music or protest. The popularity of mournful, funereal hymns sung by male voice choirs found a competitor, the loud, heavy rhythms and rebellious music of new bands. Groups such as Ar Log and Plethyn rediscovered ancient Welsh folk music and brought it up to date. The National Eisteddfod entered into the spirit, each year erecting a Roc Pavilion, where such groups could attract the younger audiences. Wales began to finally shake off the shrouds cast by the Methodist Revival of over a century before.

Since the 1960's, in the author's birthplace Flint and in other towns in Clwyd, attempts to reintroduce the Welsh language in the schools have been warmly welcomed by many of the townsfolk, and a whole new generation of children who can speak, read and write Welsh may help ensure the future of the language (and ultimately, of Plaid Cymru) in such heavily anglicized areas. Other areas, such as the Cardiff region and the Valleys have already experienced some growth in the numbers of those able to speak Welsh.

Factors for this increase include the rise of a Welsh bureaucracy; further expansion of the Welsh-oriented mass media; the continued activities of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, with its appeal to the young generation; and the effects of the Welsh Language Act of 1967. Perhaps most important is the subtle change in attitude towards the language brought about by the advantages that can be gained by its speakers in both social and economic fields. Of crucial importance in winning the hearts and minds of the non-Welsh speakers who have young children has been Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (the Welsh Nursery School Movement) founded in 1971.

In the anglicized areas of Wales, we may yet again read such sentiments as that given by Sir Walter Scott, in a letter to his son, dated December, 1820:

You hear the Welsh spoken much about you, and if you can pick it up without interfering with more important labours, it will be worth while

In the late 1990's, as we shall see, one of the more important labors of many of the Welsh people has been to continue the fight to preserve their language, and with it, much of the culture upon which it depends. To preserve this language, the ancient, magnificent tongue of the British people for so many, many centuries, will be indeed, a labor of love to make up for so much past pain.

### Supplement 1

#### Welsh Language Guide

The language of Wales, more properly called Cymraeg in preference to Welsh (A Germanic word denoting "foreigner"), belongs to a branch of Celtic, an Indo-European language. The Welsh themselves are descendants of the Galatians, to whom Paul wrote his famous letter. Their language is a distant cousin to Irish and Scots Gaelic and a close brother to Breton. Welsh is still used by about half a million people within Wales and possibly another few hundred thousand in England and other areas overseas.  
  
In most heavily populated areas of Wales, such as the Southeast (containing the large urban centers of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea), the normal language of everyday life is English, but there are other areas, notably in the Western and Northern regions, (Gwynedd and Dyfed particularly) where the Welsh language remains strong and highly visible. The Welsh word for their country is Cymru (Kumree), the land of the Comrades; the people are known as Cymry (Kumree) and the language as Cymraeg (Kumrige). Regional differences in spoken Welsh do not make speakers in one area unintelligible to those in another (as is so often claimed), standard Welsh is understood by Welsh speakers everywhere.  
  
Despite its formidable appearance to the uninitiated, Welsh is a language whose spelling is entirely regular and phonetic, so that once you know the rules, you can learn to read it and pronounce it without too much difficulty. For young children learning to read, Welsh provides far fewer difficulties than does English, as the latter's many inconsistencies in spelling are not found in Welsh, in which all letters are pronounced.

**THE WELSH ALPHABET: (28 letters)**

**A, B ,C ,Ch, D, Dd, E, F, Ff, G, Ng, H, I, L  
Ll, M, N, O, P, Ph, R, Rh, S, T, Th, U, W, Y**

(Note that Welsh does not possess the letters J, K, Q, V, X or Z, though you will often come across "borrowings" from English, such as John, Jones, Jam and Jiwbil (Jubilee); Wrexham (Wrecsam); Zw (Zoo).  
  
**THE VOWELS: (A, E, I, U, O, W, Y)**

**A** as in man. Welsh words: am, ac Pronounced the same as in English)  
 **E** as in bet or echo. Welsh words: gest (guest); enaid (enide)  
 **I** as in pin or queen. Welsh words: ni (nee); mi (me); lili (lily); min (meen)  
 **U** as in pita: Welsh words: ganu (ganee); cu (key); Cymru (Kumree); tu (tee); un (een)  
 **O** as in lot or moe. Welsh words: o'r (0re); don (don); dod (dode); bob (bobe)  
  
**W** as in Zoo or bus. Welsh words: cwm (koom), bws (bus); yw (you); galw (galoo)  
  
**Y** has two distinct sounds: the final sound in happy or the vowel sound in myrrh Welsh words: Y (uh); Yr (ur); yn (un); fry (vree); byd (beed)  
  
All the vowels can be lengthened by the addition of a circumflex (ä), known in Welsh as "to bach" (little roof). Welsh words: Tän (taan), län (laan)

**THE DIPHTHONGS:**

**Ae, Ai** and **Au** are pronounced as English "eye": ninnau (nineye); mae (my); henaid (henide); main (mine); craig (crige)  
  
**Eu** and **Ei** are pronounced the same way as the English ay in pray. Welsh words: deisiau (dayshy), or in some dialects (deeshuh); deil (dale or dile); teulu (taylee or tyelee)  
 **Ew** is more difficult to describe. It can be approximated as eh-oo or perhaps as in the word mount. The nearest English sound is found in English midland dialect words such as the Birmingham pronunciation of "you" (yew). Welsh words: mewn (meh-oon or moun); tew (teh-oo)  
  
**I'w** and **Y'w** sound almost identical to the English "Ee-you." or "Yew" or "You": Welsh words: clyw (clee-oo); byw (bee-you or b'you); menyw (menee-you or menyou)  
  
**Oe** is similar to the English Oy or Oi. Welsh words: croeso (croyso); troed (troid); oen (oin)  
 **Ow** is pronounced as in the English tow, or low: Welsh word: Rhown (rhone); rho (hrow)  
 **Wy** as in English wi in win or oo-ee: Welsh words: Wy (oo-ee); wyn (win); mwyn (mooin)  
 **Ywy** is pronounced as in English Howie. Welsh words: bywyd (bowid); tywyll (towith)  
  
**Aw** as in the English cow. Welsh words: mawr (mour); prynhawn (prinhown); lawr (lour)

**THE CONSONANTS:**

For the most part b, d, h, l, m, n, p, r, s, and t are pronounced the same as their English equivalents (h is always pronounced, never silent). Those that differ are as follows:  
 **C** always as in cat; never as in since. Welsh words: canu (Kanee); cwm (come); cael (kile); and of course, Cymru (Kumree)

**Ch** as in the Scottish loch or the German ach or noch. The sound is never as in church, but as in loch or Docherty. Welsh words: edrychwn (edrych oon); uwch (youch ), chwi (Chee)  
 **Dd** is pronounced like the English th in the words seethe or them. Welsh words: bydd (beethe); sydd (seethe); ddofon (thovon); ffyddlon (futh lon)   
  
**Th** is like the English th in words such as think, forth, thank. Welsh words: gwaith (gwithe); byth (beeth)  
  
**F** as in the English V. Welsh words: afon (avon); fi (vee); fydd (veethe); hyfryd (huvrid); fawr (vowr), fach (vach)  
  
**Ff** as in the English f. Welsh words: ffynnon (funon); ffyrdd (furth); ffaith (fithe)  
  
**G** always as in English goat, gore. Welsh words: ganu (ganee); ganaf (ganav); angau (angeye); gem (game)  
 **Ng** as in English finger or Long Island. Ng usually occurs with an h following as a mutation of c. Welsh words Yng Nghaerdydd (in Cardiff: pronounced ung hire deethe) or Yng Nghymru (in Wales: pronounced ung Humree)  
  
**Ll** is an aspirated L. That means you form your lips and tongue to pronounce L, but then you blow air gently around the sides of the tongue instead of saying anything. Got it? The nearest you can get to this sound in English is to pronounce it as an l with a th in front of it. Welsh words: llan (thlan); llawr (thlour); llwyd (thlooid)  
  
**Rh** sounds as if the h come before the r. There is a slight blowing out of air before the r is pronounces. Welsh words: rhengau (hrengye); rhag (hrag); rhy (hree)

The most common expressions that Welsh-Americans come across are Cymanfa Ganu (Kumanva Ganee); Eisteddfod (Aye-steth-vod); and Noson Lawen (Nosson Lowen)

While preparing the essay the following publications and resources were used:

# Publications by Professor R. Rees Davies, M.A., D.Phil. All Souls College, Oxford:

1. The Age of Conquest. Wales 1063-1415, Oxford, 1991
2. The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dwr (Oxford, 1995)
3. The Matter of Britain and the Matter of England, Oxford, 1996

Internet resources:

1. www.bbc.co.uk/history
2. www.planet-britain.com