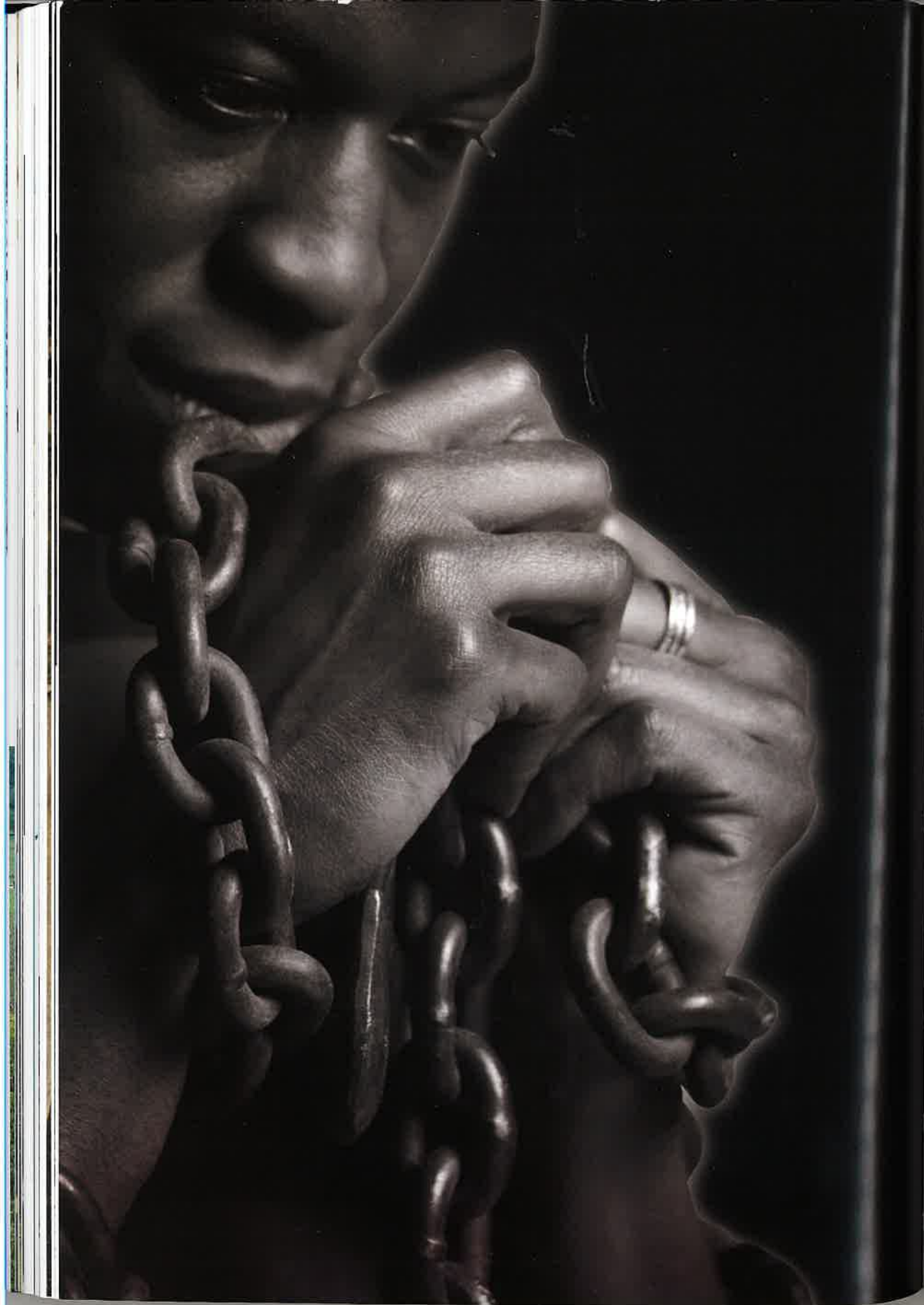




WAS WALES OPPOSED TO THE SLAVE TRADE?

Chris Evans

No one loves a slaver. Our instinctive sympathies lie with the enslaved, not those who oppress them. This is doubly the case in Wales, where we like to think of ourselves as automatically on the side of the downtrodden. That being so, it is easy enough to imagine that the Welsh were enthusiastic about the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 and the ending of slavery in Britain's Caribbean empire in 1834.

But was that really the case? There are certainly shining examples of Welsh men and women who devoted themselves to the cause of anti-slavery. In 1779, before any organised campaign against the slave trade existed, the Methodist preacher William Williams of Pantycelyn published a Welsh translation of *A narrative of the most remarkable particulars in the life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African prince*, one of the first written accounts of the Middle Passage by a survivor. That we know; we know far less about how Gronniosaw's *Narrative* was received by Welsh readers. It is a common problem for historians. In looking at abolitionism our focus falls all too readily on individuals like the poet Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg) who was passionate in his denunciations of slavery. But who defined the Welsh mainstream at the end of the 18th century? Iolo Morganwg the poet? Or his three now-forgotten brothers, all of whom migrated to Jamaica – and who all became slave owners?



Iolo Morganwg

The best way to assess the strength of Welsh abolitionism is to take its measure against abolitionism in other parts of the British Isles. Focusing on firebrands like Iolo Morganwg tells you more about him than it does about the Welsh population at large. How does Wales as a whole compare?

Not that well. The campaign against the slave trade took off in England in the 1780s with startling speed. It could do so because of the vibrancy of English urban life. England had one of the highest rates of urbanisation in Europe. Lots of people therefore lived in an environment where people and news circulated rapidly. Places like Manchester, which became an instant stronghold of abolitionism, had a cultural infrastructure on which anti-slavery campaigners could build: newspapers, social clubs and philanthropic societies. There was an emergent tradition of civic activism to be harnessed, one that allowed urban-industrial populations to make a political space for themselves, independent of the landlord class that still held sway in rural counties.

The same could not be said of Wales. A veteran abolitionist who toured North Wales in the early 1820s was struck by the political timorousness of the common people; they were *'half a Century behind* those of South Wales – and *a Century behind* those of England'. Things were little better in west Wales. He found the inhabitants of Cardigan mired in 'subordination and ignorance'. Urban backwardness meant a dearth of local anti-slavery societies.

Welsh people did petition against the slave trade, but not in large numbers. In 1792, when Parliament was deluged with abolitionist petitions, just 20 of the 519 that arrived in Westminster originated in Wales. Moreover, Welsh petitions were often conservative in form, emerging from formal county meetings. These were gatherings of the gentry elite and respectable freeholders, not of the 'inhabitants at large' – even women! – who flocked to add their signatures to petitions in English towns. The innovative campaigning style to be found there was less evident in Wales. Only Swansea, which could boast up-to-the-minute urban facilities, could claim a continuous abolitionist presence. But Swansea, which was both a fashionable seaside resort and a burgeoning industrial centre, was very much a place apart. Elsewhere in Wales, anti-slavery stuttered for long periods.

The contrast with Scotland is also telling. In many ways Scotland was not promising territory for the abolitionist cause. There were strong ties to the West Indies, where Scots were proverbially numerous as plantation managers, and Glasgow was one of the Atlantic's principal ports, specialising in the trade in slave-grown tobacco. Yet in other respects Scotland was well equipped to sustain abolitionist agitation. It had a strong urban tradition and universities that were centres of Enlightenment learning. These influences may do something to

explain the success of the petitioning movement in 1788 and 1792. The petition from Edinburgh in 1792 had over 10,000 signatures; Manchester was the only provincial centre to muster more. Scottish conditions also nourished local anti-slavery associations well before any appeared in Wales. By 1792 there were abolitionist societies in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Paisley, Perth and Aberdeen. Thirty years would pass before the foundation of the Swansea and Neath Anti-Slavery Society in 1822, the first such body in Wales and the only one of any substance.

By the 1820s, Welsh Nonconformists had started to take a keener interest in the slavery question, but Welsh Dissenting congregations, despite a growing number of adherents, exerted little political power. In the early 19th century the Anglican Church was the political as well as the religious establishment; the chapels enjoyed far less leverage. The situation in Scotland was rather more favourable. The Presbyterian Church was the state church and it was friendlier to anti-slavery than was the Anglican Church in Wales. Several leading members of the Church of Scotland were eminent in the abolitionist campaigns of the 1820s and 1830s. Dr Andrew Thomson, the minister at the prestigious St George's Church in Edinburgh, played a decisive role in converting the British movement from 'gradualism' (the hope that slavery could be abolished at some point in the future when conditions were right) to 'immediatism' (the conviction that slavery was a moral abomination that should be terminated at once, come what may). No one from Wales ever exercised influence of that sort.

That reflected a wider reality, despite the efforts of many resolute Welsh activists. Wales, sad to say, played no significant role in the struggle against slavery.

HOW DO IRELAND AND WALES COMPARE?

Ireland's role in the history of Atlantic slavery is much like that of Wales: mixed. Ireland, or more accurately the province of Munster, was an important part of the wider supply network that kept plantation agriculture functioning. Wales helped to clothe slaves, Ireland kept them fed. Cattle raised in the south-west of Ireland were driven to the slaughterhouses of Cork, where their carcasses were dismembered and their meat salted and barrelled up for export. Special care had to be taken in salting the beef, for much of it was destined for the Caribbean where it would be eaten by slaves. The sugar islands – the French islands in particular, for planters there were legally mandated to include beef in their slaves' weekly ration – were a captive market, literally so, for Irish beef.

Irish anti-slavery was akin to the Welsh: patchy and inconsistent. Ireland could not match the density of anti-slavery organisation to be found in England, but major centres like Dublin and Belfast sustained anti-slavery bodies and a lively abolitionist literature. Irish abolitionists were fortunate in that the commanding political figure of the era, Daniel O'Connell, embraced their cause so wholeheartedly. Indeed, the 'Liberator' fought the general election of 1831 on the slogan 'Reform and Negro emancipation'. Welsh politics had no one to match O'Connell's importance as a national leader, nor his commitment to 'Negro emancipation'.

Irish abolitionism was more potent than its Welsh equivalent but it was also a divisive issue. Daniel O'Connell's sincere commitment to the cause brought him into conflict with many émigré supporters. Emancipation did not sit well with the toxic racism to which Irish-Americans were prone.

DID WALES THEN CONTRIBUTE TO ATLANTIC SLAVERY?

The major slaving ports of the 18th century, Liverpool and Bristol, were close at hand but there is no evidence that any slaving expedition left a Welsh harbour. This is probably because Welsh merchant communities were too small to furnish the capital needed to fit out such a major undertaking. But like most regions that bordered the Atlantic, Wales had a contribution to make to the enslavement and exploitation of African peoples.

Slaves were expensive to acquire; those who wanted to buy captives on the African coast had to make payment in goods that local merchants wanted. Copper was one of them. Copper was highly valued in African cultures, as was its alloy brass. That gave Wales, which by the middle of the 18th century was Europe's leading producer of copper, a major role in the slave trade. Factories in the Swansea-Neath district churned out copper and brass articles that were designed specifically for the African market: manillas that were worn around the wrist or ankle as a form of portable wealth, shallow brass bowls called 'Guinea Kettles', and the slender copper rods that went by the trade name of 'Negroes'.

It was no accident that Bristol merchants featured prominently in the early days of the Swansea copper industry. Bristol was Britain's leading slave port in the first half of the 18th century and her 'Guinea' merchants could see the value of investing in copper. The Coster family took over the Melincryddan works in the Neath valley at the start of the 1730s and by the decade's end had moved on to a new, purpose-built copperworks at White Rock, near Swansea. Family members were at the very same time channelling money into the slave trade. Thomas Coster, the head of the family, was part owner of the *Amoretta*, which made seven voyages in the 1730s carrying African prisoners to South Carolina, British North America's most brutal plantation society.

The effective exploitation of the slaves who were landed in the plantation zones of the New World required that they were fed and clothed. Hungry or poorly clad slaves were sickly slaves, and no master wanted slaves who did not live long enough to redeem the price paid for them. It was the clothing of slaves that became a Welsh speciality. Slave labourers in the sugar islands and in British North America were usually dressed in a coarse woollen uniform. The fabric from which jackets and trousers were cut was called 'Negro Cloth' or – revealingly – 'Welsh Plains'. Thousands of yards of this drab material were woven every year in rural households across mid-Wales. Poverty-stricken families in Montgomeryshire and Merionnydd, ground down by rises in rents, rates and tithes, clutched at the opportunity to boost their income by carding, spinning or weaving wool. None of what they produced was consumed locally;

it was sent to far distant markets in the slave Atlantic. The whole purpose of Welsh woollens, one observer went so far as to state in the 1770s, was 'covering the poor Negroes in the West Indies'.

HOW MANY PEOPLE IN WALES OWNED SLAVES?

We don't know. We have no systematic information on slave-holding in the 17th and 18th centuries; we have only scattered knowledge of individuals or families who owned plantations overseas and became conspicuously wealthy because of it. The Pennant family, which owned five plantations in Jamaica (one of them called Denbigh), are probably the best known. They acquired massive wealth through sugar cultivation, wealth that was reinvested in slate quarrying in North Wales and the medieval fantasy of Penrhyn Castle, near Bangor. How many other Welsh families, less ostentatious than the Pennants, benefited from slave labour isn't known.

We have some indication of the extent of slave-ownership at the moment of abolition. When Parliament outlawed slavery in the British Empire in 1833, it was decided to pay compensation – to the slave owners, not the slaves! As a result, there are official papers that list all those who claimed compensation. Using these papers we are able to say that the heir to the Pennant fortune owned 764 human beings at the hour of emancipation, for whose freedom he was paid £13,870 (equivalent to £11.1 million today).



Penrhyn slate quarry

How many other slave holders had roots or residence in Wales is not easily determined. For every claimant who posted a Welsh address – like Revd Edward Picton of Iscoed, Carmarthenshire, who owned 98 slaves on the Aranjuez plantation on Trinidad – there were others who claimed via a business address and whose Welsh affinities are obscured. Only a long and meticulous process of investigation will reveal the true picture.

TIMELINE

- 1670: The foundation of the Royal African Company marks the beginning of a systematic slave trade by the English. Early shareholders include Welsh gentry families like the Morgans of Tredegar Park and London-Welsh merchants like the brothers Jeffery Jeffreys, MP for Brecon, and John Jeffreys, MP for Radnorshire.
- 1720s: Britain becomes the biggest slaving nation in the Atlantic world.
- 1730s: The Swansea copper industry is booming, helped by investment from Bristol. Copper and brass products are important 'trade goods' for Bristol's slave traders.
- 1780s: Slate quarrying in North Wales takes off, boosted by the wealth that the Pennant family had gained from their Jamaican plantations.
- 1787: The foundation of the Committee for Effecting an Abolition of the Slave Trade signals the start of an organised campaign against the 'Guinea Trade'.
- 1788: The first wave of abolitionist petitions arrives in Parliament. A second, even bigger, follows in 1792.
- 1790s: The British slave trade is at its height.
- 1807: The abolition of the British slave trade.
- 1834: Slavery is abolished in Britain's Caribbean empire although ex-slaves are forced to work for their former masters as 'apprentices' for a transitional period.
- 1838: After further campaigning by anti-slavery activists, apprenticeship is ended.

DID WALES HELP TO BUILD THE EMPIRE?

H. V. Bowen

Wales does not loom large in the many histories that have been written about the British Empire. And, on the other side of the coin, the Empire has never featured much at all in writing on the history of Wales. Indeed, few general studies of Wales have ever devoted much attention to the imperial or international dimensions of the Welsh historical experience. When overseas activity is discussed, it is usually in the context of the migrations that took place to North America, Australia, or Patagonia. Little is ever written about Welsh participation in the hard edges of imperial expansion that characterised the British conquest, control, and exploitation of colonies in the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia; and less still is said about the subsequent flows of wealth back into the domestic economy. As a result, for the most part readers will search Welsh history book indexes in vain for the words 'Empire' or 'British Empire', and this is somewhat ironic in view of the fact that it was a London Welshman, the polymath John Dee, who, in 1577, was the first to use the term 'British Empire'.

INVISIBLE IMPERIALISTS

There are a number of reasons why historians have never given much consideration to any relationship that might have existed between Wales and the creation of the British overseas empire.

First and foremost, it is certainly the case that comparatively few Welsh people went overseas and this meant that they often paled into insignificance alongside the English, Irish, and Scots. In India, for example, the Welsh seldom accounted for more than 1% of the entire British presence, and because they were scattered thinly across the subcontinent they were never able to form groups, institutions, and networks like their Celtic cousins.

Yet more than just small numbers explains the invisibility of the Welsh in the historical record of British imperialism. For, as Russell Davies has recently pointed out, Welsh historians have tended to focus their attention on the industrial working classes that emerged during the 18th and 19th centuries. Consequently, there has been a tendency to overlook the middle ranks of society, and especially those restless opportunists who went out into the wider world to oil the wheels of empire as soldiers, sailors, diplomats, doctors, administrators, merchants, and adventurers. Many of these men did in fact carve out successful careers, and in so doing they made notable and diverse contributions to British imperial enterprise. A roll call of their names would be longer than one might think, and this indicates that although the Welsh were few in numbers across the Empire they were in fact well capable of making their mark. Finally, those inclined to view Wales as colony of England have been reluctant to concede that a colonised Welsh people could ever themselves have become active and enthusiastic participants in British imperial enterprise.

Of course, much the same can be said of Ireland and the Irish, but whereas historians of Ireland have explored fully the complexities of the colonised/



Gwyn Alf Williams, the historian who sketched out an 'Imperial Wales'

coloniser relationship, few Welsh historians have ever taken up the challenge. Instead, a blind eye, or at least a partially blind eye, has been turned to Welsh involvement in the Empire. Because of this, we still do not have a clear sight of how, and to what extent, Wales shaped, and was in turn shaped by, the process of imperial expansion.

This cutting adrift of a significant part of the nation's past was noted by the historian Gwyn Alf Williams who sketched out a late 19th-century 'Imperial Wales', 'the sense and feel and smell of which, no doubt because of the formative experience of Depression, Socialism and Welsh Nationalism, Welsh historiography seems largely to have lost.' Is it possible, then, to reconnect with an even more distant imperial past by making the case that Wales was in fact more fully engaged with the Empire than is currently represented in the literature? And can it be said that the internal development of Wales was influenced by the process of imperial expansion as private wealth accumulated overseas filtered back into local economies and societies?

The evidence suggests that the answer to both of these questions is an emphatic 'yes', and an examination of early Welsh interactions with India serves to underline the extent to which Wales was affected by imperial influences, especially those of an economic type. In particular, as the 'English' East India Company carved out an empire for itself (and Britain) in South Asia between 1750 and 1830, Welshmen proved to be as adept as anyone else at making money from the process. Those who survived to return home brought their new wealth with them, and while the effects of their spending were often localised, they did very often leave an indelible imprint on the Welsh landscape.

PASSAGES TO INDIA

It is well known that some prominent figures in British India were from Wales, or at least had Welsh connections. The judge and great oriental scholar Sir William Jones was from an Anglesey family; Sir George Everest, who gave his name to the mountain, may (or perhaps may not) have been born in Crickhowell; Sir William Nott, an uncompromising commander of British forces during the first Afghan War of 1838 to 1842, was born in Neath and grew up in Carmarthen. Such examples are interesting, but cherry-picking them in a random fashion does not help to establish the full extent or strength of any Welsh links with India. Here, it is necessary to look beyond the prominent and the well known, because by seeking out people of the second or third rank we can obtain a much better sense of any group motivations and actions that were at work in Wales.

During the second half of the 18th century, men from Wales went to India primarily to make money. There was not yet any large-scale British missionary activity in India, and thus a vast majority were motivated by the simple desire to acquire the large financial fortune that would set them up for a comfortable retirement. Most of these men were employed by the East India Company but they also traded 'on the side' and exploited many opportunities to conduct private business. They were often ruthlessly single-minded about this and, such was the way of doing things in British India, there can be little doubt that all but the most high minded of them crossed over the line into corruption and illicit activity.

It is certainly the case that a number of men in Wales were inspired by the success of the 'heaven-born general' Robert Clive. 'Clive of India' established British control over Bengal following the battle of Plassey in 1757, and at the same time lined his pockets with a very large amount of money that came from 'presents' he obtained from local rulers. With a domestic political power base that extended into Wales from his home county of Shropshire, Clive was able to use his influence in London to secure entry into the East India Company for a number of his friends and associates. As a result, well-connected fortune-seekers from Breconshire, Montgomeryshire, and Radnorshire were in a prime position to take advantage of the company's expansion in India after 1760.

A key figure within the development of an enduring cross-border East Indian network was Walter Wilkins. After serving as the first governor of Chittagong province during the early 1770s, Wilkins returned home with a large private fortune to settle at Maesllwch castle, near Glasbury. Others from the area followed him in his profitable passage to India and back. Wilkins's brother, Jeffreys, served the Company in Patna; and John Lloyd from Llanwrtyd became a commander of East India Company ships. David Price, born in Merthyr Cynog, was fortuitously placed as the prize agent of the company's army when it stormed Tipu Sultan's citadel at Seringapatam in 1799. On his retirement to Brecon, Price became a well-respected oriental scholar and translator of Persian manuscripts. Harford Jones, from Presteigne, took up company posts at Basra and Baghdad before, in 1807, he became first British Minister Plenipotentiary to be sent to the court of Persia. These men, and others like them, played the system very effectively indeed. They served the empire and the empire served them.

Similar patterns were replicated elsewhere in Wales, most notably in Pembrokeshire where some families built up long traditions of service in India. Often coming from minor gentry or professional backgrounds, those who entered company service were strongly anglicised, and there is little evidence

that they either spoke the Welsh language or were self-consciously Welsh in any way. And yet, at the end of their time abroad, these men nearly always returned to Wales, and unlike many of the successful Scots and Irish who served in India they tended not to use their wealth as a means of climbing the social ladder in England. They formed a small and tightly-knit class of local 'nabobs' who as wealthy nouveau riche were often regarded with considerable suspicion and distrust in late-18th century Wales.

EAST INDIAN FORTUNES

The aim of most of those who returned to Wales from India was to become firmly established in landed society. With this in mind they invested heavily in property and the social trappings that they thought should go hand-in-hand with their new-found wealth. Conspicuous consumption was the name of the game. Because of this, it is now possible to identify a surprisingly large number of houses and landed estates that at one time or another were owned by those who had served in the east. These were dotted across a large swathe of territory that stretched south-westwards from the Boulton estate of Harford Jones which straddled the England-Wales border near Presteigne, right through to Tenby where a number of former East India Company servants purchased houses.

Near Llandeilo, the Aberglasney estate was bought for 10,000 guineas in 1803 by a retired East India Company surgeon, Thomas Phillips, who had family connections in the area. During the late-18th century the Upton estate near Pembroke had been purchased by Captain John Tasker. It was said that Tasker had 'acquired a competent fortune' in India and then 'retired to the place of his birth to enjoy it'. From the Company's maritime service, John Jones returned to his roots in Swansea, where in 1794 he bought the striking St Helen's House on a prime coastal site. Jones invested the profits he had accumulated from private trade he conducted when sailing in Asian waters as an officer and commander on board ships of the company.

And it was not just returning Welshmen who snapped up land and property. For political reasons Robert Clive purchased estates in Monmouthshire and Montgomeryshire during the 1760s, and he was followed into Wales by other English nabobs. Most notable perhaps was the idiosyncratic John Zephaniah Holwell who had been temporary Governor of Bengal at the time of the infamous 'Black Hole of Calcutta' episode of 1756. Holwell, who became a JP in Pembrokeshire, invested heavily in the construction of the eccentric Castle Hall, Milford, during the 1770s. Later, Francis Fowke, the Company's



Aberglasney



Paxton's Tower

controversial Resident at Benares between 1775 and 1786, who had amassed a fortune of over £70,000 from trade in opium and diamonds, began the building of a large house on the site of a medieval castle at Boughrood in Radnorshire. No doubt it was Fowke who encouraged his former assistant, John Benn, also to invest part of his £80,000 fortune in Radnorshire. By 1821 Benn had acquired 59 parcels of land, and this added greatly to the concentration of East Indian wealth in the county.

An especially enduring mark was left on the Welsh landscape by William Paxton who, having made a large fortune in Calcutta, spent £40,000 on the Middleton Hall estate, just outside Llanarthne in Carmarthenshire. Paxton built a new mansion, said to be the finest in Wales, laid out ornamental gardens and woodland, and created ponds that were serviced by an elaborate underground network of water pipes. At the time of his death in 1824, his fortune amounted to almost £300,000 and his 2,650-acre estate was dominated by 'Paxton's Tower', or 'Paxton's Folly' as it was known to the locals. The tower, built in honour of Nelson, remains as a prominent local landmark and the National Botanic Garden of Wales is now located on the site of Paxton's former estate.

In some places other forms of investment were undertaken. The Wilkins brothers and John Lloyd used their East Indian fortunes to build up the economic infrastructure of Brecon and the surrounding area. Some of their funds were channelled into the establishment of the Brecon Bank, and they also invested heavily in transport and industry. The transformative local effect of East Indian wealth manifested itself in a rather different way in Llandovery where the former East India Company surgeon, Thomas Phillips (not to be confused with Thomas Phillips of Llandeilo), chose to invest a part of his very substantial fortune. In 1847, when he was in his 80s, Phillips was the main mover behind the establishment and building of the Collegiate Institute, which today exists as the public school known as Llandovery College. And with almost obsessive zeal Phillips diverted much of the rest of his fortune into Welsh education and learning.

These examples illustrate that when the surface of Welsh society is scratched it is possible to uncover significant traces of economic activity that arose directly from British overseas expansion. It would be quite wrong, of course, to suggest that Wales as a whole was somehow transformed by the creation of the Empire, but different regions were certainly tied into wider processes of change and development caused by the exertion of British power in India. Among other things, this calls into question traditional views of Wales as an isolated and inward-looking country that seldom interacted with the wider world.

A WELSH LEGACY IN INDIA

In today's India there are few visible signs of any Welsh involvement in the first phase of the British conquest. However, Thomas Parry, born near Welshpool in 1768, made his mark in more ways than one. Parry found his way to Madras (present-day Chennai) in 1788 but then left company service to take up private trade. He began as a small merchant but over time branched out into shipping, insurance, and industry, eventually becoming one of the most powerful businessmen in southern India. Parry made a large amount of money, but he never saw Wales again because, like many others, he suffered an early death from cholera. Nonetheless, his legacy lives on in the form of his company, which is now India's second oldest business organisation. In Chennai today, 'Parry's' is a defining feature of the urban landscape, with Parry's Corner serving as a key transport junction and providing a central location for the home for what is now E.I.D. Parry (India) Ltd. Parry's company, now part of the Murugappa Group, has interests in more than 200 enterprises ranging from agro-chemicals through to the ceramic bath ware that is adorned with the distinctive 'Parryware' stamp. Indeed, so ubiquitous is Parryware that to go the bathroom in India is nearly always to be reminded of Wales!

THE IRISH ARE EVERYWHERE. WHERE ARE THE WELSH?

Gethin Matthews

There is a common belief that emigration from Wales is not numerically significant, particularly when compared with Scotland, or most particularly, Ireland. The general perception is that overseas emigration was relatively unimportant, particularly when you look at the massive amount of migration that occurred *into* the coalfields of South Wales.

I would argue to the contrary, that although Wales never suffered the same trauma as Ireland, a country that lost so many of her people through an emigration that was driven by desperation, Wales lost enough people to leave a mark on the nation. Emigration was significant numerically; it was localised, meaning that certain parts of Wales experienced a substantial impact from emigration; and also the selective nature of emigration meant it changed the make-up of communities back in Wales.

It wasn't just people that crossed the Atlantic – ideas also flowed back and fore between Wales and America (and indeed other emigration destinations such as Australia). One of Wales's foremost historians, Dr John Davies, has argued that the birth of Welsh Nationalist ideas in the late Victorian era didn't take place in Wales, but in the Welsh communities of Pennsylvania and Ohio. That is, it was only by leaving Wales and looking at it from a distance that Welsh people began to see the unity of the country. Some of these individuals returned to Wales, and their ideas helped to shape the way the Welsh at home looked at themselves.

THE NUMBERS GAME

One fundamental question to consider is how many Welsh emigrated in the 19th century, but straightaway there's a problem – the Welsh are consistently under-represented in many official records because they are very often



The Statue of Liberty – a sight for sore eyes

included as English. To give one clear example: according to the United States immigration records, the number of Welsh immigrants to the United States in the period 1820–1950 was just under 90,000. But if you look at the US census return for 1890, you will see that over 100,000 residents of the USA were born in Wales. So, this shows that the figures in the immigration records are totally unreliable. There is, however, one painstaking way of estimating the numbers that emigrated from Wales, and that is to look at the census returns every ten years, and work out how much of the population has gone missing. This has been done for the period 1861 to 1900, showing the emigration rate for each county in Wales and England, and the statistics reveal a number of interesting patterns.

Looking at the percentage of male residents who emigrated, four of the top six counties are Welsh (Breconshire, Pembrokeshire, Montgomeryshire and Monmouthshire), with Glamorgan also in the top ten, and the rest of the western counties of Wales are also high up in the league table. In all, nine of the thirteen counties of Wales are above the average figure for England and Wales of 3.1% of the male population emigrating.

A similar pattern can be seen for female emigration: here, Breconshire is top of the pile, with 5.4% of the ladies of the county emigrating. Welsh counties fill five of the top nine places and again, nine of the 13 counties are above the average for England and Wales.

The figures are in themselves pretty high, but you get some even more striking statistics if you consider that the majority of the emigrants were aged between 15 and 24. If you just consider this portion of the population, then the proportion of emigrants shoots up, to 28% of young Breconshire men, and 26% of young Breconshire women, and 25% of young Monmouthshire men and 18% of young Monmouthshire women. Furthermore, there were significant variations within each individual county. The high emigration rate from Breconshire, Glamorgan and Monmouthshire hides the fact that there were some areas in these counties where emigration was minor and others where the flow of emigrants was a torrent.

As well as the major differences in the patterns of emigration within Wales, there are also significant changes in the picture if you look decade by decade. Within the forty year period 1861–1900 there are a number of patterns, because emigration was not a constant flow. For south-east Wales, the emigration rate was exceptionally high in the 1860s, and remained high in the 1870s and 1880s, before slowing to a trickle in the 1890s – a decade when the coal industry in South Wales was booming. Conversely, the pattern for emigration from Caernarfonshire shows more of a rollercoaster ride: high in the 1860s; very low in the 1870s, very high in the 1880s, and back down to a trickle in the 1890s. This



Welsh fortune-seekers in Colorado in the 1880s

pattern can largely be explained by the emigration (or not) of slate-quarrymen, responding to the relative fortunes of the slate industry in north-west Wales and in the USA. Certainly a lot of slate-workers went from North Wales to the USA in the late 1860s, just after the end of the American Civil War, when there was a lot of rebuilding work to be done in the country.

The basic message here is that there are so many different factors that impacted upon the decision of whether or not to emigrate. These factors varied across different regions of Wales, and they changed with time. For example, when fast and efficient steam-powered boats were introduced for the trans-Atlantic voyage in the 1850s and 1860s, this meant that the cost of emigrating to America came right down. It also opened up the possibility of temporary emigration – before that almost all the human traffic was one-way, from Britain to America, because few people would want to face *two* Atlantic crossings in the cramped and unhygienic conditions of the emigrants' quarters below decks in a sailing ship. But once it became possible to cross the Atlantic in two weeks, emigration ceased to be an irreversible process, which meant that you could get to return home some day to see your family again.

GLOBAL MOVEMENTS; LOCAL PATTERNS

The *local* nature of emigration is a point that needs always to be borne in mind when considering emigration from Wales. There were times and places in Wales when emigration was part of the local culture: an option that was considered and debated within most families. One implication of this is that emigration had a particular and deep impact on certain communities in Wales. A prime example is Merthyr Tydfil and the heads of the valleys area. In the 19th century, Merthyr men turned up all over the globe. Consider this report from the *Cardiff Times* on April 3, 1863:

Merthyr – Emigration

... Merthyr's sons & daughters are in America, South & North, California, Queensland, India, Russia, Australia and the Rocky Mountains – an old innkeeper of Caepantwyll lives tranquilly in Mexico and a Dowlais puddler works in Hungary.

Although this report mentions Merthyr's sons and daughters, the emigration from Merthyr was led by men, usually young men, and often highly skilled workers. This reference here to 'puddlers' is indicative – the puddlers were the most skilled and best paid workers in the iron industry. Now, in this period, Merthyr's ironworks were literally world famous: the products of Merthyr's blast

furnaces were exported all over the globe, and if you were a Merthyr ironworker, you could be confident that you could walk into a job in an ironworks anywhere in the world because of your town's reputation.

This meant that there was an emigration culture in Merthyr from the start of the industrial period. Emigration was spearheaded by the most highly skilled workers – the furnace managers and the puddlers, but hanging on their coat-tails there would be all kinds of semi-skilled and unskilled labourers. The way it worked was that the furnace managers would establish a new ironworks in the United States, and these works would attract a high number of labourers from the manager's home patch – the men would know that wages and prospects were likely to be better for them in the USA, so off they went.

But the really interesting thing about this report is that it shows how diverse the emigration fever was in Merthyr in the 1860s. Some of the men went to establish ironworks in places other than North America, as evidenced by the reference to Russia and Hungary. But others went to places that had no iron industry, but other opportunities for adventurous young men – such as the gold-fields of California, Australia and the Rocky Mountains. So it seems that although the appetite for emigration was started by the iron industry, once the Merthyr district acquired a taste for emigration, the men of Merthyr were more likely than men from other, less go-getting, parts of Wales to depart for places where there was any kind of opportunity. Indeed, in this period the phrase 'emigration mania' and 'emigration fever' ('*y dwymyn ymfudol*' in Welsh) is to be found very often in the Merthyr and Aberdare newspapers.

Because the emigration was localised and *selective* – i.e. it affected some elements of the community more than others – over the years emigration worked to change the nature of Welsh communities. One example of how emigration impacted on a region of Wales can be found in North Monmouthshire in the mid-1800s. Up until that time, the area was strongly Welsh-speaking, but this area, like Merthyr, was among the first in Britain to become industrialised, with ironworks running in an arc from Blaenavon to Tredegar. It seems that in the space of a couple of decades, Welsh-speakers became a minority because such a high proportion of the skilled workers emigrated – i.e. in this case it was *emigration* just as much as *immigration* that caused the decline of the Welsh language.

Another industry that saw sizeable emigration from Wales was the tinplate industry. In the 1880s, South Wales was the world-leader in production of tinplate, with three-quarters of its output being exported to America. However in 1890 the USA imposed the McKinley tariff, which slapped a 48% tax on imported tinplate. Overnight, this caused a crisis in the Welsh tinplate industry,

and a massive opportunity for the USA's industrial entrepreneurs, who set up new tinplate works, and recruited Welsh workers *en masse*. This inevitably had a substantial impact upon those places that supplied the emigrants. There is one telling example from Swansea: Pentre Estyll chapel was sited literally across the road from the Cwmfelin tinplate works, where most of the chapel's male members worked. Between 1895 and 1898 the chapel lost 229 of its 500 members – almost all to the United States.

Considering the facts and figures that are available, it is clear that emigration from Wales was substantial enough to have a significant impact on Welsh culture, the Welsh economy, and on the life of communities throughout the country.

WHAT ABOUT THE WOMEN?

If the story of Welsh emigration in general is under-researched, then the story of Welsh women emigrants is doubly so. The evidence is dominated by details of what the men did – for example, it was almost always the men who wrote the letters home which were published in Welsh newspapers. So although the figures indicate that 37% of Welsh emigrants were women in the second half of the 19th century, they are often hardly visible.

Once again the figures are revealing in showing regional differences within Wales: for every county the figures for female emigration are lower than for male emigration, but sometimes the divergence is substantial. In general, for those predominantly rural counties where the emigrants tended to head for a rural area in the USA, they were more likely to go as a family group, and so the differences between the sexes are less marked. On the other hand, emigration from industrial counties was spearheaded by single men, who set off to exploit the better opportunities and higher wages available in American industry, and so the male emigration rate was substantially greater than the female emigration rate.

WHERE DID THEY GO, AND WHERE DID THEY END UP?

When trying to work out how many Welsh emigrants ended up in the different destinations around the world, there are many problems. As noted, the official records are not always trustworthy because the Welsh are under-represented: furthermore, so many migrants were mobile, adapting their plans as they responded to changing circumstances and economic developments. Having said that, the USA was clearly the prime destination for Welsh emigrants for almost every year in the 19th century – the exceptions being a few years in the

early 1850s when the Australian Gold Rush was at its peak. Towards the end of the century both Canada and Australia were becoming ever more popular for Welsh migrants: it is likely that Canada was the most favoured destination in the first years of the 20th century.

Despite the impression you might get from certain accounts of Welsh emigration, Patagonia was never a prime draw, and indeed more Welsh emigrants went to South Africa than ever went to Argentina. (It is estimated that around 3,000 Welsh settled in 'Y Wladfa', the Welsh settlement in the Chubut Valley, whereas in comparison there were over 4,300 Welsh-born residents of South Africa in the 1920s).

However, one very important aspect to bear in mind is that for many Welsh emigrants, their ultimate destination was home – Wales! It is estimated that between the 1870s and 1914, 40% of the emigrants from Wales and England returned home sooner or later – given the economic boom in the South Wales valleys in the latter part of this period, perhaps the Welsh figure is actually higher. This is an area where the official statistics are no help at all, so there is no sure way of knowing the exact percentage. However, if you look through the census returns for places like the Rhondda valley at the end of the 19th century you will find streets where there are numerous families where the eldest children were born in Wales, the middle ones born in America, and the youngest born in the Rhondda. (See, for example, the three such families in Miskin Street, Treherbert, in the 1881 census).

One of the consequences of this back-migration was that it helped to make the culture of these places reflect that of America in many ways: it was cosmopolitan, outward-looking and confident. There were many communities in Wales in the 19th century where what was happening in the USA was of just as much interest as what was happening in London, so that when you read the contemporary newspapers you find that their window on the world looked west across the Atlantic rather than east towards England.



'Welcome to Swansea'. Death Valley, California