

Assignment 1: Analyse/critically analyse, compare, and contrast three key aims of Welsh cultural revivalism as set out by the *Constitutions of the Society of Cymmrodorion* and Augusta Hall's eisteddfod essay, identifying both their shared assumptions and their differing objectives, styles, and emphases.

Introduction

The Welsh Cultural Revival started in the eighteenth century as a reaction to the perceived loss and diminishment of the importance of Welsh literature, language, history, music and traditions. To halt and reverse this decline, a movement developed, first among the middle-class antiquarians, quickly spreading to others of a similar social status who wished to broaden the scope of the revival to include the other key areas of Welsh culture that were seen to be in danger¹. This also coincided with the rise of clubs and Societies, often bringing together like-minded people with a common interest, one of which was the Society of Cymmrodorion². There were also individuals who were also committed to undertaking similar work, one of whom was Augusta Hall (Lady Llanover)³.

The objective of this essay is to critically analyse two Relics, created almost 100 years apart, both of which highlight various aspects of Welsh language and culture that the writers believed were under threat and should be saved. The first relic is the *Constitutions of the Society of Cymmrodorion*, which was created in 1755⁴. The second relic is Augusta Hall's essay, *Advantages Resulting from the Preservation of the Welsh Language and National Costumes of Wales*, written in 1836⁵.

The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion founded in 1750 as created out of an earlier society, *The Most Honourable and Loyal Society of Antient Britons*, founded in 1715 which was started by a group of philanthropic Welshmen living in London who wished to support fellow countrymen and their families, most notably by funding a charity school for their offspring. By 1750, it was recognised that the society needed to evolve to better serve the large number of people that arrived in London in the first half of the 18th Century and it was at this point that *The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* was formed. The new Society met monthly to discuss such topics as history and Welsh matters, continuing to raise funds for charity. The

¹ Iain McCalman, and others, eds., *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age : British Culture, 1776-1832*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 1999), <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/display/10.1093/acref/9780199245437.001.0001/acref-9780199245437-e-729?rkey=TXfVJq&result=1>> [accessed online 28 November 2025]

² Roger L. Emerson, 'Clubs and Societies' in Alan Charles Kors (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2002). pp.66 - 74

• ³ August Hall, Dictionary of Welsh Biography < <https://biography.wales/article/s10-HALL-AUG-1802#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&manifest=https%3A%2F%2Fdamsssl.llgc.org.uk%2Fiiif%2F2.0%2F4672544%2Fmanifest.json&xywh=395%2C320%2C531%2C436> [accessed 28 November 2025]

• ⁴ The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, < <https://www.cymmrodorion.org/the-society/our-history/> [accessed 28 November 2025]

⁵ Augusta Hall, *Advantages Resulting from the Preservation of the Welsh Language and National Costumes of Wales* (Cardiff, 1836)

constitution was drawn up in 1753 and published in 1755 containing the aims of the Society, some of which will be analysed later in this essay.

August Hall was born in Llanover, near Abergavenny, the daughter of a wealthy English industrialist. Hall received a good education that included classics, history, geography, classics, music and art. Her interest in the Welsh language and culture was evident from an early age and was fostered by Lady Elizabeth Coffin Greenly (1771–1839) who was a fluent Welsh speaker and a friend of Hall's mother. Hall became Lady Llanover upon her marriage to Benjamin Hall, 1st Lord Llanover. Lord and Lady Llanover's home, Llys Llanover, became known as the centre for Welsh culture both in Gwent and further afield. It was here that Lady Llanover met and corresponded with her large group of friends including Welsh antiquarian collectors and scholars, as well as internationally renowned scholars. It was for her contribution to local eisteddfodau that she is particularly known where she was able to demonstrate her love for her joint passions of the triple harp used to play Welsh music and Welsh textiles. It was a combined passion for Welsh culture and Welsh textiles that was to become the topic of her entry into the 1834 Eisteddfod held in Cardiff. In her essay, *The Advantages resulting from the Preservation of the Welsh Language and National Costumes of Wales*⁶.

Preservation of the Welsh language

The preservation of the Welsh language was a core tenet of the *Society of Cymmrodorion* and as such has been written into the Constitution with references to the use of the Welsh language appearing in multiple places and the ability to speak Welsh or at least an interest in learning being required of its members. The Society set high expectations for the type of members that they hope to attach, describing them as '.... Gentlemen of Learning and Knowledge in the *British* and other Languages...'. There is a common expectation that runs throughout the constitutions that the Welsh language will be used as much as possible for all matters related to the Society including the advertising of the monthly meetings and the usage of Welsh for the toasts made during the meetings. Rule twelve explicitly states that, 'The Discourse of the Society shall be as much as possible in the Antient British Language, which they are specially bound to cultivate.' This is an interesting rule as it also states it is the duty of the members to cultivate the Welsh language, but this is more as a secondary point within the rule. The constitution further states that the Society shall maintain a single library of existing Welsh books and manuscripts as well as publishing its own periodicals (although this does not specifically state that they will be in Welsh). The Society does not limit itself to the shores of Britain but pledges to also provide support overseas colonies, such as that in Pennsylvania, to perpetuate the old British language. And finally, the Society states its ambition aim to provide

⁶ <https://biography.wales/article/s10-HALL-AUG-1802#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&manifest=https%3A%2F%2Fdamsssl.llgc.org.uk%2Fiiif%2F2.0%2F4672544%2Fmanifest.json&xywh=395%2C320%2C531%2C436>

a Welsh Language church in London so that Welsh-speaking people can worship in their native language which would also help with the preservation of the language ⁷.

Lady Llanover's essay makes a powerful argument for the benefits that the Welsh language brings to diverse areas of life which include: a sense of Nationalism; Religion and moral code and loyalty to the Crown. She then looks at how life would be diminished without the Welsh language resulting in 'unfavourable changes in the character of a people...' which she attributes to the being deprived of their, 'Philological, Bardic and Antiquarian Treasures'. It opens with a powerful debate about Nationality stating '...-that feeling of attachment to our native county and native race which makes us in an especial manner desire their welfare', indicating that this is felt most strongly by the people of Wales where the existence of the Welsh language has played a major role in keeping alive a sense of national feeling. Lady Llanover's staunchly Protestant views are very much to the fore of this essay, and she uses them to argue how, despite multiple challenges, Welsh being proven to be the bedrock of worship to which the people of Wales have always returned. She also links this to the way in which the Welsh have been faithful servants of the King of England but questioning if this would remain unchanged if Wales were to be Anglicised (here she is referring to the Anglican Church in Wales and the use of English in services). Lady Llanover rather harshly describes how the people of Wales might become if deprived of their language and culture, '...they would either be callous, stupid and indifferent, or they would become as remarkable for crime, as they are now *justly celebrated* for the reverse.' She goes on to say that conversely the preservation of the Welsh language may have been a barrier to commercial trade, however, this has also provided the people of Wales with a degree of protection against the English press. In her footnote on this point, she includes a reference to the stoning of the Bishop of Llandaff in 1820 in which it says, '...-Happy indeed is it for the lowly and sequestered peasant in such times as these, if he hears little of what is stirring in the busier world'. Lady Llanover also points out the importance of the Welsh language from a philological perspective, describing it as,

...and inexhaustible mine of highly interesting matter. It not only contains the roots, but actually supplies the key to the grammatical construction of some of principle languages of Europe, and even evidences and extraordinary connection with those of the Eastern world.

Literary and antiquarian restoration and preservation

The Introduction to the *Constitutions of the Society of Cymmrodorion* describes its intention:

To cultivate therefore a Language so excellent in itself, so fruitful in many venerable and undoubted Monuments of Antiquity, so highly useful and indeed necessary, to the Restoration and Improvement, not only of the History of Great Britain and Ireland,

• ⁷ The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, < <https://www.cymmrodorion.org/the-society/our-history/> [accessed 28 November 2025]

but likewise of several Countries upon the Continent; and to make it more thoroughly and generally understood.....

To support this intention the Constitutions are very specific and describes how this will be achieved. There is, as stated above, a desire to attract gentlemen of learning who share a common interest to the Society and it is these men that will advise the officers on the purchase of books (for the Society's library, see above) which will be stored in a Cabinet at the school in Clerkenwell Green.

The Librarian, with the Approbation of the Managers, shall purchase at the Society's Expence one Copy (if to be had) of every Book that hath ever been printed in the antient British Language ; and of every one that shall be printed hereafter : also as many antient British Manuscripts as can be procured at a reasonable Price: Likewise such Books in any other Language, treating of the History and Antiquities of Britain, as shall be judged useful and necessary towards carrying on the Designs of the Society. ‘

Preservation of aspects of Welsh culture

The second key topic that Lady Llanover addresses in her essay is the decline in the wearing of Welsh Costume which is being replaced by the wearing of ‘foreign luxuries in articles of dress.’ She expounds the benefits of the traditional, wool garments as being a material that is well suited to the Welsh changes of climate and being healthier for the wearer offering some protection against rheumatic conditions and being mainly worn by women. She then goes on to say how much better it was when Welshwomen of the previous generation wore Welsh costume, aligning it with an ability to fully discharge their household and agricultural duties, something women now wearing thin, cotton type materials cannot do and linking it to a ‘false standard of respectability’. She points out too that the traditional dress was often home-made a fact of which the wearer could be proud. This entire passage appears to only apply to peasants or servants and not to members of the higher classes. In a very puritanical fashion Lady Llanover is most disparaging of the wearing of ‘....straw bonnets, ribbons, frills, capes and ringlets...’ linking them with the caprice of fashion. She continues in the same vein describing girls who have become milliners’ apprentices as having ‘corrupt morals’ whilst bemoaning that wool is being exchanged for cotton.

Conclusion

On first inspection, the two relics are not overly similar in content, presentation, authorship or intended audience. They do however hold common interest in several of the key aims of Welsh cultural revivalism. The actual Constitutions and the essay are totally opposite in style, as befits the purpose of the documents, with the Constitutions being written in an objective and factual manner, devoid of emotion. In contrast, Lady Llanover's essay is florid and full of passion intended to speak to the hearts of her audience.

Both relics come from a real desire to express a sense of national identity linked to an understanding of an ancestral and historical past, connected through the Welsh language, but they differ greatly in their objectives for preserving the language although they do agree that it is under threat. The *Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* appear to have a far simpler agenda on this point than that of Lady Llanover. For the Cymmrodorions, language is about retaining and perpetuating their distinctive identity and culture whilst at the same time being able to improve their knowledge of history, further reinforcing their sense of identity. For Lady Llanover however, there seems to be a very different agenda with a lot of her explanation for the need to preserve the Welsh language being related to her religious principles, she also links the potential loss of the Welsh language with the unsupported idea that the people of Wales would have a complete change of character, with them even becoming criminals. There is also a sense of using language to keep people under control, what Lady Llanover describes as protecting them from ‘infidel principles’, can only be achieved when language is used to isolate people from the rest of the world.

There is a fundamental difference between the approach taken by both relics, with the Cymmrodorions adopting a more formal institutional and intellectual London-centric approach with aspirations to become a Pan-Celtic organisation yet still retaining a sense of unity and brotherhood with their fellow countrymen living in Wales. In contrast, Lady Llanover advocates for cultural changes at a local, rural level, identifying the wearing of traditional Welsh Costume to improving health and morals as well and support the Welsh economy due to the use of regionally produced Welsh flannel. Both the *Constitutions of the Society of Cymmrodorion* and *Advantages Resulting from the Preservation of the Welsh Language and National Costumes of Wales* share a commitment to the preservation and promotion of Welsh identity but there is a fundamental difference in approach which can be mostly attributed to the very different circumstances of the authors and their intended audience.

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