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Language as symbol in churchyard monuments: the use of Welsh in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Pembrokeshire

Harold Mytum

Graveyard memorials of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries are items of material culture which are most amenable to archaeological analysis. Not only are they closely datable and associated with named individuals through their inscriptions, but they are also well provenanced and can be studied in a regional or site level. Graveyard memorials constitute a major category of material culture from this period in Britain that can be tightly defined in terms of time, space and social context, and thus can be used to examine processes of change.

Memorials as contexts

Memorials offer opportunities for communication in a number of ways. The initial appearance of a monument – its size, shape, colour and location – is on closer examination augmented by both the written text and details of form and decoration. Graveyard monuments are erected within a landscape setting which includes topography, vegetation and existing monuments. The memorial may, on the one hand, emphasize conformity and similarity, or, on the other, individuality and variability. In Pembrokeshire, south-west Wales, it is possible to consider not only social position but also cultural affiliation through an analysis of memorials. In this area where both English- and Welsh-speaking populations can be found, the choice of language was used as a cultural indicator and, indeed, one of national allegiance.

There was a widespread change in the late eighteenth century in both the form of decoration and the nature of the inscription on memorials. This is to be found not only in Britain but in British colonial and ex-colonial contexts (Burgess 1963; Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966). The exact details of styles and rapidity of change vary according to local circumstances, but the changes are always of the same general character. There was a move away from calligraphic styles of lettering and the use of motifs such as death's heads and cherubs, and towards styles of lettering derived from typography and to motifs such as crosses and flowers.

Memorials in the old tradition often spoke to the reader of the stone directly, with the deceased making a statement from the grave through both text and symbol, about morality, mortality and redemption. In the new tradition, emphasis was much more towards defining and commemorating the deceased, and the text was usually in the form of a memorial statement which emphasized kinship relationships, place of residence or occupation. In Pembrokeshire kinship and residence were most frequently used, although mariners were an exception in often stating their profession (Kilminster and Mytum 1987; Mytum 1990). Decoration was now used to help define the social persona of the deceased, by indicating occupation or membership of a fraternity, or to evoke remembrance through the use of flowers. Some symbols such as crosses, Bibles or other inscribed designs had a more religious connotation, and these were echoed in the use of biblical quotations on memorials.

The gravestone was largely inspired by the internal wall monument of the gentry classes which consisted of a panel or cartouche for an inscription and a surround of decoration and symbol. While some wall ornaments were in the image of freestanding monuments such as sarcophagi, others took a more architectural form of a door or window, with the inscription in the centre. In the new tradition it was the architectural influences which most affected gravestone design, and in headstones was this most noticeable. The headstone thus had a central text with decoration principally above but also sometimes down the sides of the monument. While that at the top was undoubtedly the most important, the other elements could be significant supporting features, and indeed might relate to the overall form of the monument which itself could be highly decorative.

Within the new tradition there was also a stronger tendency towards differentiation by memorial type according to social class, partly because a wider spectrum of the population was being commemorated on stone monuments. For example, at Nevern and Newport use of census records has demonstrated that agricultural labourers, carpenters and shoemakers erected headstones as well as farmers, master mariners and the professional classes. Differentiation could be displayed by those who chose to do so by the type of monument, and the most popular design chosen by the more affluent during the mid-nineteenth century, particularly in the north, was that of the pedimented headstone.

The pedimented headstone was usually made completely of slate, and was a complex monument of many elements fixed together using wooden pegs or metal strips, bolts or clamps (Figure 1). Most, if not all, originally had a coffin-shaped bodystone lying over the grave, sometimes slightly raised on vertical slabs, giving an even stronger impression of a coffin. Footstones were sometimes placed at the end of the bodystone but these rarely survive. The pedimented form is very much inspired by architectural features, and very close parallels can be drawn with contemporary doorways on town- and farmhouses in the area. While the slate is machine-cut, there is a very wide range of designs, particularly of the supporting columns, and the variety of fixing arrangements suggests that individual masons made up designs from prefabricated elements. The type occurs in north Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire, but the distribution stretches up to north Wales, and it can be considered a feature of Welsh culture (Table 1). The design is rare south of the Landsker, and about half of these differ from the standard pedimented form by incorporating surrounds made from other rock types, though these exotics do also rarely occur in the north.

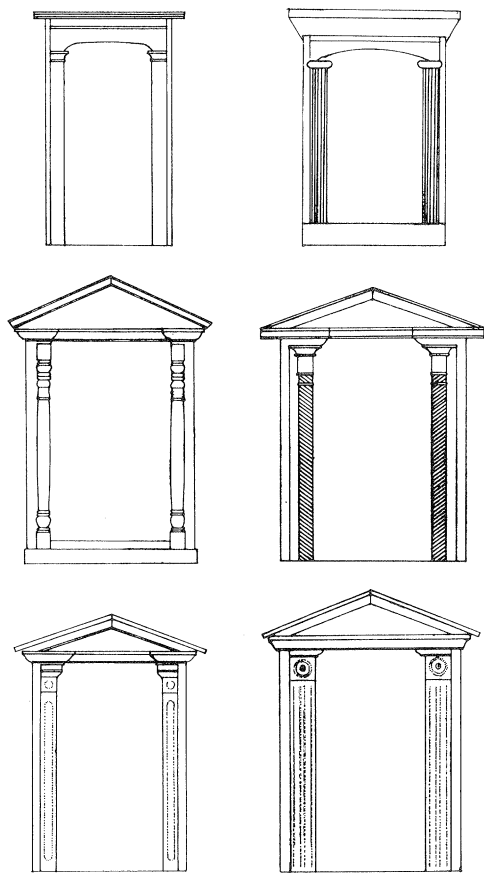


Figure 1 Pedimented headstones from Pembrokeshire.

Table 1 Numbers of pedimented headstones by decade, language and location to the north and south of the Landsker

<i>Date</i>	<i>North</i>				<i>South</i>			
	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>Bilingual</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>Bilingual</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Total</i>
1810	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
1820	—	1	1	2	—	—	—	—
1830	1	9	7	17	—	—	2	2
1840	—	2	11	13	—	—	1	1
1850	—	7	6	13	—	2	4	6
1860	—	4	4	8	—	1	3	4
1870	1	1	4	6	—	—	1	1
1880	—	1	2	3	—	—	1	1
TOTAL	2	25	36	63	—	3	12	15

A	B	C
BEDD JOHN EVANS <i>Treikert Plwyf hwn hunodd Mawrth 25.^{ain} 1876 yn 81 Mlwydd oed.</i> Gosodwydiddynion farw unwaith ac wedihynny bod barn. HEB. IX. 27 HEFYD MARY EVANS ei briod, 'a hunodd Gor.12.1897, yn 77 Mlwydd oed. A'r nefoedd a fynegant eigyf- iawnder ef: canys Duw ei hun sydd Farnwr.	<i>Sacred</i> TO THE MEMORY OF DAVID JAMES <i>OF UNDER TOWN IN THIS PARISH, MASTER MARINER, WHO DIED APRIL 13TH, 1851 AGED 81 YEARS</i> ALSO OF ANN JAMES, <i>RELICT OF THE ABOVE, WHO DIED OCT 13TH 1863 AGED 83 YEARS</i> "There remaineth therefore rest to the people of God."	SACRED <i>to the memory of</i> DAVID WILLIAMS of Parrog in this Parish, <i>Master mariner, Son of Capl THOMAS WILLIAMS from ANNE his beloved wife, died 28th Oct^r 1838: Aged 31 Years.</i> Ceisio sylwedd mewn byd gwagedd, A dry'n golled yn y diwedd; Cariad Duw sy'n anfesurrol, Trwy rin'r Iawn in edifeiriol. ALSO, of the above ANNE THOMAS died Feb. 5th 1869 Aged 92 Years.

Figure 2 Inscriptions from pedimented headstones. A Welsh only; B English only; C Bilingual. The relative size and style of text is an approximate representation of the originals.

The materials and labour necessary to produce these monuments puts them in a category distinct from the other headstones of the period, and their cost must have been considerable. They do, however, make a distinctive impact within a graveyard and the size of a slab within the architectural frame was such that it could carry lengthy inscriptions, again incurring costs but allowing display and communication. That the pedimented headstone was erected by the more affluent families of the neighbourhood can be gathered from the inscriptions themselves and from census data. Farmers, master mariners, shipbuilders, custom officials, clergy and even some gentry chose this form of memorial.

A set of rules or grammar can be postulated for both text and decoration on headstones. That for nineteenth-century Pembrokeshire pedimented headstone texts is outlined below, though similar rules applied to other contemporary monuments in the area, and would seem to have been in operation elsewhere in Britain and the colonies. The grammar provides the rules for the order of phrases, the way in which they are positioned on the stone. It also dictates where decorative elements of particular kinds may occur. For some monument types (including the pedimented headstones) the regularity even extends to the choices of typeface with which the texts are inscribed. A similar grammar for the text applied to both English and Welsh language stones (Figure 2). Graveyard monuments of the twentieth century contain less text, but largely retain the same phrase order and relative sizes of typeface.

The first element of the pedimented headstone was an introductory phrase placed at the top of the gravestone. Examples included 'Sacred to the memory of', '*er cof am*'; 'Here lies', '*bedd*'. The first word was usually placed alone at the top of the stone, and in such cases could be heavily decorated. Next came the name of the deceased, written in large letters and in capitals. After this came some defining characteristic, usually the address in the case of a man, or 'wife of x' for women. This was written in italics, smaller than the name. There then followed 'who died' and the date, with 'aged n years', on a further line. There may then have followed a quotation, usually from the Bible, normally in upper and lower case. If it was a biblical quotation the source was normally given. Additional

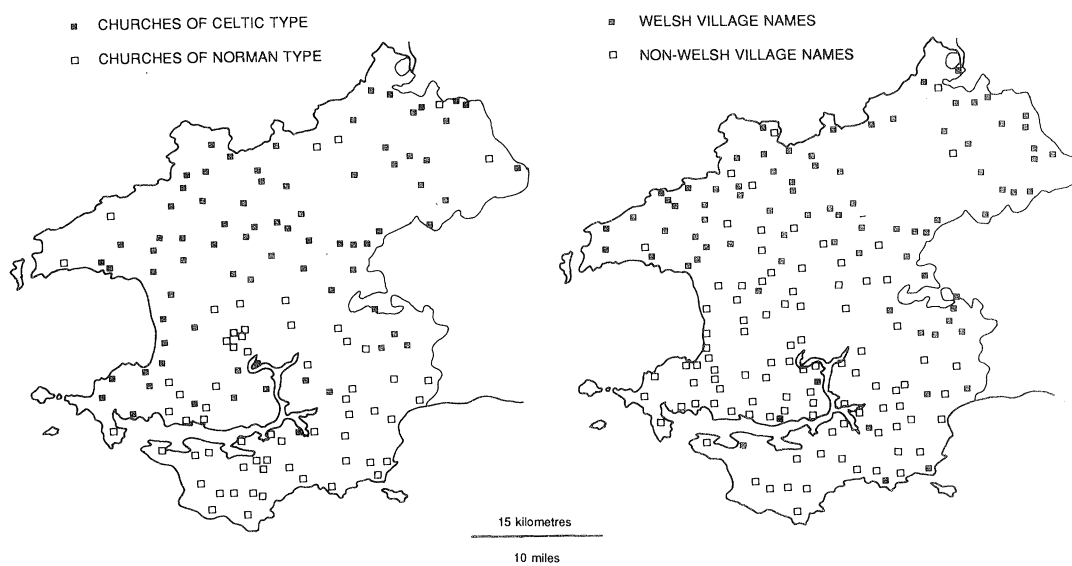


Figure 3 Distribution of church types and village names in Pembrokeshire (based on John 1972).

inscriptions were added to the gravestone in much the same style, except that 'also' in distinctive letters separated the inscriptions for each of the deceased, and further introductory phrases were omitted.

The Landsker

Geographers, linguists and archaeologists have been concerned to identify the cultural divisions in Wales which separated those areas which retained native traditions and those which have become influenced by external forces, largely from England (Williams 1935; Pryce 1978a, 1978b). One of areas where this division has been clearest and most stable is in Pembrokeshire, where the boundary between the English and Welsh areas is known as the Landsker.

The distribution of placenames and church types in Pembrokeshire clearly indicates the medieval divisions between the Anglo-Norman south and native Welsh north (Figure 3). The stability of this divide between the Welsh and Anglo-Welsh is well attested in sources of the early modern period where the sharp contrast was noted with reference to both language and other aspects of culture. At the beginning of the seventeenth century George Owen recorded in his *Description of Penbrokeshire* that seventy-four parishes spoke English, sixty-four Welsh and six were bilingual (Owen 1963: 48). Moreover, Owen specifically noted that the methods of agriculture and land measurement were different in the two areas, and in his more detailed accounts many other cultural distinctions can be discerned between the Welsh and the English areas. By 1888 the linguistic and cultural divide was a little more blurred than in George Owen's day, but there was still limited contact between the two populations; the southern, English-speaking area had already by

CENSUS DATA 1931

Percentage of population
able to speak Welsh

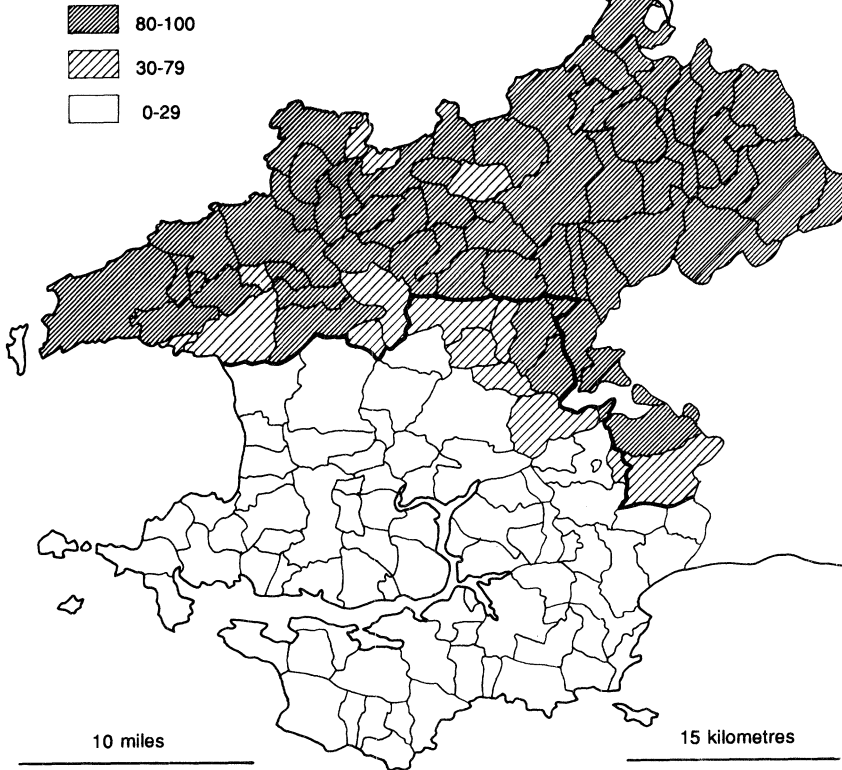


Figure 4 Distribution of population able to speak Welsh in 1931. The solid black line indicates the line of the Landsker as described by George Owen in the early seventeenth century (adapted from John 1972).

this time been termed 'little England beyond Wales' (Laws 1888). Language use therefore reflected and helped to reinforce a wider cultural divide, and one amenable to study through graveyard memorials.

The census data form the most comprehensive dataset available for the study of language use for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (the first national census referring to individuals was taken in 1841), and have been used to confirm the stability of the Landsker line (John 1972). Although there may have been a dilution in the percentage of the population speaking Welsh in the north, the division between the two parts of Pembrokeshire has remained remarkably constant in recent times (Figure 4). The census returns, however, do have certain disadvantages. Only the ability to speak Welsh is recorded; whether the language is habitually used, or whether the respondent can read or write Welsh, has never formed part of the questionnaire (John 1972: 15). The result is that the returns may reflect more cultural affiliation than practice; those who feel Welsh may say they speak it even if they rarely actually do so; those who feel English but may be able to speak or read Welsh may not feel it necessary to record the fact if they rarely use Welsh.

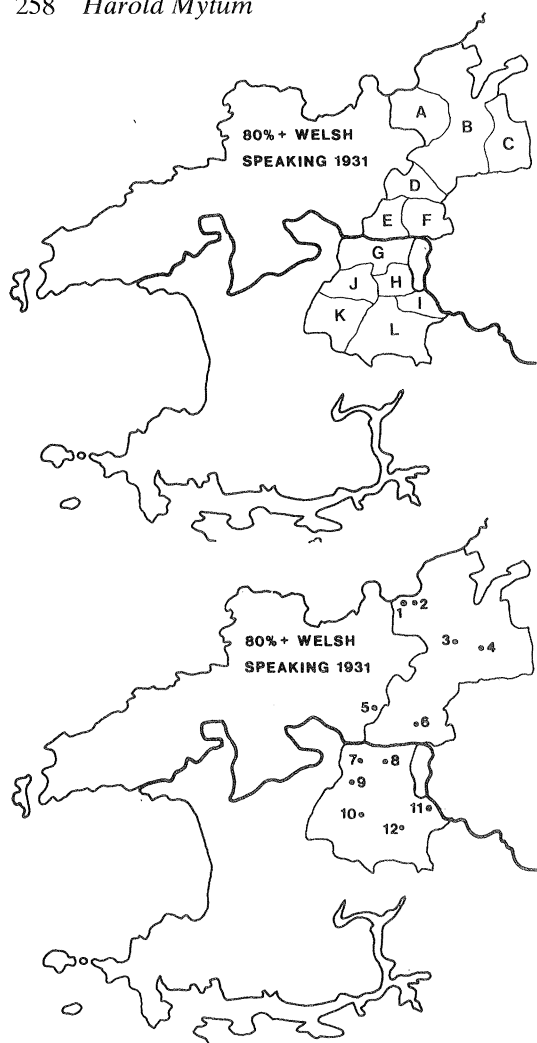


Figure 5 Location of burial grounds in the study area. Anglican: A Newport; B Nevern; C Meline; D Morvil; E Castlebythe; F Henry's Moat; G Ambleston; H Walton East; I Clarbeston; J Spittal; K Rudbaxton; L Wiston. Nonconformist: 1 Brynhyfryd, Newport; 2 Ebenezer, Newport; 3 Cilgwyn; 4 Brynberian; 5 Puncteston; 6 Tufton; 7 Ambleston; 8 Woodstock; 9 Zion's Hill; 10 Scolton; 11 Clarbeston; 12 Wiston.

In this regard, the gravestone evidence is of interest since the choice of language use on memorials indicates a commitment and ability in the language beyond a limited oral vocabulary.

A study area was chosen within Pembrokeshire in order to examine the variability in monument type and language used over time and space. Six Anglican parishes were selected from the north, and a further six from the south of the Landsker (Figure 5). The Anglican Church in Wales formed part of the Church of England until 1920, when that of Wales was separated, disestablished, and became the Church of Wales within the Anglican communion. It has traditionally been the church patronized by the gentry, though it was also supported by a spectrum of the population. Nonconformist chapel burial grounds from approximately the same area were also included so that the two main religious communities in the region could be compared, though nonconformists had to be buried in Anglican churchyards until chapel burial grounds were established from the beginning of the nineteenth century. A total of 4,357 memorials was recorded, which contained

Table 2 Numbers of inscriptions, by language, burial ground and location to the north or south of the Landsker

<i>Anglican, north of the Landsker</i>				
<i>Parish</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>Bilingual</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Total</i>
Newport	165	258	437	860
Nevern	140	95	242	477
Meline	17	6	18	41
Morvil	1	4	3	8
Castlebythe	33	7	17	57
Henry's Moat	17	21	47	85
Total	373	391	764	1528
<i>Anglican, south of the Landsker</i>				
<i>Parish</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>Bilingual</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Total</i>
Ambleston	5	20	100	125
Walton East	10	11	96	117
Clarbeston	2	1	136	139
Spittal	—	2	143	145
Rudbaxton	—	—	186	186
Wiston	—	—	268	268
Total	17	34	929	980
<i>Nonconformist, north of the Landsker</i>				
<i>Chapel</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>Bilingual</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Total</i>
Brynhyfryd, Newport	58	1	28	87
Ebenezer, Newport	20	35	59	114
Cilgwyn	179	38	24	241
Brynberian	316	45	53	414
Puncheston	78	—	16	94
Tuften	100	—	16	116
Total	751	119	196	1066
<i>Nonconformist, south of the Landsker</i>				
<i>Chapel</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>Bilingual</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Total</i>
Ambleston	32	—	33	65
Woodstock	14	—	16	30
Zion's Hill	3	6	171	180
Scolton	2	1	165	168
Clarbeston	31	8	103	142
Wiston	—	—	178	178
Total	82	15	666	763

sufficient surviving inscription to indicate language use (Table 2). Most stones are in one language, but a significant proportion in the north are also bilingual.

In Pembrokeshire the divide between Welsh- and English-speaking areas produces some divergent populations living in close proximity and in similar social, economic and

physical environments. It is thus possible to identify variability in material culture and behaviour which may be assigned to cultural factors. With regard to graveyard memorials, the most noticeable difference is that of language though some styles of monument also correlate with particular groups. The pedimented headstones, for example, were popular with the professional classes such as government officials, middling landowners and master mariners in the north.

Language on memorials is normally a relatively neutral element. What is said may be very potent, but the choice of words is normally limited. In England the use of Latin or Greek epitaphs on some gentry or clergy memorials served to emphasize the learning of the deceased, and distanced them from the great majority of those observing the memorials. A limited, educated group could appreciate the apposite chosen phrase, but for most the unintelligibility *was* the message. For all other memorials, those who were literate could have free access to them all, and indeed they were written with that in mind. For the illiterate, all memorial inscriptions worked in the same way as the Latin or Greek phrases, but even so many could have identified names and the familiar phrases used on so many monuments. This familiarity of phraseology, and the predictable grammar of memorial inscriptions, is particularly important in a bilingual area such as Pembrokeshire.

The choice of a particular language for a memorial indicates a commitment to that language, a statement of affiliation and confidence that the language will continue and so the inscription will continue to function. As so many English speakers are monoglot, the use of Welsh is therefore an exclusion. Stones in English in the earlier nineteenth century could also be read by only a few, but by the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century more or less the whole population could read English at least well enough to understand memorials. Thus it is the choice of Welsh – a language for various reasons on the defensive against the spread of English – that is the more critical cultural indicator.

The formulaic nature of memorials was the same whether they were written in English or Welsh. The layout was the same, the choice of typography the same. This had a fundamental effect on the way in which such stones could be read even by those not conversant with Welsh. The name of the deceased, the identifier of a placename, and at least parts of the date of death could be read by all. This critical information meant that memory could be perpetuated whatever the fate of the language, though more personal information – other descriptive phrases, the introductory terms, the epitaph or biblical quotation remained obscure to the English speaker. However, Welsh language stones hid less than one might first think; the choice of memorial form, material and decorative motifs all acted to unite across the linguistic divide, even though some monument types and decorative motifs were more popular on one or other side of the Landsker, as was the case with the pedimented headstones.

Gravestones were not only focuses for private, family grief and remembrance but were active at a wider social level. Ethnographic accounts relating to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century from the adjacent area of south Cardiganshire show that burial grounds and their memorials were used to explain and perpetuate the memory of kinship relations which stretched back over generations (Jenkins 1971). Besides passing through a churchyard on the way to services (which was the case at all Church of Wales churches in the area, but only some of the chapels), attendance took place at other times. Families

were expected to weed graves in a chapel cemetery before any burial took place, and all were tidied before Palm Sunday when flowers were placed on the graves of deceased relatives. Jenkins (1971: 4) also notes that 'While in the cemetery people walk round in small groups looking at the graves and reading the tombstones, asking one another whether they remember whoever it is that lies buried there, inquiring how he or she was related to others familiar to them, discussing any details about which they are doubtful'. The process of remembering and placing the dead within the kinship and tenorial structure was an important concern. The graveyard memorial played an important part through the inscription, in whatever language, but it would also have had a role in terms of the nature of the monument and its siting which would have further contextualized the deceased and given substance to the name.

The use of an introductory phrase in Welsh or English is a valuable indicator of preferred language use. When considering the graveyards over the period from 1740 to 1979 it is possible to chart the changing use of Welsh as the primary memorial language, and to contrast those parishes north of the Landsker with those to the south. Two main messages are conveyed by the introductory remarks. The first concerns location of the body (e.g. Here lies the body of, with the use of *bedd* in Welsh), the second places emphasis on memory (e.g. In loving memory, with the use of *er cof am* in Welsh). The latter sentiment is always dominant in Pembrokeshire, though the body location had its heyday at an early phase (1790s to 1830s), and was often linked, though certainly not exclusively, with the flat ledger slab form of memorial which further emphasized the covering of the grave. It is worth noting, however, that the few Welsh versions of this phrase occur slightly later (from the 1850s both north and south of the Landsker), as Welsh becomes more popular as a language on memorials, and occurs more frequently on headstones (Figure 2a).

In north Pembrokeshire, the overwhelming majority of the population spoke Welsh until well into this century. Moreover, during the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century many of these were monoglot Welsh. The gentry and Anglican clergy spoke English as their first language, though many could also converse in Welsh. From the mid-1840s there was greater emphasis on the use of Welsh in church services (Jones 1980), though this had been accepted in north Pembrokeshire much earlier. In order to communicate with the mass of the population, and to prevent loss of congregation to the Welsh-speaking nonconformist chapels which were so numerous in the area, local clergy would tailor their services to the linguistic needs of the congregation, if necessary conducting bilingual services. For example, as early as 1708 the churchwardens of Nevern Anglican parish church wrote that 'Our parishioners are promiscuously Welsh and English, and accordingly we have books in both languages' (Evans 1935: 302).

The nonconformist chapels were not under the influence of the gentry and tended to use Welsh exclusively in those areas where this was the vernacular language. A wide range of social classes apart from the élite were represented, and the chapel-goers identified themselves with the *pobol tai bach*, people of the little houses, rather than the *y gwŷr mawr*, the big people, also described as *y gwŷr byddigion*, the gentry (Jenkins 1980). This range of social classes used memorials competitively to emphasize their social standing, and indeed it would seem that memorial types were more strongly used to indicate this in nonconformist burial grounds than in Anglican churchyards, with the use of a wide range

of monuments including columns with urns, pedimented headstones and tall simpler headstones. Higher social rank in Anglican graveyards was marked by the use of family plots as much as through monument type, though the chest tomb and later the pedimented headstone were popular.

The language of the stones: to 1850

The use of English introductory phrases for the early nineteenth century reflects the dominance of English in the Anglican graveyards even in north Pembrokeshire during that period (Figure 6). Welsh does not even make an appearance until the 1810s, and remains a tiny minority. Welsh memorials appear from the beginning in nonconformist graveyards, but they do not have any surviving fully legible monuments in the study area before the 1810s. Given the commitment to the use of Welsh during services it is unexpected to note that, even here, English is used in the majority of cases until the 1850s. In the first half of the nineteenth century English was the official language of record, and so appears even on memorials placed in Welsh-speaking contexts. At this stage memorials in Pembrokeshire are still relatively rare and are associated with the more educated classes who could speak and read English themselves. That they chose to be remembered in a language other than

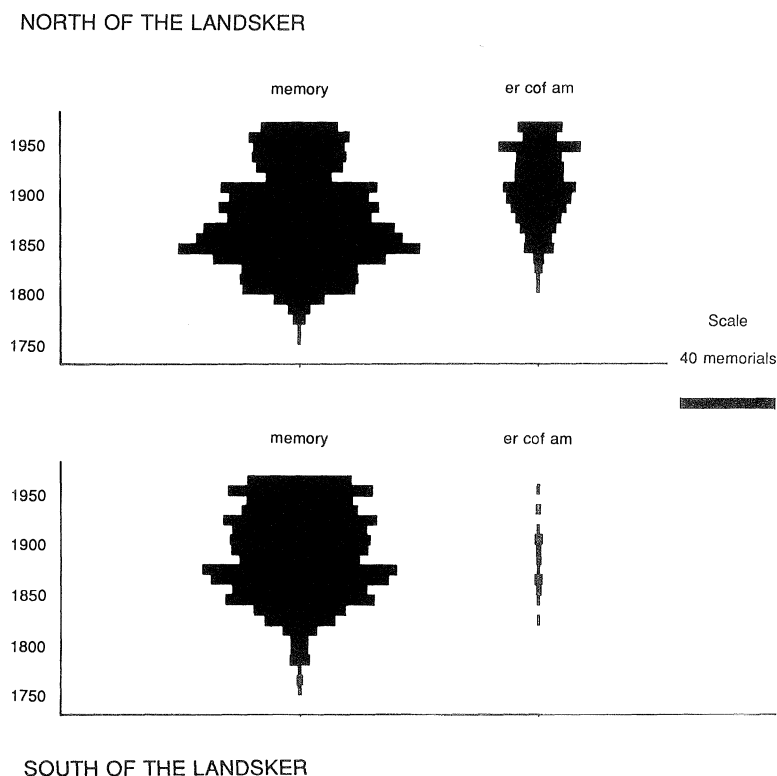


Figure 6 Battleship curves demonstrating the popularity through time of 'memory' and 'er cof am' in Anglican graveyards north and south of the Landsker.

the one of which they had shared in religious service perhaps indicates a tendency to ape aspects of English culture seen in other aspects of nonconformist behaviour (Jones 1980: 58–9).

Fluency in English was seen as necessary to succeed in many aspects of life, so perhaps use of that language on a memorial implied that the person commemorated had indeed been successful. The pedimented headstones from the Anglican graveyards in the north indicate the desire to demonstrate some command of English among the economically successful section of the population (Table 1). Of the sixty-two such headstones only two were completely in Welsh. However, twenty-five did incorporate a Welsh epitaph or biblical verse, and so indicated a knowledge of and support for the Welsh language also.

In south Pembrokeshire English was the dominant language and the overwhelming majority were monoglot. This can be seen to have been the case not only among those buried in the graveyards of the Anglican church (which had but one Welsh memorial in the study area before 1850), but also in the chapel burial grounds where only one per decade with the Welsh '*er cof am*' phrase was erected (Figure 7). South of the Landsker the few pedimented headstones in Anglican graveyards all incorporated English, and only three were bilingual. It is interesting to note, moreover, that these bilingual stones come from Ambleston and Walton East just south of the Landsker, and indeed one commemorated a deacon from the Calvinistic Methodist chapel of Woodstock, which probably attracted Welsh speakers to its services but did not have its own burial ground in the 1850s.

During the first half of the nineteenth century most education was through the medium of English, but with emphasis on learning by rote and not explanation. The result was that the actual meaning of English had to be acquired by the children themselves if they were Welsh speaking. Testing ensured that passages could be recited, but in many cases the meaning was completely unknown to those who had so passed the tests (Durkacz 1983: 165). Therefore, literacy in English developed slowly, and Welsh literacy depended on any training given either at home or in nonconformist chapels.

In Pembrokeshire in the period up to 1850, there would have been a significant percentage of the population who were illiterate, and others who were literate in only one language. In this context graveyard memorials might be thought to take on an unfamiliar role. However, the standardization of the memorials, already described, made this less of a problem.

The language of the stones: from 1850

After critical comments by a Commission of Inquiry into the state of education in Wales (Parliamentary Papers 1847), bilingual teaching developed, though often with the subtext of teaching English more effectively so that in due course Welsh could be abandoned. By the 1880s, however, Welsh was widespread and recognized in education, and most of the population would have been to some extent bilingual and literate. In this context the stones can be treated as texts in the familiar sense.

In parallel with the development of Welsh in the education field, there was a cultural revival of all Celtic languages and culture in the nineteenth century, and the most well organized of these was in Wales. Festivals known as *Eisteddfodau* were established and

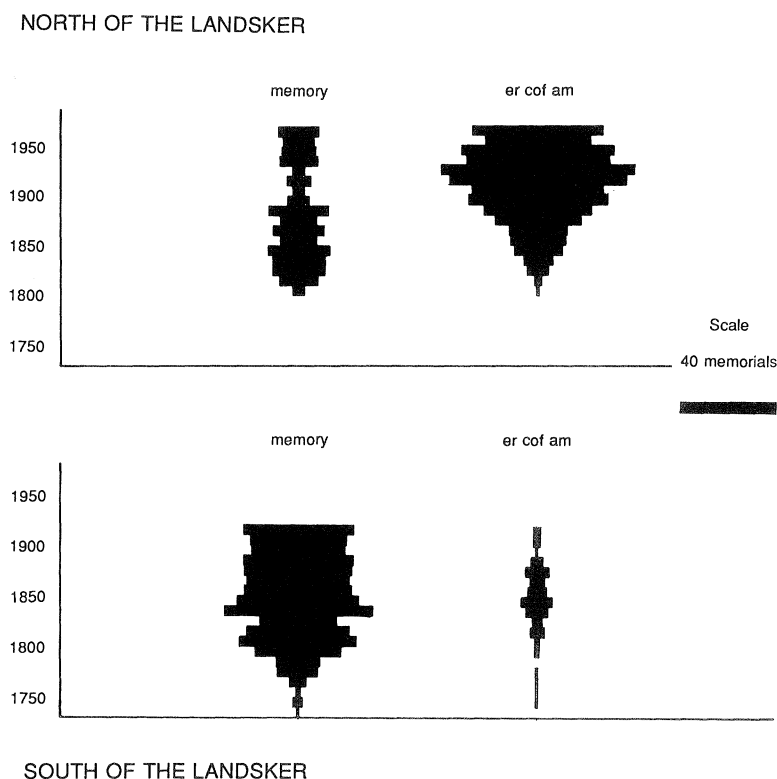


Figure 7 Battleship curves demonstrating the popularity through time of 'memory' and 'er cof am' in nonconformist burial grounds north and south of the Landsker.

gradually, during the first half of the century, shook off English elements to become a major influence in Welsh culture. Not only poetry and literature but also music and dance were promoted, and a national identity could be forged at a time when more people could reach the national and regional events by way of the developing railway network (Durkacz 1983: 198–9). Welsh nationalism developed in the late nineteenth century, and this was largely drawn out of the experiences of a common cultural heritage seen through events such as Eisteddfodau. This revival in the fortunes of Welsh, and its increasing acceptability in middle-class and even gentry contexts, meant that Welsh was more frequently chosen as the medium for communication on gravestones.

Welsh was used for introductory terms on over 10 per cent of monuments from the 1850s in Anglican churchyards north of the Landsker, and at times reached 40 per cent, but English always remained the majority choice (Figure 6). This can be contrasted with the nonconformist burial grounds where, from the 1850s, Welsh became the majority choice, and remains overwhelmingly so up to the present. The security of Welsh, once established as the language for memorials in the northern nonconformist burial grounds, reflects the central role of the language in the cultural and religious identity of those groups. This contrasts strongly with the southern memorials which, not surprisingly, have few Welsh language introductions (never more than three in a decade) in the Anglican graveyards.

The cultural difference between north and south is most visibly demonstrated by the fate of Welsh on the southern nonconformist burial monuments. Even at the peak of Welsh language use in the early part of the twentieth century no more than 20 per cent of memorials have a Welsh introduction, and there are very few bilingual stones at any date (Figure 7).

Thereafter there was a steady decline in the use of the Welsh language. Although Welsh could be used in schools, education policy, particularly at secondary level, encouraged the use of English (Adler 1977: 11). The growth of English language media such as radio further eroded the use of minority languages. This is mirrored in the stones: in the south, only four memorials with Welsh introductions have been erected in Anglican graveyards since 1920, and even in the nonconformist burial grounds in that area only 6 per cent of memorials have a Welsh introduction by the 1970s. In the north, use of Welsh is erratic in Anglican contexts, though it does not suffer as great a decline as would be suggested by census data. The reason for this may be that the actual decline in use is partially hidden in the memorial data since the stones generally commemorate older inhabitants who often speak Welsh even when their children have given it up and their grandchildren perhaps never learnt it. Thus, the decline in Welsh may not be visible in monuments for several decades after the trend began, especially as the population is generally living longer and so further delaying the erection of memorials.

Only in the last two decades has the decline of the Welsh language been halted and then reversed, with its revival and reintroduction to the educational system in a more extensive way, especially in the north. Where Welsh was already very much a minority language and did not relate to wider cultural activities and identity it has largely withered away, but in its heartland areas, where it forms a core aspect of the culture, it has remained strong and from this base expansion can begin. There is a growth in Welsh-language radio, television and popular publishing, and an increasing confidence in the future of the language. This is particularly supported by that part of the population from the nonconformist tradition where the language has been retained. Here the use of Welsh introductions on memorials has continued to be the overwhelming choice, with 75 per cent consistently choosing this language in recent decades.

If the Welsh revival is to be effective, however, a wider section of the population will have to learn Welsh. There is evidence that many lapsed Welsh speakers and even some previously monoglot English speakers are now learning Welsh, including some of the numerous incomers who have moved to the area. It will be a sign of their personal feelings about integration into the community if they choose a Welsh or bilingual inscription for their memorials. It must be recognized, however, that monoglot Welsh speakers have all but disappeared; while 15 per cent of the population could speak only Welsh in 1901, those that learn Welsh now can all speak English. As many English speakers cannot speak Welsh, this is always going to lead to pressure on the minority tongue, and indeed may encourage the use of English merely to ensure that all can understand. However, the evidence from memorials suggests that linguistic and cultural affiliation remain powerful factors in the choice of memorial language. The gravestone data will continue to reflect attitudes to Welsh language and culture in the future as they have in the past.

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Abstract

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Language as symbol in churchyard monuments: the use of Welsh in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Pembrokeshire

Graveyard memorials combine form, decoration and inscription to communicate the social persona of the deceased to those visiting the burial ground. In Pembrokeshire, south-east Wales, a linguistic divide known as the Landsker is expressed through graveyard memorials by the language chosen for the inscription. Variability in language choice is demonstrated not only through time and space, but also by status and religious affiliation (Anglican or nonconformist). Language differences reflect wider cultural ties and these are also expressed through memorials, with the pedimented headstone popular in north Pembrokeshire being used as an example here.