

What About the Welsh? Celtic Revival Era Relics From the 18th and 19th Centuries

An Analysis of the *Constitutions of the Society of Cymmrodorion* and Augusta Hall's Eisteddfod
Essay on *Advantages of Protecting the Welsh Language and National Costumes of Wales*,

Prepared For:

Relics of the Celtic Revival: Ten Key Texts in Context (HPCS6011)

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

By

Zane Newitt

Student No. 1604554

November 24th, 2025

Introduction – The Great Interrogative

Welsh Cultural Revivalism, an important and in many ways, primal, subset of the Celtic Revival movements spanning from the early 18th century, emerged during a confluence of other movements, uprisings and geopolitical shifts. It was greatly impacted by, and in some ways, birthed in response to them. Modern connotations such as; The Age of Saints, woad painted, plaid clad warriors, ‘the Noble Savage’ or the Awen filled Bard, along with reverent elevation of Europe’s oldest language to nearly mystical levels sprang from founts fed by the currents of the French, and later, American Revolution (s), the trailing ends of the Renaissance, the emergence of the Industrial Revolution, the nominal yet hollow unity of 1706, and the muscular expansion of the British Empire. These combined to crescendo, forcing an interrogative at the heart of cultural revivalists amongst the native Britons; ‘*what about the Welsh?*’ What place do the Welsh have in debates over what nationhood meant, or what the Rights of Man were? As fraternal orders conjured ancient customs and arcane rituals exploring the Unity of God and the Brotherhood of Man, where did the Welsh fit? And of the winds of unity, what was their role in the Empire, and in defining *Britishness* itself?

Many 18th and early 19th century Welsh contemporaries to these movements wrested with and influenced this ‘great interrogative,’ in so doing, they left a treasure trove of primary source documents in the form of essays, poems, prose, fellowship monitors and other manuscripts whereby their contributions can be studied. Two key texts, or relics, from the Welsh Cultural Revival will be examined as the scope of this work. *The Constitutions of the Society of Cymmrodorion*, contained within *Y Cymmrodor, Embodying The Transactions Of The Cymmrodorion Society Of London (1755)* and *The Prize Essay On The Advantages Resulting From The Preservation Of The Welsh Language, And The National Costume of Wales (1836)* by Lady Augusta Hall, share at least three broad objectives; Cultural Nationalism and Patriotism (Wales as a distinct and special nation), the preservation of the language and lastly, the promotion of Culture through conservation of customs, dress, mythology, legal works, festivals and other hallmarks of Welsh culture. The relics demonstrate that the Welsh antiquarians, leaning on Wales’s ancient pedigree as a continuous people, argued for them to be a culture worth ‘reviving’ and being at the vanguard of the prevailing movements of the day.

A Thumbnail Sketch of the Relics

The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion is a fellowship that, according to its official website, *is dedicated to promoting the language, literature, arts and science of Wales.*¹ The

¹ Honorary Cymmrodorion Society (n.d.) < <https://www.cymmrodorion.org/> > [accessed 21, November, 2025]

Society grew out of the earlier Honourable and Loyal Society of Antient Britons (founded 1715)² and was a forum for Welsh-centric acts of benevolence, antiquarian and social pursuits. Although the capital of England seems, on the surface, like an odd place to foment a Celtic revival, it was there where power, influence and opportunity was concentrated and thus the perfect place from which to contend for the promotion of Wales. Three brothers from Anglesey, Willaim, Richard and Lewis Morris, started the society (the latter being ‘the leading light of the Welsh cultural revival of the 18th century’)³ in 1751 and it continues to function in 2025. A constitution codifying the criteria for membership, rules and activities of the members, but also garnished with rich Welsh poetry, membership rolls, statistical data such as the composition of local and international contributors by region, and a comprehensive listing of important Welsh subject matter for Society Member study, debate and contemplation makes the document a special, treasured relic from the Welsh Cultural Revival.

The second relic is an award-winning essay written for the 1834 Eisteddfod by Lady Augusta Hall, the Baroness of Llanover. She lived from 1802 to 1896 and was a member of the Welsh gentry emanating from Monmouth. Being a woman of both influence and affluence, Hall, who took an avid interest in Celtic Studies and the Welsh language, was an active member of the patriotic Cymreigyddion Society. Her home was a cultural center, and the sum of her life was dedicated to advocacy for Welsh language, culture and values. The subject of her essay is Patriotism. This is achieved first, she contends, through the preservation of the language, the conduit for ensuring the welfare and continuance of the nation⁴. Secondly, the social conservative Baroness shifts to a fiery promotion of Welsh culture via traditional folk costume, the topic for which the author is most known.

Although very different in audience and construct, the two works contribute to the ‘great interrogative’ through three key aims; Nationalism, Language Preservation and Cultural Promotion, the study and embracing of which result in a revival of ancient culture and the ongoing happiness and welfare of its People.

Cultural Nationalism and Patriotism

Both *The Constitutions of the Society of Cymmrodorion* and *The Prize Essay On The Advantages Resulting From The Preservation Of The Welsh Language, And The National Costume of Wales* begin as an apologetic for Nationalism. In this context and timeframe, Nationalism was not defined by the Nation State being the organizing principle for a Society,

² Honorary Cymmrodorion Society (n.d.) < <https://www.cymmrodorion.org/> > [accessed 21, November, 2025]

³ Honorary Cymmrodorion Society (n.d.) < <https://www.cymmrodorion.org/> > [accessed 21, November, 2025]

⁴ Augusta Hall, *The Prize Essay On The Advantages Resulting From The Preservation Of The Welsh Language, And The National Costume of Wales*, (London: Longman Reese, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman; Cardiff: William Bird, 1836), p. 3.

nor for National Sovereignty, or for Welsh Independence. These contemporary connotations should not be read backwards into the relics. Rather, Nationalism, to them, meant the recognition and distinction of a continuous People with a shared language, customs, music, religion and other cultural markers. In the preamble to *The Constitutions*, the writers suggest that (Cultural) Nationalism is universal, and part of every human's experience:

There is implanted in the Nature of Mankind, a strong Attachment to that Country which gave them Birth, and a laudable Curiosity to acquaint themselves with the genuine History and Antiquities of those People from whom they are immediately descended.⁵

Hall's essay, identical to *The Constitutions*, opens with this claim as well, adding further detail to the operating assumption. Stating that love of native country and race are God-given. She writes, *Nationality, like that innate and intuitive love which parents bear their offspring, is more or less implanted by the Creator in the breast of every human being...*⁶

Both relics start with an apologetic for Nationalism as a wide, universal appeal, then narrow the focus and articulate Welsh distinctives. Lady Hall explores the differences between Nationalism and Patriotism as she makes an impassioned appeal for both:

Nationality, therefore, if not precisely synonymous with patriotism, is at least of kindred origin, if not the very germ from which that exalted sentiment is evolved. Nationality is a virtuous feeling which exists within us at our birth, and either strengthens with our strength, and is developed with our manhood, or it is crushed and suppressed-though seldom or ever totally extinguished.⁷

She then surgically defines the difference between the two for her reader/judges, asserting that Nationalism is love for country⁸ (and if not love, then at minimum, a recognition of its distinctives) that induces Patriotism, which is characterized by honorable conduct, a wishing for the Nation's welfare, and lastly, the active promotion of that welfare to the best of the individual's abilities.⁹ The very first Article in the *Constitutions* echoes the same language (without naming it Patriotism), demanding that the Cymmrodorion Brothers *profess themselves*

⁵ Reverend Robert Jones Evans, Editor, *Y Cymmrodor, Embodying The Transactions Of The Cymmrodorion Society Of London, Etc.* Volume 1 (London: Printed For The Society, T. Richards, 37 Great Queen Street, WC, 1877), p. 305.

⁶ Augusta Hall, *The Prize Essay On The Advantages Resulting From The Preservation Of The Welsh Language, And The National Costume of Wales*, (London: Longman Reese, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman; Cardiff: William Bird, 1836), p. 3.

⁷ Ibid, p.4

⁸ Ibid, p.4

⁹ Ibid, p.4

*hearty Well-wishers and Promoters of the Honour and Welfare of the Principality and its Inhabitants, and shall be of the Age of one and Twenty Years or upwards.*¹⁰

Both relics have a natural flow of establishing that Nationalism and Patriotism are universal virtues shared by mankind, then make the case for the special distinctions of the Native Britons. Hall argues for the Welsh as the most Patriotic of all men, writing:

How often have we not seen the last moments of the dying soothed by the assurance that their bodies should rest in death on the spot to which they were attached in life by ties of birth, kindred and associations ? and to the honor of their race, there are no people amongst whom this interesting quality is more evidently manifested than the inhabitants of Wales.¹¹

That Wales is distinct and special does not, in the view of both relics, make a case for separation from the recently *De Jure* (and long since *De Facto*) United Kingdom. Rather, Hall claims, that a Patriotic Wales, filled with the knowledge and pride of its culture and history, better serves the King, *The Welsh have long and faithfully served the ancestors of the King of Great Britain, who in his own person is the lineal inheritor of the Crown of England, Scotland and Wales*¹². Britishness, or *Of the Britons* is equated to Welshness in both manuscripts, but their uniqueness aims to contribute to, not remove from, the Empire. Hall suggests that an Anglicized Wales, for example, would become *callous, stupid or indifferent* subjects.¹³ Likewise, the Cymmadorion Society, whilst standing on the primacy of the Britons, pledge their fidelity to the King George, testify of their *firm attachment to His Majesty* in the preamble of their Constitution.¹⁴

Where distinctive Nationalism and invigorated Patriotism is the ends, the means, and the subject given the most attention and volume in both relics, is the Welsh Language, and the preservation thereof.

Preservation of the Language as a Conduit for Cultural Revival

¹⁰ Reverend Robert Jones Evans, Editor, *Y Cymmrodor, Embodying The Transactions Of The Cymmrodorion Society Of London, Etc.* Volume 1 (London: Printed For The Society, T. Richards, 37 Great Queen Street, WC, 1877), p. 318.

¹¹ Augusta Hall, *The Prize Essay On The Advantages Resulting From The Preservation Of The Welsh Language, And The National Costume of Wales*, (London: Longman Reese, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman; Cardiff: William Bird, 1836), p. 5.

¹² Ibid, p. 5.

¹³ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁴ Reverend Robert Jones Evans, Editor, *Y Cymmrodor, Embodying The Transactions Of The Cymmrodorion Society Of London, Etc.* Volume 1 (London: Printed For The Society, T. Richards, 37 Great Queen Street, WC, 1877), p. 317.

The relics do not promote preservation for its own sake, rather it is the vehicle necessary to the understanding past, and preserving the future, of a distinct identity in Wales. Neither Hall nor the Morris brothers advocate a *Welsh Onlyism*, as evident by the fact that the *Constitutions* are published similar to an interlinear Bible, aiding the readership in appreciating both languages. Likewise, and contrary to modern competitions, Hall's Eisteddfod entry was penned in both English and Welsh. Nevertheless, Welsh is paramount. Nationalism is natural, and patriotism is a virtue, per both works, and the only way to appreciate these qualities is through a command of the British, or Welsh tongue:

No one can be ignorant, that in order to explain the ancient Monuments, Customs, and Manners of any People, a competent Knowledge of their Language is absolutely necessary : And as the British, or Welsh, is the Language of the original Inhabitants of Great Britain ; without a Critical Knowledge of it, it will be found extremely difficult, if not impracticable, to investigate the most ancient British Antiquities with any degree of Success.¹⁵

The *Constitutions* proceed from to put forth the superiority of the Welsh language on the merits of its uncorrupted purity; something found in no other Tongue on Earth. This argument urges a pride of purity, intimating the Welsh have a profound place in revivalist movements because the periscope into their ancient wisdom and lore is intact, accessible and distinguished.

And whereas most other Languages have been changed and corrupted, so as in length of Time to become in a great Measure unintelligible ; we have undoubted Proofs that the British has continued very near the same, at least for twelve hundred Years past; the Compositions of the famous Poet Taliesin, the two Merddins, Aneurin Wawdrydd, and Prince Llywarch hen, who all flourished in the fifth Century, being, at this Day, perfectly intelligible in this Language.¹⁶

The Brythonic that gave way to Old, then Medieval Welsh, may not have been as directly and easily as cipherable as the Antiquarian fellowship suggests, but the underlying point that the Welsh, surrounded by English, French, German and Spanish thinkers, poets and philosophers, had a body of historical work far more intact and unbroken than their peers, strongly makes the case for a British place at the table of revivals and cultural movements.

¹⁵ Reverend Robert Jones Evans, Editor, *Y Cymmrodor, Embodying The Transactions Of The Cymmrodorion Society Of London, Etc.* Volume 1 (London: Printed For The Society, T. Richards, 37 Great Queen Street, WC, 1877), p. 305.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 311.

Lady Hall's essay goes even further than this, giving the native tongue of the Britons as the reason that the Principality did not fall into Romanism, that freedom of thought and conscience persisted in a Dark Age. That the Saints, such as Illtud and Dyfrig were able to teach and preach in Welsh, and centuries later see the Scripture in the tongue of the Common Man, makes Welsh the language of the Protestant Reformation years ahead of English and the King James Bible.¹⁷ And more still, Hall proclaims that it the Welsh, being the most ancient and preserved language, can unlock the keys to understand other languages, putting Welsh at the vanguard of understanding history, *It not only contains the roots, but actually supplies the key to the grammatical construction of some of the principal languages of Europe, and even evidences an extraordinary connexion with those of the Eastern world.*¹⁸ Lastly, Hall concludes the Preservation component of her essay by reminder her competition judges that the Welsh language must be approached beyond mere philology; that the language itself carries intrinsic values.

and it has also been the means of supplying to the world some of the brightest and most finished specimens of imagination and composition for as it was to the harp of blind Parry of Rhuabon that we are indebted for the conception of the Bard of Grey, so it is to the Awen of Aneurin and his successors.¹⁹

Lady Hall, following her call to Patriotism, makes the Welsh Language its greatest channel, giving mankind knowledge of both Druids, Seers, the earliest versions of the Christian Faith, the mystical, the reverent, and the love of land and community. Having declared the importance of Nationalism and Patriotism, conducted via Preservation, the two relics lastly turn to Promotion of Welsh culture.

External Outreach versus Internal Showcase

With respect to the third aim, *promotion*, the relics greatly differ. Lady Hall's essay has a call to action that is local, insular, and exclusive. After spending considerable essay space extolling the advantages to preserving the Welsh Language, she pivots to a short beseeching of Welsh woman (through the Eisteddfod essay) to honor traditional costumes and for Wales in general to support locally made goods.

Lady Hall's audience are from South and Southwest Wales (Gwent and Dyfed) and, being participants in the Eisteddfod, are already likely enthusiastic supporters of Welsh culture. The essay's short portion on Costume is not evangelical, but rather an indictment against modernity

¹⁷ Augusta Hall, *The Prize Essay On The Advantages Resulting From The Preservation Of The Welsh Language, And The National Costume of Wales*, (London: Longman Reese, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman; Cardiff: William Bird, 1836), p. 7.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 9.

and plea for conservation. The essay's introduction and long section on Language reads like the antiquarian style of her day. It contains crisp chapter summary bullets followed by academic style prose that simply and authoritatively declares (whether true, false or embellished) a view of Welsh history using the Triads and other commonly used sources from the time. By contrast, the final paragraphs are more akin to a rant written in the first person, the punctuation suddenly changing to include several exclamation points and deep emotion:

There was a time when the garment of homemade manufacture formed the boast of the wearer, and was allowed to reflect honour on the house and family in which it was fabricated, but of late years, how are circumstances changed !!²⁰

Hall provides her views on the domestic role of the woman as governess of the home, the kitchen, portions of the farm, in commerce etc. and bemoans that younger women have traded fashion over tradition, favoring thinner clothing over the thick, better made local wools that are more suited to the needs of a hearty set of chores and duties, often discharged during inclement weather. She blames outside, urban and non-Welsh influences and laments the *tyranny of fashion*²¹ as a source of moral decay a threat to the old ways.

For Hall, revival requires a strict, well-preserved showcase of ancient form and custom. Observed *prima facie*, the primary source document provides no description of what the Welsh Costume looks like whatsoever. Hall is silent on the subject. This is noteworthy as she is best known for her rendering of the Traditional Welsh (folk) Costume in printworks and in practical use, even requiring that her staff and servants wear them regularly. It is possible that her passion in this regard was so well attested that she needed not invest time on it within the words of the essay itself. Although an inward attempt to conserve Welsh culture, outside study reveals that Lady Hall very much favored an international Pan Celtic revival and it appears that her call to action in the essay was to establish a tradition in Wales like the Folk Costumes of her Celtic cousins, such as the XXX adorned by the Bretons.

The Constitutions of the Society of Cymmrodorion are directly opposite. From the conditions of membership to the far-reaching audience, to the desire for ancillary bodies in sundry locations, their aim is promotion via outreach and international appeal.

The unique wording in Article I is a carefully worded invitation for 'anyone' to join the Society. Its offering is narrow, *all born or bred in the Principality of Wales*,²² then the tent broadens to any landowner in Wales, any who speaks or desires to learn British (Welsh), and lastly, any who promote, honor or wish-well the Principality of Wales.²³ The word-play is

²⁰ Augusta Hall, *The Prize Essay On The Advantages Resulting From The Preservation Of The Welsh Language, And The National Costume of Wales*, (London: Longman Reese, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman; Cardiff: William Bird, 1836), p. 11.

²¹ Ibid. p. 11.

²² Reverend Robert Jones Evans, Editor, *Y Cymmrodor, Embodying The Transactions Of The Cymmrodorion Society Of London, Etc.* Volume 1 (London: Printed For The Society, T. Richards, 37 Great Queen Street, WC, 1877), p. 319

²³ Ibid, p. 319

exceptional marketing aimed at establishing a fellowship for any man who loves Wales. Next, in Article X, the Society establishes constitutional mechanics for establishing auxiliary bodies in Westminster, Southwark, and a general reference to Eastern Societies.²⁴ Transcending the borders of the British Isles, or Europe, the Cymmrodorion promote Wales internationally, with specific focus in America, *And the Society do heartily invite their Brethren of the Welsh Colony in Pennsylvania to correspond with them ; being very desirous of perpetuating the antient British Language in that Province.*²⁵

The focused activities of the Fellowship also differ from Hall's inward conservation to external activities and pursuits such as charitable giving and ensuring that Saint David's Day is better conducted and showcased for the public.²⁶

Lastly, following the Constitution itself is a suggested topical list for subjects to be discussed and pursued by the Society. This portion of the relic is a remarkable syllabus that includes every subject that is associated with Celtic Revivalism, and more. Ranging from the study of Ghosts and the paranormal to Geology, from mysticism to manufacturing, this *list*, read on its own reads as the blueprint for the very subjects driving the aforementioned movements of the day.

The relics are a treasure that answer the question "what about the Welsh?". They combine to provide a primary source view, in English and in Welsh, of the universality of Cultural Nationalism, of the appeal to Patriotism, of the distinct advantages and necessity of preserving the oldest language in Europe, of its conduit to understanding Antiquity, and the promotion of preserving Welsh dress, to outreach advancement of customs, festival and the pursuit of worldview subjects that place the Welsh at the very vanguard of the Celtic Revival and the emerging Britishness of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 319

²⁵ Ibid, p. 329

²⁶ Ibid, p. 369

Bibliography

Aaron Jane, *Nineteenth Century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender, and Identity* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2007).

Brooks, Simon, *Why Wales Never Was* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017)

Evans, Reverend Robert Jones, Editor, *Y Cymmrodor, Embodying The Transactions Of The Cymmrodorion Society Of London, Etc.* Volume 1 (London: Printed For The Society, T. Richards, 37 Great Queen Street, WC, 1877)

Hall, Augusta, *The Prize Essay On The Advantages Resulting From The Preservation Of The Welsh Language, And The National Costume of Wales*, (London: Longman Reese, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman; Cardiff: William Bird, 1836)

Honorary Cymmrodorion Society (n.d.) < <https://www.cymmrodorion.org/> > [accessed 21, November, 2025]

Kaminski-Jones, Dr. Rhys, *Welsh Revivalism in Imperial Britain, 1707-1819* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2025)