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BOOK CULTURES, GENTRY IDENTITIES AND THE WELSH COUNTRY HOUSE
LIBRARY: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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Abstract

Country houses have provided repositories for some of the most significant and sizeable accumulations of literature ever assembled in Wales. Most of these accumulations have been displaced and dispersed over the last century. The presence of books within the Welsh country house was commonplace, yet the Welsh country house library has not yet emerged as a concerted focus of academic enquiry. This article seeks to provide a framework for such an endeavour, reflecting on existing scholarly debates which are relevant to the subject and suggesting future lines of enquiry. The research potential of books and libraries is significant. This article is especially interested in probing the relationships which existed between owners and their books, and the implications of these engagements for our understanding of the identities and outlook of landowning families in Wales.

INTRODUCTION

The Welsh country house library is a subject with considerable potential for concerted interdisciplinary enquiry. This article is offered as a 'state of the field' analysis: rather than providing insights derived from fresh engagement with primary material, it seeks to summarise existing work, synthesise relevant scholarly debates and suggest avenues of future

enquiry. There is an energetic research agenda centred on the country house library in England. Mark Purcell's recent volume on the subject – which incorporates plentiful material from Wales – has been heralded as ‘a launching pad for future research’.¹ Such scholarship now connects and contributes to wider debates in book history: on reading practices, textual materialities, women's book ownership, the book trade, scholarly networks, the circulation of texts, as well as the architectural and spatial settings of books within the country house. Case studies of individual libraries, collectors and regions have been central to the development of such research and there are growing bodies of scholarship focusing on country house libraries in Ireland and Scotland.² This article considers the scope for integrating studies of Welsh collections and contexts into this corpus, whilst also suggesting that analyses of country house libraries can provide useful perspectives on wider themes and issues in Welsh history. Medieval manuscripts and Welsh-language texts have understandably dominated as focuses for scholarship in Wales.³ Eiluned Rees's publications on printed books and libraries in

¹ Mark Purcell, *The Country House Library* (New Haven, 2017); review by David Pearson in *Library and Information History* (hereafter *LIH*), 34/2 (2018), 136-7. Purcell provides a summary of the field at pp. 10-21.

² For example, Peter H. Reid, ‘Patriots and rogues: some Scottish lairds and their libraries’, *LIH* 35, 1 (2019), 1-20; Elizabethanne Boran (ed.), *Book Collecting in Ireland and Britain, 1650-1850* (Dublin, 2018); Karen Baston, *Charles Areskine's Library* (Leiden, 2016); M. Purcell, *The Big House Library in Ireland* (Cambridge, 2011); Mark R. M. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment* (Leiden, 2010).

³ Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton (eds), *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature* (Cambridge, 2019); Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Aberystwyth, 2000); Philip Henry Jones and Eiluned Rees (eds), *A Nation and its Books: A History of the Book in Wales* (Aberystwyth, 1998); *A*

eighteenth-century Wales provide an important counterweight.⁴ However, beyond a handful of case studies on prominent libraries and collectors, Thomas Lloyd's contribution to *A Nation and its Books* remains the only recent consideration of the Welsh country house library.⁵

This piece probes the relationships which existed between owners and their books: how libraries informed and interacted with the identities, interests, roles, outlook and values of their owners. How, when and why were books acquired, used, perceived, displayed, preserved and dispersed by the gentry, squirearchy and aristocracy? What was the 'social life' of these books and what does this suggest about the nature of the country house in Wales and the roles of landowners in society, culture and politics c.1300-1920? Was there anything distinctive about country house libraries in Wales? The article teases out some of these questions, not with a view to providing definitive answers, but to encourage further analyses of primary material. Studying books within the country house setting necessitates a multi-

Guide to Welsh Literature, 7 vols (Cardiff, 1992-2003); Geraint H. Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society in Wales, 1660-1730* (Cardiff, 1978).

⁴ Eiluned Rees, 'An introductory survey of 18th century Welsh libraries', *Journal of the Welsh Bibliographical Society* (hereafter *JWBS*), 10 (1966-71), 197-258; eadem, 'Developments in the book trade in eighteenth-century Wales', *The Library*, Series 5, 24/1 (March 1969), 33-43; eadem, 'Pre-1820 Welsh subscription lists', *JWBS* 11/1-2 (1973-4), 85-119; eadem, 'Bookbinding in 18th century Wales', *JWBS* 12/1 (1983-84), 51-66; eadem, *The Welsh Book-trade before 1820* (Aberystwyth, 1988).

⁵ Thomas Lloyd, 'Country-house libraries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', in Jones and Rees (eds), *A Nation and its Books*, pp. 135-46. See also Mark Purcell, 'National Trust libraries in Wales', in David Adshead (ed.), *National Trust Historic Houses & Collections Annual* (2011), 12-19.

I am grateful to Tom Lloyd for commenting on an earlier draft of this article.

period framework of analysis. The piece begins with a chronological outline of the historiography relating to the Welsh gentry and their books, followed by a consideration of key research themes and challenges, with suggestions and possibilities for future lines of enquiry.

I

MANUSCRIPT CULTURE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF *UCHELWRIAETH*, c.1300-1500

Research on manuscript culture in medieval Wales demonstrates that books have long had a place in the *plastai* (great houses) of the *uchelwyr* (gentry).⁶ The fragmentary and possibly unrepresentative nature of surviving evidence from this period allows for only tentative conclusions. For example, there are extraordinarily few surviving Books of Hours from medieval Wales, despite this devotional text being the most popular of all privately-owned books.⁷ Evidence of books being commissioned by or featuring among the possessions of the upper echelons of Welsh lay society begins to emerge more clearly and consistently from the late thirteenth century, signifying an enhanced role for the *uchelwyr* and their houses in a sphere of literary culture traditionally dominated by the Church and monastic scriptoria.⁸ The production of lawbooks in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has been suggested as an

⁶ For useful overviews see Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*; Huw Pryce, 'The origins and the medieval period', in Jones and Rees (eds), *A Nation and its Books*, pp. 1-23.

⁷ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 21. The fifteenth-century 'Pembroke Hours' at Philadelphia Museum of Art was possibly produced for Sir William Herbert, 1st Earl of Pembroke.

⁸ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 16, 39, 54; Pryce, 'Origins', pp. 14-16.

early appropriation of what was still predominately an ‘ecclesiastical artefact’.⁹ Daniel Huws has analysed the ‘eruption of producing books and recording literature’ in the 150 years after c.1250, a period which Llinos Smith sees as ‘crucial ... in the development of a literate mentality’ in Wales.¹⁰ These were important features in the multiplicity of processes which established the gentry as leaders of local Welsh society across the same period.¹¹

The book referenced in the will of Cynwrig Sais (d.1311) of Northop, Flintshire, and the eight books – three of them in Welsh – belonging to the Glamorgan nobleman Llywelyn Bren (d.1318) are regularly cited as early evidence of book ownership among the *uchelwyr*.¹²

Information about book ownership in medieval Wales is heavily dependent on colophons and inscriptions preserved within extant manuscripts. Despite considerable efforts to address the ‘by whom, for whom and where?’ origins of surviving manuscripts, Huw Pryce concludes that ‘we can only guess ... how many of the Welsh gentry owned, let alone read, books’.¹³

Two of the most significant and intensely researched anthologies of Welsh texts, Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch (c.1350) and Llyfr Coch Hergest (c.1400), are closely linked with *uchelwyr* patrons: Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd (c.1325-1392×8) of Parc Rhydderch, Cardiganshire, and

⁹ Pryce, ‘Origins’, pp. 9-10. See also Huw Pryce, ‘Lawbooks and literacy in medieval Wales’, *Speculum*, 75/1 (2000), 29-67; T. M. Charles-Edwards, *The Welsh Laws* (Cardiff, 1989).

¹⁰ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 13, 36-7; Llinos Beverley Smith, ‘Inkhorn and spectacles: the impact of literacy in medieval Wales’, in Huw Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 203.

¹¹ A. D. Carr, *The Gentry of North Wales in the Later Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 2017).

¹² Carr, *Gentry of North Wales*, pp. 103-4.

¹³ Pryce, ‘Origins’, p. 14.

Hopcyn ap Tomas ab Einion (fl.1337-1408) of Ynysforgan, Gower.¹⁴ Parc Rhydderch is also associated with Llawysgrif Hendregadredd, a major source for the poetry of the *gogynfeirdd*.¹⁵ Llyfr Ancr Llanddewi Brefi (1346), a substantial compendium of religious texts in Middle Welsh, was compiled at the request of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn ap Phylip of Cantref Mawr, Carmarthenshire.¹⁶ Evidence of female book ownership in medieval Wales is miniscule, an exception being the Welsh translation of the Athanasian Creed commissioned for Efa ferch Maredudd ab Owain in the later thirteenth century.¹⁷ Brynley Roberts notes that ‘such clear evidence for the literary activity of the gentry class is uncommon’: the extent to which such patronage and possession of manuscripts was typical of the *uchelwyr* remains unclear.¹⁸ Welsh praise-poetry provides tantalising insights into the intellectual culture of the medieval *plas* (great house). Books and learning featured as components of praise in the poems addressed to Hopcyn ap Tomas and the Parc Rhydderch family, attributes which were

¹⁴ Daniel Huws, ‘*Llyfr Coch Hergest*’, in Iestyn Daniel et al. (eds), *Cyfoeth y Testun: Ysgrifau ar Lenyddiaeth Gymraeg yr Oesoedd Canol* (Cardiff, 2003), pp. 1-30; Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 227-63; Prys Morgan, ‘Glamorgan and the Red Book’, *Morgannwg*, 22 (1978), 42-60.

¹⁵ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 193-223.

¹⁶ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Book of the Anchorite’, *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118396957.wbemlb151> (accessed 17 December 2021).

¹⁷ Ceridwen Lloyd Morgan, ‘Welsh women and the written word’, in Pryce (ed.), *Literacy*, pp. 149-65.

¹⁸ Brynley F. Roberts, ‘Hopcyn ap Tomas ab Einion’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/48547> (accessed 17 December 2021).

later affixed to houses and patrons such as Rhys ap Siancyn (fl. c.1440) of Aberpergwm and Elisau ap Gruffudd ab Einion (d.1489) of Plas-yn-Iâl.¹⁹

This fragmentary evidence appears to substantiate a trend: that by c.1400 the core components of early Welsh literature had been recorded in writing and that these texts were increasingly incorporated, physically and culturally, into the world of the gentry. The key works were, in Latin: history, law and *vitae* of native saints, including the Welsh chronicles (*Annales Cambriae*), Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the *Itinerarium Kambriae* and *Descriptio Kambriae* of Giraldus Cambrensis and the *Vita Griffini Filii Conani*; and in Welsh: texts of Cyfraith Hywel Dda, poetry of the *cynfeirdd* and *gogynfeirdd*, *Brut y Tywysogion* and *Brut y Brenhinedd*, Mabinogion, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, the Welsh Roland cycle, religious works and bardic grammar.²⁰ The copying and ownership of these texts by the leaders of Welsh society contributed towards the enshrining of a rich native literary heritage. Simultaneously, *uchelwyr* were well aware of the wider world.²¹ By the fourteenth century, French literature was exerting a major influence in Wales; the circulation and translation of Latin and French manuscripts evidences broader cultural interests and a

¹⁹ Smith, 'Inkhorn and spectacles', pp. 204-6; Morfydd E. Owen, 'The prose of the *cywydd* period', in A. O. H. Jarman et al. (eds), *A Guide to Welsh literature 1282-c.1550* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 316-18; Peredur Lynch, 'Aberpergwm a'r traddodiad nawdd', in Hywel Teif Edwards (ed.), *Nedd a Dulais* (Llandysul, 1994), pp. 1-25.

²⁰ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 12-13; Pryce, 'Origins', pp. 8-9.

²¹ A. D. Carr, 'Inside the tent looking out: the medieval Welsh world-view', in R. R. Davies and Geraint H. Jenkins (eds), *From Medieval to Modern Wales* (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 35-44.

European outlook (contextualising later developments in the multilingual and cosmopolitan character of country house libraries).²²

Llinos Smith warns against drawing too close a connection between the book-related interests of the medieval *uchelwyr* and the libraries established by their descendants and successors in later centuries. Rolls and quires were probably more numerous than books in the form of volumes or codices; literary possessions were probably never extensive; ‘libraries’ did not exist as physical spaces in nascent *plastai*; and reading was still largely a specialist skill and a shared communal activity as much as an intimate act performed in silence.²³ Nevertheless, it is reasonable to conclude that in late-medieval Wales, possession and patronage of books reflected positively on the image of the gentry: their learning, cultural outlook and material world. The literary cultures embodied within manuscripts seeped into emerging concepts of *uchelwriaeth*, just as the gentry were establishing their position of leadership in Welsh society.²⁴ Many of the manuscripts compiled, collected or copied during this period were to remain within the sphere of the Welsh country house – but rarely the same one – for centuries.

²² Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, ‘Literary borrowing in medieval Wales and England’, in Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones (eds), *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales* (New York, 2008), pp. 159-73; Llinos Beverley Smith, ‘The Welsh language before 1536’, in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 27-30.

²³ Smith, ‘Inkhorn and spectacles’, pp. 204-7.

²⁴ Helen Fulton, ‘Literary networks and patrons in late medieval Wales’, in Evans and Fulton (eds), *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, pp. 129-54; Dafydd Johnston, *Llên yr Uchelwyr: Hanes Beirniadol Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg, 1300-1525* (Cardiff, 2005), pp. 421-53.

Welsh-language treatises on agriculture, milling, hunting and heraldry had direct associations with gentry pursuits and the practicalities of estate management.²⁵ The later medieval period also witnessed an increase in the production and preservation of records linked to the processes of governance and administration, and in the acquisition, inheritance and management of land.²⁶ Both spheres played an important part in drawing *uchelwyr* deeper into multilingual textual communities, increasing the presence of the written word – in Welsh, English, Latin and French – within the *plas*. The interconnectivity of this multilingual textual culture is exemplified by the commonplace book and Latin grammar compiled by John Edwards (d.1498) of Plas Newydd, Chirk.²⁷ A descendant commended the founder of the Gwydir estate, Maredudd ab Ieuan ap Robert (d.1525), for attending school in Caernarfon, where he ‘learnt the English tongue, to read, to write and to understand Latin, a

²⁵ Smith, ‘Welsh language before 1536’, pp. 24-5; Morfydd E. Owen, ‘Functional prose’, in A. O. H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes (eds), *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, Vol. I (Cardiff, 1992), pp. 248-76.

²⁶ Pryce, ‘Origins’, pp. 12-16; Smith, ‘Inkhorn and spectacles’, pp. 208-11; A. D. Carr, ‘The writing of private deeds in late medieval north Wales’, in Pryce (ed.), *Literacy*, pp. 223-37; Ralph A. Griffiths, ‘Public and private bureaucracies in England and Wales’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 30 (1980), 109-30; Llinos Beverley Smith, ‘*Tir prid*: deeds of gage of land in late medieval Wales’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (hereafter *BBCS*), 27 (1976-8), 263-77.

²⁷ Llinos Beverley Smith, ‘The grammar and commonplace books of John Edwards of Chirk’, *BBCS*, 34 (1987), 174-84; Smith, ‘Welsh language before 1536’, pp. 25-7, 35-6, 41-3.

matter of great moment in those days'.²⁸ The arrival of printed works in Latin and English over subsequent decades was not alien to the multilingual textual world of the Welsh gentry. The increased textualisation of literature in later medieval Wales proceeded alongside prolific patronage and performance of bardic poetry within the houses of the gentry, especially *canu mawl* in the form of the *awdl* and *cywydd*.²⁹ It was an overwhelmingly oral and aural mode of communication.³⁰ This tradition was central to Welsh medieval literature and represented an integral means of publicly promoting the status and honour of *uchelwyr*. The convergence of bardic patronage, manuscript culture and the records of administration and estate management on the late-medieval *plas* raises questions about the literacy, education, culture, languages and identity of the gentry, which merit further analysis. These aspects of literature and writing interlinked and combined to provide part of the foundation for the next, critical phase in the history of the book within the Welsh country house.

II

THE ARRIVAL OF PRINT AND THE IMAGE OF THE 'CAMBRO-BRITISH' GENTRY, c.1500-c.1700

²⁸ John Wynn, *History of the Gwydir Family and Memoirs*, ed. J. Gwynfor Jones (Llandysul, 1990), p. 49.

²⁹ Carr, *Gentry of North Wales*, pp. 204-35; Johnston, *Llên yr Uchelwyr*.

³⁰ Sally Harper, *Music in Welsh Culture before 1650* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 14-20; Patrick K. Ford, 'Performance and literacy in medieval Welsh poetry', *The Modern Language Review*, 100/4 (2005), xxx-xlvi; Brynley F. Roberts, 'Oral tradition and Welsh literature', *Oral Tradition*, 3/1-2 (1988), 61-87.

Huws asserts that ‘the advent of the printed book did little to check the vigour of the manuscript tradition’ in Wales.³¹ The proliferation of print across Europe from the mid-fifteenth century coincided, in Wales, with an intensification of the gentry’s collecting, commissioning and copying of manuscripts. During this period the compositions of *beirdd yr uchelwyr* (the poets of the gentry) were preserved in writing – increasingly by poets themselves. Manuscript anthologies of the poetry of the *cywyddwyr*, together with Welsh genealogies, heraldic material and pedigree rolls became prized gentry possessions.³² Huws’s forthcoming *Repertory of Welsh Manuscripts and Scribes* will allow for more detailed analyses of the relationships of patronage and exchange between the Welsh gentry, poets and scribes which fuelled this immense literary activity. Copyists such as Llywelyn Siôn, Ieuan ab Ieuan ap Madog, William Dafydd Llywelyn, Thomas Wiliems of Trefriw and John Jones of Gellilyfdy, played a significant part in furnishing *plastai* with Welsh manuscripts. Poets too, many expanding their roles to embrace genealogy and heraldry, produced copious manuscripts; whereas the gentry also created manuscripts for their own

³¹ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 23. See also Graham C. G. Thomas, ‘From manuscript to print: I – Manuscript’, in R. Geraint Gruffydd (ed.), *A Guide to Welsh Literature c.1530-1700* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 241-62.

³² Ben Guy, ‘Writing genealogy in Wales, c.1475-c.1640’, in Jost Eickmeyer et al. (eds), *Genealogical Knowledge in the Making: Tools, Practices, and Evidence in Early Modern Europe* (Berlin, 2019), pp. 99-125; M. P. Siddons, *Welsh Pedigree Rolls* (Aberystwyth, 1996); idem, *The Development of Welsh Heraldry*, Vol. I (Aberystwyth, 1991); P. C. Bartrum, ‘Notes on Welsh genealogical manuscripts’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (hereafter *THSC*), 1968, 63-98; 1976, 102-18; 1988, 37-46; Francis Jones, ‘An approach to Welsh genealogy’, *THSC*, 1948, 303-466.

collections.³³ Poetry, heraldry and reading Welsh were incorporated into the lists of ‘twenty-four feats’ (‘Y pedair camp ar hugain’) expected of Welsh gentlemen.³⁴ It was these dimensions of *uchelwriaeth* which induced Wiliam Llŷn (d.1580) to praise Rhys Vaughan (d.1580×82) of Corsygedol as a learned *uchelwr*, well-versed in the chronicles, genealogies, bardic grammar and scripture.³⁵ Piers Mostyn (c.1495-1580) of Talacre was remembered as ‘a learned man & great collector’.³⁶ Into the seventeenth century, the Caernarfonshire gentleman-cleric Wiliam Bodwrda (1593-1660) bequeathed ‘eight Paperbookes in folio (conteyninge transcripts of Brittish Cywyddau, Englynion, &c) ... as an Heyre loome, to the Heyre of Bodurda’, with a proviso that his executor Sir Griffith Williams (d.1663) of Penrhyn ‘have the use of them ... to pervse or transcribe’.³⁷ The ‘love of my countrey and our ancestors’ which inspired Robert Vaughan (d.1667) of Hengwrt to amass the pre-eminent manuscript collection of Welsh literature and history, was deeply rooted in Welsh gentry culture.³⁸

³³ Owen, ‘Prose of the *cywydd* period’, pp. 318-21; Thomas ‘Manuscript to print’, pp. 245, 251.

³⁴ ‘Noblemen’s interests’, *Guto’s Wales*, <http://www.gutorglyn.net/gutoswales/en/diddordebau.php> (accessed 17 December 2021).

³⁵ J. Gwynfor Jones, ‘Government and society 1536-1603’ in J. and Llinos Beverley Smith (eds), *History of Merioneth: Vol. II – The Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 2001), p. 691.

³⁶ Nesta Lloyd, ‘The correspondence of Edward Lhuyd and Richard Mostyn’, *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, 25 (1971-2), 46.

³⁷ Dafydd Ifans, ‘Wiliam Bodwrda’, *National Library of Wales Journal* (hereafter *NLWJ*), 19/1 (1975), 88-102 (quote at 99); Geraint Gruffydd, ‘Llawysgrifau Wiliam Bodwrda o Aberdaron (a briodolwyd i John Price o Fellteyrn)’, *NLWJ*, 8/3 (1954), 349-50.

³⁸ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 288.

Alongside the production of new manuscripts and the transcription of earlier texts, older volumes continued to descend to and circulate within gentry-poet-scribe networks. Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch was removed from Parc Rhydderch to Plas-yn-Iâl and Rhiwedog in north Wales; afterwards to Y Tŵr in Mold and hence via Gellilyfdy to Hengwrt and Peniarth.³⁹ Llawysgrif Hendregadredd was likely incorporated into the manuscript collection assembled by Gruffydd Dwnn (c.1500-c.1570) at Ystrad Merthyr; Llyfr Coch Hergest had passed into the ownership of the Vaughans at Hergest and Tretŵr by the late-fifteenth century, before being acquired by Sir Thomas Mansel (c.1556-1631) of Margam.⁴⁰ The outstanding collections of Welsh manuscripts assembled at Hengwrt, Gloddaith, Gwysaney and Cefn-y-Braich are increasingly well-researched, but it seems likely that the presence of manuscripts within the houses of the gentry was widespread across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴¹ Mapping the ownership and copying of manuscripts to individuals and houses over time would vastly improve our picture of the intellectual culture of the Welsh country house, especially if such a resource also facilitated cross-referencing with information on the sites of bardic patronage and early estate building. The manuscript tradition continued to flourish within Welsh culture and the country house well into the eighteenth century; maintaining an important connection with Wales's medieval literary heritage across a period

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 256-63.

⁴⁰ Morgan, 'Glamorgan and the Red Book', 43; Ceri W. Lewis, 'The literary history of Glamorgan from 1550 to 1770', in Glanmor Williams (ed.), *Glamorgan County History, IV: Early Modern Glamorgan* (Cardiff, 1974), p. 578; G. H. Hughes, 'Y Dwniaid', *THSC*, 1941, 115-49.

⁴¹ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 287-99, 303-39; Hywel D. Emanuel, 'The Gwysaney manuscripts', *NLWJ*, 7/4 (1952), 326-43.

when the proliferation of print intensified the internationalisation of the gentry's literary horizons.⁴²

Historians have examined how the Welsh gentry adapted their self-image in the new political, cultural, social and religious framework precipitated by the Act of Union of 1536-43 and the Protestant Reformation.⁴³ Similarly, W. P. Griffith has traced how the vogue for classical learning – facilitated through a growing number of grammar schools in Wales, university education at Cambridge and Oxford, and legal instruction at the Inns of Court – affected the cultural outlook of the Welsh gentry as they adjusted to new roles in the local governance and administration of the Tudor and later Stuart state.⁴⁴ On the one hand, university learning and immersion in Renaissance humanism played a central role in preserving and promoting Welsh literature: 'almost the whole of the published Welsh output in this period comes from the pens of university-educated writers'.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the new system of government, coupled with opportunities for advancement in the English structures of politics, law and church, increasingly broadened the cultural, linguistic and literary horizons of Welshmen. By the end of the sixteenth century this outlook was contributing towards a demise in patronage

⁴² J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Scribes and patrons in the seventeenth century', in Jones and Rees (eds), *A Nation and its Books*, pp. 85-90.

⁴³ For example, J. Gwynfor Jones, *The Welsh Gentry, 1536-1640* (Cardiff, 1998); Peter Roberts, 'Tudor Wales, national identity and the British inheritance', in Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (eds), *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533-1707* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 8-42.

⁴⁴ W. P. Griffith, *Learning, Law and Religion: Higher Education and Welsh Society c.1540-1640* (Cardiff, 1996), pp. 387-426.

⁴⁵ Griffith, *Learning, Law and Religion*, pp. 395, 398; Branwen Jarvis, 'Welsh humanist learning', in Gruffydd (ed.), *Guide to Welsh Literature*, pp. 128-53.

for a stubbornly conservative bardic order and whilst the gentry often retained deep interests in their Welsh heritage and traditional cultural activities, they were increasingly combining them with new ideas, forms of knowledge and literature which had their centres of gravity outside Wales. Following the arrival of print, these cultural ‘cross tendencies’, signified by multilingual gentry, operating across Welsh and English spheres, and attaching themselves to a ‘Cambro-British’ identity, were to exert profound influences on the character and composition of country house libraries in Wales.⁴⁶

In the mid-1990s Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes claimed that ‘gentry libraries have been researched only partially for the period 1500-1700 [and] we cannot begin to reconstruct the reading matter that most country gentlemen had on their shelves’.⁴⁷ Though further groundwork is still required, the picture for England has improved dramatically over the last quarter-century, thanks to an abundance of case studies and online databases.⁴⁸ In

⁴⁶ Lloyd Bowen, ‘Information, language and political culture in early modern Wales’, *Past & Present*, 228 (2015), 125-58; J. Gwynfor Jones, ‘The Welsh gentry and the image of the “Cambro-Briton”’, *ante*, 20/4 (2001), 615-55; Philip Jenkins, ‘Seventeenth-century Wales: definition and identity’, in Bradshaw and Roberts (eds), *British Consciousness and Identity*, pp. 213-35; Griffith, *Learning, Law and Religion*, pp. 390, 411-26; Peter Roberts, ‘The Welsh language, English law and Tudor legislation’, *THSC*, 1989, 19-75; W. Ogwen Williams, ‘The survival of the Welsh language after the Union of England and Wales’, *ante*, 2/1 (1964), 67-93.

⁴⁷ Felicity Heal and Clive Homes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* (Basingstoke, 1994), p. 278.

⁴⁸ Pamela Selwyn and David Selwyn, ‘Books for the gentry and the nobility’, in Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (eds), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Vol. I – to 1640* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 489-519; David Pearson, ‘Patterns of book ownership in late seventeenth-century England’, *The Library* 11/2 (2010), 139-67; Matthew Dimmock et al. (eds), *The*

comparison, our knowledge of the character, composition and chronology of country house libraries in early modern Wales is miniscule. Gloddaith, Gwysaney and Hengwrt, famous for their manuscript collections, also included vast numbers printed books: almost 2,000 were listed in a c.1658 catalogue of Robert Vaughan's study at Hengwrt. Edward Herbert (1583-1648) of Cherbury's library has been researched in depth and painstaking attempts have been made to partially reconstruct the dispersed collections once at Gwydir, Henllys and St Donats.⁴⁹ Historians are also starting to assess how the north Wales gentry of the seventeenth century acquired, used and shared their books.⁵⁰ Beyond these studies, information is limited and piecemeal. We know virtually nothing of the library at Raglan Castle, purportedly destroyed during the Civil War.⁵¹ The same applies to the books which presumably belonged to dozens of prominent Welsh gentlemen-lawyers and -scholars. To take two Glamorgan examples: Sir Edward Carne (c.1496-1561) was renowned for his 'learning and civility', yet

Intellectual Culture of the English Country House, 1500-1700 (Manchester, 2015); Annika Bautz and James Gregory (eds), *Libraries, Books and Collectors of Texts 1600-1900* (New York, 2018); David Pearson, *Book Ownership in Stuart England* (Oxford, 2021).

⁴⁹ Dunstan Roberts, 'Lord Herbert of Cherbury's Library at Montgomery Castle', *LIH* 31/2 (2015), 117-36; J. Gwynfor Jones, *The Wynn family of Gwydir* (Aberystwyth, 1995), pp. 171-81; Graham C. G. Thomas, 'The Stradling library at St. Donats, Glamorgan', *NLWJ*, 24/4 (1986), 402-19; B. G. Charles, *George Owen of Henllys* (Aberystwyth, 1973), pp. 32, 173-5, 193-9.

⁵⁰ Mary Chadwick and Shaun Evans, 'The library of Thomas Mostyn of Gloddaith, c.1676-1692', in Bautz and Gregory (eds), *Libraries, Books and Collectors*, pp. 87-103; Sadie Jarrett, 'The status and identity of the Salesburys of Rhug and Bachymbyd, c.1475-c.1660' (unpublished PhD thesis, Bangor University, 2020), 228-38; Sarah Ward-Clavier, *Royalism, Religion and Revolution: Wales, 1640-1688* (Woodbridge, 2021), pp. 78-94.

⁵¹ Purcell, *Country House Library*, pp. 63, 92-3.

the contents of his study at Ewenni remain elusive; so too the books of the prominent judge and legal writer David Jenkins (1582-1663) of Hensol. A meticulous study to identify and analyse the evidence of gentry book ownership in early modern Wales would be most welcome. This might incorporate three intertwined strands of enquiry: 1) the extent to which country houses acted as repositories for the earliest printed Welsh books; 2) the initial incorporation into Wales of printed texts in languages other than Welsh; and 3) the interrelationship between the arrival of print and the continuing manuscript tradition. Studies of early print culture in Wales have justifiably concentrated on the first printed books in Welsh (from the mid-1540s) and the progression towards the translation of the New Testament and Book of Common Prayer (1567), and complete Bible (1588, 1620 and 1630).⁵² Early print output in Welsh was simultaneously momentous and underwhelming: the early programme of publications succeeded in preserving Welsh as an officially sanctioned and standardised literary language of religion and print; but the output was limited, partially because licensing laws and royal patents restricted presses to London, Cambridge and Oxford.⁵³ Glanmor Williams calculates that about thirty Welsh-language

⁵² Eryn M. White, 'The Bible and the book in early modern Wales, 1546-1770', in Caroline Archer and Lisa Peters (eds), *Religion and the Book Trade* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 6-28; J. Gwynfor Jones, *Aspects of Religious Life in Wales c.1536-1660* (Aberystwyth, 2003), pp. 64-121; R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'The first printed books, 1546-1604', in Jones and Rees (eds), *A Nation and its Books*, pp. 55-65; Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 338-60.

⁵³ Rheinallt Llwyd, 'Printing and publishing in the seventeenth century', in Jones and Rees (eds), *A Nation and its Books*, pp. 93-103; Charles Parry, 'From manuscript to print: II – printed books', in Gruffydd, *Guide to Welsh Literature*, pp. 263-76.

books were printed in the sixteenth century, with an additional 150 to c.1700.⁵⁴ Published works by writers from Wales were far more numerous in English than Welsh.

It was the regular movement of the gentry and information between powerbases in Wales and cultural, educational and political centres in England which facilitated the early integration of printed books into Wales. An account of c.1550 has William Salesbury walking around St Paul's Cathedral, 'from shop to shop', enquiring after an English-language book which had been requested by John Edwards of Chirk.⁵⁵ Wales can offer valuable perspectives on the trade in early printed books. Historians have argued that 'the invention of printing itself was a potential danger to the Welsh language in the sixteenth century'.⁵⁶ The flourishing European print economy which had taken hold in England threatened to overwhelm Welsh as a language of learning and civility. A fear for the future status of the language provided a major impetus to Welsh humanist scholars: an anxiety that the gentry were no longer reading and writing Welsh literature radiates from the prefaces of their publications.⁵⁷ In line with these proclamations, R. Geraint Gruffydd argued that a lack of cultural leadership by the gentry contributed to Wales experiencing only a 'limited' Renaissance.⁵⁸ Other historians

⁵⁴ Glanmor Williams, 'The Renaissance and Reformation', in Jones and Rees (eds), *A Nation and its Books*, p. 49.

⁵⁵ H. S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers, 1475-1557* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1989), p. 21.

⁵⁶ Glanmor Williams, 'Language, literacy and nationality in Wales', *History* 56/186 (1971), 4-5; Williams, 'Survival of the Welsh language', 96.

⁵⁷ Williams, 'Renaissance and Reformation', pp. 46-48; Jarvis, 'Welsh humanist learning', pp. 128-53; R. Brinley Jones, *The Old British Tongue: The Vernacular in Wales 1540-1640* (Cardiff, 1970), pp. 43-45, 50-51.

⁵⁸ R. Geraint Gruffydd 'The Renaissance and Welsh literature', in Glanmor Williams and Robert Owen Jones (eds), *The Celts and the Renaissance* (Cardiff, 1990) pp. 17-39.

have seen the infamous ‘language clause’ of the Act of Union, coupled with the demise of *beirdd yr uchelwyr*, as signifying a departure of the Welsh language and literature from the *plas*.⁵⁹ The gentry of this period are the first generation to be recruited by historians into poorly conceived notions and narratives of ‘anglicisation’: an overly simplistic yet deeply embedded binary interpretation of Wales’s cultural and social history.⁶⁰

The continuity of the manuscript tradition complicates such assertions. So too the fact that the gentry had long been accustomed to operating across multiple languages. Similarly, the Welsh books which were printed up to the lapse of the Printing Act in 1695, and long afterwards, were regularly subsidised or supported by the Welsh gentry.⁶¹ Though it should not be assumed that literacy was confined to this group of society, alongside the clergy it is reasonable to assume that they formed a significant part of the intended and actual readership. Books were regularly dedicated to individual gentlemen, whereas prefaces were commonly

⁵⁹ Richard Suggett and Eryn White, ‘Language, literacy and aspects of identity in early modern Wales’, in Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500-1850* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 62-7; Geraint H. Jenkins et al., ‘The Welsh language in early modern Wales’, in Jenkins (ed.), *Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 62-5, 78-81; Ceri W. Lewis, ‘The decline of professional poetry’, in Gruffydd (ed.), *Guide to Welsh Literature*, pp. 50-63.

⁶⁰ The most complete expression is in A. O. H. Jarman, ‘Wales a part of England, 1485-1800’, in A. W. Wade-Evans et al., *The Historical Basis of Welsh Nationalism* (Cardiff, 1950), pp. 79-98. For more recent iterations see Katharine K. Olson, ‘The Acts of Union: culture and religion in Wales, c.1540-1700’, in Evans and Fulton (eds), *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, pp. 160-4; Jenkins (ed.), *Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 3-7; Glanmor Williams, *Renewal and Reformation: Wales, c.1415-1642* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 461-2.

⁶¹ Llwyd, ‘Printing and publishing’, p. 94; Jones, *Welsh Gentry*, pp. 51-2; Roberts, *Old British Tongue*, pp. 66-70.

addressed ‘At bendefigion a boneddigion ...’ (‘To nobles and gentlemen . . .’) at large.⁶² Gruffydd Robert dedicated his *Gramadeg Cymraeg* (1567) to Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (1501-70).⁶³ Herbert and Edward Somerset, Earl of Worcester (1553-1628) were regularly lauded as Welsh ‘Maecenas’ figures in the Renaissance mould.⁶⁴ Effusive dedications do not prove that an actual patronage relationship existed, though other evidence confirms the gentry’s continuing patronage of Welsh literature.⁶⁵ Thomas Wiliems acknowledged the assistance of numerous Welsh gentlemen towards the completion of his Latin-Welsh dictionary.⁶⁶ Sir John Wynn (1553-1627) of Gwydir was deeply vested in efforts to publish this dictionary, which eventually formed a basis for John Davies of Mallwyd’s *Dictionarium Duplex* (1632).⁶⁷ Sir Edward Stradling (1529-1609) of St Donats financed the publication of 1,250 copies of Siôn Dafydd Rhys’ *Cambrobrytannicae Cymraecaeve linguae institutiones et rudimenta* (1592), to be ‘given and bestowed ... upon such gentlemen and others ... for the advancement of the British tongue’.⁶⁸ Sir James Perrot (1571-1636) of Haroldston received a copy and there was another in Richard Mostyn’s Penbedw library by the end of the seventeenth century: it would be worth checking all

⁶² Jones, *Aspects of Religious Life*, pp. 110-21.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-9.

⁶⁴ J. Gwynfor Jones, ‘The gentry of east Glamorgan: Welsh cultural dimensions, 1540-1640’, *Morgannwg*, 37 (1993), 14-16.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-39; Michael Brennan, *Literary Patronage in the English Renaissance: The Pembroke Family* (London, 1988).

⁶⁶ Jones, ‘Gentry of east Glamorgan’, 8.

⁶⁷ Jones, *Wynn Family of Gwydir*, pp. 175-8

⁶⁸ Thomas, ‘Stradling library’, 402.

accessible extant copies for provenance details.⁶⁹ Sir Thomas Myddleton (1550-1631), who acquired Chirk Castle, funded the publication of his cousin's metrical Welsh psalter in 1603; and in 1630 sponsored the publication of 'Y Beibl Bach' – the first octavo version of the Welsh Bible produced for domestic use.⁷⁰ Religion and piety were important driving forces in Welsh scholarship. The Merioneth gentlemen, Rowland Vaughan (c.1590-1667) of Caer-gai and Ellis Lewis of Llwyn-gwern, respectively published Welsh translations of popular English-language works on Christian education, namely Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety* (*Yr Ymarfer o Dduwioldeb* (1629)) and Ralph Winterton's translation *Considerations upon Eternitie* (*Ystyriaethau Drexelivs ar Dragywyddoldeb* (1661)). Both translations were requested and sponsored by Merioneth gentlewomen: Catherine Anwyl of Parc and Margaret Lloyd, heiress of Ceiswyn and wife of John Lloyd of Rhiwedog.⁷¹ Margaret Vaughan of Llwydiarth, Montgomeryshire, commissioned another translation in the same genre. These examples are indicative of some of the ways Welsh gentlewomen provided patronage for books during the seventeenth century. They also underline the need to assess the presence of early Welsh printed books in the country houses of Wales. Philip Jenkins's assertion 'that even in the most solidly Welsh counties ... the seventeenth-century gentry simply had never

⁶⁹ Roger Turvey, 'Interpreting the life, career and character of Sir James Perrot', *Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society*, 12 (2003), 51; Lloyd, 'Edward Lhuyd and Richard Mostyn', 33-4.

⁷⁰ Jones, *Aspects of Religious Life*, pp. 102-7; Gruffydd Aled Williams, 'Wiliam Midleton, bonheddwr, anturiwr a bardd', *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society*, 24 (1975), 74-116.

⁷¹ J. Gwynfor Jones, 'Welsh gentlewomen: piety and Christian conduct c.1560-1730', *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, 7 (1999), 25-33.

owned Welsh books' is refutable.⁷² Closer analysis of the inscriptions, annotations and other evidence of provenance, within extant copies of early Welsh printed books would enrich understandings of their use and readership by the gentry.

The motivations for acquiring books were many and varied, but antiquarianism provided a major impetus. Sir Edward Stradling of St. Donats, Rice Merrick (d.1587) of Y Cotrel, George Owen of Henllys, John Lewis (d.1615) of Llynwene, Sir John Wynn of Gwydir and Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt, were, together with figures such as Sir John Prise (1502-55), Humphrey Llwyd (1527-68), David Powel (d.1598) and John Davies (c.1567-1644) of Mallwyd, at the apex of immense Welsh antiquarian activity.⁷³ These gentlemen should not be viewed as typecast, but as representative of various dimensions in a shared antiquarian culture which looked both inwards and outwards, and to the past and present for its inspiration and dissemination. With an emphasis on Welsh history, genealogy and heraldry, it fused the older Welsh manuscript tradition with new Renaissance learning, promoting the collection and composition of texts, in both print and manuscript. Until the end of the sixteenth century it regularly coexisted with continuing bardic patronage and afterwards, with profuse heraldic display. This blending of antiquarianism with ancestry reinforced the image of the 'ancient Briton' within concepts of Welsh gentility which were increasingly adjusting to a 'Cambro-British' milieu. Antiquarianism exerted a lasting influence, a pinnacle being

⁷² Philip Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class: The Glamorgan Gentry 1640-1790* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 231.

⁷³ Dillwyn Miles, 'George Owen of Henllys', *THSC*, 1998, 5-23; Jones, *Wynn Family of Gwydir*, pp. 167-89; Ceri W. Lewis, 'Syr Edward Stradling', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, 19 (1993), 139-207; Lewis, 'Literary history of Glamorgan', pp. 594-603; Charles, *George Owen of Henllys*; Francis G. Payne, 'John Lewis, Llynwene: historian and antiquary', *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*, 30 (1960), 4-16.

the groundswell of gentry support for Edward Lhuyd's (1659/60?-1709) seminal *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707), dedicated to Sir Thomas Mansel (1668-1723) of Margam.⁷⁴

Stradling was an early exemplar:

Above all he is to be remembered for his singular knowledge in the British Language and Antiquities, for his eminent encouragement of learning and learned Men, and for his great expense and indefatigable industry in collecting together several Monuments and ancient Manuscripts of Learning and Antiquity. All of which with other books were reduced into a well ordered Library at St Donates, to the great credit and renown of that place and his Family.⁷⁵

Edward Herbert was similarly praised for constructing an 'elegant and noble pile' at Montgomery Castle: 'his library was an ornament thereto and abundantly replenisht with books of his own purchasing and choyce'.⁷⁶ The inward and outward facing dimensions of Welsh Renaissance scholarship were replicated in the character and composition of the gentry's emerging book collections. Following the arrival of print, the texts brought into the country houses of Wales became increasingly eclectic and multilingual, representing a diverse range of subjects including theology, history, classics, law, drama and poetry, travel and geography, science and mathematics, and contemporary politics and religion.⁷⁷ Welsh texts were fused within these cosmopolitan and multilingual repositories of knowledge, reflecting the intellectual interests of the gentry and the various cultural and political worlds they inhabited. At Carew Castle, Sir John Perrot (1528-92) possessed books in French,

⁷⁴ Philip Jenkins, 'From Edward Lhuyd to Iolo Morganwg: the death and rebirth of Glamorgan antiquarianism', *Morgannwg*, 23 (1979), 29-47; Lewis, 'Literary history of Glamorgan', pp. 592-611.

⁷⁵ Thomas, 'Stradling library', 402.

⁷⁶ Roberts, 'Lord Herbert of Cherbury's library', 17-18.

⁷⁷ Pearson, 'Patterns of book ownership', 139.

Spanish, Greek and Latin, together with ‘a verie bigge booke in fol: written on parchement treating of the lawes of Howell Dha & other British lawes’.⁷⁸ Edmwnd Prys (1542-1623) applauded the wealth of learning available at Gwydir, including the works of Euclid, Sebastian Münster and Oronce Finé.⁷⁹ These came to sit alongside medieval Welsh texts such as *Ystoria Dared*, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* and *Vita Griffini filii Conani*, Sir John Wynn’s own history writings and influential printed books as diverse as Powel’s *Historie of Cambria* (1584), Camden’s *Britannia* (1586), Hooker’s *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1594), Bacon’s *Essays* (1597), Bayly’s *Practice of Piety* (1611) and Caterino D’avila’s *Historia delle guerre civili di Francia* (1630).⁸⁰

More research is required to establish how pervasive these multicultural and multilingual literary tastes were across the full spectrum of Welsh gentility. The 1630s catalogue of twenty-two books belonging to William Griffith (1597-1648) of Carreglwyd points to a ‘multifarious collection of a highly educated, multilingual, cosmopolitan Welsh scholar, lawyer and landowner’.⁸¹ The majority of his books were in Latin, with a Greek grammar, a Franco-Latin volume of Cicero’s Letters, works of classical history, Euclid’s writings on geometry and Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* in the original Italian – a work credited with transforming perceptions of gentility across early modern Europe. Another Anglesey gentleman-lawyer, Hugh Owen (d.1642) of Gwenynog, who was renowned for his learning in French, Spanish, Italian and Dutch, utilised this knowledge to produce *Dilyniad Crist*, a

⁷⁸ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 302; Turvey, ‘Sir James Perrot’, 52; Geraint Dyfnallt Owen, *Elizabethan Wales* (Cardiff, 1964), p. 39.

⁷⁹ Jones, *Wynn Family of Gwydir*, p. 172.

⁸⁰ Jones, *Wynn Family of Gwydir*, pp. 171-81.

⁸¹ Griffith, *Learning, Law and Religion*, pp. 425-6.

Welsh translation of Thomas à Kempis's *De Imitatione Christi*.⁸² It was a culture which influenced the gentry's spending habits: in the 1640s, Humphrey Matthews of Castell-y-Mynach, Glamorgan, owed £500 to a London bookdealer for a collection of manuscripts.⁸³ It also affected the physical appearance and intellectual character of the country house. In Merioneth, Huw Llwyd of Cynfal-fawr, Maentwrog, was praised for having his books well-arranged on his shelves; and even the modest Tŷ'n-y-braich in Dinas Mawddwy featured a range of Welsh and English printed works, including Salesbury's *Kynniver Llith a Ban* (1551) and Vaughan's *Yr Ymarfer o Dduwioldeb* (1629).⁸⁴ By the end of the seventeenth century, books and libraries had become central to the image of some Welsh gentlemen. Thomas Mostyn of Gloddaith was applauded for having 'ye best tast[e] of books & learning of any country Gent[lema]n yt ever I saw in these parts'.⁸⁵ His correspondence not only details how he sourced and acquired his books, it evidences how they were actively used in his life as a gentleman.⁸⁶ His books and manuscripts were regularly borrowed, exchanged, transcribed, studied and commented on as part of the formation of important relationships and networks which helped promote an image of his learning, culture, sophistication and liberality. It was an image of gentility which preserved his Welsh identity within a broader, multicultural and multilingual outlook. Mostyn saw no contradiction in presenting himself as simultaneously Welsh, English and British: a 'Cambro-Briton' with significant wider

⁸² E. G. Jones, 'Hugh Owen of Gwenynog', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society*, 1938, 42-9.

⁸³ Jenkins, *Glamorgan Gentry*, p. 231.

⁸⁴ Jones, 'Government and society', p. 696.

⁸⁵ Lloyd, 'Edward Lhuyd and Richard Mostyn', 32.

⁸⁶ Chadwick and Evans, 'Library of Thomas Mostyn', pp. 87-103.

interests in European texts and ideas. Such was the character of early country house libraries in Wales.

III

THE WELSH COUNTRY HOUSE LIBRARY ESTABLISHED, c.1700-1900

As demonstrated through the works of Eiluned Rees and Geraint Jenkins, the evidence for analysing country house libraries, and book culture in Wales generally, is considerably richer from the late-seventeenth century. Rees argues that by the eighteenth century, the library was established as a commonplace feature in the Welsh country house.⁸⁷ Elisabeth Leedham-Green and David McKitterick give the 1660s as the period by which ‘the wide-ranging library [was] an essential element of a gentleman’s house’.⁸⁸ It would be useful to achieve greater clarity on the timeframe for the establishment of libraries – including as dedicated rooms for the storage, display and reading of books – across the full spectrum of Welsh landed society and in the different regions on Wales.

It was a trend which depended on leisure, privacy and an inclination to read amongst the landed class, as well as economic and physical capacity to purchase and store multiple books. In Glamorgan, Thomas Powell of Coytrahen possessed books valued at £10 in 1674, whereas Richard Herbert (c.1669-1725) of Cilybebyll and Thomas Price of Penllergaer each possessed

⁸⁷ Rees, ‘Introductory survey’, 229-30.

⁸⁸ Elisabeth Leedham-Green and David McKitterick, ‘Ownership: private and public libraries’, in John Barnard and D. F. McKenzie (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge, 2002), p. 328.

libraries of about 100 books by c.1700.⁸⁹ Bookplate evidence suggests that Sir John Aubrey (c.1650-1700) of Llantrithyd and Francis Gwyn (c.1648-1734) of Llansannor also had sizeable collections.⁹⁰ In Radnorshire, William Probert of Llanddewi Hall left his ‘whole study of books’ (valued at £20) to his son in his will of 1697.⁹¹ There were over 1,700 printed books, 800 pamphlets and 93 manuscripts at Llannerch, Denbighshire, in 1778.⁹² Margam had 1,850 volumes by the 1740s, increasing to 2,500 by 1750.⁹³ Sizeable collections were made and maintained at Chirk, Gelli Aur, Mostyn, Penbedw, Picton, Powis, Trawscoed and Wynnstay. In some houses the library now presented as a primary feature: Theophilus Evans (1693-1767) esteemed the library at Llwynderw, Carmarthenshire as ‘casgliad gwerthfawrocaf o lyfrau a llawysgrifau’ (‘the most valuable collection of books and manuscripts’) and in the 1770s, Hester Thrale (1740-1821) commended Chirk as ‘the best library we have been shown in Wales’.⁹⁴ Thomas Pennant (1726-98) of Downing, Thomas Johnes (1748-1816) of Hafod and John Lloyd (1749-1815) of Wigfair were renowned bibliophiles: the latter’s collection of 10,000 books, manuscripts, prints, maps and scientific

⁸⁹ Jenkins, *Glamorgan Gentry*, p. 230; D. R. L. Jones, ‘Coytrahen: the families, estate and house’, *Morgannwg*, 34 (1990), 45.

⁹⁰ David Pearson, ‘Sir John Aubrey’, *Book Owners Online*, https://bookowners.online/John_Aubrey_ca.1650-1700; ‘Francis Gwyn’, *Book Owners Online*, https://bookowners.online/Francis_Gwyn_1648/9-1734 (accessed 21 January 2022).

⁹¹ Ruth Bidgood, ‘Families of Llanddewi hall’, *Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*, 44 (1974), 23.

⁹² Emanuel, ‘Gwysaney manuscripts’, 329.

⁹³ Jenkins, *Glamorgan Gentry*, p. 230

⁹⁴ Garfield H. Hughes, *Bywyd a Gwaith Iaco ap Dewi* (Cardiff, 1953), p. 59, quoted in Rees, ‘Introductory survey’, 220; Adrian Bristow (ed.), *Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale’s Tour in North Wales, 1774* (Wrexham, 1995), p. 120.

apparatus requires further research.⁹⁵ The opulent neo-Norman library at Penrhyn Castle constructed for George Hay Dawkins-Pennant (1764-1840) housed an extensive collection of books, while John Cole Nicholl (1823-94) of Merthyr Mawr assembled 20,000 volumes.⁹⁶ Wynnstay ‘contained books on every conceivable subject’ and most demonstrated wide-ranging literary interests and influences. Rees establishes history and genealogy, classical literature, political philosophy, theology, topography, law and agriculture as the primary characteristics of Welsh country house libraries, with antiquarianism and religion continuing as core subjects.⁹⁷ Libraries habitually contained multiple Bibles and dictionaries, pamphlets, journals, periodicals and novels, as well as prints, sheet music, maps, scientific instruments, coins, sculptures and other antiquities. Books were important physical and visual features of the country house, but also integral to many aspects of its social, cultural, religious and intellectual environments, facilitating pleasure, amusement, learning, piety and improvement. Though generic categorisations of country house libraries can help us to understand the core facets of gentility, and how these evolved over time, the character and composition of a library was always determined by the particular circumstances leading to its creation. Books are the best source materials for book history; their study, as material objects, can reveal how libraries interknitted with the political and social functions of their owners: as landowners, officeholders, politicians, agriculturalists and industrialists. Books regularly connected to and informed wider activities associated with the house and estate. Owen Wynn (1592-1660)

⁹⁵ Eiluned Rees and G. Walters, ‘Thomas Pennant’s library’, *The Library*, Series 5, 25/2 (1970), 136-49; Gwynfryn Walters, ‘Bibliotheca Llwydiana’, *NLWJ*, 10/2 (1957), 185-204; R. J. Moore-Colyer, ‘Thomas Johnes of Hafod: translator and bibliophile’, *ante*, 15/3 (1991), 399-415.

⁹⁶ Mark Purcell, ‘The library at Penrhyn Castle’, *Book Collector*, 59/2 (2010), 241-50; Lloyd, ‘Country-house libraries’, p. 138.

⁹⁷ Rees, ‘Introductory survey’, 200, 234-36.

of Gwydir purchased more than a hundred books on alchemy and metallurgy to inform lead-mining operations on his estate.⁹⁸ Sir William Wogan's (c.1638-1708) library at Llanstinan included copies of Dalton's *Countrey justice*, Pulton's *Statute book*, Gardiner's *Compleat constable* and Markham's *Husbandry*.⁹⁹ The legal, clerical, military and political careers pursued by some Welsh landowners were reflected in their libraries: Abercamlais in Breconshire was packed with Bibles collected by its line of resident clergy and the library at Garthwin, Denbighshire, included law texts used by its lawyer proprietors.¹⁰⁰ Individual interests are also evinced: Philip Yorke (1743-1804) of Erddig and H. R. Hughes (1827-1911) of Kinnel introduced numerous genealogical texts to their libraries; Nicholas Bennett (1823-99) of Glanyrafon assembled an outstanding collection Welsh music; and Lewis Weston Dillwyn (1778-1855) of Sketty Hall developed a significant collection on natural history and botany.¹⁰¹ In 1825 the library at Llwyngwair, Cardiganshire, included numerous nonconformist works, reflecting the Bowen family's Methodist sympathies.¹⁰² These examples emphasise that libraries should not be seen in isolation from the wider activities, interests and occupations of their owners. Nor should pursuits such as hunting or farming be viewed as incompatible with the maintenance of an active library. Books were influential:

⁹⁸ Owen Morris, *The 'chymick bookes' of Sir Owen Wynne of Gwydir* (Tempe, AZ, 1997).

⁹⁹ David W. Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites: The Gentry of South-west Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff, 1986), p. 197.

¹⁰⁰ Lloyd, 'Country-house libraries', pp. 138, 140; Rees, 'Introductory survey', 235.

¹⁰¹ Eric Griffiths, *Philip Yorke: Squire of Erthig* (Wrexham, 2005), pp. 141-65; Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), NLW MSS 1501-1631; *South Wales Daily News*, 4 May 1900, p. 4. NLW holds 1,000 volumes from L. W. Dillwyn's library.

¹⁰² R. J. Colyer, 'The gentry and the county in nineteenth-century Cardiganshire', ante, 10/4 (1981), 506-7.

informing decisions, actions and attitudes across all spheres of influence converging on the country house and estate. Pennant recalled that it was the gift of a book on ornithology from John Salusbury of Bachygraig which ‘first gave me a taste for that study and ... a love for that of natural history in general’.¹⁰³ There is considerable scope for further research on the relationships between landowners, their books and the influences they exerted in society. A critical part of this scholarship is understanding the role of gentlewomen as owners and readers of books. Thomas Lloyd has pointed to the several thousand books owned by Catherine Davies, preserved in the combined Leeswood-Tower library.¹⁰⁴ Also in Flintshire, a 1778 catalogue of the household furniture at Iscoyd belonging to the late Elizabeth Hanmer (c.1700-1777) listed scores of books, including many which were stored in her own ‘closet’.¹⁰⁵ Two of the principal purchasers of books from the 1781 sale of the Peterwell library in Cardiganshire were Lady Mansel of Iscoed and Mrs Protheroe of Dolwilym.¹⁰⁶ It was Mary Owen (1781-1869) who commissioned John Broster of Chester to catalogue the Brogyntyn library in 1809.¹⁰⁷ Charlotte Priddle has partially reconstructed and analysed the library of Elizabeth Giffard (1766-1842) of Nerquis, whereas Fiona Brideoake has shown how the well-furnished library at Plas Newydd, Llangollen, was fashioned into the ‘saloon of the Minervas’.¹⁰⁸ **Melanie Bigold’s article in this edition develops Brideoake’s work and**

¹⁰³ Thomas Pennant, *The Literary Life of the Late Thomas Pennant* (London, 1793), p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Lloyd, ‘Country-house libraries’, p. 139.

¹⁰⁵ *A Catalogue of the Household Furniture of Mrs Hanmer ... at her Seat of Iscoyd-Hall* (Chester, 1778).

¹⁰⁶ H. J. Lloyd Johnes, ‘A Cardiganshire library’, *NLWJ*, 6/3 (1950), 304-5.

¹⁰⁷ NLW, Brogyntyn estate records, PQK1/15.

¹⁰⁸ Charlotte Priddle, ‘Eliza Giffard and her books’, *Libraries: Culture, History and Society*, 1/2 (2017), 153-70; Fiona Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen* (Lewisburg, PA, 2017), pp. 123-54.

contributes two more case studies of Welsh women's libraries, but further work would be welcome.

IV

BOOKS IN THE WELSH COUNTRY HOUSE

Beyond Wales, the country house is fixed as an important focus for analysis in book history. The intellectual shift towards assessing the social and cultural lives of country houses, pioneered by Mark Girouard, provides an important framework for this programme; he asserted that books were 'an essential part of country-house life'.¹⁰⁹ Country house studies have expanded far beyond art and architectural history; studies of architecture and interior design have nevertheless helped to contextualise the physical presence of books within the country house: their storage, display and use.¹¹⁰ Such enquiries have developed a clearer chronology of the creation of rooms specifically designed for intellectual activity – from closets and studies to libraries by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – and the later repositioning of the library as a public reception room, essential to nineteenth-century country house entertainment. Though the architectural evolution of country houses in Wales is increasingly well established, we know considerably less about the evolution and nature of interior display within the *plas*. Books were an essential part of the material culture of the

¹⁰⁹ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (New Haven, 1978), p. 164.

¹¹⁰ Susie West, 'An architectural typology for the early modern country house library', *The Library*, 14/4 (2013), 441-64; eadem, 'Looking back from 1700: problems in locating the country house library', in Dimmock et al. (eds), *Intellectual Culture*, pp. 178-94; Lucy Gwynn, 'The architecture of the English domestic library, 1600-1700', *LIH*, 26/1 (2010), 56-69; Simon Jervis, 'The English country house library: an architectural history', *LIH*, 18/3 (2002), 175-90.

country house, necessitating special furniture and fixtures for their storage and reading, and coexisting with wider schemes of display. The last will and testament of Sir John Conwy (1575-1641) of Bodrhyddan underlines the potential of probate records to facilitate such study: he bequeathed his ‘library of books’ to his brother, instructing that they were ‘to remayne at the house at Botruthan for him and his heires for ever, [also] desiring that a catalogue be made of all such books as shall be left by me at my dices [i.e. decease], there to remaine with the said books in the said library’.¹¹¹ In the late-eighteenth century, Thomas Pennant derided the spaces at Gloddaith and Mostyn used to store the Mostyn family’s ‘excellent collection of books and manuscripts’.¹¹² At other houses, such as Fonmon, Hafod, Picton and Trawscoed, the library presented as a primary architectural and aesthetic feature. Nineteenth-century library spaces ranged in scale from the enormous rooms at Cardiff, Margam and Penrhyn castles, to the relatively modest Gothic library at Treberfydd, Breconshire.¹¹³ Other houses, such as Plas Gronw in Wrexham, lacked a dedicated library room, but had other spaces in the house ‘choked with books’.¹¹⁴ The 1840 catalogue of the vast book collection at Wynnstay shows that they were stored throughout the house.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, chests and cupboards continued as repositories. The ‘large chest full of MSS.’ at Tre’r-Bryn, near Cowbridge, was the glory of the house as late as the 1790s; Richard Fenton (1747-1821) found a ‘basket of old MSS.’ at Bodysgallen; and E. R. G. Salisbury

¹¹¹ Enid Roberts, ‘Seven John Conways’, *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, 18 (1960), 73.

¹¹² Thomas Pennant, *Tours in Wales*, Vol. III (London, 1810), p. 145; idem, *The History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell* (London, 1796), p. 72. See also Richard Fenton, *Tours in Wales (1804-1813)*, ed. John Fisher (London, 1917), pp. 200, 244.

¹¹³ Purcell, *Country House Library*, pp. 152-3, 243; Lloyd, ‘Country-house libraries’, pp. 142-3.

¹¹⁴ Lloyd, ‘Country-house libraries’, p. 143

¹¹⁵ NLW MS 2785C.

(1819-90) ‘ransacked many an old cupboard in Wales’ in search of old Welsh books.¹¹⁶

Another commentator noted that ‘it was the chest at Llanover that contained the treasures of that large house rather than its library’.¹¹⁷

By the nineteenth century, the display of books – as an assertion of learning, culture and taste – was an important consideration. **Herbert** M. Vaughan commented in 1947 that ‘what the squire of the last century liked to see ... was a handsome book-case filled with choicely bound volumes’; Lord Harlech (1885-1964) confirmed that the books at Brogyntyn were ‘arranged more for their effect as room background, in virtue of their size and colour of their backs, than for the purpose of reference’.¹¹⁸ Notwithstanding the notion that great houses should possess book-lined walls, active use probably always surpassed ostentation in the motivations and mindsets of owners. The motto used by William Wynne (d.1776) of Tower in his armorial bookplate proclaimed that ‘Ni bydd doeth na ddarllenno’ (‘he who does not read will not be wise’); David Lloyd (1748-1822) of Alltyrodyn made detailed notes on his reading; and the 1891 obituary of Charles Kemeys-Tynte of Cefn Mabli relayed that he was ‘a most cultured man who spent a great portion of his time in the splendid library he had gathered’.¹¹⁹

Case studies of libraries amassed by individual book owners can provide important insights into the role of books in the construction of their self-identity. However, the status of the

¹¹⁶ Lewis, ‘Literary history of Glamorgan’, p. 592; Fenton, *Tours in Wales*, p. 200; E. R. G. Salisbury, *A Catalogue of Cambrian books at Glan-aber* (Caernarfon, 1873), p. 7. See also Lisa Tallis’s article in this number.

¹¹⁷ Lemuel John Hopkin James, ‘The Llanover MSS.’, *JWBS*, 1/6 (1914), 180-3.

¹¹⁸ Herbert M. Vaughan, ‘Old country-house libraries in south Wales’, *Wales*, 26 (1947), 290; [W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore], ‘The Brogyntyn library of printed books’, *NLWJ*, 5/3 (1948), 172.

¹¹⁹ NLW MS 14990F; Lloyd, ‘Country-house libraries’, p. 135.

country house as a dynastic space, subject to the laws of inheritance, provides an important context for the study of the books and libraries they contained. Country houses provided the potential for stability and security: the preservation and accumulation of books across generations of the same family. This theoretically allows for analyses of continuities and changes in the interests, characteristics, outlooks, tastes and education of landowners over time. Some owners attempted to establish their books as heirlooms: dynastic possessions fixed to a house or lineage ‘for ever’. Simon Thelwall (1526-86) of Plas-y-Ward specified ‘that all my books shall remaine always in my howse’; Robert Jones (c.1682-1715) of Fonmon instructed that following his death his ‘books [are] not to be sold, dispersed or diminished’; and Edward Jones (d.1815) of Wepre Hall left his library ‘as an heirloom to the estate’.¹²⁰ When Llannerch Hall was leased in 1787, it came with ‘the use, reading and enjoyment’ of the books, pamphlets and manuscripts, which were viewed as hereditaments to the house.¹²¹ Notwithstanding efforts to make libraries permanent fixtures of the dynastic setting, such wishes were always dependent on the receptiveness and indeed existence of descendants. Sharon Turner’s (1768-1847) conceptualisation of Welsh country house libraries speaks to these realities:

Time and accident consume MSS. as well as buildings and men. Old copies decay or are lost, and new ones succeed. When families die, their libraries become dispersed, and many a MS. and book, which were once hoarded as treasures, have mouldered on stalls, or have been used as wastepaper. Sons very often inherit neither the taste nor

¹²⁰ London, The National Archives, PROB 11/69; Purcell, *County House Library*, p. 251; Hawarden, North East Wales Archives, Flintshire Record Office DA/A/9/33.

¹²¹ T. Jeffreys, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in Llannerch Library* (n.p, 1787).

the knowledge of their fathers; and they who squander the estates of their ancestors, are not very likely to be careful of their books.¹²²

The same could be applied to country house libraries across Britain and Ireland. Books acquired, read and treasured by one generation might be disregarded or dispersed by the next. The status of the books purchased by Richard Jenkins in 1865 and set up in well-lit attic chamber at Cilbronnau, Cardiganshire, was entirely altered after a decision by his successors to convert the room to a bedchamber, leading to the relocation of most and burning of some of the books.¹²³

Books often enjoyed vibrant ‘social lives’ which removed them from fixed positions in the house: ‘private’ library designations are problematic. As early as 1711 Sir John Philipps (c.1666-1737) of Picton Castle noted the ‘books lent’ out from his library.¹²⁴ Equally, stability and security were never guaranteed. Warfare and fire destroyed some of the most significant accumulations of literature ever made in Wales. The purported devastation of Raglan Castle during the Civil War was later bemoaned as ‘an irreparable loss to the literature of Wales’.¹²⁵ Books at Chirk Castle and Talacre were also pillaged during the conflict.¹²⁶ Powis Castle’s books were almost destroyed by fire in 1684; the splendid libraries at Hafod (1807) and Wynnstay (1810 and 1858) went up in flames and, according to

¹²² Sharon Turner, *A Vindication of the Genuineness of the Ancient British Poems* (London, 1803), p. 21.

¹²³ Vaughan, ‘Old country-house libraries’, 291.

¹²⁴ Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites*, p. 196. **On this theme see also Julie Mathias’s article in this edition.**

¹²⁵ William Probert (trans.), *Y Gododin, and the Odes of the Months* (London [1820]), p. 24; ‘Welsh manuscripts’, *The Metropolitan Magazine*, 17 (1836), 125-6.

¹²⁶ Purcell, *Country House Library*, pp. 92-3; Lloyd, ‘Edward Lhuyd and Richard Mostyn’, 46.

tradition, books at Kinmel and Alltyrodyn suffered the same fate.¹²⁷ Furthermore, despite the aura of dynastic stability and permanence, unbroken lineal descent was rarely achieved within gentry families: historians have pointed to varying degrees of ‘demographic crisis’ which brought an end to many long-established lineages emanating from the old *uchelwyr*.¹²⁸ The resulting patterns of marriage and inheritance, coupled with the establishment of new landed interests, often with profits derived from industry, trade, colonialism and slavery – and regularly by families with little prior connection to Wales – exerted profound impacts on the character of country house libraries. Most became composite collections: pooling books inherited from, purchased by and gifted to numerous owners connected in complex interrelationships over time. Understanding the genealogies of landed families is important for deciphering the composition of country house libraries. This is reflected in Lord Harlech’s description of the 17,000 books at Brogyntyn in the 1940s:

The collection is one of long and slow growth during 450 years and was made according to their varying occupations, tastes and interests by successive generations of owners of Brogyntyn. It ... well illustrates or typifies the cultural life and education of a number of squirearchal families, which, by intermarriages, have merged the books of many generations of book buyers into a single country house library.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Purcell, *Country House Library*, p. 116; *North Wales Chronicle*, 13 March 1858, p. 7; ‘The old Lleweni library’, *The Cambrian Remembrancer*, November 1877, 16. But see the note on the ‘destruction of libraries’ in *JWBS*, 2/3 (1918), 112-14.

¹²⁸ Philip Jenkins, ‘The demographic decline of the landed gentry in the eighteenth century’, ante, 11/1 (1982), 31-49.

¹²⁹ Ormsby-Gore, ‘Brogyntyn library’, 172.

V

RESEARCHING A DISPERSED HERITAGE

In 1947, Herbert M. Vaughan warned that Welsh country house libraries were ‘rapidly disappearing and will soon become a memory of the past’: eradicated as part of the broader social, political and economic trends, and UK taxation policy, hastening the demise and break-up of landed estates and country houses across Britain, especially after 1918.¹³⁰ In the 1920s, Vaughan had been to value the library at Blaenpant, Cardiganshire, prior to the auction of the house, only to find the ‘valuable books flung haphazard on the floor’.¹³¹ Across the early-twentieth century, scores of Welsh libraries were sold off in their entirety; others were severely thinned with the removal of ‘prized’ items. Recent sales of contents from Glyn Cywarch (2017) and Gredington (2021) evidence the continuing removal of literary heritage from Wales’s country houses. Rees bemoaned that the breakup and dispersal of books across a global marketplace was ‘to the great detriment of Welsh culture’.¹³² It also poses a significant challenge for the research of libraries: detailed sale catalogues or newspaper listings were only occasionally produced for earlier auctions, while the dislocation of books from their country house and library settings strips them of contexts, making it much more difficult to assess their historical use and significance.¹³³

¹³⁰ Vaughan, ‘Old country-house libraries’, 290-6, which should be read in conjunction with Vaughan’s *The South Wales Squires* (London, 1926). See also Purcell, *Country House Library*, pp. 248-67; Peter H. Reid, ‘The decline and fall of the British country house library’, *Libraries & Culture*, 36/2 (2001), 345-66.

¹³¹ Vaughan, ‘Old country-house libraries’, 292-3.

¹³² Rees, ‘Introductory survey’, 238-9.

¹³³ Lloyd, ‘Country-house libraries’, p. 141.

Welsh manuscripts fortunately formed an early collecting priority for the National Library of Wales (established in 1907): it now holds about two-thirds of all extant medieval Welsh manuscripts.¹³⁴ The acquisition of the Hengwrt-Peniarth and Mostyn manuscripts represent milestone achievements in the history of the institution. However, early collecting policy and financial limitations meant that libraries were rarely purchased in their entirety.¹³⁵ In comparison to the cultural significance vested in Robert Vaughan's manuscripts, most of his printed books were dispersed far and wide via an antiquarian bookseller.¹³⁶ While many other genres of heritage associated with Welsh country houses and estates have been catalogued, recorded or listed on a national scale, printed books and libraries have lacked attention.

One important starting point for researching Welsh country house libraries might be the various houses which retain historical book collections: books are the best source materials for book history. As Mark Purcell has remarked: 'even the libraries which have not been sold have very largely disappeared from view', yet they 'comprise an extraordinary and very largely untapped resource'.¹³⁷ National Trust properties, served by a dedicated libraries curatorial team and a full online catalogue of books, are amongst the obvious targets for analyses.¹³⁸ In 2006 the University of York Library partnered with Yorkshire country houses

¹³⁴ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 40.

¹³⁵ Exceptions include books from the Castell Gorfod, Chirk, Dolaucothi and Plas Power libraries. See also W. Ll. Davies, 'Thomas Johnes of Havod', *NLWJ*, 1/2 (1939), 98-9.

¹³⁶ 'The Hengwrt library of printed books', *JWBS*, 1/3 (1911), 76-83.

¹³⁷ Mark Purcell, 'The country house library reassess'd', *LIH*, 18/3 (2002), 157, 170-1.

¹³⁸ Purcell, *County House Library*, pp. 268-90; Purcell, 'National Trust libraries in Wales', 12-19. For the catalogue see 'National Trust', *Jisc Library Hub Discover*,

<https://discover.libraryhub.jisc.ac.uk/about/libraries/national-trust.html> (accessed 17 December 2021).

to catalogue and explore the research opportunities linked to their libraries.¹³⁹ It would be worth applying this model to houses in Wales falling outside the National Trust's remit.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, academic and public libraries across Wales, and internationally, have books which previously resided within country houses.¹⁴¹ These can sometimes be identified through accession registers, but more often require detailed book-by-book provenance research, with evidence of previous ownership demarcated by inscriptions and bookplates: 'relics of vanished libraries'.¹⁴² There is considerable scope for upscaling this provenance research in a coordinated fashion. Charlotte Priddle's project to reconstruct digitally the globally dispersed library of Eliza Giffard depended on improved online descriptions and finding aids created by libraries and cultural heritage organisations: she identified 126 titles belonging to Giffard, held in twenty-seven institutions across the USA, UK, Canada and Ireland.¹⁴³ Historical books also appear elsewhere online. David Pearson's *Book Owners Online* is the latest in a package of databases and directories designed to collate information on historical books and their owners.¹⁴⁴ Creative searching of current listings on AbeBooks

¹³⁹ 'YCHP libraries project', *University of York*, <https://www.york.ac.uk/library/other-libraries/yhcp/> (accessed 17 December 2021).

¹⁴⁰ For an earlier initiative, see Margaret Evans, *A Catalogue of the Library at Fonmon Castle* (Cardiff, 1969).

¹⁴¹ This is confirmed by an ongoing project to catalogue the books of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society.

¹⁴² David Pearson, *Provenance Research in Book History* (2nd edn, London, 2019). H. M. Vaughan published numerous catalogues of Welsh bookplates.

¹⁴³ Charlotte Priddle, *The Library of Eliza Giffard*, https://wp.nyu.edu/eliza_giffard_library (accessed 17 December 2021).

¹⁴⁴ David Pearson, *Book Owners Online*, <https://www.bookowners.online> (accessed 17 December 2021).

and eBay returns dozens of books, dating between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, previously associated with more than thirty Welsh country houses. These e-commerce sites do not provide a stable base for research; but do provide a source of information on historical book ownership which future digital humanities projects might be able to capture to facilitate scholarly analysis.

Eiluned Rees made extensive use of archives and records held by the National Library in her pioneering studies of Welsh bibliography, including library catalogues (which are more common from the mid-eighteenth century).¹⁴⁵ These are frequently preserved amongst family and estate papers in other archives across Wales. Identifying and then systematically analysing library catalogues as ‘Big Data’ would not only provide a more comprehensive picture of the composition of libraries over time but would facilitate useful comparisons across different libraries and cross-referencing with aligned sources such as subscription lists.

VI

MANUSCRIPTS, COUNTRY HOUSES AND THE LITERARY CULTURE OF WALES

In 1894, W. Jenkyn Thomas (1870-1959) recounted a heated discussion on the subject of Welsh manuscripts.¹⁴⁶ One of the contributors commented on ‘the conduct of those owners of old manuscripts who refuse to allow scholars to inspect them’. Another ‘drew harrowing pictures of priceless manuscripts stowed away in all manner of damp corners, some steadily rotting away and in danger of becoming irretrievably illegible’. A third told the gallant tale of how he had conspired to rescue a ‘priceless manuscript’ from an unnamed ‘squire’:

¹⁴⁵ Rees, ‘Introductory survey’, 222-8.

¹⁴⁶ W. Jenkyn Thomas, ‘The rape of the manuscript’, *Wales*, 1/5 (1894), 218-21.

This man was a most ungodly Philistine ... His father had collected a splendid library, and used to take immense pride in it, but when this unworthy son succeeded to the estate ... he sold most of the books, and threw the others into an out-house, where they lay in heaps, one on top of the other, higgledy-piggledy, and he turned the library into a billiard room.

Whether fact or fiction, the account encapsulates some of the most prevalently held eighteenth- and nineteenth-century views of landowners' attitudes towards the literary heritage of Wales residing in their libraries.

Up to the eighteenth century, few attempts were made to publish the core components of medieval Welsh literature, which continued to be transmitted in manuscripts. A succession of Wales's leading antiquaries recognised country houses as prime repositories of a distinctive and esteemed literary heritage which was considered an integral ingredient in Wales's past and future as a nation. Across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries recurrent efforts were made to publish and promote the texts contained within old Welsh manuscripts.¹⁴⁷ These endeavours formed an important part of the waves of pronounced cultural revival to preserve and develop all things Welsh and placed a sharp focus on the gentry's attitude towards their manuscripts and their role in supporting Wales's cultural and intellectual enrichment.¹⁴⁸

One of the landmark achievements was the publication of *The Myvyrian Archaiology* (1801-7). Its opening pages encapsulate the contradiction which emerged regarding landowners and

¹⁴⁷ Glenda Carr, 'The London Welsh', in Jones and Rees (eds), *A Nation and its Books*, pp. 147-56;

Brynley F. Roberts, 'Scholarly publishing, 1820-1922', in *ibid.*, pp. 221-35.

¹⁴⁸ Bethan M. Jenkins, *Between Wales and England: Anglophone Welsh Writing of the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff, 2017); J. Bray, *Essay on the Means of Promoting the Literature of Wales* (London, 1839).

their manuscripts.¹⁴⁹ The editors praised Paul Panton (1758-1822) of Plas Gwyn and Thomas Johnes of Hafod for their ‘patriotism’ and ‘liberality’ in lending their volumes towards the completion of the work, acknowledging that:

There still happily remains a great number of ancient manuscripts in the Welsh tongue; some of them brought together into the valuable depositories of public-spirited gentlemen, who are liberally solicitous of preserving such treasures for posterity . . .¹⁵⁰

But simultaneously, one of the editors (Iolo Morganwg) roundly criticised the gentry for abandoning the culture and language preserved within these ‘venerable monuments’:

Our old manuscripts have for ages been locked up in the libraries of some of the first families in Wales ... In every other nation of Europe such venerable monuments of ancestral celebrity, in the possession of ancient and opulent families, would have been long ago produced to the world with the degree of exultation that would have been very laudable; but it has not been so in Wales . . .¹⁵¹

Such rhetoric of neglect, disinterest and outright antipathy needs to be considered in greater detail. William Jones (1726-95) bemoaned that ‘at Cyfronydd ... all the books and manuscripts were locked up in the bakehouse with a maid who was ordered to burn them all in the oven’.¹⁵² Scholars also claimed that the Hengwrt library was ‘rifled’, and that across the eighteenth century, rats, rain and poor maintenance wrought devastation to the

¹⁴⁹ Owen Jones, Edward Williams and William Owen (eds), *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (London, 1801–7), I, pp. ii-xxi.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Welsh archaiology: the general advertisement’, in *ibid.*, I, p. [v].

¹⁵¹ [Edward Williams], ‘A short review of the present state of Welsh manuscripts’, in *ibid.*, I, p. [ix].

¹⁵² Melvin Humphreys, *The Crisis of Community: Montgomeryshire, 1680-1815* (Cardiff, 1996), p. 167.

manuscripts.¹⁵³ But from 1807 Griffith Howel Vaughan (1770-1848) made efforts to reassemble the manuscripts which had ‘escaped’ from Hengwrt over the previous century, and in 1859 the collection was bequeathed to the antiquarian squire W. W. E. Wynne (1801-80) of Peniarth, who proved himself a worthy custodian.¹⁵⁴ The attitude of the gentry towards the Welsh manuscripts in their possession requires a more nuanced consideration. That Welsh manuscripts retained a status in the minds of Welsh landowners is evidenced by the number of ‘new’ collections made over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: at Downing, Hafod, Kinmel, Llanover, Plas Gwyn, Wigfair and Wynnstay, for example.¹⁵⁵ Loaning and copying texts had historically been integral features of the Welsh manuscript tradition. John Davies of Mallwyd had use of manuscripts from Gwydir and Margam, and Humphrey Humphreys (1648-1712) enjoyed unrestrained access to the Gloddaith manuscripts. Access to Hengwrt was notoriously difficult across the eighteenth century, whereas admittance to the Wynnstay library was more restricted after 1772. Sir William Williams of Llanforda permitted Edward Lhuyd ‘to see and read any of my books ... but I’ll not by any means lend any book out of my house ... neither shall any part of my manuscripts be transcribed’.¹⁵⁶ Despite regular complaints, scholarly access to Welsh country house libraries was generally permitted: glowing testimonies of liberality suggest that Alltyrolyn, Corsygedol, Hafod, Llannerch and Plas Gwyn were especially hospitable.¹⁵⁷ Proposals to publish and research Welsh manuscripts were incorporated into the objectives of all Wales’s leading cultural, literary and historical societies. In 1818 a society for the

¹⁵³ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 297; Rees, ‘Introductory survey’, 218-20, 228-30.

¹⁵⁴ Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 298-9.

¹⁵⁵ Rees, ‘Introductory survey’, 209-12.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 218-20; Emanuel, ‘Gwysaney manuscripts’, 327, 332-3.

preservation of the remains of ancient British literature – The Cambrian Society [for Dyfed] – was established under the patronage of the most prominent landowners in Wales, under the premise that: ‘The valuable remains of our ancient national literature have suffered ... irreparable losses by fires and neglect, to the great discredit of a literacy age and nation’.¹⁵⁸

The objective was to catalogue and transcribe Welsh manuscripts, collect all printed works in the Welsh language and create a prospectus for a new History of Wales. This was followed in 1837 by the establishment of the Welsh Manuscript Society, to publish the most important manuscripts of prose and poetry, with English translations. It received significant support from landowners who subscribed to the published works including *Liber Landavensis* (1840) and *Heraldic Visitations of Wales* (1846), which were amongst the many Welsh books printed at Llandovery by the antiquarian squire William Rees (1808-73) of Tonn.¹⁵⁹

Despite the good intentions and limited achievements of the various schemes, they failed to deliver fully on the ambitious objectives. At the end of the nineteenth century there was still a sense that the literature and history of Wales was hidden away in country house libraries, restricting opportunities for national cultural and intellectual awakening. J. Gwenogvryn Evans (1852-1930) played a major role in identifying and recording the manuscripts held within Welsh country houses. His *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* (1898-1910), compiled for the Historical Manuscripts Commission, provided an essential foundation for twentieth-century efforts to safeguard the literary heritage of Wales within new national repositories, and fuel deeper scholarly understandings of Welsh history and literature. Extraordinarily few Welsh manuscripts remain in the country houses of Wales.

¹⁵⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 125 (January 1819), 3-4.

¹⁵⁹ Roberts, ‘Scholarly publishing’, pp. 223-4.

VII

WELSH BOOKS AND BOOKS ABOUT WALES: GENTRY IDENTITIES IN THE
COUNTRY HOUSE LIBRARY

Beyond the manuscript tradition, was there anything distinctive about country house libraries in Wales? Commentary on these libraries has frequently been wrapped up in debates about the ‘anglicisation’ of the Welsh gentry since the Act of Union of 1536-43. David W. Howell implies that the fashion for assembling country house libraries was in itself an importation from England.¹⁶⁰ Geraint Jenkins asserted that eighteenth-century libraries reflected the squirearchy’s detachment from the history, culture and language of Wales and the ‘antipathy which new landowners exhibited towards things Welsh’.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, Eiluned Rees stated that country house libraries played a central role in ‘safeguarding the literary heritage of Wales’.¹⁶²

Libraries can provide evidence for assessing changes and continuities in the cultural identities of landowners in Wales; however, the framework for analysis must be more nuanced than a binary Welsh-or-English model of ‘anglicisation’. Book historians have repeatedly asserted that libraries and the trade in books need to be understood as international entities. A nationally restrictive politics of identity did not dictate landowners’ engagements with books, nor can the vast diversity of texts they incorporated into their libraries be neatly separated out into ‘Welsh’ and ‘English’ categories. In the period following the Act of Union it is incontrovertible that gentry in Wales saw themselves as part of what was becoming a British

¹⁶⁰ Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites*, p. 195.

¹⁶¹ Geraint H. Jenkins, ‘The eighteenth century’, in Jones and Rees (eds), *A Nation and its Books*, pp. 109-11; but see also Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society*, pp. 260-2.

¹⁶² Rees, ‘Introductory survey’, 198.

polity and identity. This exerted profound influences on the character of their libraries, which in many respects mirrored those of their counterparts in England. But this was fully compatible with assertions of Welsh interests, identity and patriotism. Libraries existed as hubs into which converged vast assortments of knowledge and ideas – both new and old – from different geo-cultural and geo-political contexts, and in multiple languages. Within this mix, Welsh books or books about Wales nearly always featured as a significant component. Subscription lists demonstrate that landowners continued to play a crucial part in funding the publication of Welsh books across the long eighteenth century.¹⁶³ Significant publications on Welsh history, culture, literature and language received a solid core of subscriptions from across the different ranks of Welsh landed society, both men and women. This trajectory continued across the nineteenth century. Some historians have sought to explain away this negative correlation between what they see as an ‘anglicised’ gentry continuing to purchase Welsh books by suggesting that landowners were somehow compelled or reluctant to subscribe to such works.¹⁶⁴ Bethan Jenkins has advanced Rees’s earlier argument that subscribing to books presented a new method for the gentry to demonstrate continuing patronage of Welsh culture and literature following the demise of the bardic tradition.¹⁶⁵ This is compelling. Subscription was a public performance: the inclusion of named subscribers in printed lists and advertisements meant that they were permanently and publicly associated with such books.

¹⁶³ Rees, ‘Welsh subscription lists’, 97-9; Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society*, pp. 255-78.

¹⁶⁴ Leslie Baker-Jones, *Princelings, Privilege and Power: The Tivy-side Gentry in their Community* (Llandysul, 1999), p. 168; Colyer, ‘Gentry and the county’, 506; Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites*, p. 199.

¹⁶⁵ Rees, ‘Introductory survey’, 214; Jenkins, *Between Wales and England*, pp. 139-72, esp. pp. 143, 151.

Jenkins's distinction between *llenyddiaeth Gymreig*, literature about or from Wales, and *llenyddiaeth Gymraeg*, literature in the Welsh language, can also be usefully applied to country house libraries.¹⁶⁶ More research is required to clarify the chronologies, regional patterns and extent of Welsh-language ability amongst landowners in Wales from the sixteenth century. By the mid-eighteenth century it is likely that a majority of landowners in Wales – especially beyond the western heartlands of *Y Fro Gymraeg* – were unable to read the Welsh books in their libraries. It nevertheless seems that subscription to Welsh-language books continued, alongside the retention of older Welsh volumes. The Wynnes of Leeswood in Flintshire used a handsomely bound 1690 folio copy of the Welsh Bible to record family baptisms.¹⁶⁷ Coedmor in Cardiganshire was home to several volumes of *cofiannau* (memoirs) of eminent Welshmen and books of Welsh poetry.¹⁶⁸ When the Downing, Kinmel, Powis and Singleton libraries were sold in the early-twentieth century, they all featured Welsh books, while Nicholas Bennett's library at Glanyrafon was packed with Welsh volumes of history and music.¹⁶⁹ To be clear, the number of Welsh-language publications featuring among the possessions of the gentry was always dwarfed by books in English, while books in Latin and other European languages were also well represented; but book ownership preserved a presence for the Welsh language within the country house, including within the libraries of landowners originating outside Wales, who had acquired

¹⁶⁶ Jenkins, *Between Wales and England*, p. 12

¹⁶⁷ Henry F. J. Vaughan, 'The Wynne of Leeswood family Bible', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 5th ser., 3/9 (1886), 75-9.

¹⁶⁸ Baker-Jones, *Tivyside gentry*, p. 168.

¹⁶⁹ *The Western Mail*, 26 October 1893, p. 7; *South Wales Daily News*, 4 May 1900, p. 4; *Flintshire Observer*, 15 May 1913, p. 6; *Denbighshire Free Press*, 16 May 1914, p. 5; *South Wales Weekly Post*, 18 October 1919, p. 1; *Catalogue of ... the Valuable Library from Powis Castle* (London, 1923).

their Welsh estates through purchase, marriage or inheritance. Even though the Bosanquet family were newly arrived in Monmouthshire they introduced a number of early-nineteenth-century Welsh poetry books to Dingestow Court.¹⁷⁰ Such examples align with Philip Jenkins's comments on the political need for newly-established landowning families in Wales to stress or invent cultural connections to their new powerbases.¹⁷¹ Purchasing Welsh books and engaging with Welsh literature perhaps formed part of efforts to assimilate into the practices and expectations embedded within Welsh gentility and into Welsh society at large. Books about Wales (*llynyddiaeth Gymreig*) always featured as a core component in Welsh country house libraries. In Herbert M. Vaughan's summation: 'they contained very few books in Welsh, but nearly always a fair number of standard works connected with Welsh history, topography and antiquities'.¹⁷² This reflects the fact that the gentry principally understood and expressed their Welsh identity as ancestral heritage: a rich interweaving of the past, pedigree and place which conditioned their own inherited role and influence in contemporary Wales. As Bethan Jenkins asserts, within the historiography of Wales there has often been a 'supreme over-determination of language as the last remaining marker of difference between a politically united Wales and England'.¹⁷³ Over the nineteenth century a stream of English-language antiquarian, genealogical and topographical publications emphasised a distinctive Welsh history in which the ancestors and predecessors of Wales's landowners played central parts. These books regularly found a place on the shelves of their libraries. Books about Wales remained central to Welsh country house libraries into the

¹⁷⁰ Lloyd, 'Country-house libraries', p. 138.

¹⁷¹ Philip Jenkins, 'The creation of an "ancient gentry": Glamorgan 1760-1840', *ante*, 12/1 (1984), 29-49.

¹⁷² Vaughan, 'Old country-house libraries', 290.

¹⁷³ Jenkins, *Between Wales and England*, p. 2.

twentieth century. They were not simply enclaves of ‘anglicisation’ in the Welsh countryside.

CONCLUSION

The Welsh country house library is a subject that would benefit greatly from collaborative interdisciplinary analysis. Future research should proceed as part of the vibrant international programmes of academic and cultural heritage activity converging on the subject. The collections and expertise of the National Library will remain central to future advances in this field. This article highlights an endemic and continuing dispersal and dislocation of literary heritage from country houses in Wales. The lack of attention afforded to printed books is out of step with past and present strategic efforts to list, record or catalogue other forms of heritage associated with Welsh country houses and estates. Dispersal poses significant challenges for analysing the historical and cultural dimensions of printed books in Wales, which can only be partially overcome by creative and digital research methodologies. The continuing sale and dispersal of the few remaining historical book collections from Welsh country houses adds a degree of urgency to this agenda.

The chronological and thematic assessments herein are offered as a framework for future analyses. There are some key points for consideration. First, books have a long history as part of the houses of the Welsh gentry; the libraries which developed across the post-medieval period should be contextualised within this earlier intellectual and manuscript culture. Second, the traditional focus of scholarship on Welsh manuscripts and Welsh-language texts needs to be balanced with a more comprehensive assessment of the integration and influence of literatures in languages other than Welsh: the country house library was a multilingual domain. Third, libraries were usually international in character and composition.

Books can provide useful insights into the cultural identities of landowners, including the nature of their Welsh consciousness and identity, but such assessments ought to proceed beyond simplistic models of ‘anglicisation’. Fourth and finally, the relationships which existed between the gentry and their books were complex and potentially of profound significance. Further research on gentry libraries should embrace the wider contexts and functions of country houses, estates and their owners in society. Projects to address the problems and possibilities highlighted here would be warmly welcomed.