

RHL. I.

# CYLCH-GRAWN

CYNMRAEG;

NEU

## DRYSORFA GWYBODAETH.

Rhifyn Cyntaf, Pris Chwe cheiniog.

Am CHWEFOR 1793.

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Y GWIR YN ERBYN Y BYD.

*Na ymddiried i'rh fyw, oni i Dduw a'i ddifgyblion.*

TALIESYN.

T R E F E C C A :

Argraphwyd yn y Flwyddyn 1793.

(Source: National Library of Wales.)

# Beginnings of Radicalism

Gwyn A. Williams

'Dyma ni yn awr ar daith ein gobaith!' ('Here we are now on the journey of our hope!') Morgan John Rhys, a broad-minded *Baptist* who became a Jacobin (a slang term for democrat), launched his summons to the Welsh to create a free, representative and liberal new order in his *Cylchgrawn Cymraeg* (*Welsh Journal*) of 1793 (D.3), the first Welsh-language journal seriously to discuss political issues. He put the words into the mouth of the legendary Prince *Madoc* who was believed to have discovered America in 1170 and to have left there a tribe of Welsh Indians. By the 1790s, in America, those Welsh Indians had been 'identified' as the Mandan Indians of the largely unexplored Missouri (D.1).<sup>1</sup>

D.3

D.1

The American dimension is central to the history of the first Welsh radicalism. Despite its '*French Revolution*' tone, British Jacobinism generally, with Tom Paine as its symbol, was essentially an Anglo-American movement. Welsh radicalism was the most American component of it.

Welsh-American *Dissenters* were over-represented in America and prominent in its Revolution; they remained in direct and close contact with Welsh *Dissenters* at home, who took the lead in political reform movements which responded strongly in turn to the challenge of the *French revolution*. Moreover, during the crisis years of 1795–6 and 1800–1, there was a significant emigration from Wales, which sent thousands to America (D.12) (with penniless thousands more clamouring to get away) and sent many of them over-charged with the idea of regaining contact with the Lost Brethren, the Welsh Indians, to create a Free Wales in the West (D.2, D.6, D.7, D.8).

D.12  
D.2  
D.6  
D.7  
D.8

In America, radicals like Morgan John Rhys, freed from inhibition, could voice opinions only hinted at in Wales (D.6). In the abundant private correspondence which survives, every single Welshman who wrote to a spiritual brother in the new USA called himself, in the most revolutionary French style, a '*Sans-culotte* Republican' (Pennepek). When Welsh people applied for American citizenship in the USA, the majority described their homeland (illegally, indeed treasonably) as the Kingdom of Wales.

D.6

Their Jacobinism, like that of the London-Welsh intellectuals, was the vehicle for a romantic and radical nationalism. And the American example, charged now with French styles, drenched every radical and protest movement in the turbulent Wales of the 1790s — in books, leaflets, journals and graffiti, in the chanted slogans of Machynlleth pubs and Bala rioters, in the speeches at nocturnal mass meetings in Llanbryn-mair or a Denbigh in the grip of armed and organized crowds and in the Address published in insurrectionary Merthyr Tydfil in 1801, which prefigures the next forty years on the southern coalfield (D.5, D.9, D.13). This American dimension has been rediscovered but recently, like a lost Atlantis. It locates Welsh Jacobinism in a wider and deeper context.

D.5  
D.9  
D.13

## A received wisdom and its inadequacies

An American provenance for the first Welsh radicalism is certainly recognized in the 'received wisdom' on this subject.<sup>2</sup>

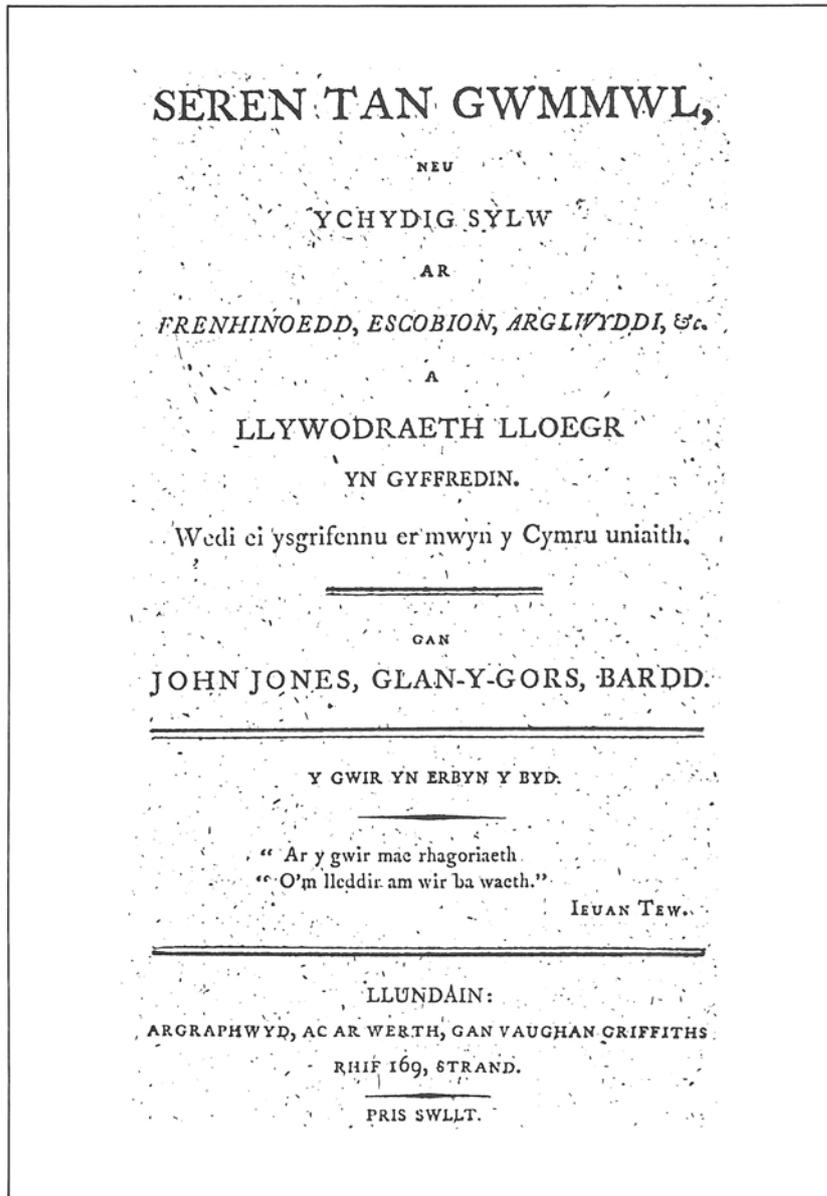
This interpretation accepts that 'politics' in Wales begins with the American Revolution, perceived by many as a British civil war and by Welsh *Dissenters*, subjected to legal discrimination, as a challenge to win full citizenship. It notes that Welsh book production accelerates from the 1770s; the number of political texts multiplies six-fold. Out of this, Britain's first post-colonial crisis, grow the reform movements associated with *John Wilkes*, the County Association movement of Christopher Wyvill and the Society for Constitutional Information with its full democratic programme.

These movements had some impact on Wales: for example, the 1782 trial for seditious libel of the Dean of St Asaph, who had published a pamphlet against the American War by his brother-in-law, the Orientalist Sir William Jones. His acquittal evoked a major popular rally in the Wrexham-Ruabon area, which was later to be disturbed by the pro-French propaganda of the Jacobin industrialists John Wilkinson and Josiah Wedgwood and was to become the theatre of an organized popular rebellion in the 1790s. The *Wilkes* affair touched Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire; a scatter of radicals, liberal *Dissenters* and bohemian intellectuals committed to a Welsh revival emerged; in the 1780s, the radicalized London-Welsh society of the *Gwyneddigion* took the lead.

Out of a Glamorgan in the throes of modernization, came two major, international philosophers of the age of Atlantic Revolution. *Dr Richard Price*, a prolific *Unitarian* thinker who supported the Americans, was invited to serve as financial adviser to the new USA, preached a sermon which provoked *Edmund Burke* into writing his classic of conservatism, and died in 1791, to send the new French National Assembly into official mourning for him. The younger *David Williams* became a *Deist*, wrote in defence of the Americans, was made a Citizen of the new French Republic, crossed to France to advise on its democratic constitution and devised a *Deist* liturgy which informed the National Religion of that republic.

Such people plunged into the turmoil of the 1790s — war against France, government repression, successive waves of anti-Jacobin witch-hunts, forced industrialization and agrarian modernization, social crises and an accelerating advance of *Methodism* and 'methodized' *Dissent*. In its examination of the role of Jacobinism within this cauldron of competing ideologies, the 'conventional wisdom' treats it solely as an intellectual phenomenon and treats it at three levels.

*Richard Price* and *David Williams* are considered to be people who wrote in England and in English for a wider world and their influence on Wales is assumed to be negligible. Then there were Welshmen outside Wales who addressed themselves to their compatriots. Foremost were the passionate antiquarians, scholars and preachers of national revival, the London-Welsh *Gwyneddigion*, in alliance with *Iolo Morganwg*.

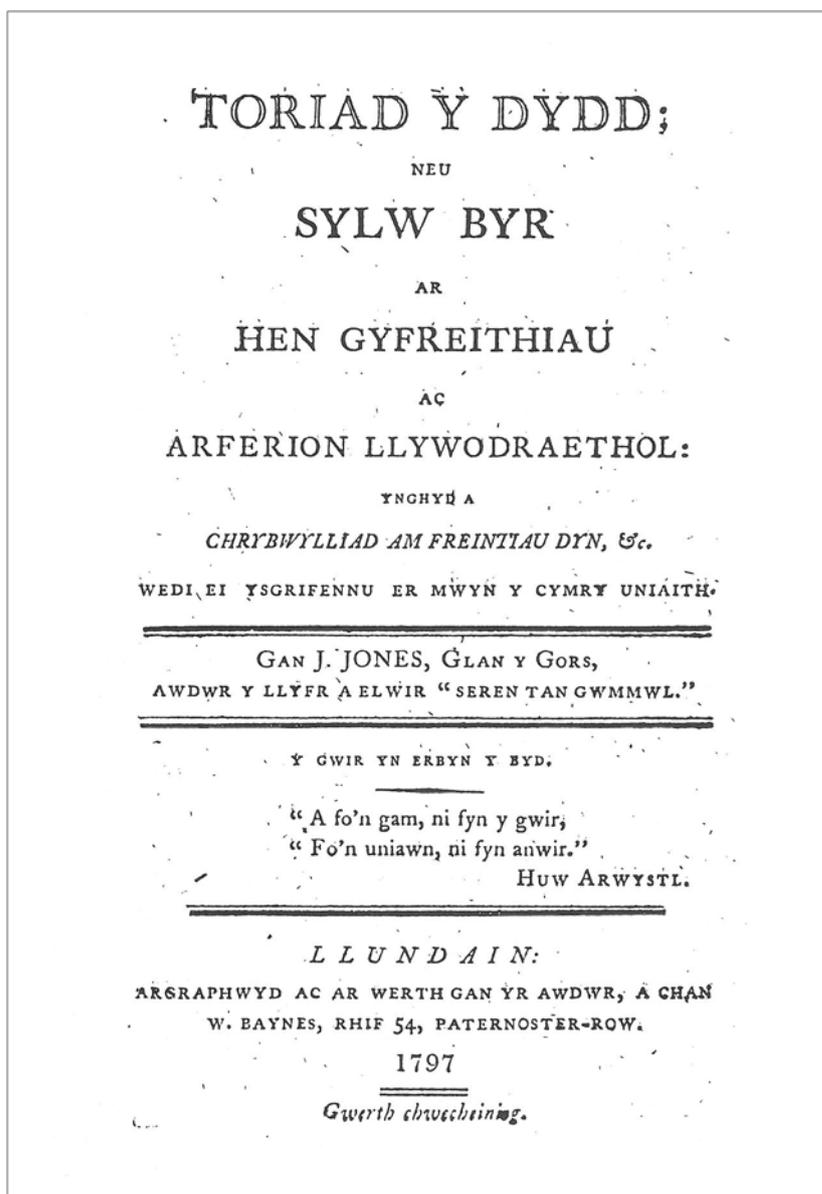


(Source: National Library of Wales.)

The *Gwyneddigion*, enmeshed with the London radicals around *William Blake*, published scholarly texts and radical nationalist propaganda. From 1789, in alliance with like-minded men in north Wales, they revived the *eisteddfod*, tried to make it into a national academy and an instrument of Jacobinism. Before the counter-revolution engulfed them, their prize subjects were democratic and their prize medals were struck by M. Dupré, who became official engraver to the French Republic. *Iolo Morganwg*, from 1792, offered the Welsh a dazzling, if largely mythical, vision of their own past and presented his 'rediscovered' *Gorsedd* of Bards of the Island of Britain as a democratic élite of People's Remembrancers to a nation reborn in liberty. *Jac Glan-y-gors* (John Jones), a member of this circle, published *Toriad y Dydd* (*Daybreak*) (1795) and *Seren dan Gwmwl* (*The Clouded Star*) (1797), which were the Welsh versions of the ideas of Tom Paine.<sup>3</sup>

The 'conventional wisdom' records the devotion of these men, but also registers their failure in face of the reaction and the apostasy of many — Iolo and Jac were to sing in praise of Nelson and the Volunteers (although Iolo's 'apostasy' was evidently mere self-protection — witness his response to the French landing at Fishguard) (D.10). It is even more dismissive of the handful of Welshmen at home who wrote in Welsh. Morgan John Rhys brought out his *Cylchgrawn* in 1793; it ran for five issues. Its successors, the *Drysorfa* (1795) of Tomos Glyn Cothi (Thomas Evans) and the *Geirgrawn* (1796) of David Davies were even more short-lived. Thomas Roberts's *Cwyn yn erbyn Gorthymder* (*Protest against Oppression*) (1798) was the most specifically Welsh of all the Jacobin texts, but it could not stand against *Gair yn ei Amser* (*A Word in Season*) (1798), the politically quietist manifesto of the *Methodist*, Thomas Jones.

D.10



(Source: National Library of Wales.)

Welsh society, largely illiterate in English, backward and in the grip of the gentry and the clergy, proved impenetrable. The new and growing power of *Methodism* and the more conservative elements of *Dissent* were hostile. War with France, the repression, the patriotic rally after the French landing in Fishguard in 1797, defeated the Welsh Jacobins. Recognizable 'precursors' of democracy in Wales, they were in their own time a marginal and transient phenomenon.

Certainly there is a basic truth in this argument. The Jacobins were a minority and they were defeated. The thesis as it stands, however, is no longer tenable.

The assumption that internationally renowned spokesmen made no contact with monoglot Welsh at home grotesquely exaggerates their isolation. *Richard Price* went home every summer and his kinsfolk were radical colonizers of the Welsh mind. David Jones, the Welsh *Freeholder*, preached the doctrines of the *Unitarian* democrat *Dr Joseph Priestley* as a way of life; the *Unitarian* hub in Wales was 'buried' among Welsh speakers on the Teifi, in the Black Spot of the *Calvinists*. The vocabulary of such people was common discourse. By 1800, the growing industrial village of Merthyr was taking weekly consignments of journals from London.

A classic example is provided by Morgan John Rhys's *Cylchgrawn* itself. In the fourth number, he printed chapter fifteen of the celebrated *Les Ruines* of *Constantin de Volney*. Published in 1791, *Volney's Ruins*, a classic of the radical French *Enlightenment*, became a standard text for democratic and working-class movements in Britain for three generations. Its key chapter appeared in Welsh four years earlier than in English.<sup>4</sup> For that matter, both *Goethe's Werther* and a *Beau-marchais* play were 'broadcast' in Wales within a year of original publication. 'Backward' Wales was in the throes of modernization and the most advanced European ideas penetrated swiftly.

More seriously, the 'conventional wisdom' takes no cognizance of two fundamental and related phenomena, which have but recently been restored to history. Between 1795 and 1801, western Wales was a 'disturbed district', repeatedly convulsed by riot, protest and rebellion.<sup>5</sup> Much of that popular action was charged with the ideas of the Jacobins. Closely related to the 'disturbed district' was the migration to America from 1793 onwards.

From the 1780s, contact between the established Welsh communities in America and Wales was revived. It is the *Baptist* connection which is particularly well documented. Dr Samuel Jones of Pennepek Chapel in Philadelphia became the focal centre of a transatlantic correspondence which embraced the *Baptist* college in Providence, Rhode Island (later Brown University). That correspondence brings to life a veritable *Baptist* International, in ideas, books, ultimately people, which even had its own ships — three or four favoured vessels run by the Loxley family of Philadelphia (into which Morgan John Rhys married). This *Baptist* correspondence (to which there was a *Congregationalist* parallel, hinted at by the surviving documents) is not only a prime source for the migration movement of the 1790s; it throws a flood of light on attitudes and actions back in Wales.<sup>6</sup>

Nor is there any sense in this 'conventional wisdom' that the Welsh Jacobins were not the starting-point of a long and potent tradition. There was a direct, face-to-face transmission of the democratic ideology from the 1790s to the increasingly 'working-class' radicals of the early nineteenth century. This is particularly visible in the textile districts of the Severn in mid-Wales, in the disturbed hinterland of Carmarthen and in the iron and coal valleys of the south-east.

The central weakness of the 'conventional wisdom', in short, is that it compartmentalizes. It treats as distinct issues, attitudes and actions which were in fact intimately related. It fails to integrate Welsh Jacobinism into the social reality of an eighteenth-century Wales which was an Atlantic province of a novel Great Britain.

## **A society and its intellectuals**

The Union of England and Scotland in 1707 was a significant punctuation point in the process which transformed two off-shore islands of Europe into Great Britain, the seat of a world-wide commercial empire. In that process, its backward province of Wales became an export sector of an Atlantic economy.

Ninety per cent of British copper, tin-plate and related industries was concentrated around Swansea and Neath, geared to Atlantic export. The cloth trade had migrated to mid and north Wales, where a farm-based industry, under the control of the *Shrewsbury Drapers*, sent its products, both the flannels of Montgomeryshire and the rougher webs and stockings of Merioneth, to the Gulf of Mexico and other American destinations. This industry turned a great tract of 'rural' Wales, stretching from Machynlleth in a great arc through Merioneth and Montgomeryshire to the Denbighshire border country, into a network of factory-parishes dependent on outlets like the busy little Atlantic port of Barmouth. Lead, and every other mineral, was busily exploited, while the cattle export trade bred banks and a new breed of entrepreneur; there were the beginnings of another British export monopoly in slate. In the early eighteenth century, an iron industry based on scattered charcoal furnaces was already supplying a sixth of British pig iron and, from the 1760s, the opening up of the coalfields in north-east and south-east Wales heralded a major expansion.

Merchant capitalism, with its multiplying rural workers in industry, artisans, shippers, salesmen, drovers, was sending pulses of change through slow-moving parishes. Throughout the century, there was a remorseless rise in the numbers of artisans, workers in the service trades, shopkeepers, teachers, doctors, lawyers of humble origin. As these 'lower-middle orders' rose, the traditional lesser gentry of Wales, multi-tudinous in consequence of the old kindred system, lost their grip and their political status, disappeared from public life or were forced to adjust.

In the last years of the century, growth accelerated. The invention of the *puddling process* turned the southern coalfield into the prime centre of the British iron industry; forty per cent of its pig iron was produced there, in huge, integrated and mushrooming enterprises. The momentous migration into the south-east began. At this stage, the north-eastern coalfield was no less breakneck in its growth. The outbreak of war with France in 1793 — a war

that was to last a generation — thrust a crisis of modernization on the rural cloth industry. New entrepreneurs from Lancashire moved in to prise loose the grip of Shrewsbury; the first factories rose on the Severn, a small class of native employers clawed their way up, as many farmer-artisans were driven into the ranks of the *proletariat*. At the same time, modernizing landowners resorted to *enclosures*, the annual lease and other innovations in the harsh context of war, with its inflation, taxes, levies of men for the militia and the navy, grain shortages and the closure of the port of Barmouth. As the coalfields boomed, traditional society in west and north Wales lurched into social crisis. The rapid growth of *Methodism* and an evangelical *Dissent* in north and west was one human response.

The all-powerful class of gentry which controlled this society was itself in the throes of change. This was most dramatic in Glamorgan, as a recent study has revealed.<sup>7</sup> In little more than a generation, the Glamorgan gentry were transformed; by 1750, only ten of thirty-one great estates were still in the hands of the original families; there was an infusion of new men, many of them English. They were hugely wealthy: nineteen men in Glamorgan owned more land than the seven richest nobles of Toulouse in France: forty-seven men owned eighty per cent of the county. They were modernizers, they prepared their lands for the advance of industry. From mid-century onwards, they abandoned the romantic *Jacobitism* of their forebears and embraced a *Whig* Great Britain with its 'blue-water' strategy of commercial imperialism. In the process, they tended to forget their predecessors' paternalist concern for their Welsh tenants and their Welsh culture. A spiritual vacuum opened up in Glamorgan, partly filled by a new opposition drawn from former *Tories* but attracting the newer men from the 'lower-middle orders'. The lodges of *Freemasonry* were its breeding-grounds and in the crisis of the American Revolution, that opposition went patriot in quasi-Jacobin style. These were the men who recruited *Richard Price* and *Iolo Morganwg* as their election writers, men drawn from the lively bilingual artisan culture of the Vale of Glamorgan with its links to the tougher *Dissenting* radicalism of the hill country, now going *Presbyterian-Unitarian* and to the radical and often *Unitarian* circles of London.

Glamorgan was an extreme example, but similar changes may be detected in Pembrokeshire, Monmouthshire, Anglesey and, above all, Denbighshire. Societies west of the central massif were slower to change; a growing concentration of land-ownership tended to squeeze out the lesser gentry, many of whom found compensation in the *Methodism* which offered an alternative source of local authority. The demographic crisis of the gentry in general was nothing like as severe as in Glamorgan, but a proliferation of Welsh heiresses brought intruders, many of them Anglo-Scottish, and from mid-century, as nostalgic *Jacobitism* was abandoned, the Welsh *magnates* and gentry shifted from the old politics to the new. So did the opposition. In the ten years after 1760, the number of *Freemasons'* lodges in Wales rose from six to sixteen.

An intellectual and spiritual vacuum opened in a society which was steadily being drained of any specifically Welsh identity. Into this vacuum moved *Dissent*, *Methodism* and romantic nationalism.

It was in the eighteenth century, through the sustained campaigns for literacy symbolized by the celebrated *circulating schools* of Griffith Jones, that the Welsh people learned to read; a majority of adults probably became technically literate in Welsh. They learned to read in terms of the Bible and of Protestant sectarianism. This was probably one source of the *Methodist* movement within the Anglican Church which grew slowly from the 1730s, passionate, evangelical, sometimes ecstatic, but also highly organized, hierarchical and authoritarian. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, as modernization intensified, the growth of *Methodism* accelerated as it swept into the troubled west and north. The sects of the old *Dissent* were swept along with it, in a series of mass mission campaigns into the disturbed districts. In the process, many caught the evangelical fever and there was a prolonged crisis of growth within *Dissent*, as the newer styles challenged its old rationalism and radicalism.

The *Baptists* split wide open and there was turmoil among *Independents* and *Presbyterians*, as a newer religious rationalism, grounded in the *Enlightenment*, resisted the 'methodized' evangelicals. Nonconformity, officially joined by the Anglican *Methodists* after 1811, advanced so rapidly that over little more than a generation it captured a majority of the Welsh (one of the most remarkable transformations in the history of any people). But it advanced through contradiction and controversy which turned Welsh intellectual life into a cockpit of competing ideologies.

During the troubled 1790s, one curate in Anglesey wrote in anguish to the King, claiming that north Wales was being 'overrun' by 'hordes of *Methodists* descanting on the Rights of Man'; a magistrate humiliated by armed and organized crowds in Denbigh blamed the rebellion on *Methodists*. In that time and at those places some *Methodists* may well have been social rebels, but the official leadership of *Methodism* and the more evangelical *Dissent*, and its mass propaganda, was politically quietist and even *Tory*. It was the rationalist *Dissenters* who were radical.

They found a vanguard in the *Unitarianism* which grew from a handful of chapels on the Teifi which, in the early eighteenth century, embraced *Arianism* and denied the divinity of Christ. This radical break from orthodoxy led them into ever wider fields of rationalist heresy. Thinking of this order captured the small *Presbyterian* denomination whose very title came simply to mean liberalism in theology. It made inroads into *Independence*, particularly in Glamorgan, Denbighshire and parts of Carmarthenshire. It informed the schism among the *Baptists*. A specific *Unitarian* denomination took shape in south Wales in 1802, but people of this temper were present among most denominations and a considerable number ran off the Christian spectrum altogether, to embrace *Deism*.

These were the men who took the lead in every reform campaign — against the slave trade, for the emancipation of *Dissent*, for parliamentary reform, in support of the American and *French Revolutions*. They were increasingly affected by the fashionable intellectual millenarianism of the time. Before he launched the *Cylchgrawn*, Rhys had crossed to revolutionary France to preach the Protestant liberty of prophecy's Last Days and had persuaded the

*Baptist* associations of south-west Wales to finance a French translation of an old *Puritan* and unorthodox Bible.

These men found political allies among people very different in style — the bohemian intellectuals of a romantic Welsh nationalism. This movement had sprung from, indeed exploded out of, a hard, century-long labour by the Morris brothers of Anglesey, their London-Welsh Cymmrodorion Society and its allies, to rescue and revive lost Welsh traditions, to print and reprint classical poetry, history, dictionaries. Their successors in the *Gwyneddigion*, active freethinkers mostly, Owen Jones, William Owen, *Iolo Morganwg* and the like, up to their eyes in the ferment of artisan London at the climax of what seemed an Atlantic Revolution, were swept into their own form of millenarianism.

Their radicalism, in a creative outburst which resurrected an *eisteddfod*, created a *Gorsedd of Bards*, revived *Madoc* and launched a new vision of history, expressed a nationalism as romantic as that which convulsed many of their counterparts in the little lost nations of Europe — Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Catalans. *Iolo Morganwg* was Wales's version of the romantic poet who spoke for such peoples. Characteristically, Iolo made his Druids *Unitarian* and claimed that their liberal creed had been transmitted through the secret books of the *Freemasons*!<sup>8</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, in short, the modernization of Wales generated a loose-textured but potent organic intelligentsia which preached democracy to the Welsh in millenarian terms. At first, they operated within the shelter of a 'respectable' patriot opposition which had emerged in regions like Glamorgan and Denbighshire. That protection disappeared in the panic response to the second *French Revolution* of August 1792, which overthrew and killed a king and cheated a democratic republic in blood and terror. All over Britain, the respectable recoiled from democracy even as thousands of artisans and the 'lower orders' flocked to join their unprecedented popular societies. Over the winter of 1792–3, the lawyer John Reeves, with covert government support, organized a massive McCarthyite campaign of 'loyalism' in an attack on the press and reformers of every stripe, with Church and King mobs baying through the streets. The campaign climaxed in the declaration of war against France in February 1793. The Welsh radicals were hit as hard as any others; the *Gorsedd* was treated as a subversive organization. Morgan John Rhys, with *Gwyneddigion* support, brought out the *Cylchgrawn* to butt its way against the storm, but in 1794 came the second spasm of repression, witch-hunts, the opening of mail, mass arrests, more street mobs and the *Treason Trials* (D.4).

D.4

Jacobinism was driven underground. It dwindled into private correspondence, itself unsafe from government spies (much of the 'apostasy' of Jacobins can be explained in such terms). It was precisely at that point, however, that Welsh Jacobins, like their colleagues in England, were offered access to a wider audience in the wave of troubles which broke in 1795.

### **Voting with their feet**

Central to the troubles of 1795–6 and 1800–1 were grain shortages and famine prices, to which crowds all over Britain responded in a classic reaffirmation of the 'moral economy' of the fair price and the just wage; they

took over markets and fixed prices, they stopped the export of local foodstuffs, they clashed with soldiers. So serious was the movement that in 1795, with the war effort paralysed, Pitt asked the French for peace terms. In 1800–1, it was even worse, since Jacobins and trade unionists emerged from the shadows and real insurrection threatened (it was partly to materialize in the nation-wide insurrection plans associated with the *Despard conspiracy*). Britain was driven to the *Peace of Amiens*.

In Wales, forced recruitment for the militia and the navy were additional grievances and behind it all to west and north was the crisis in the cloth trade and the advance of capitalist farming in a traditional community.<sup>9</sup> In 1795 price riots and crowd actions broke out all over Wales — Bangor, Conwy, Aberystwyth, Narberth, Bridgend; huge gangs of colliers scoured the north-eastern coalfield; hundreds of men in military formation seized Denbigh, imprisoned the magistrates and forced them to sign a ‘treaty’, while a small farmer, John Jones, made speeches evoking the arguments over representation and taxation of the American crisis (D.5). There were riots in the south-west and, at Haverfordwest (a notorious Jacobin stronghold), a virtual insurrection. Over the winter of 1796–7, resistance to conscription plunged Merioneth and Montgomeryshire into turmoil. There were large-scale riots against the militia and the *Navy Act*; Bala, Barmouth and Machynlleth were storm-centres. Mass meetings for months on end, around the troubled cloth centre of Llanbrynmair, demanded a government of the poor not the rich (D.9). Soldiers were repeatedly marching and counter-marching through little Bala and there were Jacobin toasts in its pubs.

D.5

D.9

Hardly had the country settled, when the French staged their comic-opera landing in Fishguard, to provoke a patriotic spasm and a witch-hunt against *Dissenters*. The patriotism did not last beyond 1798. In 1800, it was officially reported that the working people of the north-eastern coalfield were totally disaffected; pikes were being manufactured and the government seriously feared an armed insurrection throughout north Wales. On the southern coalfield, and for the first time, insurrection gripped Merthyr Tydfil and gripped it for eighteen months (D.13). Only the peace with France brought respite.

D.13

These revolts are, of course, significant in themselves. While not ‘political’ in the sense of being the product of an organized movement, they were violent expressions of a *malaise* which could not help being political. They cannot be dismissed as ‘non-political’.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, these actions were steeped in the language of the Jacobins, whether it was the speeches of John Jones in Denbigh or of a Republican small farmer in Anglesey (D.11) or the actions of the crowd who forced a magistrate to wear wooden clogs to experience what the French had rebelled against (D.5). The great storms left behind a residue of radicals all over Wales, concentrated in particular on the textile centres of the Severn, the troubled hinterland of Carmarthen and the coalfields. The Address issued by rebels in Merthyr in 1801 constituted a veritable political programme (D.13).

D.11

D.5

D.13

*This day was published,*  
AN

# ADDRESS to the PEOPLE

OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF

## Great Britain and Ireland,

ON THE THREATENED

# I N V A S I O N .

---

EXTRACTS FROM THE ABOVE WORK.

**A**MONG the inexpressibly dreadful consequences which are sure to attend the conquest of your Island by the French, there is one of so horrible a nature, as to deserve distinct notice. This barbarous, but most artful people, when first they invade a country in the conquest of which they apprehend any difficulty, in order to obtain the confidence of the people, compel their troops to observe the strictest discipline, and often put a foldier to death for stealing the most trifling article. Like spiders they artfully weave a web round their victim, before they begin to prey upon it. But when their success is complete they then let loose their troops, with relentless fury, to commit the most horrible excesses, and to pillage, burn, and desolate, without mercy, and without distinction. But the practice to which I particularly allude will make your blood freeze in your veins. These wretches are accustomed, whenever they prevail, to subject the women to the most brutal violence, which they perpetrate with an insulting ferocity, of which the wildest savages would be incapable. To gratify their furious passions is not however their chief object in these atrocities. Their principal delight is to shock the feelings of fathers and brothers, and husbands! Will you, my Countrymen, while you can draw a trigger, or handle a pike, suffer your daughters, your sisters, and wives, to fall into the power of such monsters?

*Specimens of French Ferocity and Brutality in Wales.*

It is well known that in the last War some French troops succeeded in effecting a landing in Wales. They were greatly superior to the regular force which happened to be in the part of the country where they landed: but, upon setting, at a distance, a number of Welch women with red cloaks, whom they mistook for foldiers, they surrendered! The following proofs of their ferocity and brutality are well attested.

A peasant whom they had compelled to assist them in landing their stores, presumed to ask for some compensation, upon which the commanding Officer drew a pistol, and SHOT THE POOR FELLOW THROUGH THE HEART.

Two Officers went to a house, in which was a woman in child-bed, attended by her mother, who was upwards of Seventy Years old. The French brutes tied the husband with cords, and, in his presence, defiled both the wife and the mother!!!

L O N D O N

Printed by H. BRYER, Bridewell Hospital, Bridge Street.

The Address is sold by J. DOWNES, Temple Bar; J. SPRAGG, King Street Covent Garden; J. ASPERNE, Cornhill; and J. HATCHARD, Piccadilly.

Price Two-pence each, or Twelve Shillings the Hundred, and Eighteen-pence per Dozen.

A memento of Fishguard in 1797.

One feature is striking. The core of continuous disturbance was the cloth district of mid and north Wales. This was precisely a heartland of the migration movement. The rioters of Llanbrynmair were friends and kinsfolk of people who had just left for the Land of the Free. A key figure was *William Jones*, a vinegary *Voltairean* from the cloth village of Llangadfan, a Welsh revivalist in touch with the Londoners. He never left his parish for more than a fortnight but was better informed on America than His Majesty's Ministers. He it was who, at the Llanrwst *Eisteddfod* of 1791, had circulated an Address hailing the 'discovery' of the Welsh Indians on the Missouri (D.1).

D.1

The *Madoc* myth is central to the migration and to Welsh Jacobinism in general. The discovery of the Mandan Indians on the Missouri (who at once became the target of the rival fur-trade imperialisms of Britain, Spain and the USA) set off a *Madoc* fever in America which was transmitted to Wales through the publication of a learned study by a London-Welsh clergyman in 1791. The response was electric among Welsh radicals and *Dissenters* now struggling against the odds. *Iolo Morganwg* not only read a paper on the Welsh Indians to the Royal Society; he prepared a plan for a Welsh liberty settlement in the west alongside the Lost Brothers — a project which haunted the whole migration movement (D.2).

D.2

John Evans of Waunfawr near Caernarfon threw up home and job, moved to a colony of Welsh Jacobins in London, crossed to Baltimore in the steerage and started walking into the wilderness of Spanish territory beyond St Louis. After a first abortive attempt to go up the unexplored Missouri alone, he finally enrolled in the Missouri Company, Spain's last imperial venture in North America and, in Spanish service, became the first white man to reach the Mandans from St Louis. He held them against the Canadian companies for Spain and ultimately for the USA, only to die at 29 in New Orleans in drink and disillusion.<sup>11</sup>

And after him in 1794, went Morgan John Rhys, giving up the struggle at home, to go on a horseback tour of the American Republic, to fight for a black church in Georgia and for Indian rights on the Missouri, finally to launch the *gwladfa*, a national home for the Welsh, in Beulah, Pennsylvania. And after both of them from 1793 went hundreds of Welsh families, making their way through riots, redcoats, Algerian corsairs and hideous crossings which cost half the lives on board, to reach their new Free Wales in the West, while behind them, thousands trapped in poverty clamoured to escape. From the cloth country of mid and north Wales they came, and from the south-west, politically quiet, but slithering into its own occult *malaise* which was to debouch into the *Rebecca Riots*.<sup>12</sup>

Their Free Wales in Beulah failed, broken by the opening of easier Ohio lands and the abrupt acceleration of Welsh emigration around 1800. The Welsh dispersed into an anonymous America. Their fellows back home were defeated. When war was resumed, it was in different circumstances and against the tyrant Napoleon. The Jacobins vanished into the underground; many of their spokesmen were driven out of the historical memory of the Welsh.

## **Tradition**

Yet, in that underground, they established a new political tradition in Wales. The addresses and pamphlets which came out in Merthyr (D.13) during the insurrection of 1800–1 (when two miners were hanged) not only set out a political programme; they indicate a connection with nation-wide insurrectionary plans linked to the *Despard conspiracy*. This is the spiritual climate of the *Chartist march on Newport* forty years later. It fixes the style of those forty years.

D.13

The Jacobin tradition was transmitted, face-to-face, through the *Unitarians* and other dissidents to the new Wales. Through-out the early nineteenth century a kind of 'radical triangle' repeatedly reappears in Wales, linking the textile townships on the Severn, the hinterland of Carmarthen and the iron and coal settlements on the southern coalfield. These had been precisely the regions where Jacobinism had won some popular following. *Volney's Ruins* had been printed by Morgan John Rhys in 1793; it was reprinted, word for word from his journal, in *Udgorn Cymru*, the *Chartist* newspaper of the 1840s.

This can serve as a symbol for a historic truth. Jacobinism in Wales, defeated in its own time, created a new political tradition in Wales whose ultimate expression was Welsh *Chartism*.

This can serve as a symbol for a historic truth. Jacobinism in Wales, defeated in its own time, created a new political tradition in Wales whose ultimate expression was *Welsh Chartism*.

## Notes

- 1 G.A. Williams, *Madoc*, 1987.
- 2 David Williams, *A History of Modern Wales*, 1977, and *Welsh History Review*, 1967, on his work.
- 3 Prys Morgan, *The Eighteenth-Century Renaissance*, 1981; G.A. Williams, 'Romanticism in Wales', in *Romanticism in a National Context*, 1988.
- 4 G.A. Williams, 'Morgan John Rhys and Volney's *Ruins*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, xx, 1962.
- 5 D.J.V. Jones, *Before Rebecca*, 1973.
- 6 G.A. Williams, *Madoc*, and *The Search for Beulah Land*, 1980.
- 7 Philip Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class: The Glamorgan Gentry 1640–1790*, 1983.
- 8 Morgan, *Renaissance*; Williams, *Romanticism*.
- 9 Jones, *Before Rebecca*.
- 10 E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 1971; G.A. Williams, 'The Primitive Rebel and the history of the Welsh', in *The Welsh in their History*, 1982.
- 11 Williams, *Madoc*.
- 12 Williams, *Beulah Land*.

## Sources

D.1 To All Indigenous Cambro-Britons: Permit me at this juncture to congratulate you on the agreeable intelligence lately received from America, viz, that the colony which Madog ab Owain Gwynedd carried over the Atlantic in the twelfth century are at this time a free and distinct people, and have preserved their liberty, language and some traces of their religion to this very day . . . our countrymen have not bent the knee to Baal, nor sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, they are at this time a free people . . .

(6–7 August 1791. Copy of an address circulated at the Llanrwst Eisteddfod by William Jones, Llangadfan, and enclosed in a letter to William Owen Pughe. National Library of Wales MS 13221, fo.339–43.)

## D.2

1. To petition Congress for their interfering assistance in purchasing, on peaceful and equitable terms, of the Indians, a portion of land near the Mississippi between the Ohio and the Illinois.
2. As soon as 100 Welsh emigrants exclusive of Women and Children are obtained, to engage a vessel to carry them over.
3. As there are none rich, it is requisite that each person or family should be able to pay the proper quota towards defraying the expense of passage and land travelling.
4. Those who are able to purchase land, to give freely for ever as many acres as necessary for raising provisions for their families or otherwise to require no other payment than X months' labour for every acre to the donor.
5. That Plans of Government and Religious Polity on the purest principles of Justice, Peace and Liberty shall be assented to by solemn affirmation and manual signature by every emigrant before he can be admitted of the party.
6. That such mechanics as appear to be remarkably skilful and of good character shall with consent of the majority be taken over at the expense of the Association provided such mechanics shall engage to follow their profession for seven days.



Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg). (Source: *National Library of Wales*.)

7. The mechanics deemed necessary and to be taken over at the common expense are Masons, Carpenters, Smiths, Miners, Weavers, Fullers, Potters, Braziers etc., schoolmasters.
8. Every one that can pay £5 towards the Land-Purchase money, exclusive of passage and travelling expenses, to be admitted of another company of Mechanics, who are to be endowed with proper privileges during the time they shall follow their several occupations.
9. That none be admitted of the Company who cannot speak Welsh or have at least a wife that can.
10. That the legal language of the Colony shall be Welsh and all pleadings in Law, all religious worship etc. shall be in it, the English also to be taught as a learned language and source of knowledge.
11. To purchase a common Library, 2 copies of Chambers' Cyclopaedia, 1 of the Scotch Cyclopaedia, Pryde's Mineralogy, Watson's Chemistry, 5 copies Owen's Dictionary, for a Select Society.

Required of Congress

1. some pieces of cannon
2. a garrison to be paid by the Colonists.

(‘Plan of a Welsh Colony’, April 1792, by Iolo Morganwg, to be submitted to the American Minister. Note the choice of ‘affirmation’ rather than ‘oath’. National Library of Wales MS 13104, fo.28–62.)

**D.3** Newyddion Pellenig a Chartrefol. . . Yn yr *eisteddfod* ddiwethaf yn nhre’ Derby, dygwyd dau ddyn ger bron y llys am werthu gwaith Mr Paine ar Ddynol Hawl (*The Rights of Man*). Mynnodd y rheithwyr (jury) ddarllain y llyfr a chwedi ei ystyried yn fanol, barnasant nad oedd y gwerthwyr yn euog — Not guilty.

Dygwyd gwr yn Llundain (Mr Wood) o flaen y llys, am argraphu annerchiad Paine at yr annerchwyr:- cafodd y rheithwyr eu hanfon gan arglwydd Kenyon ddwy waith i ystyried yr achos, a chwedi aros yn hir bob tro, barnasant fod y dyn yn euog o argraphu’r llyfr, eithr nad oedd yn euog o un gosp. Er bod rhai’n cael myned yn rhydd, y mae llawer yn cael eu carcharu am argraphu a gwerthu gwaith y gwr uchod.

. . . Dywedir fod y rhyfel presennol yn sefyll i’r ddeyrnas hon mewn pymtheg can o bynnau bob awr . . . Dyma’r fendith i ryfel!

. . . Y maent wedi cyhoeddi yn senedd Paris fod Pitt yn elyn dynolryw.

. . . Y mae Marat, un o aelodau’r senedd-dy (Convention) yn Paris wedi ei ladd gan Charlotte Corde . . . Yr oedd y Marat hwn, mae’n debyg, yn un o’r Jacobins mwyaf yn Paris ac, o bossibl, yn dymuno’n dda i’r wlad . . .

. . . Yn awr yw’r pryd i’r byddinoedd cyssylltiedig i wneud eu goreu i ddfetha Ffraingc; canys as gall y Ffrangcod ond dala ychydig o fisoedd yn fwy, o bossibl yr unant au’u gilydd, ac yna fe fydd mor anhawdd eu gorchfygu ag attal y haul yn godi . . . Y mae’r llythr a gafwyd yn Ffraingc oddiwrth Pitt wedi cynhyrfu senedd Paris yn anghyffredin; y maent yn dywedyd fod llywodraeth Lloegr yn ymddwyn yn deilwng o fwrddwyr tu ag attynt; trwy hirio cynnifer o ddynion yn ddirgelaidd i yrru’r wlad ben-ben ac i ladd eu gilydd. Os ydyw’r hanes yn wir, mae’n waradwydd i ddynoliaeth fod neb yn ymarferyd a’r fath ddirgelion, hyd yn oed i ddinystrio eu gelynion . . .

(Foreign and Home News)

At the latest sessions in the town of Derby, two men were summoned before the court for selling Mr Paine’s work *The Rights of Man*. The jury asked to read the book, and after studying it in detail, returned a verdict of Not guilty. A man in London (Mr Wood) was summoned before the court for printing Paine’s Address to the Addressers — Lord Kenyon sent out the jurors twice to reconsider the case, and after a long wait on both occasions, they returned the verdict that the man was guilty of printing the book, but was not guilty of any offence. While some go free, many are being jailed for printing and selling the works of this man.

. . . It is said that the present war is costing this kingdom £1,500 an hour . . . Behold the blessings of war!

. . . The parliament in Paris has declared Pitt an enemy of the human race.

. . . Marat a member of the Convention has been killed by Charlotte Corday . . . This Marat, it seems, was one of the leading Jacobins in Paris and possibly a man who wished well to his country.

. . . Now is the time for the allied armies to do their best to destroy France, because if the French can hold out for only a few months longer, they will possibly re-unite, and then it will be harder to conquer them than to stop the sun from rising . . . The letter from Pitt discovered in France has caused uncommon agitation in the Paris Convention; they say the government of England is behaving like a gang of criminals towards them, by sending in secret agents to turn France upside-down and to set the French to killing each other. If this story is true, it is a disgrace to humanity that anybody should resort to such vile trickery, even to destroy their enemies . . .

(21 August 1793. Extracts from the first news report to appear in the *Cylchgrawn Cymraeg (Welsh Journal)*, edited by Morgan John Rhys, the first Welsh-language journal seriously to discuss political issues. *Cylchgrawn Cymraeg*, 3 Awst (August) 1793.)

**D.4** All the thieves and whores of London are assembled about the fellow called Reeves and his fiddlers and faddlers in a mighty band, bawling and squawling like the Songs of Caterwauling, God-save-the-king, Church and King for ever! They press every one that passes by into this infernal service, crying to him — Blast your eyes! Cry Church and King! Church and King, damn your soul! I jabber'd Welsh, squeaked out Church SANS King in as broken a manner as I could and passed for a Dutchman.

(Iolo Morganwg on an encounter with the witch-hunting mobs of John Reeves, during the summer crisis of 1794, when *Habeas Corpus* was suspended and hundreds arrested, a crisis which reached its climax in Treason Trials in the autumn. [Dutchman = German.] National Library of Wales MS Iolo 837.)

**D.5** My Lord Duke. I am extremely sorry to acquaint your Grace with the following alarming Facts.

In pursuance of the Directions of the last Act of Parliament, for manning the Navy, my Brother Magistrates and I proceeded to carry it into Force, in the course of the last week, & issued our Orders to the several Parishes, thro' the County, accordingly.

The magistrates who reside in the neighbourhood of Denbigh, have, for some Time, held a regular monthly Meeting, upon the first Wednesday in the Month, being the Market Day, in that Town; in my way thither,

this morning, some Friends met me, before I reached the Town, to apprise me that a very considerable Mob had assembled from the district, & adjoining my Parishes, to the amount of between 400, or 500 Persons, and are then in the Town, waiting for the Arrival of the Magistrates, two of the Gentlemen with whom I act being Clergymen it occurred to me, that they were, at the moment, attending, or doing Duty in their respective Churches; I therefore resolved to go on to Denbigh, to meet the Mob, & sent a Messenger to the eldest Mr Clough, to acquaint him with these circumstances, whenever he might arrive at Home, hoping that their assembling had been in consequence of their not being thoroughly acquainted with the Nature of the Act of Parliament, & that I could, by explaining it to them in their native Language, pacify them, & prevail upon them to disperse, but when I come to Denbigh, the Street was full of People to the amount I have stated, most of them armed with large Sticks, & Bludgeons, & upon my beginning to explain the Act to them, one John Jones of Aedryn, Farmer (who is supposed may be the Person whose name appears in the late Trials) told me, they did not want to have the Act explained to them, that Lord Camden had maintained in the House of Lords in the year 1775 or 1776 'that no Britton could be taxed without the Consent of the People'; the People became very unquiet, & used much seditious;

& disagreeable Language, and I found too, that an Order had been issued, by the *Deputy Lieutenants* for holding a Meeting, on this Day, to ballot for men to serve in the Militia, in the Room of those who had died since the last Meetings, and that the High Constables had, ignorantly, issued their Precepts to the several Parishes (not having regard to those Parishes only, in which the vacancies had fallen out) and that this Proceeding had excited the present Alarm amongst the People: but I have my Suspicions that these Lists were the Fabrication of some seditious men, who took this Mode of stirring up Discontent amongst the Ignorant stating to them, that a new, & general Ballot was intended; it was in vain to expostulate with them, they were determined to resist the raising of any more men for the Militia, or the Mareens as they stiled them, meaning, no Doubt, the late Act for manning the Navy. Some of the Ringleaders of the Mob threatened me bodily Hurt, & that they would pull down my Houses, stone by stone, as well as those of my Colleagues if we attempted to carry either of the lists into Execution, seven or 8 of them laid hold of My Horse's Head, Stirrups, etc. etc. and John Jones pretended to wish me well, & advised me to comply with the Requests made by the Mob, or he did not know the Consequences of a Refusal; after about an Hour spent in this manner, the Revd Mr Thos. Clough came up the Town, & met me, when the Mob surrounded him, and laid hold of his Horse in like Manner, & conducted him, & me up to the Crown Inn. Mr Clough alighted from his Horse, & went up into one of the Rooms above Stairs, accompanied by a great Number of the Mob, & I continued on Horseback at the Door, and before the Window of the Room in which Mr Clough was, & upon the Mob requiring a Paper, under our Hands, that we would not proceed to enforce either the Militia or *Navy Act*, we complied with the

Proposal, seeing it was in Vain to avoid it, when a Stamped Piece of Paper was brought to me, & I wrote that Mr Clough & I undertook, and promised, that we would use our endeavours to prevent any more Men being ballotted for, etc. etc., the Paper was read to them, translated into Welsh and John Jones was called upon to peruse it, he seeming all the Time to be the Person the Mob looked up to, and he suggested an Amendment including the late *Navy Act*, which I at his Request, & Diction, interlined; the Paper was then sent upstairs for Mr Clough's Signature, and some other Amendment was suggested by John Jones, which he was dictating, & Mr Clough writing, when I went into the Room, by the direction of the Mob. In a short time Mr Roger Butler Clough arrived at the House, & the Mob then insisted upon his signing the Paper which he did after much Debate amongst the Leaders it was resolved that one Paper was sufficient, some of them having proposed that a Paper should be given to each Parish, which Point was at length given up, & John Jones was fixed upon to keep the Paper; this having been complied with, some of the Mob demanded Money, as Payment for their Loss of Time, & to procure Meat & Drink, one proposing that we should give them 5s. a Parish, which was accordingly done . . .

(1 April 1795. A magistrate's account of the crowd's seizure of the town of Denbigh during the widespread riots, crowd actions and rebellions which convulsed much of western Wales in the crisis of that year and the next over food shortages, conscription and the war. J. Lloyd, Wigfair — Home and War Offices, HO 42/34/191.)

- D.6** O FRANCE: although I do not justify thy excesses, I venerate thy magnanimity . . . INVINCIBLE FRENCHMEN! go on! . . . The Popish beast has numbered his days! . . . Infatuated Britons! I feel for your insanity, although four thousand miles from your coast . . . ANCIENT BRITONS! awake out of sleep! Open your eyes! Why are your tyrants great? Because you kneel down and cringe to them. Rise up. You are their equals! If you cannot rise, creep to the ocean and the friendly waves will waft you over the Atlantic to the hospitable shores of America . . . Quit the little despotic island which gave you birth and leave the tyrants and the slaves of your country to live and die together . . .

(1795, 4 July Oration by Morgan John Rhys at Greenville (later Ohio), site of Indian Peace talks, published by the St David's Society of Philadelphia in 1798 and dispatched in bulk to Wales. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA.)

- D.7** The only news that this country affords is that a vessel sails from Carnarvon to America this month with about 300 Emigrants all Inhabitants of Carnarvonshire, Anglesey or Denbighshire.

(Robert Williams, Llandudno, to William Owen, 21 January 1796. National Library of Wales MS 13224, fo.161–2.)

**D.8** Where is this new country which you are going to secure to the Welsh and how are the poor moneyless emigrants to get thither? . . . I recommend the bearer of this, Theophilus Rees, a man with a competent share of property but with the disadvantage of knowing but little English. He and his family of eleven are leaving with many *Baptists* . . . together with a number of *Presbyterians* and other serious people to the number of six or seven score . . . would that I could join them in your happy country, but I am forced to return to hateful England . . .

(William Richards (Lynn), St Clears, to Dr Samuel Jones, Philadelphia, 22 March 1796. Pennepek papers, USA [Pres-byterian = Unitarian].)

**D.9** Court of Great Sessions, Montgomeryshire. The jurors present. That John Ellis, late of the parish of Llanbryn-mair in the county of Montgomeryshire, yeoman, being a pernicious and seditious man and contriving and intending the liege Subjects of our said Lord the King to incite and move to hatred and dislike of the Person of our said Lord the King and the Government established within this Realm on the Seventeenth Day of December in the 37th Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord, King George III [1796] . . . the said John Ellis then and there was talking of and concerning the Government of our said Lord the King unlawfully, maliciously and wickedly did publish, utter and declare with a Loud Voice these Welsh words following, to wit . . . I mae yr Tylawd yn cail eu gwascu gan y Cywaithog ag i mae ne wedi resolvio y gael rheiolaeth arall ag ny dydiw ddim yn power Gwirboneddigion y wlad ei rhwystro ne ag ys gwna nhw fe geiff fod yn waed am waed . . . which Welsh words bear the same meaning as the following English words . . . The Poor are oppressed by the Rich and we are determined to have another Government and it is not in the power of the Gentlemen of the Country to prevent it, if they do, it shall be blood for blood . . .

[17 December 1796. An incident during the sustained disturbances throughout Merioneth and Montgomeryshire over the winter of 1796–7, which were triggered by the new Militia Act of November 1796, but which broadened in scope and became ‘subversive’. For three months, the region around Llanbryn-mair in particular witnessed many outrages and mass meetings hostile to the government; a number of small farmers of the parish were indicted for ‘raising insurrection’.]

(National Library of Wales MS Great Sessions, Montgomeryshire 1797, Gaol Files 4/196/1.)

**D.10** Breeches, petticoats, shirts, blankets, sheets (for some received the news in bed) have been most woefully defiled in South Wales lately on hearing that a thimblefull of Frenchmen landed on our coast . . . Our Dragoons sent us some companies of Dragoons after the old women of Pembrokeshire had secured the damned Republicans as it seems we are requested to call them. Are there no lamp-irons in Downing

Street? I fear that the hemp crop of the last season failed. We must allow that the French are beforehand with us in the most useful arts and sciences, witness their invention and use of the guillotine . . .

(7 March 1797. Iolo Morganwg's comment on the French landing at Fishguard. Lamp-irons (street lamp standards) were what the Parisian populace favoured for the lynching of bishops and other undesirables; hemp provided the English gallows-rope, Iolo Morganwg to William Owen Pughe, National Library of Wales MS 13222, fo.131–4.)

- D.11** I am a Jacobin and a Republican and know a Republican Government would be a much better one than the present and I'll lay a wager that there will not be a Crowned Head in Europe in three years' time and that there will soon be a change in our Government.

(23 June 1800. Great Sessions, Anglesey. John Phillips, small farmer of Llangefni, quoted as making a public declaration at Llannerch-y-medd. 'Seditious' pamphlets had been circulated in Llannerch-y-medd during the crisis of 1796. During the even more serious crisis of 1800–1, which forced the Peace of Amiens, 'Republican principles' had been widely disseminated through north-west Wales, directed at small farmers reacting against the Militia Act and the grain crisis. University College of North Wales, Porth yr Aur, Add. MS 2060 and Plas Newydd correspondence, II, 3551–4.)

- D.12** The bearer of this, Daniel Davis, is about to emigrate to your country with his wife and seven children. He is by trade a mason and understands the farming business pretty well . . . his wife has had some education and has sometimes kept school . . . Two of her brothers are in the ministry in England among the *Presbyterians* . . . I am ashamed to trouble you and Dr Rogers so often with the concerns of these poor Emigrants, but what in God's name can I do? . . . I cannot describe to you the condition of our poor country, thousands of the poor move about the country begging bread . . . Myriads would emigrate if they had money . . .

(William Richards (Lynn), Newcastle Emlyn, to Dr Samuel Jones, Philadelphia, April 1801. Pennepek Papers, USA.)

- D.13** An Address to the Workmen of Merthyr Tydvil

The present high price of the necessaries of Life is gone to such enormous rate that we the workmen of the Ironworks on the Hills have come to the following resolutions, that they are determined to assemble on a certain day, to consider of the most effectual method to be adopted in extricating ourselves and the rising Generation from the Tyranny and Oppression of the times for it is evident to the shallowest understanding that it is sure to go worse and worse for every new Tax that is laid on us, is sure to raise the Price of the articles that are taxt, which we makes no doubt but what you will freely admit. So we hopes

that you will join us in the above desirable undertaking, so necessary to the happiness and preservation of the human race and rescue ourselves and the succeeding Generation from the most daring, insulting and atrocious Tyranny, so dont lose no time in concerting measures to collect yourselves together in a mass and be all of one mind as one man, and there will be no doubt of our success for the Tyrants will not be able to face us, for their guilty consciences will make them tremble with fear, altho they puts such trust in the military force of those kingdoms but it can never be supposed that an army of natives will fight to keep their Fathers and Mothers, Sisters and Brothers and all their relations in a state of Slavery and Misery and it will fall to their own Lot as soon as they are discharged from the Service, we was all in hopes that you would a come over that way when you rose lately and if you had we should a Completed that great work of reformation before this time and should be a people at once free and happy, we have concluded that M-a-y- D-a-y [*sic*] shall be the time for the Farmers will have all their Corn in the Ground and there will be no fear of famine if the Almighty will be pleased to send us a good harvest — Next Sunday or the following one is the time. There is a great many men that believes that the King has no power, but what is given him by parliament, it tis true, that it twas intended that it should be so in the beginning, but the Case is alterd very much for he and his Ministry has got all the power, and both houses of parliament are no more than a shadow or an image for he has got such means to bribe and corrupt them, so that the major part of them will give their Votes with him, Let him propose what he will, So when he sends a Bill towards raising supplies for the Current Year he is sure to find a Majority for they are sure to find there is a part of it to themselves and it is not unreasonable to suppose when a prince has got Thirty Seven or Thirty Eight millions a year of revenues from his subjects that it is his interest to bribe a few in order that he might be enabled to fleece the rest for his Ministers and Privy Counsellors and a great part of both Houses of parliament are in places of profits and emolument, so that and the rest live in hopes of arriving at preferments themselves, so that they dont care how they the rest of their fellow Creatures does so they do gain their point, but it tis quite against the true intent and meaning of the people that they represent for the representatives of the people ought to be a set of men wholly impartial, both to King and People and not take Bribes for their Votes, Nor to complain of the grievances if there did none exist, but they are become unlawful assembly, and ought to be deposed as well as him that has corrupted them, and a new form of government Established upon *Whig* Principles or any other that may be adopted after the sense of the Nation is taken on the subject . . .

(Quoted in David J.V. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protests in Wales 1793–1835*, London, 1973, pp.213–5.)

## Debating the Evidence

Gwyn A. Williams writes an eloquent essay on the beginnings of Welsh Radicalism, a subject which he has done so much to illuminate, especially in

its transatlantic dimension. He has restored the *Madoc* legend to its proper place in Welsh history (*Madoc: the Making of a Myth*, London, 1979) and he has uncovered the close connections which existed between radical *Dissenters* in Wales and their counterparts in the newly independent United States of America (*The Search for Beulah Land*, London, 1980). It is fascinating, indeed heady, stuff and its importance as the origin of a major tradition in modern Welsh politics is immense.

### **Source D.1**

*William Jones's* message to his fellow countrymen is not made explicit in this extract — but it is surely clear enough. What are the implications of what he says?

### **Source D.2**

What were to be the main characteristics of the colony which *Iolo Morganwg* proposed should be established near the Mississippi? Can it be a coincidence that it was in this general area that the 'Welsh Indians' were then thought to live?

### **Source D.3**

It is relevant to ask if this is a primary source for the events reported. Perhaps more important is the fact that this is the first example of radical political journalism in the Welsh language. For the first time monoglot Welshmen could read of such matters in their own language.

### **Source D.4**

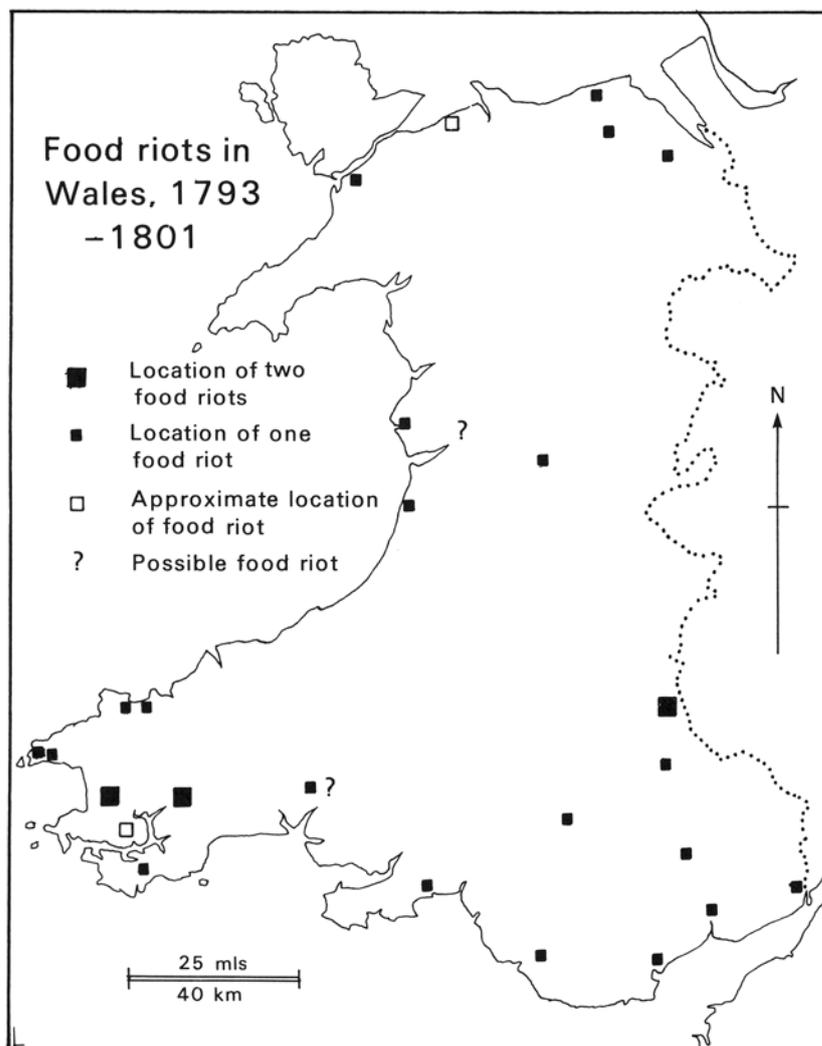
What is the historical value of a passage such as this? (One need not assume that every detail is literally true. See Source D.10 for another of *Iolo Morganwg's* colourfully phrased letters).

### **Source D.5**

Are there any reasons for thinking that the squire and magistrate, John Lloyd, sent a reasonably accurate account of these proceedings at Denbigh to the Home Secretary? What queries should one have in mind when handling evidence of this kind? Consider carefully the role of John Jones of Aeddryn in the Denbigh riot.

### **Source D.6**

Perhaps Fourth of July speeches always tend to the rhetorical. Morgan John Rhys's view of the state of things in Wales may be justifiable, but what is one to make of 'the friendly waves will waft you over the Atlantic'? Note Professor Williams's comment about 'hideous crossings which cost half the lives on board'. Is such a speech likely to have had much influence in encouraging emigration from Wales to the United States?



### **Sources D.6, D.7 and D.8**

These extracts illustrate the exodus of Welsh people to America following the crisis of 1795. They also underline Professor Williams's point about the close contacts which already existed between the *Dissenters* on either side of the Atlantic. (Also compare Source D.12, dated 1801.)

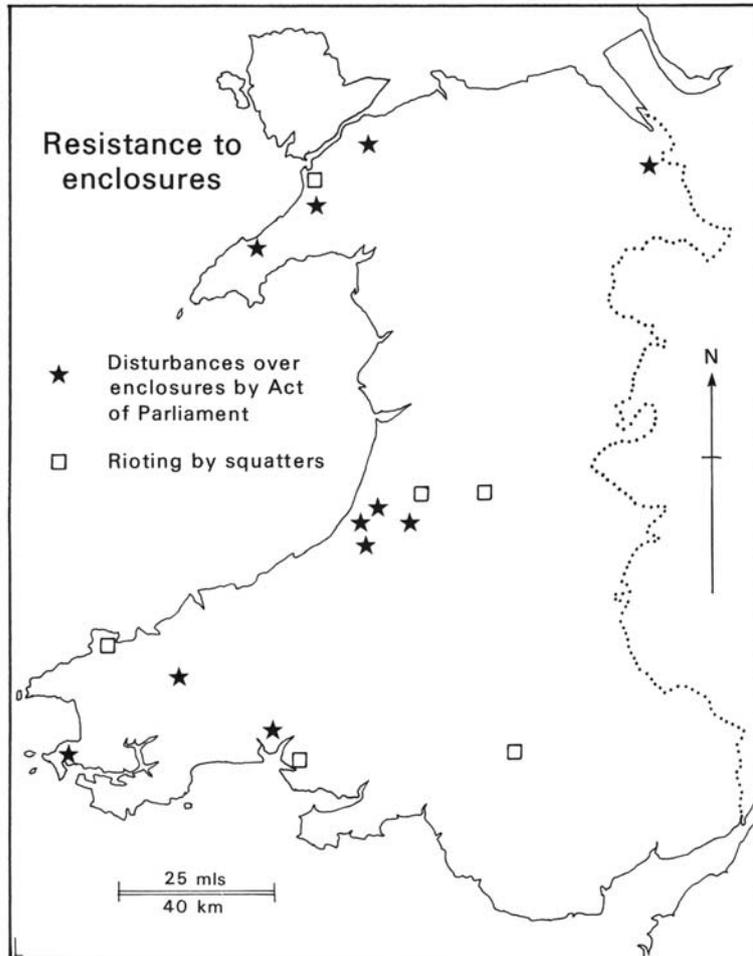
### **Source D.9**

This is a presentment of the Grand Jury of Montgomeryshire, at that time an essential preliminary to a criminal trial. In archaic and highly charged language the Grand Jury states that there is a case to be answered, and the trial of John Ellis would follow. This is not therefore a statement of facts proved in court, much less a verdict. Nevertheless, it seems likely enough that John Ellis did utter the stirring Welsh words alleged.

### **Source D.10**

*Iolo Morganwg* is both indecent and seditious in this private letter to his friend William Owen Pughe; he would have been in serious trouble had the authorities intercepted it. Written about a fortnight after the farcical episode of

the landing of the French near Fishguard and their defeat by the ‘old women of Pembrokeshire’, the letter exhibits the exaggerated response of an out-and-out radical. Can one believe that he really advocated executions on lamp posts and the guillotine? What was the reaction of the majority of Welsh people to the French invasion?



### Source D.11

Sources D.5, D.9 and D.11 illustrate the radical views of people in widely separated parts of rural, Welsh-speaking Wales in the 1790s. Compare also the views of *William Jones* of Llangadfan given in Source D.1 and in Source B.21 in the chapter on ‘New Enthusiasts’. Comment on the penetration of radical ideas into the remotest areas of the country following the American and French revolutions.

### Source D.12

This letter of 1801 re-emphasizes the point to be gleaned from Sources D.6, D.7 and D.8 about the transatlantic dimension of Welsh *Dissent*; this connection facilitated emigration to the United States. Note in particular the *Presbyterian* connection in the light of what Professor Williams says about the radicalism of that denomination.

## Source D.13

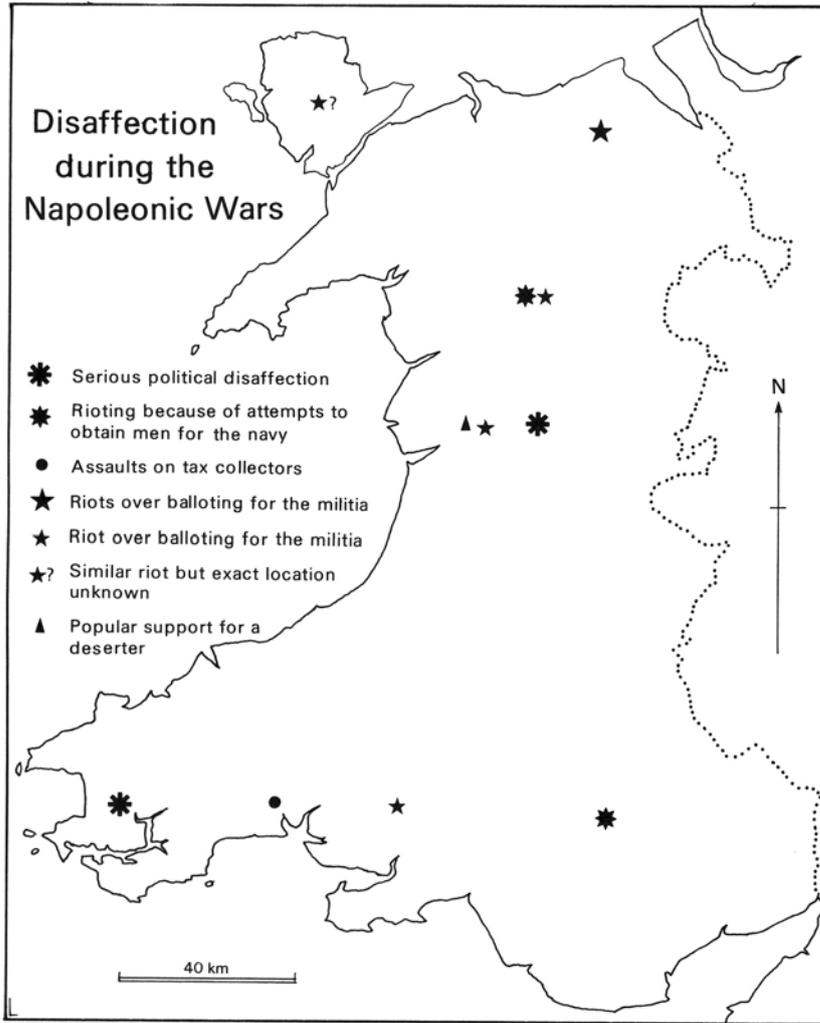
What strikes you about the style of this cry of the workmen of Merthyr? The American and French revolutions and the writings of Tom Paine provided the ideology, the misery of food shortage and soaring prices in 1800–1 provided the seed-bed. The radicalism of rural Wales in the 1790s was short-lived (it did not revive until the middle of the nineteenth century), but this document from the heart of industrial Wales is truly the start of a political tradition which is dominant even now.

## Discussion

The thirteen sources which have been selected mostly date from the 1790s — the decade which Gwyn A. Williams elsewhere describes as ‘an intellectual cauldron of competing ideologies in Wales’ (*When was Wales?*, Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, 1985, p.152). The documents have been chosen to illustrate the ferment among certain sections of the Welsh population and of the London Welsh in the wake of the American and French revolutions; they also show the unrest which existed in most parts of Wales in consequence of the social and economic dislocations of the period of the French wars (1793–1815).

Riots were endemic in the 1790s, and especially so in the critical years 1795–6 and 1800–1; they occurred in market towns, in industrial districts and in the countryside. Their causes were oppression, misery and hunger, and their spokesmen were beginning to voice a radical ideology. Political ideas of the American and French revolutionaries (prominent among the philosophers of these revolutions were the Welshmen *Richard Price* and *David Williams*), and the writings of Tom Paine (*The Rights of Man*, 1790–2, mediated through the Welsh language by *Jac Glan-y-gors*), had penetrated to the remotest parts of the north and west.

But one should be careful to place this evidence in a broad context. The radicals were few in number in the 1790s and they mostly belonged to the ‘left wing’ of *Dissent* (Nonconformity) — people such as *Iolo Morganwg*, William Richards of Lynn and Morgan John Rhys. They were men who were moving towards *Unitarianism* and rationalism in theology. They formed what Professor Williams (following the Italian Antonio Gramsci) calls an ‘organic intelligentsia’. The majority of *Dissenters* in Wales — together with the *Methodists*, by whom they were greatly influenced — were of a quite different cast: evangelical, *Calvinist*, absorbed in religious and spiritual concerns, quietist if not *Tory* in politics.



The formal political structure too was only slightly affected by the radical movement of the late eighteenth century. The old-style, gentry-dominated parliamentary politics dating from the Acts of Union in the sixteenth century was still in place. (See Philip Jenkins's analysis of this in his chapter 'Political Quiescence and Political Ferment'.) *Dissent*, Radicalism, industrialization and the rise of a wealthy new class of capitalists and professional men, all these things were pressing against the bastions of the traditional political families in the 1790s, but it was several decades before there was any major yielding of power. The election of Benjamin Hall, son-in-law of the Cyfarthfa ironmaster Richard Crawshay, as member for Glamorgan in 1814 was the first outward sign of change.