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Print, language and identity: newspapers in Wales since 1804

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Before the coming of the age of the popular New Journalism in the 1890s, Welsh print culture consisted of a rich variety of monthly journals, specialist magazines, newspapers and broadsides as well as the almanacs, theological dissertations, political tracts, travel guides, biographies and fiction that made up the Welsh book trade. Nineteenth-century newspapers, however, were themselves highly diverse forms, featuring not only news items from Wales and beyond, but also letters, poems, reviews, features, short stories, serialised novels, articles on music, art, the human and natural sciences, acres of religious exegesis and, of course, square miles of political comment, theory and analysis. Much of this prodigious literary activity remains to be recovered from the five hundred or so newspaper titles which were produced in Wales during the nineteenth century, and which are now conserved in our libraries and archives. A people's literature may be said to have been buried there, and the purpose of this paper is to help in the unearthing and the appreciation of its many forms.

The origins of Welsh periodical publishing are to be found in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when, from London and later from Shrewsbury, Thomas Jones brought out his Welsh-language *Almanac*, as well as an English-language *Collection of All the Material News*. The earliest titles printed in Wales were uncertain and highly speculative affairs, *Tlysau yr Hen Oesoedd*, produced by Lewis Morris of Holyhead in 1735, is unlikely to have survived its first number, and *Trysorfa gwybodaeth, neu eurgrawn Cymraeg*, issued by Josiah Rees in Swansea in 1770 was issued fortnightly and lasted for only three months. As in so many other respects, political and cultural, the 1790s was a decade of experimentation and renewed vigour in periodical publishing in Wales. *Y Cylchgrawn Cymraeg* was issued by the radical activist and Baptist minister Morgan John Rhys from a variety of locations in north and west Wales, a venture which provided a model for Thomas Evans's

Miscellaneous repository, neu y drysorfa gymmysgiedig and David Davies's *Y Geirgrawn* of 1795 and 1796 respectively, both established to propagate the democratic principles of the French Revolution in Wales. Though again short lived, these efforts demonstrated the possibilities of periodical publishing and led to further, if very different, titles being produced from the turn of the nineteenth century.

The idea that the periodical press could be used to help sustain and develop communities of belief was adopted most readily not by post-enlightenment political radicals but by the leaders and members of religious denominations, whose control of the press in Wales, particularly of the Welsh-language press, was established early and remained powerful throughout the nineteenth century. In 1799, Thomas Charles of Bala and Thomas Jones of Denbigh established *Trysorfa ysprydol* and by so doing set a pattern for the Welsh denominational press which, despite the high costs of paper during the Napoleonic Wars, was followed by such titles as the monthly Wesleyan magazine *Yr Eurgrawn Wesleyaidd* in 1809 and the Baptist *Seren Gomer* in 1814. The latter marked an important departure in periodical publishing insofar as it was modelled not on the miscellaneous magazine formats of all previous Welsh-language periodicals, but on the weekly newspaper. It survived only for one year before being forced by financial pressures to revert to the safer fortnightly magazine form. Its failure prevented for twenty years any further experimentation in Welsh-language weekly newspaper journalism, but by launching *Seren Gomer*, and by devising for it a newspaper style and format in Welsh, its founder, Joseph Harris (Gomer), had established an important benchmark which later editors and journalists writing in Welsh would openly acknowledge as being the most formative for their craft.

If Welsh-language newspaper journalism emerged out of a tradition of religious periodical production in Wales, English-language journalism had more than a century of experience to draw upon. In England, editors had been refining the newspaper format since at least the 1700s, when such metropolitan and provincial newspapers as the *Daily Courant* in London and *Berrow's Worcester Journal* were first launched. The first newspapers in Wales were modelled on those earlier English ventures, beginning with the *Cambrian* in Swansea in 1804, the *North Wales Gazette* in Bangor in 1808 and the *Carmarthen Journal* in 1810. But newspapers, in whichever language, differed from magazines not only in their formats, but also in the ways in which they were financed, distributed and consumed, and required a far more commercial environment in which to flourish. Advertisements, not sales, were the key to success, and so newspapers, to have a chance to survive the high taxes imposed by successive governments on paper, advertisements and individual copies of weekly periodicals which contained 'intelligence' in the form of 'news', a concept that was being evolved - and taxed - at the time, needed to be commercially viable. Increasingly, this meant being located close to those who would advertise in their columns, such as merchants, operators of shipping lines and producers of commodity goods. In this early period, it was the commercial 'middling sort' which sustained the newspaper press, both as advertisers and readers. The larger extractive industries of coal, iron and slate did not need to advertise their wares in the pages of newspapers, and so were on the whole outside the newspaper economy. Newspapers were thus centred initially in market towns such as Swansea, Carmarthen, Bangor and Brecon, and subsequently in the industrial belts where adequate commercial funding was to be found in the shape of small manufacturers and shopkeepers, along with good distribution networks and bodies of readers. Newspaper literature thus developed in tandem with an expanding middle-class economy, reflecting both its financial realities and the changed and enlarged expectations of its writers and readers. The history of the newspaper cannot be separated from the history of the society which nourished it with funds, shaped its content and secured it the attention of readers.

Little is known about the circulation or readership figures of newspapers in Wales in the nineteenth century, other than that they fluctuated, often wildly, from place to place and from time to time. Estimates of the extent of general newspaper reading are consequently so imprecise as to be of little

historical value. In any case, the numbers of copies sold by the publisher bore little relation to the actual circulation. Newspapers were purchased, in the first instance by well-off individuals, tavern keepers or reading rooms, but would then normally be sold and resold, the price decreasing day by day, until the paper had been worn out. Furthermore, newspaper production was a notoriously insecure business, and sales brought little remuneration compared to the income derived from the printing of advertisements. If a title could not rely on the early and sustained support of local advertisers, its chances of survival were slim. Bearing these limitations in mind, the rate at which new titles were established throughout the century does provide newspaper history both with a broad chronology and a very general index of the newspaper's pattern of growth.

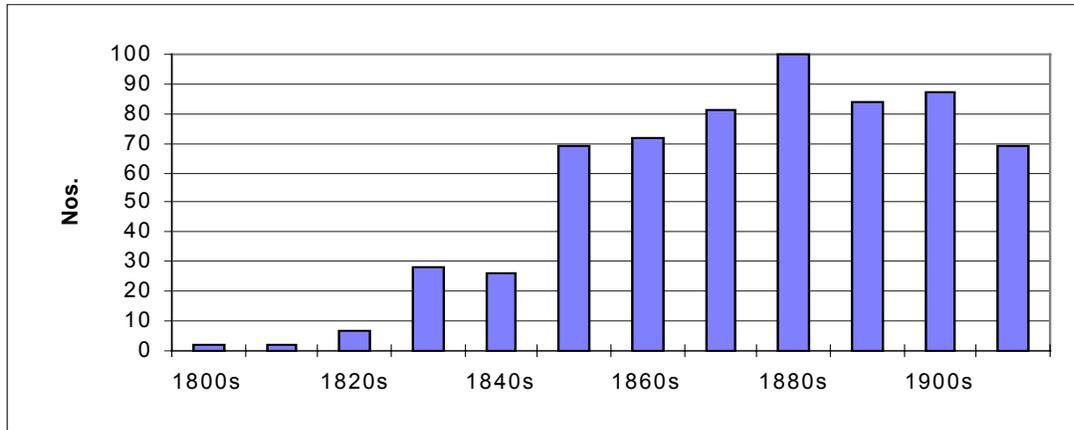


Fig. 1. Total number of titles launched in each decade, 1800-1919
Source: Extracted from Report of the NEWSPLAN project in Wales (1994)

These figures reveal two surges of activity, one in the 1830s, when the number of new titles jumped from 7 to 28 following the reduction, after a long period of agitation, of the newspaper stamp from 4d. to 1d, the other in the 1850s, following the complete abandonment of the stamp tax in 1855, when numbers rose steeply from 26 to 69. Numbers of new titles continued to increase steadily each decade for the following thirty years, culminating in the 1880s when one hundred new titles were launched. The majority of these newspapers were published in the English language, but as the graph below demonstrates, the rate of growth of the one hundred or so new Welsh-language titles established during the nineteenth century also increased in the same critical decades.

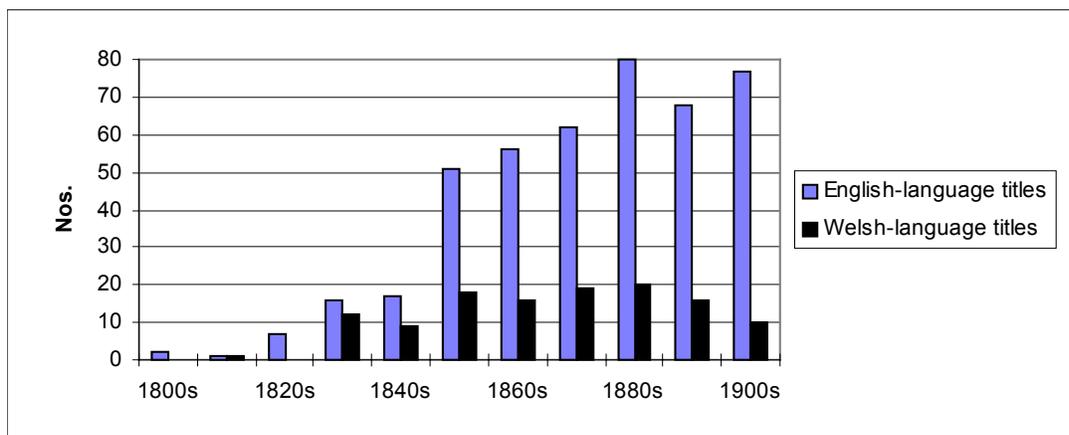


Fig. 2. Number of titles launched, by language, in each decade, 1800-1909
Source: Extracted from Report of the NEWSPLAN project in Wales (1994)

As a proportion of all new papers launched in Wales, however, Welsh-language titles declined from 35% of the total in the 1840s to a little over a quarter in the 1850s. Thereafter, the ratio of new Welsh to English titles declined from 23% in the 1860s to 19% in the 1900s. A further five Welsh-language titles were produced in each of the two English cities where substantial Welsh-speaking communities had formed, namely Liverpool and London.

The uneven nature of the newspaper's pattern of growth in Wales is explained in a number of ways. On the whole, restrictive legislation coupled with the economic conditions that obtained in Wales before the 1850s did not provide much encouragement for newspaper enterprises. Many were produced as speculative ventures by printers, often merely to attract advertising revenue to subsidise the publication of books. Of those produced at this time, only the *Monmouthshire Merlin*, founded in Newport in 1829, the *Welshman*, issued from Carmarthen in 1832, the year of the Great Reform Act, and William Rees's *Yr Amserau*, launched in Liverpool in 1843, can be said to have been commercially successful. The preconditions for a successful newspaper enterprise, however, were transformed during the 1850s and early 1860. Most strikingly, the abolition of the Stamp Duty in 1855, together with the paper and advertising taxes in 1853 and 1861, removed fiscal constraints on periodicals carrying news throughout the United Kingdom, and newspaper publishers responded with alacrity to the new opportunities. *Yr Herald Cymraeg* appeared in Caernarfon at almost exactly the same time as the *Daily Telegraph* did in London, and for precisely the same reasons - to take advantage of the potentially lucrative free-market conditions that now obtained in newspaper publishing. For in addition to the relaxation of fiscal restrictions, newspapers in the mid-1850s became a much demanded commodity. War has always been good for journalism, and the events in the Crimea, recorded so vividly by reporters in the field such as William Howard Russell for the *Times*, fed the curiosity of new, scarcely literate readers and created a 'news hunger' which journalists have been trying ever since to satisfy.

The Denbigh printer, Thomas Gee (1815-1898), was one among many to respond to this mid-Victorian demand for news. Gee's career combines in one person the key elements that made for successful Welsh-language journalism in the nineteenth century, namely business acumen, religious faith, political commitment and, most importantly of all, a keen sense of which stories would sell. Apprenticed at his father's printshop in Denbigh, Gee started writing political articles for the press during the election of January 1834, and in December of the following year he launched *Y Cymedrolwr*, a monthly temperance journal edited by Owen Jones (Meudwy Mon). A decade later, in 1845, Gee, now fully in control of his father's business, launched *Y Traethodydd*, a new kind of literary magazine in Welsh. But realising that Wales needed 'something more of a railway and steam character than the monthlies' (the railway had reached Denbigh in 1852), Gee in 1857 launched his weekly (from 1861 twice-weekly) newspaper, *Baner Cymru*. Incorporating Gwilym Hiraethog's Liverpool-based *Amserau* in 1859, *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* swiftly became the most important and widely-read Welsh-language weekly newspaper.

But in addition to legislative reform and the stimulation provided by foreign wars, the dramatic proliferation of newspapers of both languages produced in Wales, as well as of the English newspapers that were distributed and read in Wales, reflected deeper changes in the structure of Welsh society and in the wants and expectations of its people. The geographical expansion of the press beyond the catchment areas of the printshops where they were produced was initially slow, difficult and expensive, at least until the methods of distribution were improved. But investment in roads and the building of railways during the middle of the nineteenth century, and the parallel growth of urban centres where copies could be distributed cheaply and effectively on the streets, vastly increased the potential size of the market. The growth of disposable incomes in areas of industrial employment, which enabled individuals to buy their own copies of cheap newspapers, also transformed the ways in which newspapers were consumed and ensured higher returns from sales. Such developments made newspaper enterprises more attractive to

advertisers and investors, and further improved the profit margins of the successful titles. In turn, the publishers of the more profitable newspapers were able to invest in new typesetting and printing machinery, and so to strengthen further the financial reserves of the enterprise, releasing funds which could be used to exert greater influence in the market, and, eventually, to eliminate competing titles through bankruptcy or incorporation. As the century progressed, the disparity between the fortunes of the dailies (which were able to take maximum advantage of urban expansion) and the weeklies (still associated with the smaller towns and the rural areas) increased, and the economic difference between the wealthier English and the poorer Welsh-language titles became even more pronounced. The rhythms of newspaper history, therefore, are intimately related to the ebb and flow of economic and social conditions, and to the resulting shifts in the demographic balance of rural and urban populations and of Welsh and English speakers. In this economic sense, Welsh-language journalism was *structurally* disadvantaged right from the start in relation to the English-language press.

The risks involved in establishing a new title, however, were significant in whichever language it was to be printed. In the 1820s, 57% of titles failed in the year in which they were launched - a crude but vivid indicator of the extent of the overall failure rate. Fledgeling newspaper enterprises continued to be highly vulnerable to market pressures, and around a quarter of all titles failed within one year in each decade from the 1830s onwards. These failure rates reflect either the weakness of the commercial advertising base, or the absence of an adequate readership; in either case, there was evidently more enthusiasm among editors and printers to publish newspapers than there was to support and buy them, though difficulties in distributing copies may have proved decisive in a number of instances. Yet, despite the uncertain commercial climate in which newspapers were started, the very earliest titles proved to be among the most robust. The *Cambrian*, Wales's first newspaper established in 1804, survived as a separate title until 1930, whilst the *Carmarthen Journal*, which first appeared in 1810, remains extant at the time of writing. Furthermore, forty titles which remained in circulation after the Second World War had been started in the nineteenth century. Once a title had established itself in a commercial community, and was manifestly seen to be servicing the needs of its readers, the foundations of its future success had been laid.

Little direct evidence exists of the financial calculations made by Welsh newspaper publishers, but C.P. Scott's arrangements for setting up a Welsh edition of the *Manchester Guardian* in November 1892 provide an indication of the scale of the enterprise. Acknowledging that returns on outlay would be slow, Scott was advised that by offering advertising space at very low rates, the *Guardian* could successfully compete with the Liverpool papers that circulated in north and mid Wales. 'It is in the advts.' he was told, 'that we must look for a slight profit', given that the circulation would 'never be a very great figure - perhaps 10,000 at the outside'. Scott also noted that the circulation of newspapers in Wales was substantially higher in the summer than at any other time of year. It was estimated that additional linage and telegraphing costs incurred in gathering Welsh material for the Welsh edition would add up to £8 per day, which would require an average circulation of eight thousand copies per day to break even. At the time, the *Guardian* sold no more than six hundred copies a day in Wales, whereas it was estimated that the Liverpool papers were selling four and a half thousand copies each day, mainly in north Wales. Publishing a nineteenth-century Welsh newspaper was a high risk, entrepreneurial activity, where good local knowledge and careful planning was essential if the venture was to be a success.

However, while the soundness of the commercial basis of the enterprise was paramount, the newspaper market in Wales was to a significant extent mediated by social institutions. Chief among these were religious organisations and political parties, both of which served to sustain by subsidy and other means certain sections of the Welsh newspaper press. A substantial number of titles required the stimulus of religion or politics (often inseparable categories in nineteenth-century Wales) to appear in the first place, and many others could not, and would not, have survived for any length of time without this

additional support. Both the Established Church and the Nonconformist denominations were actively involved in the setting up and the provision of long-term financial and moral aid to newspapers. They did so in order to take advantage of both of the propagandist and evangelical possibilities of the cheap popular news press, and in order to provide their communities of faith with a national focus, identity and a means of expression. The Anglican Church in Wales, fearful that entire sections of the weekly newspaper press had fallen into the hands of Nonconformists, made strenuous efforts to repair the damage to the Church. Robert Saunderson in Bala had launched *Y Gwyliedydd* in January 1823, a journal which sought explicitly to extend the interests of the Established Church among the monolingual Welsh. The magazine also contained news items from home and abroad, the first issue providing some coverage of the Greco-Turkish war. Other magazines, such as *Yr Haul* and *Yr Eglwysydd* followed in 1835 and 1847 respectively. The former, edited and largely written for thirty years by the indomitable David Owen (Brutus), raised polemical writing in Welsh to new and vitriolic heights. But Anglican newspapers fared less well. Attempts by the Dean of Bangor to secure funds from Canterbury and elsewhere to launch a new press offensive against Nonconformity led in 1881 to the establishment of *Y Llan* under the management of the Rev. Ellis Robert (Elis Wyn o Wyrfa), a title which shortly superseded two other Anglican newspapers established in previous decade, *Y Dywysogaeth* and *Amddiffynydd yr Eglwys*. Throughout the century, Anglicans found it an uphill struggle to sustain an active Anglican-supporting press in either magazine or newspaper formats. The Calvinistic Methodists, in contrast, flourished in both types of publication. Though privately owned and independently produced, the weekly newspaper *Y Goleuad*, launched in October 1869, provided consistent support to the denomination, acting as both an organiser and a forum of debate as well as a source of denominational and general news before it was finally purchased outright by the Calvinistic Methodist general council in July 1914. The Congregationalists, too, invested their energies in their own weekly title, *Y Dysgedydd*, started in 1821. Profits from the paper were used to provide pensions for retired ministers. It was out of Independent journalism that David Owen (Brutus) had appeared in the early 1830s, and it was with the Congregationalist David Rees (y Cynhyrfwr) of Llanelli, editor of *Y Diwygiwr*, that he was to sharpen his polemical writing during the following thirty years. *Y Tyst Cymreig*, published from 1867 by a Liverpool-based joint-stock company, the Welsh Newspaper Co., was among the most successful of the religious commercial ventures despite having to compete from 1881 with a rival Congregationalist newspaper, *Y Celt*, also produced by a limited company. The Baptists, who with Joseph Harris's *Seren Gomer* had been the first in the field in 1814, were also responsible for what was arguably the best -produced weekly Welsh-language newspaper title in the nineteenth-century, *Seren Cymru*. The involvement of minister from various denominations in the production of newspapers and magazines in Wales at this time may also reflect their higher levels of literacy and their access to a defined readership. The denominations also acted as a distribution agencies and as sources of advertising income for their 'own' newspapers. Such forms of engagement, moreover, demonstrate the ways in which religion, Established and Dissenting, served to underpin both small publishing businesses and the public use of the Welsh language during the nineteenth century.

Welsh-language journalism, however, operated also within the context of its English-language counterpart. The two journalisms, though distinct in style and vocabulary, and often in purpose, interrelated at a number of points: the same writers could be found writing for both Welsh and English language titles, they drew on similar sources of information, they depended on the same advertisers and distributors, were in some instances owned by the same proprietors, and sometimes even competed for the same readers. Furthermore, virtually all English-language titles carried some articles or poems in Welsh, or printed in English reviews and summaries of the contents of Welsh-language newspapers and journals. There were, however, some important differences between Welsh-language titles and those which were printed predominantly or wholly in English. In English-language newspapers, there was less motivation, and fewer opportunities, for the direct influence of the religious bodies to be exercised. This is not to say that they were free from all external pressures. On the contrary, commercial newspapers existed in an

often heightened political atmosphere, one in which journalists were seen to have important and inescapable political functions. Party leaders, however, tended to be averse to direct Party ownership of newspapers, and were positively hostile to the granting of regular Party subsidies to journalists. While wealthy individuals such as the Marquess of Bute or Lord Penrhyn or Sir Watkin Williams Wynne may have contributed to the coffers of Conservative-supporting newspapers such as the early *Western Mail* or the *Wrexham Guardian*, following the lead of Benjamin Disraeli's support for the *Press* newspaper in 1854, party leaders were on the whole suspicious of such long-term involvement, and were fearful of the financial implications of making anything more than a token gesture of support for their own backers in the press. There was also a degree of disdain felt towards the popularisers of the press, at least until the extension of the Franchise and the Redistribution of Seats in 1884-85, when a sudden expansion of the urban electorate required them to rethink their cultural hostility to the 'mass' and to devise new means of educating them politically. The press, the Tories, soon learnt, was a means of winning elections. The Liberals had long sensed this, and had, at least since the 1830s, been actively encouraging the liberal press. David Lloyd George, who began to contribute to newspapers under the pseudonym 'Brutus', redolent as it was of mid-nineteenth century iconoclastic journalism, and who had set up *Udgorn Rhyddid* with D.R. Daniel in Pwllheli in 1886, was heavily involved in the Welsh National Newspaper Co. in Caernarfon, publishers of *Y Genedl Gymreig*, *North Wales Observer* and *Y Werin*, ostensibly as the company solicitor, but in reality, as his correspondence with director W.J. Parry demonstrates, as the architect of the group's editorial policy. Lessons learnt in his involvement with the press in north Wales during and after his election to Parliament in 1890 were subsequently applied with vigorous intent to his dealings with the Fleet Street press barons. In south Wales, tensions between Liberals and Conservatives were brought into a wider public realm by means of the two main dailies, the *Western Mail* and the *South Wales Daily News*. The former was established as a Tory election sheet, and was privately funded in its early years by the Marquess of Bute before coming under the leadership of Lascelles Carr and a Board of Directors that included George Riddell (later Carr and Riddell were to purchase the *News of the World*). Its rival, owned and edited by the Duncan family until it was bought by the *Western Mail* in 1928, and edited in its late nineteenth-century heyday by David Davies, fought a long campaign during and between elections against Tory influence in the region. But they did so as Liberals, not as journalists in the pay of the Liberal Party. And while the *South Wales Daily News* may have been seen by miners' leader Thomas Halliday in 1874 as 'the lickspittle of the masters', the independence of the press from overt political control in both political camps was jealously guarded. Party funds were in the main offered only for electoral advertising, as sanctioned by the Corrupt and Legal Practices Act of 1883.

The daily press, first launched in Swansea in 1861 with the *Cambria Daily Leader*, created a new and less religiously or politically fragmented newspaper readership, particularly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The news values of the New Journalism were embraced both by the *Western Mail* and its rival, the *South Wales Daily News*. Aiming at a comprehensive coverage of sport and other forms of entertainment as well as of political and institutional affairs, the journalists of the *Western Mail*, under the skilful tutelage of Lascelles Carr and the Welsh-speaking editor, William Davies, steered the paper away from its local origins, with a circulation of some 13,000 in 1874, to the lively south Wales daily which enjoyed a circulation of nearer to 100,000 by the beginning of the First World War. Carr, like a number of other key innovators in Welsh journalism such as Robert Saunderson in Bala and John Gibson in Aberystwyth, had been born and trained in England, and brought English experience to bear on the fledgeling industry in Wales. Carr brought not only his sub-editing and managerial skills to Cardiff in the early 1870s, but injected also his Conservative politics and his democratic instincts into the ethos of the new morning newspaper. He, more than the paper's covert proprietor, the Marquess of Bute, was the talent which moulded the paper's heady if unorthodox mixture of Tory principles and a commitment to a 'national' coverage of Welsh affairs.

The two Cardiff-based morning papers not only sought to extend their readerships among existing newspaper-reading social groups, but they also consciously targeted new sectors of the market. Whilst the *South Wales Daily News* introduced a regular children's column and 'A woman's letter to women - by a Lady Journalist', the *Western Mail* issued in the 1890s an entire, eight-paged weekly 'Ladies' Own Supplement', edited, the readers were assured, 'by a Lady for Ladies' In marketing terms, the woman reader was regarded as the chief means whereby the paper would find its way into the private sphere of the home on a regular basis, and thus its purchase and consumption would be more likely to become a habit which would span the generations. The copiously illustrated women's supplement of the *Western Mail* contained pages of fashion, cookery, shopping, gardening, marriage guidance, medical and parenting advice, and fiction. Class distinctions, however, were as evident here as in any other part of the paper, for while some women were intended by the editor to read the *Western Mail* for its women's pages, and to be charmed by their impressive and attractively-packaged range of middle-class consumer goods, others were to be drawn by its 'servant girls wanted' columns, which advertised low-paid jobs for female domestic servants. Other women's pages appeared in the *South Wales Echo* and the *South Wales Radical and Nonconformist* at about this time, the latter written by Catherine Pritchard (Buddug), a leading member of the Bardic Order, and a prolific writer in both English and Welsh. The closest Welsh-language journalism came to addressing the perceived needs of this section of the readership was in the monthly journal *Y Gymraes*, edited by Evan Jones (Ieuan Gwynedd) in Cardiff in 1850-51. The weekly newspaper *Seren Cymru*, in its first issue published on 13 December 1856, had also acknowledged the neglect of women and women's concerns in Welsh journalism, and urged its female readers, with some success, to become regular correspondents.

There were no Welsh-language equivalents to such popular dailies as the *Western Mail* and the *South Wales Daily News*, although the socialist writer J.R. Derfel had spelt out as early as 1864 the means whereby such a newspaper might be launched and sustained. Neither was there much enthusiasm for the sport and scandal formulae of the New Journalism. 'Who would turn to a Welsh paper for an account of the Derby?', W. Eilir Evans wondered sarcastically in 1907. There are two reasons for the relative absence of 'popular' items in the Welsh-language press. One, without doubt, is cultural, a reflection of the extent to which the social values of Welsh Nonconformity had infiltrated the editorial mindset, and shaped the expectations of the readers, let alone controlled the publishers' purse-strings. 'Myfenydd', writing in *Y Diwygiwr* in 1874 excoriated the English-language newspaper press for 'sowing the seeds of atheism and free-thought', while praising the Welsh-language press for protecting his 'beloved nation' from being bewitched by the siren songs of dangerously alien ideas. In the same vein, John Herbert Jones described his work for *Yr Herald Cymraeg* as a means of defending 'the civilization and culture of Wales in the face of the large cities'. But another, equally compelling, reason for avoiding sport in particular was that it was expensive news to gather first-hand, and there was no guarantee that the readership, especially in rural areas, would be remotely interested in cricket or football in any case. Furthermore, buying reports second-hand from the news-agencies, and translating them into Welsh, was unlikely to make attractive reading. But it would be misleading to give the impression that Welsh-language newspapers did not print their share of the salacious. Selections from court proceedings, and translations of police news, provided, if only in surreptitious form, a window onto a far less ordered world of drunkenness, sexuality and violence. A case might even be made for the functional significance of such reports in Welsh Nonconformist newspapers, as a reminder to the reader of the presence of sin, and of the shameful consequences of giving in to temptation. Less generously, such reports might also have confirmed, strengthened even, the righteousness of the virtuous by allowing them to experience, safely and vicariously, the hell of other people's lives.

If Welsh-language weekly news journalism was in no position to compete on equal terms with its better resourced English-language near neighbour, it did, nevertheless, develop a style and a mix of content that was not noticeably different, at least in format. Roger Edwards (1811-1886), whose

pioneering *Cronicl yr Oes* was published in Mold from 1835 and 1839, was the first to pick up the baton dropped by Gomer in 1815 by introducing political and social issues into religious news journalism, a development which was shortly emulated by Hugh Hughes's *Y Papur Newydd Cymraeg* in Caernarfon and Josiah Thomas Jones's *Y Gwron Cymreig* in Merthyr, all made possible by the reduction of the Stamp Duty in 1836. But it was the early commercial success of Gwilym Hiraethog's *Amserau* from 1843 that made Welsh-language newspapers a practical possibility, and which persuaded Thomas Gee of the feasibility of launching *Baner Cymru* in 1857. By the 1880s, Gee and his editors had fashioned for *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* a news format every bit as formulaic, structured and cohesive as that of the *Western Mail*, a paper which also sought a national coverage for the whole of Wales. Though not formally edited by its prolific proprietor, *Y Faner* (as it was familiarly known) was until his death in 1898 closely associated with Gee's own public persona and political ambitions.

One of the most frustrating aspects of reading nineteenth century newspapers today is that so many of those who contributed to that transformation remain unknown to us. Few Welsh writers are acknowledged in by-lines or signed articles. The anonymity of writers was carefully preserved, at least until the 1890s, in order to help ensure equally the uniformity of the text and the privacy of the author. Signature, all too often, was regarded as a sign of personal vanity. Even readers' letters were signed pseudonymously, and many correspondents graced their printed missives with their bardic names. Some, such as 'Brutus', were drawn from classical texts, whilst others, such as 'Vulcan' might denote an occupation. And where 'Y Cynhyrfwr' (the agitator) or 'ap Ffarmwr' (son of the farmer, used by J.O.Jones during the Anglesey agricultural labourers' agitation) were more vividly descriptive, others, like 'Cymro Tawel' (the quiet Welshman), the *nom-de-plume* of the congenitally troublesome radical, John Thomas Morgan of Merthyr, were ironic. But even when they can be identified, little is known about the great majority of these writers. The legions of nineteenth-century Welsh newspaper writers must continue to wait for their historians. Such much-needed studies of Welsh writing might usefully begin with surveys and evaluations of serialised fiction in Welsh periodicals and newspapers. Roger Edwards, again, was among the first in the field with his serialisation of *Y Tri Brawd a'u Teuluoedd* in the monthly magazine *Y Drysorfa* in 1866-67, and in 1879 and 1880 Daniel Owen's *Y Dreflan* and *Rhys Lewis* were also serialised in the same publication. By 1890, Owen's work was being printed in serial form in the weekly newspaper *Y Cymro*. In Aberdare, the publishers of the weekly newspaper *Y Gweithiwr Cymreig* helped ensure the success of its launch in January 1885 by printing the first instalment of a novel by the journalist and Welsh-language activist, Beriah Gwynfe Evans. Evans also published his fiction in the Caernarfon weeklies *Y Werin* and *Y Genedl Gymreig* in the early 1890s, and arranged the translation of Charles Reade's popular novel *Never Too Late to Mend* for the latter in December 1890. Annie Harriet Hughes (Gwyneth Vaughan) translated other novels for serialisation in Welsh-language weeklies, including works by Henry Drummond, as well as writing prolifically under her own name. Samuel Evans, the editor of *Seren Cymru* had sensed as early as 1856 that Welsh women were talented authors, and was convinced that among such writers as Elen Egryn, Mair Gwynedd, Marged Aberteifi, Eliza Caerfyrddin and Mrs Llewelyn Llangynydd a 'Welsh Hannah Moore or Harriet Beecher Stowe' could be teased out of obscurity by the weekly press.

The overall effects of newspapers on social behaviour was a matter that exercised a number of observers in nineteenth-century Wales. They had witnessed, if not its birth in 1804, then certainly the early growth of this native-born press, and had seen with their own eyes its expansion and proliferation. Many were fascinated by this new phenomenon, and argued amongst themselves in debating societies, reading rooms and taverns about its possible influence. William Davies and Evan Lloyd Jones jointly won the essay prize at the Cardiff Eisteddfod of 1883 for their account of 'The Periodical Literature of Wales during the present century', whilst others, such as John Davies (Gwynedd) inquired into the condition of 'Welsh newspaper literature' ('Llenyddiaeth Newyddiadurol Cymru') in *Y Traethodydd* in 1884, as did T.M.Jones in *Llenyddiaeth Fy Ngwlad*, published in 1893. Welsh newspapers, then, were appreciated

critically by their contemporaries as a form of literature, and were the active subjects of discussion as well as passive objects to be read.

However, despite the existence of such material, an enduring problem with newspaper research, that is to say research about newspapers and their conduct, is that so little extraneous evidence has survived the 'presentist' mentality of so many journalists in the past. Letters, reports and other documents and ledgers were often destroyed in the belief that the only thing worth preserving for posterity was the newspaper itself, the distillation of all the work that had contributed to its making. Consequently, much of the evidence must be drawn from copies of newspapers themselves. This presents historians with a number of additional difficulties. One is that evidence drawn from the pages of newspapers about the newspaper itself was constructed explicitly and with much deliberation by proprietors, editors and correspondents. This naturally shapes the ways historians 'read', and make use of, the newspaper press. But another difficulty for researchers is the huge volume of printed material, and the often arbitrary ways in which it is accessed. The relatively recent advent of digitized newspaper text opens up new possibilities for research, but it also contains some dangers. On the positive side, word searches on personal and place names, institutions, organizations and so forth will not only make the accessing of information easier and quicker, but will also produce new linkages through time and geographical locations, and thus will produce new forms of knowledge. I can see enormous potential, for example, for the systematic study of language change, or the reconstruction of individual lives and organizational processes. There may, however, be some significant drawbacks. First is the danger that readers will lose sight of the context, particularly at the level of the page. The serendipitous nature of reading general, juxtaposed, material, not only replicates the ways in which the text was originally intended to be read, but also informs the historian's understanding of the particular object of attention. Forms of digitised access will need to be sensitive to the general as well as to the particular. Secondly, digitization is an expensive option. My main concern is that its application should not lead to the creation of a hierarchy, with digitized texts at the top, and others deemed too troublesome or marginal left at the bottom in their paper and/or microfilm forms. I'm particularly exercised by the fact that, should this be so, the many Welsh language titles, or those with short runs, will be excluded, with all its implications for future breakthroughs in Welsh newspaper research in either language.

At the present moment, research into Welsh newspapers remains largely undeveloped. Yet the volume of newspaper material produced in Wales during the past two centuries, the synergies between the two languages, and the significant political and economic dimensions of newspaper history, not to speak of the biographical information and the literary output that remain properly to be uncovered in its pages, demands that newspapers receive more intensive historical attention. Digitisation, if applied to the newspapers of Wales, will, despite my reservations, no doubt provide some extremely helpful tools to facilitate and possibly to transform that research process. Much has been said in recent years about media and the construction of national identities, some of it, I regret to say, by myself. Increasingly, however, I am inclining to the view that what really needs to be researched is the identity in Wales of print itself. And that will take us beyond the specificities of newspapers to embrace the peculiar characteristics of Welsh print culture as a whole.