WALES, THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE NEW BRITISH HISTORY

In the 1920s and 1930s Lewis Namier and Herbert Butterfield punctured the traditional Whig pieties of English historical narrative.[1] Not only were notions of inevitable progress, institutional evolution or political high-mindedness soon beyond repair, in the longer run constitutional history died as an acceptable vehicle for explaining the English past. Nevertheless, there was one curious survival from the old paradigm. Anglocentricity continued to thrive until the mid-1970s, when its insidious effects were exposed by John Pocock. In an influential and uplifting set of articles,[2] Pocock showed how English history could not really be explained without reference to the Atlantic archipelago of which England was, although obviously the dominant part, a part nonetheless. Pocock quite deliberately proselytized on behalf of what has come to be known as 'the new British history', and one wonders if this evangelism – regardless of Pocock's caveats - created unrealistic expectations of what new British historians might deliver. After all, many happenings and processes that occurred within the British Isles lacked a transnational or 'British' dimension. Thus, while new British history was a welcome supplement to the parochialism of self-enclosed national history, it was far from being an adequate substitute for traditional understandings of the past within each of the four nations. Furthermore, while it was obviously important to correct the distortions of arrogant and unthinking 'anglocentricity', England, necessarily, remained central to the story. Relations among the peripheries themselves –

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[1] H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, 1931); L. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London, 1929); Namier, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (London, 1930).
[2] J.G.A. Pocock, 'British history: a plea for a new subject', *Journal of Modern History* 47 (1975), 601-21; Pocock, 'The limits and divisions of British history: in search of the unknown subject', *American Historical Review* 87 (1982), 311-36; and now, Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands: essays in British history* (Cambridge, 2005).

between Scotland and Ireland, say, or Ireland and Wales – were brought onto the historian's agenda for the first time, but were unlikely to usurp the central historical preoccupations of England's relations with the rest of the British Isles. That England looms larger than Scotland, Ireland and Wales in the history of 'these islands' seems a matter of understandable, but misguided, regret in certain quarters.

Lopsidedness, indeed, is an inevitable feature of the 'new British history'. This becomes apparent when one considers the terms which historians routinely deploy as rough-and-ready synonyms for 'the new British history'. 'Three kingdoms'[3] history, the history of the interactions of the kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland, is – or should be - a very different affair from 'four nations' history.[4] The three kingdoms terminology has become common in the historiography of the early modern period. The breakdown of the Stuart state in the mid seventeenth century used to be described as the English Civil War, but is now known as the War of the Three Kingdoms[5], or sometimes the British Wars of Religion. The three kingdoms terminology, derived from H.G. Koenigsberger's comparative study of early modern 'composite states', that is agglomerations of two or more monarchies – each possessing its own regnal institutions - held by single dynasties, seemed very apposite to the situation of the Stuart dominions in the seventeenth century.[6] The troubles of the mid-seventeenth century seemed to have resulted from the failures of Charles I to rule with sufficient sensitivity a set of several kingdoms - the

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[3] See e.g. J. Ohlmeyer, *Civil War and Restoration in the Three Stuart Kingdoms: the career of Randal MacDonnell, marquis of Antrim, 1609-83* (Cambridge, 1993); J. Morrill, 'Three kingdoms and one commonwealth? The enigma of mid seventeenth century Britain and Ireland', in A. Grant and K. Stringer (eds), *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (London, 1995); J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Atlantic Archipelago and the War of the Three Kingdoms', in B. Bradshaw and J. Morrill (eds), *The British Problem c.1534-1707* (London, 1996).
[4] H. Kearney, *The British Isles: a history of four nations* (1989: 2nd edn., Cambridge, 2006).
[5] The first to do so – predating Pocock – was J.C. Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London, 1966), ch. 4, 'The War of the Three Kingdoms'. See also J. Morrill, 'The War(s) of the Three Kingdoms', in G. Burgess (ed.), *The New British History: founding a modern state 1603-1715* (London, 1999).
[6] See e.g. H.G. Koenigsberger, 'Composite states, representative institutions and the American Revolution', *Historical Research* 62 (1989), 135-53.

kingdom of England, with its own parliament and church; the kingdom of Ireland, which was subordinate to England, yet had its own parliament and established Anglican-style church; and the kingdom of Scotland, which was quite independent of England, happening simply to share the same monarch, and which had not only its own parliament, but also a very different kind of Protestant church and legal system from England and its dependent kingdom of Ireland. The inability of Charles I to manage the endemic frictions within this loose ensemble of kingdoms contributed to the collapse of the Stuart polity. Wales, quite rightly, does not enjoy equal billing with the three kingdoms in this historiography. While the Welsh have cut a prominent figure in the new British history of the medieval era – most notably in the brilliant pioneering work of the late Sir Rees Davies[7] – it has not figured so prominently in the study of the early modern era. By the seventeenth century, the principality of Wales – incorporated with England by the English Acts of Union of 1536 and 1543 - did not possess the institutional apparatus or the constitutional standing to match the trouble-making capacities of either Scotland or Ireland. Wales was, to be sure, caught up in the Civil Wars, but it was not a principal actor. By the same token, while there was a fascinating Welsh dimension to the Jacobite movement of the early eighteenth century, it did not possess the salience – whether political, military or ecclesiastical - of Scottish or Irish involvement with Jacobitism.[8] Of course, Wales in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had its own political history, a story which is worth telling in its own right as part of Welsh history, or, at the constituency level, as an exotic local sub-genre of parliamentary history; but the Welsh impact on the wider British world was predominantly cultural.

The essay which follows will reflect this imbalance, and will concentrate on the cultural history and historiography of Welsh interactions with the rest of the British world during the age

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[7] R.R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093-1343* (Oxford, 2000).
[8] P.D.G. Thomas, 'Jacobitism in Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1 (1960-2), 279-300; P. Jenkins, 'Jacobites and Freemasons in Eighteenth-Century Wales', *Welsh History Review* 9 (1979), 391-406.

of Enlightenment, defined very broadly as the period between the late seventeenth and the early nineteenth century. Yet this was an era which also witnessed both the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707 and the British-Irish Union of 1800-1, the loss of the first British Empire in North America and the rise of a very different imperial project on the Indian sub-continent. As far as practical politics were concerned, Wales was a marginal issue in the larger saga of British integration and disintegration, and has played a proportionately minor role in the new historiography of British state formation and imperial reconstruction.[9] Nevertheless, in the realm of political meaning, the Welsh and their heritage occupied a much more central position. The ethnonym 'Britons', which came to refer to the people of the United Kingdom of Great Britain as a whole, already existed as a term of Welsh self-description. After all, who were the true 'Britons' if not the Welsh themselves, the descendants of the ancient Britons driven west into the mountain fastness of Wales by the arrival on these shores of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes? The Welsh polymath Edward Lhuyd did not 'profess to be an Englishman, but an old Briton.'[10] By the same token, the Society of Ancient Britons was a London Welsh organization, as was the later Society of Cymmrodorion ('Aborigines'), whose name alluded to the first inhabitants of Britain, the forebears of the Welsh.[11] Evan Evans, the Anglican cleric and literary scholar, described medieval Welsh as 'the ancient British language'.[12] The question of Britishness in the eighteenth century was not simply a matter of Anglo-Scottish reconciliation post-1707 or of naturalizing the Hanoverian monarchy, it also involved defining the new British nation, a nation whose name already belonged to the ancestors of the Welsh.

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[9] Wales is largely peripheral in the two classic studies of imperial transformation C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (Harlow, 1989); P.J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India and America, c. 1750-1783* (Oxford, 2005).
[10] Quoted in S. Piggott, *William Stukeley* (Oxford, 1950), p. 8.
[11] G.H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales 1642-1780* (1987: Oxford pbk, 1993), p. 390.
[12] Evan Evans, *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* (London, 1764), p. 153.

Despite the attention focused on the making of Britain since the appearance of Linda Colley's *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (1992), historians have still to investigate in a comprehensive way the multiple meanings of the term 'Briton' in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, it has become apparent that although the ancient Britons were acknowledged as the ancestors of the Welsh, their associations were not tied exclusively to Wales.[13] In particular, there was another story to be told about the Britons, which was predominantly English and ecclesiastical. The ancient British were considered, by certain antiquaries at least, to be the founders of English institutions, if not necessarily the ethnic forebears of the English nation, who were more commonly (though not universally) identified as the Anglo-Saxons. More particularly, early modern Anglican apologists commonly celebrated the pre-Saxon era of the Church of England – that is, the primitive centuries of the ancient British church - as a golden age of uncorrupted non-Roman, proto-Protestant purity; a purity, of course, which the Reformation had providentially restored. The ancient British past was the rock on which was founded the historical claim to an Anglican jurisdiction independent of Rome. Throughout the period – from William Lloyd of St. Asaph in the late seventeenth century to Thomas Burgess of St. David's in the early nineteenth century[14] – holders of Welsh sees within the Church of England played a prominent role in championing the ancient British contribution to the Anglican tradition.

The most significant controversy about the meaning of Britishness during the eighteenth century broke out in the early 1760s. At his accession in 1760 George III announced: 'I glory

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[13] See especially J. Smyth, '"Like amphibious animals": Irish Protestants, ancient Britons, 1691-1707', *Historical Journal* 36 (1993), 785-97; Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom 1660-1800* (Harlow, 2001), p. xii.

[14] William Lloyd, *An historical account of church-government as it was in Great-Britain and Ireland when they first received the Christian religion* (London, 1684); Thomas Burgess, *Christ and not St. Peter, the rock of the Christian church; and St. Paul the founder of the church in Britain* (Carmarthen, 1812); Burgess, *Tracts on the origin and independence of the ancient British church* (2nd edn., London, 1815)

in the name of Briton'.[15] By this the new king
meant that, whereas his Hanoverian predecessors,
George I and George II, had been German princes
by birth and upbringing, who merely happened to
find themselves later in their lives at the helm
of the British monarchy and, as a consequence,
remained fixated upon the Electorate of Hanover
and its interests, he, George III, was British
born and bred, and would have Britain and its
Empire at the top of his priorities. However,
George III, whose mentor was the Scots
politician, the unfortunately named John *Stuart*,
3rd Earl of Bute, was understood, or deliberately
misunderstood, in certain quarters, to be
proclaiming a partiality towards Scots (and, by
extension, crypto-Jacobites). Britishness – not
least in John Wilkes's magazine, the *North Briton*
- was central to the vicious Scotophobic rhetoric
and iconography which accompanied the topsy-turvy
political infighting of the 1760s.[16] Tobias
Smollett, the Scots editor of the pro-government
magazine, the *Briton*, followed up his
journalistic endeavours on behalf of Bute with an
epistolary novel, *The Expedition of Humphry
Clinker* (1771), the most sustained, imaginative
exploration of Britishness to appear during the
eighteenth century. Smollett constructed his
story around a tour of England and Scotland by a
set of neutral observers, a Welsh squire, Matthew
Bramble, and his family, a device which enabled
him to explore misunderstandings which the
English held about the Scots. Effective use of
various epistolary personae within this Welsh
family and the cunning transfer of traditional
Scottish epithets onto the character of a non-
Scot, the indigent, bare-bottomed Humphry Clinker
himself,[17] enabled the author to achieve a measure
of – apparently – objective distance from the
heat of current Anglo-Scottish frictions. In the
course of the tour it turns out that virtue,
modesty and fortitude are generally to be found
in the provinces of Britain, among the Welsh and
Scots especially, while the Welsh visitors find

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[15] *His Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament On
Tuesday the Eighteenth Day of November, 1760* (London, 1760), p. 1
[16] J. Brewer, 'The Misfortunes of Lord Bute', *Historical Journal* 16
(1973), 3-43; A. Rounce, '"Stuarts without End": Wilkes, Churchill,
and Anti-Scottishness', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29, 3 (2005), 20-43.
[17] E. Rothstein, 'Scotophilia and Humphry Clinker: the politics of
beggary, bugs and buttocks', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 52
(1982), 63-78.

the urban centres of southern England, such as fashionable Bath and London, to be wens of inquity and luxury. The message could not be clearer: the moral foundations of Britain's greatness did not – indeed, could not - rest on English manners alone, regardless of the superior ethnic slurs which came so easily to the pens of the Wilkesite Scotophobes. In addition, Smollett explored associations with the ancient British past. Smollett's home town, Dumbarton (or, significantly, Dun-britton), which featured on the Brambles' itinerary, had once been the seat of the ancient British kingdom of Strathclyde. Identifying so many affinities with Wales in the culture of Dunbartonshire, Smollett's Welsh squire proclaimed that the Lowlanders of the district were 'the descendants of the Britons' (while the Gaelic language of the Highlanders, of course, suggested to the travellers yet another connection between the Scots and the Welsh).[18] If British virtue was not synonymous with the customs of the English nation, then nor was it entirely synonymous with Wales either, for the visit to Dumbarton served as a reminder of the Britons' ancient ties with Scotland as well as with Wales.

However, it is easy to overemphasise the British Problem. Notwithstanding the preoccupations of today's historians – and the new British historians in particular - with matters of identity, nationality and ethnicity, these were of secondary importance to the literati of the British Enlightenment. As Geraint H. Jenkins has shown so persuasively, the intellectual leaders of eighteenth-century Wales complacently mouthed the well-worn platitudes about the liberties of free-born Englishmen, to which Welshmen were happily entitled by a Union which went unquestioned.[19] Even the Welsh Jacobitism of the early eighteenth century – the preserve of an anglicized squirearchy - was untinged, as P.D.G. Thomas has shown, 'with any Welsh national aspirations'.[20] It was only in 1776, as Jenkins notes, that the Welsh lexicographer, John Walters, coined the word

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[18] Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771: Oxford, 1984), pp. 238, 240, 247-8.
[19] Jenkins, *Foundations of Modern Wales*, p. 300.
[20] P.D.G. Thomas, *Politics in Eighteenth-century Wales* (Cardiff, 1998), p. 133.

gwladgarwch for patriotism, while *cenedligrwydd* (nationality) only entered Welsh in 1798.[21] Nor was such reticence confined to Welsh speakers. A similar story could be told about the English vocabulary of nationhood.[22] Popular xenophobia, national resentments, ethnic slurs and an interest in national origins and folklore coexisted throughout the age of Enlightenment with concepts of ethnicity, race and nationhood which were, perhaps fortunately, underdefined and underimagined. The nation – for long one of the central uncontested building blocks of historical practice - turns out to be much less robust than historians have traditionally assumed.

The concept of Enlightenment itself has been substantially reconfigured over the past two or three decades. No longer does the historical understanding of Enlightenment resemble the crude caricature of a secular, rationalist 'Enlightenment Project'. *The Enlightenment in national context* (1981), a richly suggestive collection of essays edited by Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich,[23] opened up the variegated, and far from derivative, nature of Enlightenment beyond its francophone core. There were, it transpires, distinct zones of Enlightenment, with the enlightened *philosophes* of Catholic Europe much more polemically engaged in battling ecclesiastical authority than their Protestant counterparts in northern Europe whose commitments were more primarily academic. The moral philosophers, social theorists and political economists of Protestant Europe largely devoted their energies to working out the implications of the modern system of natural jurisprudence inaugurated in the seventeenth century by Grotius and Pufendorf. In Protestant Europe Enlightenment occurred not outside, or indeed in opposition to, the churches, but inside the churches and the universities which had been their seminaries. The mainstream of the Enlightenment, in Protestant Europe at least, ran within confessional traditions. There were really, it turns out, two

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[21] G. H. Jenkins, *Facts, fantasy and fiction: the historical vision of Iolo Morganwg* (Aberystwyth, 1997), p. 15.
[22] R. Williams, *Keywords* (1976: London, 1983), p. 213; C. Kidd, 'Identity before Identities: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Historian', in J. Rudolph (ed.), *History and Nation* (Lewisburg PA, 2006).
[23] R. Porter and M. Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981).

distinct strains of Enlightenment, a very loose grouping of religiously heterodox, politically radical and counter-cultural movements,[24] and a dominant moderate Enlightenment, found within the churches, which attempted to reconcile reason and Biblical revelation under the auspices of an updated rational Christianity.[25] Traditionalists were faced not only with radical critics of religion (of various sorts), but also by religious modernizers who wanted to use the tools of science, philosophy and history the better to bolster Christianity against its more uncompromising critics. As often as not, it turns out, the tensions within Enlightenment, in Britain as elsewhere in northern Europe, were between different readings of scripture, or between scripture and inherited confessional tradition, rather than between religion and a wholly secular philosophy. Deism has no more purchase than Rational Dissent on the new historiography of the Enlightenment.[26] It is now not only much harder to draw hard-and-fast lines between Enlightenment and its unenlightened or counter-enlightenment critics, but it is also more difficult to detach the Enlightenment from longer continuities in intellectual and cultural history. As Pocock has shown in his stunning and celebrated tour of the multiverse of Edward Gibbon,[27] the Enlightenment contained several overlapping universes of learning, not only the familiar worlds of anticlerical heterodoxy and social theory, but also the less visited worlds of classical scholarship, antiquarian erudition and orientalist learning. Nor is the Enlightenment any longer seen as the antithesis of romanticism, though R.J.W. Evans in his pioneering essay on the Welsh Enlightenment, notes how difficult it is to separate strands of Enlightenment from an anti-Enlightenment and from Romanticism.[28] It now seems inappropriate to

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[24] J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2000).
[25] R. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Princeton and Edinburgh, 1985); B. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998); J. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible* (Princeton, 2005).
[26] See e.g. K. Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Dissent: Rational Religion in Eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996).
[27] J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and religion* (4 vols. [thus far], Cambridge, 1999-2005)
[28] R.J.W. Evans, 'Was there a Welsh Enlightenment?' in R.R. Davies and G.H. Jenkins (eds.), *From medieval to modern Wales: historical essays*

pigeonhole eighteenth-century fascinations with ancient British antiquities as forms of 'proto-romanticism', when historians are now much more alert to the ways in which these apparently proleptic interests were in fact reflections of the Enlightenment's own agenda.

Not only has religion been rehabilitated within a redefined Enlightenment, the mainstream of eighteenth-century British historiography has also taken a religious turn. Although J.C.D. Clark's depiction of eighteenth-century England as a confessional state caused a great furore when it appeared in the mid-1980s,[29] historians have, regardless of their views of Clark's work, begun to pay closer attention to the religious issues which exercised contemporaries and to plot the hitherto neglected connections between the sacred and the supposedly profane. It is striking, for example, how often matters which seem at first sight to concern ethnicity, such as the ancient Celtic past, turn out to have a religious, or subversively irreligious, significance.[30] The dominant antiquarian themes of the Welsh Enlightenment were not, it transpires, intimations of Welsh nationhood by way of a recovery of a glorious ancient Welsh past (though that aspiration was present in some measure), so much as arguments about the origins of religious doctrines and institutions. Generally, what tended to enthuse and to puzzle contemporaries were, as often as not, ecclesiastical questions. How authentically Christian was the orthodox Trinitarian Christianity of the establishment, and of conventional Dissent? What was the natural religion of mankind, and how far had it been corrupted by the cynical machinations of self-interested priestcraft? Where did true ecclesiastical authority reside, if anywhere? These were the sorts of questions which the literati of the British Enlightenment asked themselves, and to which the ancient Celtic past seemed to provide some answers.

The literati who asked such questions constituted a very miscellaneous group. Some were Welsh, some English-born and resident in Wales,

in honour of Kenneth O. Morgan and Ralph A. Griffiths (Cardiff, 2004), p. 156.
[29] J.C.D. Clark, English Society 1688-1832 (Cambridge, 1985).
[30] Cf. J. Champion, 'John Toland, the Druids and the Politics of Celtic scholarship', Irish Historical Studies 32 (2001), 321-42.

some Welsh-born but living in England or of Welsh descent and based in London; others were from outside the principality altogether, but engaged in debates which were central to Welsh culture. Indeed, one of the problems of Welsh intellectual history in the age of Enlightenment, though also one of its most fascinating features, concerns the difficulty of defining its scope. Unlike Enlightenment Scotland, which had five universities, two distinct colleges of higher learning in Aberdeen alone, Wales at this period had no universities of its own – nor any national library, museum or learned society - which might lend a definitive institutional backbone to the intellectual and cultural history of Wales. Hence the significance of the otherwise informal antiquarian network which developed around the Morris brothers of Anglesey, out of which, through the efforts of the London-based brother, Richard Morris, and the visits to the capital of Lewis Morris, sprang the Society of Cymmrodorion.[31] Yet the blurred edges of Anglo-Welsh culture are a topic of some fascination in their own right, and it is worth noting that the national integrity of the Welsh intelligentsia does not seem to have been an issue for eighteenth-century contemporaries. The leading Welsh figure of the early Enlightenment, the scientist and linguist, Edward Lhuyd, was born and raised over the English border in Shropshire, and spent his career in Oxford as a curator of the museum. Oxford - Jesus College, in particular – played an important part in Welsh higher education.[32]

Arguably, the leading citadels of intellectual leadership in Wales were its bishoprics. However offensive their preferment was to the sensibilities of Welsh-speaking Wales, the 'Esgyb-Eingl' (or English-born holders of Welsh sees), such as Benjamin Hoadly, bishop of Bangor from 1716 to 1721, and Richard Watson, bishop of Llandaff from 1782, were major figures within the British Enlightenment. Hoadly's explosive sermon of 1717, *The nature of the kingdom, or church, of Christ*, provoked a major crisis in Anglican politics, which was known as

[31] J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), p. 304; P. Morgan, *A New History of Wales: The Eighteenth-century Renaissance* (Llandybie, 1981), pp. 58-61.
[32] Evans, 'Welsh Enlightenment', p. 154.

the Bangorian controversy.[33] Hoadly, viewed by some of his critics as a viper within the bosom of the establishment, had adopted an enlightened Christianity which questioned how much authority the church – an essentially spiritual institution – ought to enjoy. Nevertheless, this subversive notoriety did not prevent his ascent through the plum bishoprics of the Church; Hereford, Salisbury and Winchester. Watson too promoted an enlightened Anglicanism, though of a more sober kind. Watson, whose preferred fields of action were Cambridge and his estate in Westmorland rather than his diocese, won renown in the field of chemistry, practised agricultural improvement (in Westmorland) and also wrote in defence of a rational Christianity against two very different forms of enlightened challenge, the subtly offensive insinuations of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and the incisive thrusts of Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*. The established Church also nurtured within its cathedrals a measure of political radicalism - an outspoken brand of politics that was, surprisingly perhaps, tinged with straightforward Anglican orthodoxy and cosy *ancien régime* nepotism. Jonathan Shipley, the bishop of St. Asaph, supported the cause of the Americans during the 1770s, and in the following decade his son, William Davies Shipley, the dean as well as the chancellor of St. Asaph and, additionally, the holder of various other benefices in the diocese, was to be prosecuted for seditious libel. Ironically, the offence for which the younger Shipley was tried in 1784 was promoting the republication in Wales of an anonymous pamphlet calling for reform – though, happily, of the political rather than the ecclesiastical establishment. By a further irony, indeed, the pamphlet's author, William Jones, the orientalist, was himself a part of the Shipley connexion, marrying the Dean's sister, Anna Maria Shipley, in 1783.[34]

Enlightenment also occurred within the world of Dissent, and a Welsh expatriate was one of the leading promoters of a spare kind of enlightened Protestantism stripped down to its essential

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[33] Andrew Starkie, *The Church of England and the Bangorian Controversy, 1716-1721* (Woodbridge, 2007).
[34] Anthony Page, 'The Dean of St. Asaph's Trial: Libel and Politics in the 1780s', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (2009), 21-35.

doctrines. Richard Price, the radical Dissenting minister and champion of political democracy, was born in the parish of Llangeinor in Glamorgan and educated at Samuel Jones's academy in Carmarthenshire, but attained global celebrity – and a certain notoriety - in London. Price's message was a universal one. It is not without significance that Price's famous *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789), failed, as R.J.W. Evans pointedly notes, to mention his own homeland of Wales.[35] Similarly universal in his message was another London Welshman, David Williams, the educational theorist and translator of Voltaire, who was born near Caerphilly and also educated in the Carmarthenshire academy. However, the cosmopolitan Williams also went on to produce a history of Monmouthshire. Being an expatriate, it seems, did not entirely preclude an interest in Welsh antiquities; sometimes, indeed, exile produced a heightened interest in the native principality left behind. Prys Morgan has drawn attention to the role of the Gwyneddigion - the London Welsh organisation- including, most obviously, Edward Williams (known by his bardic name Iolo Morganwg) and William Owen Pughe, in furthering the revival of medieval Welsh literature and culture.[36] After all, the first meeting of the Gorsedd of Welsh bards – later a vital component of the National Eisteddfod - occurred not in Wales itself, but at Primrose Hill in London on 21 June 1792. More remote from Welsh origins, the founder of Indo-European linguistics, the eminent jurist and orientalist Sir William Jones, was born in London, but came of Welsh descent (his father, William, a mathematician of some renown, having been born in Anglesey).[37] However, as a barrister on the Welsh circuit between 1775 and 1783 the younger Jones renewed his connection with his homeland. Indeed, we have already noticed Jones's marriage to the daughter of the bishop of St. Asaph and the controversial reception in Wales of his reformist tract, *The Principles of*

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[35] Evans, 'Welsh Enlightenment', p. 155. Price even described himself as 'a native of England': see W.B. Peach and D.O. Thomas (eds.) *The Correspondence of Richard Price* (3 vols., Durham N.C. and Cardiff, 1983-94), II, p. 191.
[36] Morgan, *Eighteenth-century Renaissance*, p. 82. For Iolo, see P. Morgan, *Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff, 1975); G.H. Jenkins (ed.), *A Rattleskull Genius: the many faces of Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff, 2005).
[37] Jenkins, *Foundations*, p. 239.

Government, in a Dialogue between a Scholar and a Peasant (1782). In 1770, moreover, Jones had made plans, which ultimately proved abortive, to compose an epic poem on the origins of Britain, 'Britain Discovered', and then in 1778 he had further affirmed his ancestral loyalties by joining the Society of Cymmrodorion.[38] Yet, notwithstanding his Cambro-British interests and his prodigious philological appetites, Jones never bothered to learn the language of his forebears.[39]

As well as adopting a broad definition of the Welsh literati, it also seems fair to include within the ambit of Welsh intellectual history, issues which were central to Welsh culture or history, but which provoked as much interest outside Wales as within. Foremost amongst these issues, which might be described as the matter of Wales, is, of course, the history, or pseudo-history, of Druidism. The significance of Druidism in eighteenth-century intellectual life serves as a much-needed reminder that intellectual history is not a straightforward story of cumulative progression; rather contemporary *ideological* needs – even in the age of Enlightenment – distorted scholarly enquiry, and sometimes stifled genuine achievement. In the first decade of the eighteenth century Edward Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707) marked a major leap forward in the understanding of the Celtic languages. Lhuyd clearly differentiated between the Brythonic and Goidelic branches of a Celtic group of languages; yet not only did the presumed close connection between the Brythonic and Germanic languages continue to play a significant role in European linguistics until the more influential work of the Anglo-Irish antiquary Thomas Percy in the 1770s, but much more influential on contemporaries (albeit with some crucial exceptions) and indeed upon the world of Celtic antiquarianism throughout the century – as Prys Morgan has shown[40] - were the airy fantasies of the Abbé Paul Pezron. The Breton theologian's *Antiquité de la nation et de la langue des Celtes* was published in 1703 and

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[38] M. Franklin, *Sir William Jones* (Cardiff, 1995), p. 63.
[39] Jenkins, *Foundations*, p. 419.
[40] P. Morgan, 'The Abbé Pezron and the Celts', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1965), 286-95.

promptly translated into English in 1706 by David Jones. Ironically, Lhuyd, whose work eschewed the kind of myth-making found in Pezron, was a distant admirer of the Breton (though he informed his friend John Lloyd, with a wry amusement, that Pezron 'hath outdone our countrymen as to national zeal'[41]). Nevertheless, the myths of Druidism, which might have withered on the vine had antiquaries followed the sober lead of Lhuyd's scrupulous philology, flourished in soil fertilised by the arguments of Pezron.

The Druidic past appeared to meet some of the principal needs of the learned world in the age of Enlightenment, on both sides of contemporary debate.[42] The more sophisticated defenders of religion – and of particular doctrines, such as the Trinity – found in Druidism a potent reservoir of material which might be deployed against the enemies of orthodoxy. Critics of religion, on the other hand, discovered in Druidism exactly the kind of corrupt and tyrannical priesthood – as true of paganism as of Christianity – which had perverted the plain and simple truths of natural religion into systems of tortuous metaphysics upheld by clerical establishments. One of the biggest questions posed by the men of the Enlightenment, as they surveyed the internecine disputes of the different branches of Christianity and the varieties of pagan religion found both in European antiquity and in the modern world beyond Christendom, was which of all these was the true religion, and what was mere superstitious idolatry? History was an obvious way to resolve the question. Possibly, answers to the question regarding the corruptions of religion might be found, some wondered, on our British doorstep, deep in the ancient Celtic past? Paradoxically, might not ancient paganism provide indirect and unimpeachably unbiased corroboration for the truths of Christianity, which was essentially but a republication of the first religion revealed by God to the patriarchs in the primeval era? Henry Rowlands, an Anglesey vicar, thought that the

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[41] Morgan, *Eighteenth-century Renaissance*, p. 88.
[42] For eighteenth-century Druidism, see A.L. Owen, *The Famous Druids* (Oxford, 1962); S. Piggott, *The Druids* (London, 1968); S. Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New Haven and London, 1994); R. Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: the history of the Druids in Britain* (New Haven and London, 2009).

Druids 'being so near in descent , to the fountains of true religion and worship, as to have had one of Noah's sons for grandsire or greatgrandsire, may well be imagined, to have carried and conveyed here some of the rites and usages of that true religion, pure and untainted.'[43] Rowlands's *magnum opus*, *Mona antiqua restaurata* (1723), celebrated Mona, or Anglesey, as the ancient seat of the Druids. While Rowlands emphasised the moral code at the heart of Druidism and its monotheism, William Stukeley, an English antiquary and rector of a parish in Lincolnshire, was more concerned – at least in his later career - to establish the Trinitarian truths lurking in the patriarchal religion. Evidence derived from Druidism might explode the notion, put forward both by Socinians and by Deists, that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity was a piece of unwarranted metaphysical speculation smuggled into a more basic kind of religion, whether revealed or natural.[44] Stukeley's earlier researches (before he abandoned the practice of medicine for ecclesiastical preferment), however, were much less orthodox, informed by the neo-Platonic idea of a *prisca theologia*, a core of genuine truths shared by the ancient religions of the world.[45] Iolo Morganwg too contended that Druidism was an authentic legacy of the simple patriarchal ages, but one vouchsafed, by way of the Welsh bards, to modern man. Iolo, the self-proclaimed bard of the South Wales Unitarian Society, unveiled the true religion which lay concealed behind the Trinitarian accretions of the Christian tradition. Was this all mere idle speculation? Does it belong within the category – however baggy and capacious – of Enlightenment? The task of the historian is to understand the past on its own terms, and this includes contemporary notions of what enlightenment might mean. The concept of deep time would emerge from the late Enlightenment, most particularly in the new geological theories proposed by the Scottish

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[43] Henry Rowlands, *Mona Antiqua Restaurata* (Dublin, 1723), p. 45.
[44] William Stukeley, *Stonehenge: a temple restored to the British Druids* (London, 1740); Stukeley, *Abury, a temple of the British Druids* (London, 1743); D. Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science, Archaeology and Religion in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 2002).
[45] Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, pp. 91-7.

doctor James Hutton, but for many theologians, historians and men of letters the world had been existence from 23rd October 4004 B.C., or some approximation of that timescale.[46] If the world was only about six thousand years old then there was hope that in an age of Enlightenment and learning some of the gaps might be found in the short history between the history of the patriarchs told in Genesis and the world of pagan antiquity. There was a possibility that antiquaries might uncover the genuine and untold history of corruptions in religion, a story which might indeed depend on the esoteric lore of the Druids.

Druidism was but one point of contact between Welsh erudition and the wider British Enlightenment. The fracas surrounding the discovery of ancient epics from the third century A.D. attributed to the ancient Caledonian bard, Ossian, was another. In the wake of Fiona Stafford's pioneering work on Macpherson's wider intellectual context, scholars no longer see the poems of Ossian as the harbinger of an anti-enlightened romanticism but acknowledge the indebtedness of Ossian's finder-cum-forger, James Macpherson to the ideas of the Aberdonian Enlightenment, and in particular to the theories of Thomas Blackwell.[47] Moreover, historians have noticed that the reverberations of the Ossian controversy were felt throughout the British Isles, and not only along the Anglo-Scottish axis of contention made familiar by the jibes of Dr Johnson about Scotch veracity. Clare O'Halloran, in particular, has drawn attention to the concerted Irish antiquarian response to the challenge which Ossian posed to the accepted truths of Irish antiquity.[48] In Wales the reaction to Ossian took two very contrasting forms. The publication of Macpherson's epics *Fingal* and *Temora* in the early 1760s, spurred a parallel but strikingly dissimilar refurbishment of medieval Welsh poetry by Evan Evans in *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* (1764).

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[46] James Hutton, 'Theory of the Earth', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* 1 (1788); H. Trevor-Roper, 'James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh', in Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans* (London, 1987), esp. pp. 156-61.
[47] F. Stafford, *The Sublime Savage* (Edinburgh, 1988).
[48] C. O'Halloran, 'Irish re-creations of the Gaelic past: the challenge of Macpherson's Ossian', *Past and Present* 124 (1989), 69-95.

Where Macpherson dared to conjecture that the poetic fragments he had recovered were the remaining relics of a lost, ancient epic, and to reconstruct that hypothesised epic himself (twice), Evans pointed out the limitations of his sources and – very pointedly – compared the genuine remains of medieval Welsh poetry with the spectacularly (and perhaps suspiciously) serendipitous finds north of the border.[49] Evans's criticisms of Macpherson were muted and implicit, but no less telling in their way than the explicit anathemas of the Scottish Homer by Dr Johnson and his cronies. However, the Ossian affair also provided inspiration to the Welsh poet and antiquary Iolo Morganwg, whose instinct to confabulate when confronted with gaps in the literary record was reminiscent of Macpherson's own lack of scholarly scruples. Creative hoaxing and national mythmaking were vital parts of the reception of Ossian across Europe. In this way a venture, whose own origins lay in the enlightenment primitivism and sentimental provincialism of a loyal post-Jacobite North Britain, served to further the cause of various romantic nationalisms. Attention to this wider European context has been one of the many glories of the brilliant multi-volume series produced under the auspices of Geraint Jenkins and the Iolo Morganwg project.[50] Yet, as the work of Anne-Marie Thiesse on the Celtomania of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe reminds us, in Wales the primary function of Iolo's mythmaking - true to the priorities of the Enlightenment – was theological. Thiesse also notes that the activities of both Iolo and Macpherson were part of a wider trend within the Enlightenment to search out the lost cultures of early medieval Europe which had been almost entirely obliterated by the classical heritage of ancient Greece and Rome.[51]

Attention to the enlightened significance of the ancient Celtic past provides a very useful

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[49] Evans, *Specimens*, pp. i-ii.
[50] Jenkins (ed.), *Rattleskull Genius*; M. Constantine, *The Truth against the World: Iolo Morganwg and Romantic Forgery* (Cardiff, 2007); C. Charnell-White, *Bardic circles: national regional and personal identity in the bardic vision of Iolo Morganwg* (Cardiff, 2007); G.H. Jenkins, F.M. Jones and D.C. Jones (eds.), *The Correspondence of Iolo Morganwg* (3 vols., Cardiff, 2007), etc..
[51] Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales: Europe xviiie-xxe siècle* (Paris, 1999), pp. 23, 47-8.

corrective to a persistent anglocentricity in the intellectual and literary history of eighteenth-century Britain. Yet, despite the very influential efforts of the late Roy Porter to portray the British Enlightenment as a predominantly English affair whose principal debts were to Locke and Newton,[52] England's provinces were far from peripheral to the story. Arguably, of course, Edinburgh was the true citadel of Britain's Enlightenment, with London a derivative Rome which recycled and publicised the ideas coming out of the Athens of the North. Moreover, there were inter-peripheral connections too, amply demonstrated by Ian McBride's superb work on the relationship between the enlightened Presbyterianisms of Scotland and Ulster.[53] How might Wales fit into an inter-peripheral historiography of the British Enlightenment?

There are suggestions – worthy of fuller investigation, perhaps – of antithetical relationships between the Scottish Enlightenment and Welsh antiquarianism, the latter inspired in some quarters by bardic primitivism,[54] in others by an orthodox – and strongly Celtophile – Welsh counter-enlightenment. In his *Celtic Researches* (1804) Edward Davies challenged recent accounts of the earliest history of humanity which seemed characteristic of the Scottish science of man. The social theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment had disaggregated the universal history of humankind into a series of three or, more usually, four phases, each with its own typical forms of economic activity, conceptions of property and institutions. Gradual development was the hallmark of human history, with humankind progressing from an early stage of savagery, when it was nourished only from the unpredictable fruits of hunting and gathering, via herding followed by settled agriculture to the modern era of commercial refinement. Davies was unconvinced by theories of slow and incremental progress from primitive rudeness. He found it 'evident that the state of nature, or the original state of man, was not that of brutes and savages, but a state of immediate merit and exertion, and of rapid progress in civilization, and the acquisition of

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[52] R. Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (Harmondsworth, 2000).
[53] I. McBride, *Scripture Politics* (Oxford, 1998).
[54] Charnell-White, *Bardic circles*, pp. 52, 76.

useful arts.' In a direct rebuke to the stadial model of history advanced in the Scottish Enlightenment, Davies contended that 'agriculture and pasturage' were 'recorded as occupations of the very first age.' Savagery was, it transpired, a later occurrence, 'the child of accident, and has no filial marks of nature as her parent.' Alas, the misleading accounts of early man found in the writings of the 'moderns' had unfortunate 'atheistical' as well as politically radical implications; for they had 'furnished occasion to some late theorists to contend for the rights of man, to insist upon an equality of condition, and to assert the unlawfulness of every degree of authority, which has not been personally acknowledged or virtually conceded.'[55] From Welsh scholars too came the firmest responses to John Pinkerton, a controversial Scottish antiquary who deliberately flouted the authority of scripture in his speculations about the plural origins of races. William Owen Pughe, in conjunction with Archdeacon William Coxe, published *A vindication of the Celts* in 1803, and in 1829 the Reverend Thomas Price produced *An essay on the physiognomy and physiology of the present inhabitants of Britain* (1829), which roundly challenged the anti-scriptural basis of Pinkerton's arguments. Building upon his heterodox theory of aboriginal racial distinctions, Pinkerton had lauded the Gothic peoples of Europe at the expense of a supposedly much inferior Celtic race, which, unsurprisingly, prompted its own particular response from Welsh antiquaries.[56]

The British Enlightenment was not confined to the four home nations, but flourished in venues as far afield as Princeton and Calcutta. Moreover, historians have become more conscious of the ways in which the British Empire was a complex, multi-layered phenomenon, though one which lends itself too readily to the real, but nonetheless reductive, emphasis upon straightforward white-on-black racial oppression. Non-English Britons, speakers of Celtic languages especially, and non-Anglicans, most conspicuously

[55] Edward Davies, *Celtic Researches* (London, 1804), pp. xii, 6, 10, 18-19, 46.
[56] Charnell-White, *Bardic circles*, pp. 47, 54-7; *Correspondence of Iolo Morganwg*, esp. II, pp. 245, 289, 307; M. Dearnley, '"Mad Ned" and the "Smatter Dasher": Iolo Morganwg and Edward Davies', in Jenkins (ed.), *Rattleskull Genius*, pp. 425-6.

Roman Catholics though not forgetting deviant anti-Trinitarian Protestants and Deists, and on some occasions even conventional Presbyterian Dissenters, occupied an ambiguous limbo within the eighteenth-century British world between full membership of the English ruling order and unmitigated abject subalternhood. In recent decades historians – especially those working on the eighteenth century – have begun to establish connections between the formerly discrete fields of Britain's domestic and imperial histories. In particular, historians have explored linkages between England's imperial aspirations within the British Isles and the extension of the vision of a British Empire to lands overseas. Four nations history and imperial history, it turns out, have several important points of contact, not least the ways in which arguments about the supposed barbarity of the Celtic fringes of the British Isles were reshaped in the overseas empire into claims about the inferiority of peoples subject to British rule.[57]

The place of Wales in the burgeoning field of Atlantic history is, of course, well-established. Few works of Welsh history have exercised such a fascination beyond Wales as Gwyn A. Williams's classic study, *Madoc: the legend of the Welsh discovery of America* (1979), which traces the quest of John Evans among the Mandan Indians on the northern reaches of the Missouri for a purported lost tribe of Welsh-speaking Indians, the Madogwys. If Evans's search was in many ways a wild goose chase, it nonetheless provided vital information for the later geographical explorations of Lewis and Clark. In addition, Williams's *The Search for Beulah Land* (1980) demonstrated the radical connections between Wales and a Welsh outpost in Pennsylvania.

However, the second British Empire in the East has not yet attracted the same attention among Welsh (or Anglo-Welsh) historians as it has among Irish historians. Indeed, several leading Irish historians as well as historians of British anthropology in the East, have explored the surprising but influential connections between

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[57] N. Canny, 'The Ideology of English Colonization: from Ireland to America', *William and Mary Quarterly* 30 (1973), 575-98; B. Bailyn and P. Morgan (eds.), *Strangers within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991); D. Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000).

orientalist and Celtic antiquarianism in the Irish Enlightenment.[58] The central figure in this story was the military engineer Charles Vallancey, whose work was, as Cathryn Charnell-White notices, known to Iolo.[59] Vigorously and without much discrimination, he investigated the relationships between Gaelic and the languages of the Near East and India. Vallancey was connected to the circle of Sir William Jones, who scoffed – though only in private – about Vallancey's work, and whose own researches, though profound and penetrating, deferred to the Old Testament.[60] Genuine linguistic insight, it transpires, is difficult to disentangle from antiquarian fantasies and entrenched commitments to the Old Testament: all three were integral strands of an enlightened network which stretched from Ireland to Bengal.[61]

Given the connection between the Irish antiquaries and Jones, it seems worth asking whether a similar sort of story might be told about the matter of Wales – Druidism in particular – and orientalist antiquarianism. The Orient, it transpires, was a central preoccupation of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Druidic speculation, although the source of this antiquarian fantasy had roots in late seventeenth-century speculation that the religion of Abraham had been imparted both to the Druids and to the Brahmins of India.[62] Eastern theology enjoyed a curious place in Iolo's eclectic range of apparently unsystematised, magpie enthusiasms. However, this bricoleur's fascination with the East was not the arbitrary addition of yet another element in his 'multi-

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[58] J.T. Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael* (Amsterdam, 1986); C. O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland c. 1750-1800* (Cork, 2004); N. Vance, 'Celts, Carthaginians and Constitutions: Anglo-Irish Literary Relations 1780-1820', *Irish Historical Studies* 22 (1981), 216-38; W. O'Reilly, 'Orientalist reflections: Asia and the Pacific in the Making of late Eighteenth-century Ireland', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 6 (2004), 127-47; T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Houndmills, 2002); T. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997).
[59] C. Charnell-White, *Barbarism and Bardism: North Wales versus South Wales in the bardic vision of Iolo Morganwg* (Aberystwyth, 2004), p. 8.
[60] Jones, *Trautmann*.
[61] Cf. M. Franklin, 'Sir William Jones, the Celtic revival and the Oriental renaissance', in G. Carruthers and A. Rawes (eds.), *English Romanticism in the Celtic World* (Cambridge, 2003).
[62] Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, p. 65.

textured collage'[63] of genuine erudition, fantastic fabrication and pseudo-learning. Anglican orthodoxy was equally obsessed with the notion of Brahminical Druids. Edward Davies speculated on the Indian origin of the druids both in *Celtic Researches* and in *The Mythology and rites of the British druids* (1809), while the English orientalist and Anglican apologist Thomas Maurice (who claimed Welsh descent) devoted the sixth volume of his *Indian Antiquities* to a treatise on the eastern origin of the Druids.[64]

The new British history has not been without its flaws and its blindspots, but on the whole it has been a force for good in historical scholarship. Not only has it eliminated the anglocentric myopias – innocently oblivious as well as wilful – which were far from uncommon in the historiography of the 1960s and 1970s, but it has also worked to correct that other dangerous bias, the condescension of posterity. Presentist assumptions about what is normal or rational have less purchase on history when historians are attending to the complex interactions of different cultures rather than devoting themselves entirely to continuities within a single national tradition. Thankfully, the world of the British Enlightenment (known until recently as 'Augustan *England*') has ceased to be studied in a reductive way. No longer does its history omit those areas – so characteristic, as have seen of the Welsh, or, more properly, Anglo-Welsh, experience of Enlightenment – where the rational and the irrational, the progressive and the antiquarian, the empirical and the speculative, the 'enlightened' and the 'romantic' – blur and commingle.

University of Glasgow   COLIN KIDD

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[63] Charnell-White, *Barbarism and bardism*, p. 2.
[64] Davies, *Celtic Researches*, pp. 145, 149; Thomas Maurice, 'A dissertation on the Indian origin of the Druids; and on the striking affinity which the religious rites and ceremonies, anciently practised in the British Islands, bore to those of the Brahmins', in Mauriuce, *Indian Antiquities* (6 vols., London, 1800-1).

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