

## Reviews

A CONCISE HISTORY OF WALES. By Geraint H. Jenkins. 142 × 222mm. xii + 345 pp. 62 illustrations. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007. ISBN 0 521 82367 6. Price £40.00.

Half a century ago, when this reviewer was an undergraduate, single-volume histories of Wales, apart from O. M. Edwards's book in the Story of the Nations series, did not exist; those seeking an overview of the Middle Ages had to turn to J. E. Lloyd while those interested in the modern period were dependent on David Williams. For the general reader there were only the two volumes of *Wales through the Ages*, two series of broadcast talks published in 1959 and 1960.

Since that time there has, of course, been an upsurge in interest in the history of Wales and also in the availability of published material in the shape of articles, monographs and more general works. Indeed it would not be an exaggeration to speak of a revolution in Welsh historical studies over the last three decades and Professor Geraint H. Jenkins has been in the forefront of that revolution. His particular field of study has been the early modern period but he has now written a history of Wales, declaring at the outset that 'no self-respecting historian should forego the opportunity of writing the entire history of his or her native land'. This is well put: the historian looking at periods or topics outside his or her own speciality can often think outside the box and bring fresh insights to bear, and the whole exercise can be stimulating and, indeed, enjoyable.

Professor Jenkins begins on his own patch, discussing the eighteenth-century clergyman Theophilus Evans, whose *Drych y Prif Oesoedd* provided Wales with a highly imaginative but influential view of its history, and going on to describe the emergence of a more critical attitude inspired in part by geology and Charles Darwin. The pre-Roman period is summarised and the main points brought out and this is followed by the Roman conquest and occupation. The second chapter, 'The Heroic Age 383–1063', deals with the early Middle Ages (the author is at one with this reviewer in his dislike of the term 'Dark Ages'), while the third 'The Anglo-Norman Conquerors' takes the story to the conquest of 1282, beginning with a tribute to the man who first made the study of the history of Wales a serious academic activity, Sir John Lloyd. The later Middle Ages are seen as a period of 'pestilence, rebellion and renewal', a phrase which could be said to be a fair summing-up. The author's judgements are generally judicious, often with a felicitous turn of phrase: his description of Nest Ferch Rhys ap Iewdwr as a 'sassy-tongued, resolute woman' is a comment which could be applied to numerous medieval Welsh women and underlines the fact that they were not necessarily downtrodden chattels. The Glyn Dŵr revolt, central to the history of medieval Wales, receives a balanced treatment. There are a few points of fact with which a pedantic reviewer might take issue, but the treatment of the Middle Ages is well-judged and the loss of political independence in 1282–83 treated with sensitivity.

The chapter on 'Early Modern Wales' takes us down to 1776, discussing, among other things, the Acts of Union, the growth of towns and the beginnings of industry: the last topic goes right through to the career of Thomas Williams and the rise of the Anglesey copper industry at the end of the eighteenth century. Other key themes include, of course, the Renaissance, the apothecosis of the landed gentry, the translation of the Bible, the Methodist Revival and the eighteenth-century cultural revival. This is followed by three chapters, 'A Crucible of the Modern World, 1776–1900', 'Wales Awakening, 1900–2006' and 'Whither Wales'. The titles of these chapters are really self-explanatory: full attention is given to the coming of large-scale industrial activity and its social and political consequences, emigration, popular protest, the golden age of nonconformity, intellectual developments in the nineteenth century and the stirrings of a reawakened national awareness. These are the usual themes when reviewing

the nineteenth century but the author also lays stress on the reverse of what could in the past be a rather self-satisfied interpretation of nineteenth-century Wales, bringing out the hypocrisy to which nonconformity could lead, the ignoring of the history of Wales and the drive for Anglicisation as the key to a prosperous future. He points out the dichotomy symbolised by O. M. Edwards, teacher of the nation's history to the nation and at the same time promoter of the British Empire.

The prosperity and confidence of Wales in 1900 was based on coal and steel, but the dependence on these two primary industries was to prove an increasing source of weakness, especially after the First World War. This was a traumatic experience for Wales, as for the rest of Europe: economic collapse was accompanied by an agricultural depression which had begun in the late nineteenth century. The twentieth century which saw two world wars also witnessed profound social and cultural changes, the consequences of which we are still facing today. All these are described in the penultimate chapter which concludes with the coming of devolution. The book concludes with a short epilogue which underlines the importance of a sound historical consciousness and understanding for any nation.

This is a brief description of the contents: a longer account would be otiose since any history of Wales would cover the same ground. The question any reviewer has to face is what the author has done with this information. Is this an accurate and readable introduction which will give the general reader, both within and outside Wales, a clear and interesting picture of the forces which have made our country what it is today? The author's name will vouch for its readability and accuracy. Geraint Jenkins could not write an unreadable book if he tried and he is one of the outstanding historians of our time. The bibliography shows the extent of his reading and he has something interesting to say about every period, challenging many views that were once regarded as self-evident truths. All the important topics are here, often with the author's own take on them. I would strongly recommend this book to anyone wanting to know something about the history of Wales and its people.

Bangor

A. D. CARR

DICTIONARY OF THE PLACE-NAMES OF WALES. By Hywel Wyn Owen and Richard Morgan. 160 × 253 mm. lxxvii + 506 pp. Gomer Press, Llandysul, Ceredigion, 2007. ISBN 978 1 84323 901 7. Price £29.99.

Let me begin by stating the obvious: this work should henceforth constitute the first step, single-volume reference work for anyone interested in the place-names of Wales. It is, in essence, a collaborative augmentation of H. W. Owen's *A Pocket Guide: the Place-names of Wales* (1998) whose 89-page dictionary was restricted to the more prominent place-names of Wales. Only Melville Richards's *Enwau Tŷ a Gwlad* (1998)—originally serialised in a newspaper in the late 1960s—bears any comparison to the present work, but Richards's work is available only in Welsh and lacks the documentary forms assembled by our two authors (though it was also informed by many years of laborious and painstaking research in collecting such forms).

The layout of this dictionary is similar to O. J. Padel's *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-names* (1988), and it thus constitutes an exemplary presentation of toponymic material as can be expected, satisfying both specialists and generalists. There is a concise but helpful eight-page introduction followed by a similarly helpful seven-page bibliography. But the body of the work is the 506-page place-name dictionary containing—by my count—some 2074 headwords chosen mainly from their presence on a 1:250,000 scale map: many additional place-names are explained for illustrative purposes in the interpretative paragraphs that go with each entry. It is good to see a number of traditional regional names

included which are not always found on modern maps, names such as *Dyfed*, *Eliionydd*, *Glamorgan*, *Gwynedd*, *Meirionnydd*, *Powys*, *Sarn Helen* (recte *Sarn Ellen*). Since the book deals with 'the place-names of Wales' (both English and Welsh) rather than with the arguably more restrictive 'Welsh place-names', the Welsh alphabetical order is dispensed with, the headwords being ordered according to the common alphabetical order (which is indeed the best solution). Alternative names for the same headword—usually Welsh—are located alphabetically among the entries with cross-reference to the fully developed entry. Location is clearly marked by county as well as by grid reference. A translation and an element analysis are given, followed by a most welcome selection of the historical documentary forms of the place-names. Since the vast majority of the elements analysed can be found in readily available modern Welsh dictionaries, I am not as convinced as the authors of the 'invaluable' worth of a 54-page glossary of elements for the kind of book they have prepared. Those few elements not found in dictionaries can be dealt with easily in the interpretative paragraphs as well as through cross-reference. The interpretative paragraphs of the entries balance conciseness and informativeness well, but inevitably there are many slips and errors despite the stated aim of being an 'authoritative' work of reference. The nature of place-name studies is such that no book could reasonably be expected to avoid such pitfalls. The discovery of new documentary forms of Cardiff and Carmarthen—to wit *Cair Teim* and *Cair Merthin* from the tenth-century Vatican recension of the *Historia Brittonum*—were absent.

Having a professional interest in the subject I thought it better to focus on general methodological pitfalls I have sensed, rather than in listing criticisms of particular interpretations or errors found throughout the book. My first methodological critique concerns the way in which some of the interpretative paragraphs do not give due attention to other published interpretations and sometimes seem—to my taste—a little too disinclined to display hesitation concerning difficult names. In principle, the authors assert that they are 'ready to concede defeat where there is insufficient evidence' and that they want to avoid 'venturing into the realms of conjecture' (page vii), but in at least one case they fail to live up to this in the case of the mistaken interpretation given for *Llyn Llydaw* which, according to them, derives from a plural *\*llydaw* which although unrecorded, meets most of the problems' (page 298). The conjuring of a ghost word, the disregard of pronunciation, the disregard of documentary forms, the unlikelihood of the meaning adduced (Llyn Llydaw lies in the lee of the western and northern slopes of Snowdon and is unlikely to have been noted in the context of its locality for the 'unrelenting, ferocious conditions' of weather), the lack of any comparative place-names, each strengthens the argument against the inventive interpretation given here. It is in fact a model treatment of how not to interpret an obscure place-name. The etymology favoured for *Aberystwyth* also goes against the documentary evidence. I hasten to add that, contrary to such particular instances, the vast majority of cases the interpretations proffered by the authors are basically sound and reflect well the previous scholarship in the subject.

My second methodological critique is that there are signs of a further lack of disciplined linguistic analysis with respect to phonology. For example, one can object to statements such as 'only a scholarly linguistic analysis of the earliest forms and their subsequent development can illuminate the significance of a name' [my emphasis] (page viii), and indeed, this is even contradicted by the authors in the preceding page in a statement concerning modern pronunciation. The wording of the explanations given by the authors for some changes in orthography betrays an unfamiliarity with the historical and the geographical aspects of the phonology of Welsh, an understanding of which will often stand in good stead when having to decide between competing etymologies. I was sorry not to see my own volume *Language and Place-names in Wales* (2003) cited in the authors' bibliography—a book intended to help specialists decide whether a particular sound-change can be deemed regular or not. For example, it should be understood that the pronunciation <-e> of the Welsh plural <-au> is not a 'dialectal variant' but a colloquial

development common to all varieties of spoken Welsh dialects and one established well before the end of the Middle Ages, so that the explanation as 'dialectal' under *Ffrwythlle, Sarn* and many other places is misleading.

Even if I have expressed a number of criticisms, these do not detract from the general excellence of the interpretations given, nor reflect poorly on what in reality is a valuable and informative work. I will reiterate what I said at the outset: it is the best one-volume dictionary of Welsh place-names in existence, and what is more a pleasant reference work to consult.

University of Ulster

IWAN WYFFRE

PEMBROKESHIRE. THE CONCISE HISTORY. By Roger Turvey. 130 × 198 mm. xii + 160 pp. 21 illustrations. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2007. ISBN 978 0 7083 1948 2. Price £9.99.

The 'The History of Wales' series from the University of Wales Press, under the series editor Catrin Stevens, is steadily commissioning an enviable range of regional histories intended to straddle that most difficult of divides—the scholarly and the accessible. Each author is expected to bring both scholarship and regional passion to their volume, communicating the great distinctiveness of their region as well as referencing the wider nation of Wales.

Pembrokeshire is a region of Wales which has seen considerable study and debate of its complex history, both political and social. Although compact in format and concise in style, Roger Turvey's book is nonetheless a detailed and knowledgeable account which clearly draws on much personal research by the author. The book manages to pack an enormous amount of information into its seven main chapters and numerous sub-sections. The short introduction alone, which covers the physiological background, past territorial divisions and language is sprinkled with rich regional insights and conveys the author's passion for his subject. In some standard histories, the prehistoric and Roman periods can form little more than a backdrop to the historical discussion but here they form a respectable section. One might question the opinion that Neolithic communities in Pembrokeshire eked out a 'miserable existence', and Dr Turvey still favours the outmoded model first developed before the Second World War, that Iron Age settlers arrived from the continent into south-east England around 600 BC. However, these are minor issues and his discussion of the 'Celts' and the Romans is a thorough appraisal, providing the reader with a good amount of classical and historical background to the problem of the Celts, whilst remaining wary of the images of Iron Age life passed on to us by Roman historians.

Medieval and later Pembrokeshire is dominated by key historical figures, among them Gerald of Wales and Henry Tudor, and key events in the political history of Wales including the region's role in the Civil War and the Rebecca Riots. These, along with 'iconic' and emotive subjects like the *lansker* jinc, could, in more careless hands, dominate a more cursory account of the Pembrokeshire's history. Instead Dr Turvey weaves them into detailed descriptions of the county at each stage of its history. Sections on the Reformation and the Acts of Union, for example, are set against the social context of the lives of the rural poor and the later economics of agriculture. Of-discussed events are appraised in a fresh light; those surrounding the Black Death are well summarised and the harrowing deaths of many of the county's ruling elite in 1349 are seen in the context of the wider toll on the unrecorded rural population of west Wales. The problems and contradictions inherent in the attempted French Invasion are reviewed, with Turvey reminding us how seriously the event would have been received by the population at the time; only hindsight allows us to consider it to have been a 'frivolous' or 'farcical' venture. Discussion of the agricultural and economic background makes for interesting reading, describing the great revolutions in