

SIR JOHN RHŶS MEMORIAL LECTURE

THE WELSH AND THE IRISH BEFORE THE  
NORMANS—CONTACT OR IMPACT

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I MUST at the outset be allowed quietly to describe myself as a South Walian, by birth, upbringing and conviction! Add to this the impression experienced and expressed by not a few people in my community, and passed on to me at a tender, impressionable age, that there were two kinds of people who could not always be trusted, some of whom were in contact with us, who lived and worked among us. These were the North Walians and the Irish. I should not presume here to comment on this attitude, which you may consider to be faintly biased. However, years of liberal education and varied experience of life, have left me now with the firm impression that in fairness the North Walians and the Irish are not the only people who should not be trusted.

Ireland and Wales have been close to one another for very many years, and if we are to heed early tradition, they were at one time even closer. Where now we have Cardigan Bay, there was once dry land, *Cantre'r Gwaelod*.<sup>1</sup> A history of flooding at an early, indeed primeval age is common to many peoples. Professor Thomas Jones drew attention to a Latin triad (probably based on a Welsh original) in Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3514, recording the flooding of kingdoms between Wales and Ireland.<sup>2</sup> From the tale of Branwen in the Four Branches we learn that the sea between the two lands was not wide; in fact there were only two rivers, Lli and Archan, and these could be crossed on foot.<sup>3</sup> It has

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (Caerdydd, 1982), pp. 80–1.

<sup>2</sup> *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 12 (1948), 79–83. Cf. also R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (Cardiff, 1961), pp. xc-xci; F. J. North, *Sunken Cities* (Cardiff, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> I. Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Caerdydd, 1930), 39.10.

been suggested that Ireland and Britain became separate land masses in the seventh millennium BC.<sup>4</sup>

Although there is no evidence of it until comparative philologists came into their own in the post-medieval period, the Welsh and Irish must at an early stage have been vaguely conscious of some affinity, often only dimly conceived as their imagination took them back to obscure and misty times; and there is for Ireland no lack of origin legends.<sup>5</sup> In so far as valid evidence is available, we must try and look dispassionately at the relationship between them over the centuries. For the last thousand years or so we have plenty of direct evidence. When we reach back to the first millennium of the Christian era, we are offered some interesting information presented in innocence and good faith, but it is so often tantalizingly blurred and riddled with traps. We are confronted with shadowy kings and kingdoms; yet throughout the hazy history of both peoples we can detect a combination of political fragmentation with cultural unity. There is not much on which we can rely with confidence, and we are rightly reminded that these dark times 'lie outside the ordinary range of historians'.<sup>6</sup> We cannot therefore depend entirely on literary sources (alas, all too few!), but must have recourse to the findings of archaeologists, students of folklore, language, linguistic and historical geography, law, and the early traditions of the Welsh and Irish, as they are reflected in later literature. As suggested, history for us is not always helpful or reassuring, and one is drawn to the words of Edward James for encouragement and hope, if not for much else: 'We may hope that in another seventy years, archaeology will be in a position to bring some certainty to an important problem which the historical evidence can never be able to solve'<sup>7</sup>, which means that we have some time yet to wait and hope.

Let us proceed then with hope—and caution. First the languages, namely Irish and Welsh which later we came to regard as Celtic, derived from the parent Indo-European. For many years we have been able to identify the major sound-changes from the parent language, and now thanks to the pioneering work of Professor

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Richter, *Medieval Ireland—The Enduring Tradition* (Gill and Macmillan, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> M. A. O'Brien, *Early Irish Society*, ed. M. Dillon (Dublin, 1954), pp. 36–51.

<sup>6</sup> Haverfield & Macdonald, *The Roman Occupation of Britain*, p. 261. Cf. J. Morris, 'The Dates of the Celtic Saints', *JTS*, 17 (n.s.), pp. 342 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Whitelock, McKitterick, Dumville, *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge 1982), p. 36.

Kenneth Jackson in the main we can also tentatively date them, and present a chronological history of the early stages of both these languages.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of the Christian era there seem to be faint indications of a dialect division between west and south-west Britain. But as yet, British the native language of large areas of Britain, was still intact as one language, representing a development of an earlier language, akin to some forms in Gaul and other parts of western Europe.

Goedelic was another language which had developed from the same source. But Goedelic and British were then separate languages, not mutually intelligible, as some changes must have already occurred. The labiovelar  $k^w$  had developed separately in both, having become a labial  $p$  in British, in Goedelic  $k^w$ , later  $k$ .<sup>9</sup> Another language different, but not unrelated, of which we must take account, is Latin, brought here by the Romans, a speech which survived and flourished in Britain long after Rome had ceased to exercise any direct power or influence. A development which must receive due consideration also is the introduction of Christianity into Celtic lands, the details of which are so inadequately known to us.<sup>10</sup>

From the fourth century on, till the early seventh, we are made aware of Irish settlements in the western coastal areas of Britain, from south-western Scotland down to Cornwall.<sup>11</sup> These settlers must have come from Ireland, and their progress can hardly have been unrelated to the decline of Roman power and the Anglo-Saxon incursions from the fourth century on. The danger from Ireland may well explain the establishment of Roman stations at Chester and Caerleon. During this period we find also in western areas of Britain Ogam inscriptions in a unique and bewildering script. These inscriptions are memorials consisting of the names of the deceased in the genitive, and in Wales often accompanied

<sup>8</sup> Note more especially his great work, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lewis & Pedersen, *A Concise Comparative Celtic Grammar* (Göttingen, 1937), pp. 43–5.

<sup>10</sup> H. Williams, *Christianity in Early Britain* (Oxford, 1912); E. G. Bowen, *Saints, Seaways and Settlements in the Celtic Lands* (Cardiff, 1956); Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (Methuen, 1966).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jackson, *LHEB*, pp. 149–93; D. Simon Evans, *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* (Caerdydd, 1977), pp. lix–lxi; Charles Thomas, 'The Irish Settlements in Post-Roman Western Britain—a survey of the evidence', *The Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, 6 (n.s.), (1972), 251–74; Bruce Coplestone-Crow, 'The Dual Nature of the Irish Colonization of Dyfed in the Dark Ages', *Studia Celtica*, 16/17 (1981/2), 1–24.

by a form of the name in Latin letters. We find them in Argyllshire (2), the Isle of Man (6), Wales (40), Cornwall (6), Devon (2), and one in Silchester, where an Irishman may have lived and must have died at some time. But most of them are in Wales, where they are concentrated in the south-west in Dyfed, although they occur also, but much more thinly, in the north-west, and in parts of Brecknock. Mention of the latter reminds us of the account in the twelfth-century text *'De Situ Brecheniauc'* of Marchell, daughter of Tewdrig, leaving this part to go to Ireland to marry an Irish prince.<sup>12</sup> She eventually produced Brychan Brycheiniog, who in turn became father of a massive family of saints, a feat of fertility which the Irish also at times deemed worthy of accomplishment. The kingdom of Brycheiniog, thus from this time had strong Irish associations. In south-west Wales in Dyfed not only have we Ogam stones in abundance, but also kings of Irish descent, who had been there since the end of the third century. They belonged originally to the small kingdom of the Déisi in Co. Waterford, and their rule in the south-west survived until the tenth century. Here we find ourselves within an 'Irish-Sea Province,' which served as background and also as stimulant to intercourse and communication, commercial, political, ecclesiastical, artistic and literary.

It so happened that during the time of the Ogam stones the two native languages in Britain were undergoing major changes. Circumstances and events, social and political, accounted for these developments. As has generally been observed, a period of rapid and drastic change in the community profoundly affects language within a short space of time, especially as in such situations it is not possible to ensure the preservation of standards and practices. We can identify, and more importantly date the changes which occurred in Irish during this period. Some time between the first and early fifth century we have the change *nt, nc > dd, gg* with compensatory lengthening. To the end of this period we can date the oldest Ogam inscriptions. Important changes which belong to the second half of the fifth century are lenition, reduction of unstressed long vowels, *a/o* and *i/u* affection in stressed syllables. Then around 500 there occurred the loss of final syllables. In the first half of the sixth century we have the reduction of *c* or *g* in the groups *cr, cl, gr, gl, gn* with compensatory lengthening of short vowels and from the middle of the sixth

<sup>12</sup> Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (Cardiff, 1944), p. 313.

century we witness syncope. Thus within a comparatively short time the language was transformed.<sup>13</sup>

We have already referred to Latin, a language dominant during the Roman period, an adopted language which many in Britain must have been proud to claim as their own. Gildas in the middle of the sixth century described it as *nostra lingua* 'our language'.<sup>14</sup> Its influence on other languages was profound. We know of the Latin element in Welsh, at least we did know before this 'age of progress'. It enables us to trace the early development of the language from the parent British, a language which left no written form.<sup>15</sup> Likewise the other Brittonic languages. Upwards of 800 words were borrowed, chiefly in the so-called Lowland Zone, roughly the southern half of England. If we are to believe Jackson and others, these words later penetrated into the Highland Zone in the west and north, more especially during the fifth and sixth centuries.

At this time Welsh was in a process of development from late British. In the same period, namely the fifth and sixth centuries, there must have been immigration into Wales from areas to the east by people who spoke this developing language. We have already noted some drastic developments in Primitive Irish. In British the changes were no less radical. Lenition must have occurred in the second half of the fifth century. The most fundamental change was the loss of final syllables, complete by about the middle of the sixth century. All this meant an essential change in the structure and syntax of the language, with much more importance attached to the order of words, now that the endings had gone. The prepositions also became more important.<sup>16</sup> But, as we are reminded by Jespersen,<sup>17</sup> in such a situation the loss of endings and the increasing use of prepositions must in fact be considered to be the *result* rather than the cause of basic changes, something which Jackson does not make clear in *Language and History in Early Britain*. Considerable attention has been given of late to the question of the changes from British to Welsh

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Jackson, *LHEB*, pp. 142-3.

<sup>14</sup> *Gildas* I. c.23, but *Romana Lingua* c.32.

<sup>15</sup> See Lewis, *Yr Efen Ladin yn yr Iaith Gymraeg* (Caerdydd, 1943); Jackson, *LHEB*, pp. 76-121.

<sup>16</sup> *LHEB*, pp. 695-7.

<sup>17</sup> *Progress in Language* (1894), p. 97.

by scholars such as John Koch.<sup>18</sup> Here I shall be content with declaring generally that some sort of order must have already developed in the language which made the use of endings in nouns, etc. largely superfluous, hence their ultimate disappearance. At about the same time, but a little later, we have changes such as final *i* affection, with *bardī* yielding *beirdd*, and also the nasal mutation. Some important phonetic changes belong to the first half of the sixth century, and changes such as those of the spirant mutation continued apace in the second half. Then the process of change began to subside, and it has been maintained that the development of the new quantity system belongs to around 600.

Speakers of all three, British, Latin and Irish seem to have been active and enterprising in the Wales of the fifth and sixth centuries. Among them there must have been men of clear vision and firm action. We have already mentioned Gildas. Two other eminent figures became recognized later as the patron Saints of their respective lands. Patrick belonged to the fifth century, and must have come from the west of Britain, possibly from a partially Romanized area. According to the orthodox (but not the only) view of his mission, he was sent to Ireland in 432 by Pope Celestine as successor to Palladius who had died that year. Patrick spent his time in Ireland, where he toiled more especially in the north and west of the country, possibly within a relatively small area, and accomplished a most successful mission. However, the truth is that much of his life is shrouded in mystery.<sup>19</sup> His Latin, which he displayed in his works, the *Confessio* and the *Epistola*, was crude, rude and rustic, the work of a zealous missionary rather than of a trained scholar. He must have acquired it (imperfectly and inelegantly) at an early age. His native language must have been British, then an inflected language which had not yet completely undergone those changes already referred to. What one would like to know is, which language did he use in his mission? Hardly Latin, which was not generally known in Ireland. Even less likely was it British. A better candidate is Irish, Primitive Irish, which at this time like British was in a process of rapid and radical change. Where could he have acquired it in its spoken form? The simple and sensible answer surely must be that it was from among people who used it as their native tongue, in Ireland, or more likely, in western Britain. Having been thus nurtured on

<sup>18</sup> *Early Welsh Poetry*, ed. Brynley F. Roberts (Aberystwyth, 1988), pp. 17–41.

<sup>19</sup> L. Bieler, *The Life and Legend of St. Patrick* (Dublin, 1949). Cf. *The Welsh Life of St. David*, ed. D. Simon Evans (Cardiff, 1988), pp. 22–4.

two fluid, unstable languages, it is small wonder that his Latin also was shaky and insecure, and that he was conscious of his literary disabilities and disconnected delivery.

The distribution of Ogam stones serves to show that parts of Wales were more intensely Irish than others. There are stones with names in Ogam only, four in Pembroke, two in Brecknock, and one each in Ceredigion, Carmarthen and Glamorgan. These seem to suggest areas where Irish only was spoken, in the south-west in Pembroke, and also in Brecknock, which must have attracted the Irish eastwards along old trackways and Roman roads. Most of the stones however, are bilingual. The name of the departed occurs in Ogam, and along with it a British form of the name in Latin characters. Such a stone is found in Castellldwyran, Carmarthenshire. In Ogam we have VOTECORIGAS, and in Latin MEMORIA/VOTEPORIGIS/PROTICTORIS. We have C in VOTECORIGAS, and P in the British VOTEPORIGIS. This king *Voteporix* reminds us of Gildas's *Vortiporius*, who reigned in Dyfed in the middle of the sixth century, and must have been of Irish extraction and of Irish speech.<sup>20</sup>

To the sixth century belonged another patron saint, David, who was Welsh, but who also must have known and spoken Irish, if only imperfectly. He remained in Wales, and eventually settled in Mynyw, or St David's. It is said in David's *Life* that Patrick had originally intended to settle there, but was prevented by an angel, who told him he was destined for another land. And under angelic guidance and pressure he moved on, somewhat reluctantly. From the evidence of distribution patterns and early traditions it appears that David laboured mainly in an area forming a triangle within three important centres, two of which were on the coast and opposite Ireland: first Mynyw itself, then another coastal centre to the south of Aberaeron, Hen Fynyw, which might have been the site of the original Mynyw; and Llanddewibrefi, some distance inland, where we learn of a massive synod at which David performed some wondrous feats. His native language was, of course, Welsh which during his lifetime was undergoing rapid change. But he lived and worked in areas of the south-west where Irish was still spoken. He was in contact with it, and may well have been in conflict with those who spoke it. It is worthy of note that some of the early references to David come from Irish sources. There are many references to him in the *Lives* of Irish saints, who were reputed to have visited him at Mynyw, saints such as Ailbe,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. xii.

Bairre, Declan, Molua (Mo-Lúa), Aidan, Finnian and Sennán.<sup>21</sup> On a visit to St David's Finnian spoke Welsh as if it were his native tongue. David, and also Cadog, both had a favourite Irish disciple.

What evidence we have points to considerable contact at this time between Welsh and Irish. There must then have existed a state of bilingualism conducive to borrowing on both sides. Furthermore, there was Latin which during these two centuries must have influenced both. Many words were borrowed from Latin into Irish and British, including words relating to religion and the Christian Church. These must have come from the spoken Latin of the Church in Britain, since it is clear that such Christian influences as affected Ireland at this time came from Britain. Some words could have come to Irish from British or Welsh, but religious and learned words in that language are probably of Latin rather than British origin, but from a Latin affected by British pronunciation. For some time now it has been demonstrated that Latin loanwords in Irish can be divided into two groups.<sup>22</sup> In the first group, which incidentally contains no word for 'bishop', an omission of significance, if not gratification, for 'nonconformists', Latin *p* appears as *c* in Irish: Latin *Patricius* = Irish *Cothríche*. In the second group Latin *p* survives: *Patricius* = Irish *Padraig*. The first group was borrowed earlier than the second, and at a time when there had been certain phonetic developments in Irish. Between the two times of borrowing there must have occurred some important changes. The first group has been explained, notably by Professor MacNeill, as connected with the mission of Patrick towards the middle of the fifth century. The second group, a much larger one covering a longer period, belongs to the sixth century, after Irish had lost its final syllables. It has been explained as the result of the close relationship between the monasteries of Wales and Ireland in that century. Here we may refer to the *Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae*, a compilation which that doyen of Celtic hagiology, the late Père Grosjean, attributed to the ninth or tenth century, and which seems to be based on sources similar to those behind the annals. This work seeks to present in outline a history of the Church in Ireland from the time of Patrick to the year 665. It states that the 'second order' of Irish Saints, made up mainly of priests with some bishops, in the period 544–98 obtained a mass from David, Gildas

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Jackson, *LHEB*, pp. 122–48.



and Doccus. Whatever credence may be given to this work, it does seem to corroborate the evidence from other sources that the Church in Britain, more especially in Wales, a former Roman region, was exerting an influence on the Irish at this time. I have referred to the information to be gathered from the *Lives* of the Saints. Earlier we have evidence, again of doubtful validity, of the teachings and activities of Pelagius the heretic whose doctrine was condemned in 418. He also came originally from western Britain, in which land we learn that 'the enemies of grace' for a while gained power. Not so in Ireland, however, but even there some of his writings must have been kept and cherished, because several centuries later we find Irish scholars quoting from him.

In the Castellldwyran stone which we have already mentioned, the C of VOTECORIGAS represents a *recent* development in Primitive Irish from an earlier labiovelar  $k^w$ , which still existed in the time of St Patrick. This tells us that Primitive Irish was a living, changing and developing language in Dyfed towards the middle of the sixth century, as indeed was Welsh. Eoin MacWhite tells us that these Ogam stones may have been 'tombstones, cenotaphs or boundary marks'. In Wales they may primarily be taken as indicative of areas where Irish and British/Welsh were spoken, and where Latin culture was also held in high regard, as may be inferred from the way the king is described as *protictoris*. These areas were mostly in the south-west. Absence of Ogam stones, however, does not mean that the Irish had not been present, only that they had ceased to be a power in the land. Here we must stress the importance as evidence of place-names and of words in dialect. In south-west Wales there are no Ogams north of the Teifi, but as the late Professor Melville Richards has shown, the occurrence of *cnwc* 'hillock' (Irish *cnoc*) is indicative of Irish influence in Ceredigion, south of the Ystwyth. Irish must once have been prevalent in Ceredigion, and also in other areas, in Anglesey and Arfon, more so than appears at first sight. In the north-west we have names of Irish origin such as Nefyn, Soch, Desach, and more especially *Llyn* itself, which reminds us of *Lein* in *Leinster*, as does possibly *Mallaen* in Carmarthen. We should also mention here the presence of Irish names in Latin inscriptions with no Ogam, possibly people of Irish descent who had lost the language. We have at least two examples from Anglesey, CUNOGUSI, MACCUDECETI. The Irish were losing their grip, as we learn from the *Historia Brittonum* (c. 820), where we are told of the progress of Cunedda to Wales from the Firth of Forth probably early in the fifth century. He drove the Irish with great

slaughter from British territories, and his sons held dominion from the Dee to the Teifi.

In the north of Wales and in the north-west in particular, the British and Roman elements seemed to have made marked progress during our period. But by about 500 Irish was all but extinct, surviving only in place—and personal names. The south, more especially south and east of the Teifi, presents quite a different picture. Irish must have been spoken in many parts, while in some it may have been the only language in use. Over most of the country, however, it shared the field with British or Welsh which must at the time have been gaining the ascendancy, and advancing from the more central areas of Wales, the British or Brythonic parts in the land of the Ordovices where inscriptions, although not unknown, are not common, and where it was not customary to honour the dead by erecting stones to their memory. There seems to be further evidence of the earlier use of Irish in some other parts also, as we may conclude from an examination of the familiar name *Illtud*, the saint in south-eastern Wales with his church at Llanilltud (Lantwit). There is little evidence of Irish in this part of Wales, and no Ogam stones are known, but the name *Illtud* is certainly a survival of Irish influence, which may have penetrated into the south-east from Brecknock, or direct by sea. In any event, the *ill* is Irish, from *il* 'many'. The Welsh form occurs in *Llanelltud*, Merioneth, where no Irish influences are traceable.

It is clear then that Irish was on the wane in parts of Wales from before the sixth century. But during these centuries, the fifth and the sixth, it certainly continued in use in parts of the country, and the two languages must have had some influence on one another. At no other time were the two peoples and their languages closer together. I do not wish here to discuss, let alone try to resolve, the problems relating to the impact of one literature on the other, a subject exhaustively examined by highly competent and eminent scholars. I should mention the most recent works by Dr Patrick Sims-Williams,<sup>23</sup> who has already produced valuable studies on this subject, of which I have been privileged to make some use, which I gratefully acknowledge here. In order to try and encompass this large field, however, I have carefully avoided detailed

<sup>23</sup> E.g. *Bull. B. of Celtic St.*, 29 (1982), 607–14; 'The evidence for vernacular Irish literary influence on early medieval Welsh literature', in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 235–51; 'The Irish Geography of *Culhwch and Olwen*', in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers* (An Sagart, Maynooth, 1989), pp. 412–25; 'Fionn and Deidre in Late Medieval Wales', *Éigse*, 23 (1989), 1–15.

discussion of specific topics by him and others, and have aimed at presenting a general, and hopefully not misleading, picture of the relationship. Of course, the student of Welsh literature cannot afford to ignore Irish literature, and here I must refer in passing to another scholar to whom we are all so deeply indebted, the late Sir Ifor Williams, who rightly declares, 'gwaith y Gwyddel gynt yw'r help gorau i ddeall gwaith y Cymro gynt'<sup>24</sup>—'the work of the Irishman of yore is the best help to understand the work of the Welshman of yore'. Although we must, of course, readily agree with this, it does not mean that in Welsh literature we have in general borrowing from Irish, although admittedly there may well be some instances of it. In both Irish and Welsh we have corresponding types. In poetry we have a variety of themes and metres, readily comparable, whether they be descendants of Indo-European poetics or adaptations from Latin.<sup>25</sup> In both we have assonance and alliteration, praise-poetry and satire, hermit poetry, nature poetry, gnomic poetry, and of course elegy. In prose we have the laws, historical tracts, sagas—with archaic purple patches of poetry, genealogies—cooked or genuine, triads, lives etc. For literature in general we have a blend of ecclesiastical and native learning. Both literatures suggest a common source, and display similar growth and development against a common background within the Irish Sea Province. But we are obliged to conclude that any borrowing, be it direct or indirect, must have occurred mainly at times and in situations when Welsh and Irish lived together and talked together in the same land. Likewise with individual words. Sir John Rhŷs in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 1895 listed fifty words in Welsh borrowed from Irish. Miss Cecile O'Rahilly in her book<sup>26</sup> listed forty-five. Both lists require further scrutiny, as some of the words appear more than doubtful. The only thing that need be said generally here is that, even allowing for a period of contact and borrowing, the impact of the one language on the other seems to have been comparatively slight.

As we move on to the seventh and eight centuries, we find that Ireland had close links with the continent. A comparison with Wales, in so far as comparison is possible, shows in the two similar trends and developments which, while not being fortuitous, do not of necessity indicate impact and influence. Rather may they be explained as reflecting a common tendency, a 'nonconformist'

<sup>24</sup> *Canu Llywarch Hen Rhagair* (Caerdydd, 1935).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Eve E. Sweetser in *Early Welsh Poetry* (Aberystwyth, 1988), pp. 139–54.

<sup>26</sup> *Ireland and Wales* (London, 1924).

tendency, if I may so describe it. At an early stage, the Church assumed features of secular society. We witness the development of the monastic system in lands where the imprint of Roman order was faint, and where there was deep 'native' respect for ascetic values, and a dynamism no less native. A clearer and fuller view is presented of Ireland than of Wales. In Ireland it appears that the annals became contemporary after 735, when they provide detailed comment on ecclesiastical affairs. Much earlier we have evidence of the promotion of the monastic ideal and of the founding of some great monastic paruchia, between about 540 and 615, influenced according to Father Ryan<sup>27</sup> by Gildas rather than David. According to *De Excidio Britanniae* the Church was governed by bishops, while monks were in a minority. In the *Life of Samson* (c. 615)<sup>28</sup> it appears that the abbot in Britain was still under the bishop's authority. From Bede we learn that in the early seventh century Bangor-is-coed in north-east Wales was a large monastery of over two thousand monks under seven abbots. Such had been the progress of monasticism in Wales. But British Christianity was no longer the dominating influence in Ireland. *There* it is clear that monastic paruchia under native patronage, at a time when they were developing with presbyter-abbots, coexisted with an episcopalian administration. Nevertheless, the abbots were coming more to the forefront than the bishops, as we enter the period of the great monastic foundations in the seventh century, when the Irish emerge into the full light of history.

Nothing shows better the nonconformity of the Irish and Welsh than their attitude to the Easter controversy and some other matters, issues which, oddly as it may appear, helped to promote the pursuit of learning. For a while both stubbornly refused to conform to Roman practice, but some among them were more obdurate and unashamedly backward and perverse than others. In both countries there was more concern to fit the Church into the structure of native institutions than to conform to continental practice. Tradition and custom, as always among the Celts, counted for so much. The southern half of Ireland conformed in the late 630s. During the second half of the same century conformity was achieved in the northern half; Armagh which during the seventh and eighth centuries was acquiring a position of authority, subject only to the see of Rome, had conformed before 688. By 731, when Bede wrote, everyone had conformed

<sup>27</sup> J. Ryan, *Irish Monasticism, its origins and early development* (London, 1931).

<sup>28</sup> T. Taylor, *The Life of St. Samson of Dol* (London, 1925).

except the Welsh and they surrendered in 768. The Welsh may have excelled in stubbornness, but not apparently in much else at this time. The Irish, on the other hand, were more positive and more involved with the world outside, for which they received general recognition. In the seventh century English and even Frankish students went to Ireland to learn. S. Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne, says that students went in shiploads from Britain to Ireland. Likewise Bede. Many of the students had learned Irish, as had some notable leaders such as Oswald, king of Northumbria. The Ireland of those days despite the great plague of 664–6, in which a third of the population died, has been described as the intellectual centre of western Europe. By the eighth century Ireland had a great scribal tradition, at a time of much collection and classification, and during the seventh and eighth centuries its reputation for culture and scholarship spread abroad. Furthermore, from the beginning of the ninth century Irish annalists were making extensive use of the vernacular. A not dissimilar development is to be observed among the Welsh also.

We have already noted a trend towards secularization, but from about the middle of the eighth century we find in Ireland the emergence of an important new anchorite movement, that of the *Celi Dé* (the Culdees) 'companions of God' with roots in Munster.<sup>29</sup> This aspired to promote the ascetic ideal: ale was forbidden except when the monks were on long journeys. Such aspiration had been there all the time, but it now burst into flame which continued to flicker during the ninth and tenth centuries, and which produced a new interest in scholarship and literature, especially lyric poetry. However, it was not allowed to flicker undisturbed for long, for in 795 men from Scandinavia began their ravages on all the British Isles, but nowhere more severely and cruelly than in Ireland. In Ireland and in Wales ecclesiastics in their churches and monasteries and others were to be denied tranquility and security, as they became exposed to this savagery, their plight at first hardly being helped by bad weather conditions and destruction of crops. God, it would appear, was not entirely on their side, and the attacks were to continue unimpeded sporadically for some three centuries,<sup>30</sup> with the result that some men of learning fled with their books to the Carolingian schools.

<sup>29</sup> Kathleen Hughes, 'Ascetic Revival', in *The Church in Early Irish Society* (Methuen, 1966), pp. 173–93.

<sup>30</sup> P. Mac Cana, 'The Influence of the Vikings on Celtic Literature', *Congress* (Dublin, 1959), pp. 78–118.

It should, however, in fairness be remembered that before the Scandinavians ever came, the Irish had been accustomed to warfare between monasteries as a feature of ecclesiastical life. The story of the Scandinavian attacks is well known, although there are still many gaps and details to be filled in, as investigations and excavations in Dublin in the 70s have shown; verdicts on the activities of the Scandinavians seem now to be more mixed. They were, however, thirsty for land and wealth, and in Ireland they came not only to plunder, but also to settle, more especially in coastal areas in the south, where they founded centres like Dublin, Wicklow, Arklow, Wexford, Waterford, Cork, Limerick, which became trading-posts of importance. They came to Wales also as names like Anglesey, Fishguard and Swansea testify.<sup>31</sup> There also they pillaged and plundered, as we learn from the Welsh chronicles,<sup>32</sup> but their impact was much slighter than in Ireland. One of the most baffling problems confronting anyone concerned with Welsh-Irish relationship during these times is the strength and extent of the Scandinavian element in parts of Ireland by *c.* 1100.<sup>33</sup> In any communication between Wales and Ireland what kind of people, Irish or Scandinavian, did the Welsh come into contact with? We shall have to delve a little deeper into this question, but from the evidence now available, it appears that the Welsh who went to Ireland made for one or other of these Scandinavian centres rather than *Pura Hibernia*, the true real Ireland of the native Irish.

Let us now turn our attention to the evidence of contact generally during these three centuries, of which the investigations made to date have been somewhat uneven. In Wales the ninth century was the age of Rhodri Mawr. It was a time of revival and renaissance, mainly with reference to renewed interest and pride in the glories of an earlier period in the Old North. It was the kind of renaissance we witness at other times in Welsh history, characterized by a looking back to earlier times, apparently for inspiration and strength. This 'nostalgic' element can be seen and felt in the Llywarch Hen englynion. To the early part of the century belongs the *Historia Brittonum*, which also looks back at the history of Welsh and English, and which according to Zimmer<sup>34</sup> shows Irish influence. In Ireland we noted the increasing use of Irish in

<sup>31</sup> Cf. M. Richards, *Congress* (Dublin, 1959), p. 57.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. D. S. Evans, *Historia Gruffud Vab Kenan* (Caerdydd, 1977), pp. xciv–xcvi.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. lix–cxvii.

<sup>34</sup> *Nennius Vindicatus* (Berlin, 1893), pp. 207–74.

chronicles at the expense of Latin. A feature of clerical and scholarly activity in Wales during the ninth and tenth centuries was the writing of notes or glosses on Latin texts by scholars who sought to explain (to themselves and others) the meanings of words and expressions.<sup>35</sup> We have manuscripts which contain numbers of these glosses, produced by students whose spoken language was Welsh but whose literary language was Latin. In devising a written form for Welsh these scholars, handicapped by a declining knowledge of Latin, were experimenting with an exercise which was new to them, and for which they had no tradition to guide them.

One cannot but acclaim their contribution. These were the people who sometime between the ninth and twelfth centuries committed to writing the early literature which hitherto had existed only in an oral form. In a manuscript which contains Juvenius's version of the Gospels we have many glosses, and more importantly two attempts at poetry, one secular in the Llywarch Hen tradition, the other religious.<sup>36</sup> This manuscript is of relevance for Irish-Welsh relationship. More than one hand is discernible in it, and some of the glosses are in Irish. It certainly betrays Irish contact and involvement, and one is interested to note in it the words *araut di Nuadu* 'a prayer for Nuadu'. We do not know why we should pray for Nuadu, or what his role was. What we do know is that it is an Irish name, cognate with Welsh *Nudd*. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Irish scholars on their way to the Continent called at Bangor in North Wales or at St David's in South Wales,<sup>37</sup> where they cannot have been received as complete strangers. There was an Irish scholar named Dubthach<sup>38</sup> at the court of Merfyn Frych, father of Rhodri Mawr. One of the most eminent Irishmen who went to the continent towards the middle of the ninth century was Sedulius Scottus. In one of his poems he has words of praise for a king named Roricus, doubtless a reference to Rhodri Mawr of Gwynedd.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, evidence of affinity between Welsh and Irish in the eighth century and earlier is provided by Bishop Williamson in his article

<sup>35</sup> D. S. Evans, *Llafar a Llyfr yn yr Hen Gyfnod* (Caerdydd, 1982).

<sup>36</sup> I. Williams in *Beginnings of Welsh Poetry*, ed. R. Bromwich (Cardiff, 1972), pp. 89–121.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. C. H. Slover, 'Early Lit. Channels between Ireland and Wales', *Univ. of Texas Bulletin Studies in English*, 7 (1927), pp. 42–8; Evans, *Historia GVK.*, p. lxii.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. N. K. Chadwick, *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 100–1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

on the Book of St Chad, where he shows how the writing of St Chad, the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells display some (fine) features in common.<sup>40</sup> Finally we must not forget that trade also accounted for travel between the two countries and the development of some general features in the life and culture of the two peoples.

Slover states that British and Irish clerics were in continuous contact with each other up till the Norman period.<sup>41</sup> We know that they were in possession of information about each other's affairs. Their chronicles provide ample evidence. In the Annals of Ulster under 631 (=634) we learn of the burning of *Bennchoer moer in Britannia*, doubtless a reference to Bangor in Arfon. There are other references among the Irish to the Welsh and their leaders, including Saint David. We are told of the death of Conan mac Ruadhrach rex Britonum, namely Cynan, whose death is recorded by the Chronicle of the Princes under 816. The Irish chronicles tell us of the death of Hywel Dda, reputed to be the first Welsh lawgiver, in 949/950, as well as others from the tenth century. From the eleventh century we learn of the death of Llywelyn ap Seisyll (1023), Iago, the grandfather of Gruffudd ap Cynan (1039), Gruffudd ap Llywelyn (1063), and Rhys ap Tewdwr (1093).<sup>42</sup> It is, however, somewhat surprising to find so little reference to Gruffudd ap Cynan, who is reputed to have been born and bred in Dublin. This is a problem which I find puzzling, and to which I dare not publicly suggest a solution here. The Irish refer to events of some relevance to Wales or the Welsh. Horm, the leader of the Black Foreigners or Danes is mentioned as having been killed by Rhodri Mawr in 855. A son of a prince from Wales by the name Rodoricus plundered in Ireland, and was killed by the Irish. This happened in 966, 'according to Hanmer'. Then there is a reference to the English and the Foreigners of Dublin causing devastation in Wales, in 1030. And in 1030 also Diarmait Ua Briain brought a fleet to Wales, and went away with much booty.<sup>43</sup>

More than once over the centuries we find mention of Welsh leaders and princes, and for that matter saints, retreating to Ireland to seek refuge. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth Pasgen and Cadwallon fled there before Edwin; Carannog is

<sup>40</sup> *National Library of Wales Journal*, 4, 46-9.

<sup>41</sup> Slover (1927), 1-53, more especially p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Evans, *Historia GVK*, p. clxx-i.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. clxxi.



reported to have gone there with Patrick. Much later we are told in his *Historia* that Gruffudd ap Cynan fled at least five times to Ireland, but apart from him there is mention of others. We also learn of help coming from Ireland. This happened frequently in the case of Gruffudd ap Cynan in the second half of the eleventh century, but it happened to others also in their various ventures. In 1088 Rhys ap Tewdwr returned with a fleet from Ireland. There must have grown among the Welsh a tradition of crossing to Ireland to seek refuge and help, more especially from the Scandinavian centres.<sup>44</sup> Refuge and help, however, were not the only commodities sought. Learning also was available. In the fifth century St Cadog is reputed to have told his disciples, 'I now burn with ardent longing to sail to Ireland in order to study'.<sup>45</sup> Five centuries later we learn of Sulien, a member of a learned family in Llanbadarn. Sulien must have had respect for Ireland as an intellectual centre. He sailed there for a further period of education, but was blown off course, and found himself somewhere in the west of Scotland. Later he went to Ireland, and spent many years there in Glendalough or Clonmacnois with profit and obviously with pleasure, or he would not have stayed there for so long. Then he returned to Llanbadarn where he founded a school which attracted students from far and near including his four gifted sons. Sulien died in 1091, after having been twice bishop of St David's. In his work and in that of his sons, notably their manuscripts, Irish influence can be detected. It was his son Rhigyfarch, probably under Sulien's influence, who composed the *Life of St David* in the 80s of the eleventh century.

It would be tedious to expatiate still further on the question of relationship, intellectual or otherwise. Certainly there are signs of contact and communication. Welsh words can be identified (in their Old Welsh form) in Cormac's Glossary towards the end of the ninth century, although some of these may not in fact be Welsh.<sup>46</sup> This glossary is the first etymological dictionary of any native language in Europe. It was probably in the eleventh century that there was produced an Irish translation of the *Historia Brittonum* by Gilla Coemáin.<sup>47</sup> There must have been contact with churches in Ireland in the twelfth century, for we

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. lxviii–lxix.

<sup>45</sup> *VSBG*, p. 47.

<sup>46</sup> Evans, *Historia GVK*, p. lxii.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. lxiv.

learn from the *Historia* of Gruffudd ap Cynan that he bequeathed money to the main churches there.<sup>48</sup>

As we come to the eleventh century and the first part of the twelfth, we find a period largely neglected by Irish historians. Nevertheless, our knowledge is sufficient to enable us to say that in both Wales and Ireland at this time there was renewed interest in learning and letters. In Wales the circumstances and exigencies of the time doubtless in part were to account for the promotion of yet another antiquarian movement, which showed concern for and devotion to the past, both remote and recent, and which was represented in works such as the Lives of the Saints, inspired in part by Irish models, and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. These were in Latin and were meant for a wider public. In the vernacular, and intended exclusively for natives, we have works such as *Culhwch and Olwen* and the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, which people probably accepted as genuine history. In the twelfth and following century we have the Poets of the Princes. At one time it was thought that this new flowering of verse came in the wake of influences brought to Wales from Ireland by Gruffudd ap Cynan (c. 1075). The works of these poets resemble Irish poetry in many ways, poetry meant for the ear more than for the eye, but Professor Caerwyn Williams<sup>49</sup> and others have shown that they display little Irish influence or interest. Their interest lay in earlier periods in their own tradition and history. It is worthy of note that there is no reference to Irish heroes in Welsh poetry till the mid-fourteenth century.

At the beginning I referred to lack of trust, without being unduly serious or sober. As we look back at the references to the Irish in early Welsh literature, we find them variously described. In the early poetry in Welsh a distinction is made between the native Irish and the Scandinavians (in Ireland and outside). The poem *Armes Prydein*<sup>50</sup> (c. 930) distinguishes between 'the men of Dublin' (*gwyr Dulyn*) and 'the Irish' (*Gwyddyl*). The former are also described as *Gynhon Dulyn* 'the Gentiles of Dublin'. *Gynhon* is plural of *gynt*, both used of men of Scandinavian descent, often pillagers or pirates. In *Canu Aneirin* we stumble, ill-prepared and ill-equipped, upon references to them along with the Irish and Picts: *ar gynt a gwydyl a phryden* (492). In an eleventh-century poem

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. his exhaustive treatment in *Llên Cymru*, II, 1-94; III, 1-112.

<sup>50</sup> Lines 9, 10. Ed. I. Williams, English version by R. Bromwich (Cardiff, 1972).

predicting the battle of Mynydd Carn (1081)<sup>51</sup> the Irish (*Gwydyl*) are described as *diefyl duon* 'black devils', an adjective usually reserved for the Danes. Another adjective used is *diueryawc*, meaning 'plundering', a form to be equated with the Irish *dibergach*. It is used of the Irish in the Book of Taliesin (33.27): *gwydyl diefyl diferogyon*, where they are also described as *diefyl* 'devils'.

Such references are hardly complimentary. Indeed, throughout the Middle Ages Welsh sources display a hostile attitude. In the *Brut* under 1110 we are told that Madog ap Rhiryd returned from Ireland 'unable to suffer the evil ways and evil customs of the Irish'. Giraldus Cambrensis<sup>52</sup> censures them for their 'innate laziness'. Contact there certainly was, but over these long, dull and dark centuries we do not find much evidence of close cooperation and intercourse. And we may well ask in what way has this proximity affected the two peoples.

Toynbee classed both Ireland and Scandinavia as 'abortive civilizations',—independent of Rome and the western culture that followed. Earlier Cumman<sup>53</sup> in the seventh century described both Welsh/British and Irish as a pimple on the chin of the world,—a description hardly calculated to be complimentary. Both have been on the stage of history, but for how long now we do not know, as we apparently approach the terrible finality of old age.

Somebody once described Ireland as being just about the right size for a country. Judging by the rash of works by Welsh historians of late, it would appear that Wales could be described as being just about the right size for a history. Some would agree that for peoples, like individuals, there are risks in showing excessive and extravagant concern for themselves, their role and their destiny. In that way they could expose themselves to hazards and perils, to criticism, contempt, or, what is worse, special consideration and sympathy. And both of us, Welsh and Irish, North and South, surely want to avoid that.

<sup>51</sup> *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd* (Caerdydd, 1933), p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Donncha Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Gill and Macmillan, 1972), p. 71; M. Richter, *Medieval Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan, 1988), pp. 122–4.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Kathleen Hughes, *Church in Early Irish Society*, p. 107.