

## **Introduction: Books and Manuscripts in Wales, 1450-1850**

Mary Chadwick, Sarah Ward Clavier and Shaun Evans

This special edition of *The Welsh History Review* results directly from a vibrant interdisciplinary conference 'Reading, Writing, and Collecting: Books and Manuscripts in Wales, 1450-1850' held at Brecon Cathedral in the now-distant pre-pandemic days of April 2019.<sup>1</sup> The conference built on the work in Philip Jones and Eiluned Rees' edited collection *A Nation and its Books: A History of the Book in Wales* (1998). Its objectives were to share new research from across a wide disciplinary and chronological range; to bring into conversation scholars, librarians, archivists, and heritage professionals; and to explore the sources and methodologies relevant to Welsh book history. Over the two days of the conference more than fifty attendees heard papers, asked questions, and discussed reading, writing, and collecting books and manuscripts in Wales. These included a stimulating keynote address and Society for Renaissance Studies Annual Lecture from David Pearson, and thematic panels on the intersection of orality, manuscript, and print; private and historic libraries; pamphlets and broadsides; scholarship and education; and book ownership. There were period-specific panels on late-medieval manuscripts and orthography and on sharing knowledge in the nineteenth century, as well as practice-based panels on methods and theory in book history; and the book in Special Collections. Members of the 'Curious Travellers' project, based at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies in Aberystwyth, provided a fascinating insight into their work on Welsh travel and travel-writing, centred on the eighteenth-century publications of Thomas Pennant.<sup>2</sup> The Mostyn Manuscripts, subject of a centenary exhibition programme at the National Library of Wales (NLW) in 2018, featured as the focus of a special panel.<sup>3</sup> The speakers, drawn from right across and beyond Wales, spanned a chronological range from the late Middle Ages to the late nineteenth century, and career stages from PhD or DPhil students through to senior professors. It was a privilege to be able to offer financial support from the Learned Society of Wales for early career bursaries. The speakers and attendees were also from a range of disciplines and occupations. Historians and literary scholars, public and local historians, librarians, archaeologists, and heritage professionals gave papers in Welsh and English.

The range of people, topics, sources, languages and approaches discussed at the Brecon conference give some indication of the wealth of academic and cultural heritage work currently underway on Welsh books, manuscripts, and reading. Certain themes emerged from the conference: the variety and sheer number of unexplored Welsh books, manuscripts, and libraries (in a variety of languages), and the importance of uncovering the practices and lives of individual collectors such as Elizabeth Greenly, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, John Jones, and Sir John Prise. The collective also played a key part, whether the nineteenth-century printers of St. David's College Lampeter, or the Welsh students in European colleges in the sixteenth century. The conversations at coffee and dinner revealed further connections. These ranged from the Welsh books at Jesus College, Oxford, to those present in 'English' collections. While this variety was both rich and inspiring, it is also true to say that there are still significant gaps in our understanding of Welsh book and manuscript culture throughout the period 1450 to 1850. Some of these gaps are the result of a need to move beyond traditional chronological, disciplinary, and linguistic boundaries and to fully explore continuity as well as change, whether in collecting or reading practices, in orthography or the influence of politics.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://booksmanuscriptswales.wordpress.com/>. The conference was generously funded by the Society for Renaissance Studies, the Learned Society of Wales, the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, the British Association for Romantic Studies. It was supported by the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates, Bangor University and Brecon Cathedral.

<sup>2</sup> *Curious Travellers: Thomas Pennant and the Welsh and Scottish Tour (1760-1820)*, <https://curioustravellers.ac.uk/>.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Mostyn Manuscripts', *National Library of Wales [NLW]*, <https://www.library.wales/collections/learn-more/manuscripts/the-mostyn-manuscripts>.

There has been little work done, for example, on the material aspects of Welsh book culture, including the buildings and spaces in which Welsh books were stored and read, and the materiality of Welsh texts. There is also further scope to explore the history of emotions within Welsh books and manuscripts, and the evidence that emotional readings can provide for Welsh historical and social culture more generally. Finally, the limited research undertaken to date on gentry collections is a vital starting point for understanding books and manuscripts in Wales. This needs to be expanded to encompass more regional and national networks, but also to include those consumers of books, manuscripts, and news material below the socio-economic level of the gentry. 'Middling sort' or financially impoverished readers and consumers of literature (ephemeral or otherwise) can be elusive but should nonetheless feature in future examinations of Welsh reading. There is, furthermore, much remaining work still to be done on women's book ownership and reading practices, particularly in the early modern period.

This special edition picks up some of the threads from the conference and stimulates afresh the discussions begun in Brecon in 2019. The editors hope that it functions both as a showcase and a call to arms, inspiring future publications, research networks, and projects. It comes at an auspicious time for Welsh book history. It is nearly twenty-five years since the publication of the seminal *A Nation and its Books*. The new *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature* was published in 2019, followed in 2020 by two of the four volumes of *The Oxford Literary History of Wales*. A new Routledge *Handbook of Welsh History* is in production, and Daniel Huws' immensely learned and critically useful *Repertory of Welsh Manuscripts and Scribes, c.800-1800* is to be published imminently (in spring 2022) by the National Library of Wales. In the wider public sphere Welsh history and literature has come to the forefront of discussions about the future of Wales and the Union as well as other key contemporary issues. All the research showcased at the Brecon conference had foundations in earlier programmes of intellectual and cultural activity. The following section highlights some of the core features, characteristics, emphases and strengths of scholarship linked to Welsh books and manuscripts. This is followed by a consideration of some of the existing gaps and associated opportunities for the development of Welsh book and library history. Many of these avenues of future enquiry are taken up and explored within and across articles featured in this special edition. Through these, we hope to suggest future directions for the enrichment of the subject.

Manuscripts have long occupied a place of prominence in Welsh scholarship. A lengthy lineage of leading Welsh antiquarian scholars – from John Davies of Mallwyd, Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt, Bishop Humphrey Humphreys and Edward Lhuyd, to Lewis Morris, Walter Davies, Iolo Morganwg and Angharad Llwyd – esteemed the medieval manuscripts of Wales amongst the principal sources for understanding the literature, history and culture of the nation. All the major Welsh cultural societies established across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – notably the Cymmrodorion and Cambrian Archaeological Association – included aims to identify, preserve, publish and foster the study of this rich literary heritage. J. Gwenogvryn Evans' *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* (1898-1910), published at the behest of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, was a major milestone in this programme. It was followed by the foundation of the National Library of Wales (NLW) in 1907, which from the time of its inception has played a pivotal role in the collection, conservation, promotion and study of Wales' literary heritage. NLW's Peniarth Manuscripts and the *Chronicle of Elis Gruffudd* have been inscribed into the UNESCO UK Memory of the World Register.<sup>4</sup> *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (2000), a collection of essays by Daniel Huws,

---

<sup>4</sup> 'The Peniarth Manuscripts', NLW, <https://www.library.wales/collections/learn-more/manuscripts/the-peniarth-manuscripts>.

Keeper of Manuscripts and Records at the National Library between 1981-2002, has served as the indispensable centrepiece for scholarship on the subject over the last generation. Huws' forthcoming *Repertory* is the National Library's latest field-defining contribution to this agenda. Along with the creation of national cultural institutions for the collection of manuscripts, the establishment of universities in Wales provided major impetus for a new academic study of manuscripts and records as source materials for Welsh history and literature over the twentieth century, including the publication of foundational texts such as J. E. Lloyd's *A History of Wales from the earliest times to the Edwardian Conquest* and Thomas Parry's *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg hyd 1900*, translated into English by Idris Bell as *A History of Welsh Literature*.<sup>5</sup>

Helen Fulton's consideration here of the Welsh books and manuscripts rescued by Sir John Prise during the dissolution of the monasteries shows that the preservation of Welsh texts has long been a concern for Welsh people. Preserving and printing the core medieval texts of Welsh culture, history, literature and law have been central objectives in the cultural and intellectual life of Wales since the pioneering publications of the eighteenth century. William Wotton and Moses Williams' *Cyfreithjeu Hywel Dda* (1730), Evan Evans' *Specimens of the poetry of the ancient Welsh bards* (1776), Owen Jones and Wiliam Owen Pugh's *Barddoniaeth Dafydd ap Gwilym* (1789) and *The Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales* (1801-07) are but a few examples. The twentieth century provided an institutional framework for the intensification of these efforts to publish scholarly editions of core medieval texts. The editions published as part of the joint University of Wales Press (UWP) and Board of Celtic Studies' History and Law series are particularly noteworthy in this respect. A more recent highlight are the critical editions of poetry edited as part of the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies' major *Beirdd y Tywysogion* and *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* projects.<sup>6</sup> This long-term endeavour generated a scholarship which tended to lean towards individual texts and the work and contribution of particular literary figures, especially individual poets. Most of the apparatus to these critical editions, and much of the scholarly analysis, is published in Welsh including in dedicated journals such as *Llên Cymru*, *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, *Dwned*, *Studia Celtica* and the *National Library of Wales Journal*. It regularly connects with the thriving international field of Celtic Studies.

The breadth and diversity of entries included in Meic Stephens' *New companion to the literature of Wales* (1998) is suggestive of the extent of the scholarship undertaken by the end of the twentieth century. The contributions to Huw Pryce's *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* further expanded the lens of enquiry. Pryce's volume assessed the development, significance and uses of the written word within medieval Wales and contextualised the presence and production of manuscripts within broader considerations of orality, literacy, language, gender, status, governance and learning.<sup>7</sup> Building on these lines of enquiry, a research culture centred on the manuscript and literary cultures of medieval Wales is currently thriving. Recent publications by early-career researchers such as Georgia Henley, Ben Guy and Rebecca Thomas suggest an impressive depth and maturity of scholarship, primed to unlock the potential fields of study emerging from Huws' forthcoming *Repertory*.<sup>8</sup> There has been a gradual intellectual shift towards a consideration of individual texts

---

<sup>5</sup> J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, 2 Vols. (London, 1912); T. Parry, *Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg hyd 1900* (Caerdydd, 1944); T. Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature*, trans. I. Bell (Oxford, 1955).

<sup>6</sup> Full details of the 7 editions published as part of the Poets of the Princes and 43 editions published as part of the Poets of the Nobility projects are available at <https://www.wales.ac.uk/en/CentreforAdvancedWelshCelticStudies>.

<sup>7</sup> H. Pryce (ed.), *Literacy Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> For example: B. Guy, *Medieval Welsh genealogy: an introduction and textual study* (Woodbridge, 2020); G. Henley, R. Thomas, O. Jones and B. Guy (eds.), *The Chronicles of medieval Wales and the March*

and literary personages within broader cultural, social and historical milieus. This can be traced across the seven-volume UWP *Guide to Welsh Literature* (1976-2003), which reflected an expansion in the chronological and thematic range of enquiry.<sup>9</sup> This shift is further reflected in this edition, as contributors analyse individual libraries, texts, people and families in close relation to their personal and more broadly socio-historic contexts.

Printed books, and the post-medieval period in general, have traditionally played second fiddle to medieval manuscripts in the hierarchy of Welsh literary scholarship. The work of the Welsh Bibliographical Society, inaugurated in 1906, which produced an annual *Journal* between 1910-84, provided an important counterweight. Research into early printed books in Wales (since the publication of *Yny lhyvyr hwenn ...* in 1546) has, perhaps understandably, been dominated by considerations of the books printed in or about the Welsh language, especially the milestone translations of scripture into Welsh. Alongside Helen Fulton's contribution to this volume, the outputs of a recent project focusing on the life, works and influence of Humphrey Llwyd will further augment our understandings of Wales' role in the European culture of Renaissance humanism. The contributions to this edition accentuate the point that the circulation, ownership and reading of books within Wales, in languages other than Welsh, needs to be considered a core part of Welsh book and library history. The multilingual, cosmopolitan libraries of the gentry are herein highlighted as key candidates for further enquiry. For the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, Geraint H. Jenkins' pioneering study of *Literature, Religion and Society in Wales 1660-1730* remains highly influential.<sup>10</sup> It was this period which saw the integration of centres of printing into Wales, coupled with a readership which was extending more widely across Welsh society, allowing books to interact as important influences in, and as reflections of Welsh life, especially in the critical sphere of religion.<sup>11</sup> Contributions to *The Social History of the Welsh Language*, a multi-period UWP book series edited by Jenkins, have further enriched understanding of the character, influence and significance of Welsh-language writing across different cultural and societal spheres.<sup>12</sup> Another key figure in the historiography of Welsh bibliography is Eiluned Rees, Assistant Keeper at the National Library. Her eclectic corpus of articles on various aspects of Welsh book culture (from subscription lists to bindings) provide an essential foundation for the development of book history as an interdisciplinary field of study in Wales. Her achievements include the indispensable *Libri Walliae: A Catalogue of Welsh Books Printed in Wales, 1546-1820* (1987) and, co-edited with Philip Jones, *A Nation and Its Books*, which has provided a standard chronological and analytical framework for the subject.

---

*new contexts, studies, and texts* (Turnhout, 2020); G. Henley and J. B. Smith (eds.), *A companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Leiden, 2020); G. Henley and A. J. McMullen (eds.), *Gerald of Wales: new perspectives on a medieval writer and critic* (Cardiff, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> A. O. H. Jarman and G. R. Hughes (eds.), *A guide to Welsh literature [GWL]*, Vol. I (Cardiff, 1976); A. O. H. Jarman, G. R. Hughes and D. Johnston (eds.), *GWL*, Vol. II, 1282-c.1550 (Cardiff, 1997); R. Geraint Gruffydd (ed.), *GWL*, Vol. III, c.1530-1700 (Cardiff, 1997); B. Jarvis (ed.), *GWL*, Vol. IV, c.1700-1800 (Cardiff, 2000); H. Teifi Edwards (ed.), *GWL*, Vol. V, c.1900-1996 (Cardiff, 2000); D. Johnston (ed.), *GWL*, Vol. VI, c.1900-1996 (Cardiff, 1998); M. Wynn Thomas (ed.), *GWL*, Vol. VII, Welsh writing in English (Cardiff, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> G. H. Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society in Wales, 1660-1730* (Cardiff, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> My chapter in the forthcoming *Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press*, 'Wales and the Press' deals with a lot of this - want the ref? YES

<sup>12</sup> Especially G. H. Jenkins (ed.), *Language and community in the nineteenth century* (Cardiff, 1998); G. H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh language and its social domains, 1801-1911* (Cardiff, 2000); G. H. Jenkins (ed.) *The Welsh language before the Industrial Revolution* (Cardiff, 2001).

The development of a concerted academic focus in the area of Welsh writing in English is a distinctive feature of Welsh humanities research.<sup>13</sup> This has gone some way towards rebalancing the traditional scholarly focus on Welsh-language texts, highlighting the multiplicity of ways English-language writing has been used to communicate Welsh perspectives, ideas and identities. The vast majority of work in the field of Welsh writing in English focuses on twentieth-century texts. In recent decades, the nineteenth century has begun to receive critical attention. Significant book-length studies have combined comparisons of multiple sources with the careful deployment of critical frameworks including post-colonial and feminist literary theory in order to draw broad conclusions about key themes and concerns of nineteenth-century authors writing in English and to offer methodological foundations to other scholars.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding full-length studies by Sarah Prescott and Bethan M. Jenkins, the early modern period remains critically neglected.<sup>15</sup> Overall, despite methodological approaches which place great emphasis on networks and influences, the focus has tended to be on individual writers and their works.<sup>16</sup> This mirrors the scholarly approach taken by most of the contributors to this edition who take one text, source or collection and work out from there. Perhaps especially in relation to our period, the fields of Welsh writing in English and Welsh book and library history have much to offer one another. Knowledge of texts – of all kinds – which were read in Wales, and of the networks which facilitated their circulation, deepens and enlightens our understanding of the processes of authorship amongst bilingual, monolingual, and multilingual Welsh authors alike. The articles below by Helen Fulton, Melanie Bigold and Lisa Tallis clearly demonstrate this point.

The study of books and manuscripts is now highly conditioned by an increasingly digital research environment.<sup>17</sup> Continuous improvements to online catalogues and finding aids, especially when combined with enhanced provenance research, make it far easier for researchers to identify books held by public and academic libraries, and other cultural institutions, internationally. This has included the creation of international combined catalogues, pooling bibliographic data from multiple repositories.<sup>18</sup> The antiquarian book trade is now also increasingly conducted online, with detailed listings and images uploaded to book seller sites. Digitisation is also making rare historical texts much more accessible; beyond sites such as *Early English Books Online*, *Google Books* and *archive.org*, institutions such as NLW are increasingly making their manuscripts and printed books available online. Major research projects focusing on the poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym and Guto'r Glyn have included the creation of innovative online sites for hosting transcripts, translations and analyses of poems, while other online resources have been created to index or facilitate access to

---

<sup>13</sup> J. Aaron, 'Forming the Subject: The Genesis of Welsh Writing in English as an Academic Discipline', *The Association for Welsh writing in English [AWWE]*, <https://www.awwe.org/forming-the-subject.html> (2017); T. Brown, 'The Association for Welsh Writing in English: A Short History', *AWWE*, <https://www.awwe.org/a-short-history.html> (2016).

<sup>14</sup> Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff, 2004); Jane Aaron, *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity* (Cardiff, 2007); Damian Walford Davies and Lynda Pratt (eds.), *Wales and the Romantic Imagination* (Cardiff, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Prescott, *Eighteenth-Century Writing from Wales: Bards and Britons* (Cardiff, 2008); Bethan M. Jenkins, *Between Wales and England: Anglophone Welsh Writing of the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff, 2017). See also Stewart Mottram and Sarah Prescott (eds.), *Writing Wales from the Renaissance to Romanticism* (Farnham, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, outputs from the project, "Iolo Morganwg and the Romantic Tradition in Wales" at the Centre for Welsh and Celtic Studies.

<sup>17</sup> For a recent consideration of this context see B. Albritton, E. M. Treharne and G. Henley (eds.), *Medieval manuscripts in the digital age* (Abingdon, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> For example: *Jisc Library Hub Discover*, <https://discover.libraryhub.jisc.ac.uk/>; WorldCat, <https://www.worldcat.org/>; and *English Short Title Catalogue*, <http://estc.bl.uk/>.

Welsh ballads, journals, newspapers, chronicles and the medieval law texts.<sup>19</sup> NLW's invaluable 'The index to Welsh poetry in manuscript' resource was regrettably taken offline in 2021.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond Wales, David Pearson's *Book Owners Online* is the latest in a package of web-based directories and databases pooling information on historical libraries, books and their owners.<sup>21</sup> This complements more established resources including *Private Libraries in Renaissance England*, *The UK Reading Experience Database*, *Archaeology of Reading*, *Annotated Books Online* and thematic resources such as *RECIRC: The Reception and Circulation of Early Modern Women's Writing, 1550-1700* and *Early Modern Female Book Ownership*.<sup>22</sup> The recently published resource, *Manuscript Verse Miscellanies 1700-1820*, points to the value of these collections of original and commonplace poetry to the areas of reception studies and the history of reading.<sup>23</sup> Welsh books, collectors and experiences are currently underrepresented in these databases. The digital humanities possibilities are exciting and exhaustive, including opportunities to digitally re-connect dispersed libraries, link books associated with particular owners, sites or printers, and to understand local and international networks of book circulation and exchange.

The circulation, ownership and reading of printed books within Wales in languages other than Welsh is severely under-researched and the multilingual, cosmopolitan libraries of the gentry stand out as key candidates for further enquiry in addressing this lacuna. The articles collected here address this in varied, interdisciplinary and insightful ways, taking in printed texts in Welsh and English, as well as Latin. The edition as a whole evinces a substantial focus on country house libraries and underscores the benefits of an interdisciplinary and multi-period approach. Contributors draw on a wide range of sources including books themselves, library catalogues, auction catalogues, correspondence, account books, and printed accounts of libraries, their formation and transformation. All of the contributors draw out the intellectual, emotional and personal relationships between readers and their books, while drawing broader conclusions about the value of the study of libraries to our understanding of national, religious and political histories, social trends, and cultural processes of self-understanding and representation. The sometimes insubstantial presence of women as owners and readers of books – the main focus of Melanie Bigold's article – is touched upon in several of the contributions. Bigold and Lisa Tallis consider the corresponding invisibility of 'ordinary' or working-class readers, suggesting methods by which their presence and experience might be established. Readers' relationships with books are overwhelmingly constructed, experienced and mediated through relationships with people. All of the articles collected here explore different facets of the – largely positive – human interactions which are visible in the libraries under examination, taking in scholarly and professional networks, and webs of friends and relatives. They demonstrate that the study and reconstruction of collections of texts has the potential to deepen our awareness of the interconnectedness of different circles of people throughout the early modern period and into the nineteenth century, and of the ways that social relationships were built, maintained and managed.

---

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/> and <http://www.gutorglyn.net/>. Also <http://croniclau.bangor.ac.uk/chronicles.php.en>; <http://cyfraith-hywel.cymru.ac.uk/>; <https://www.library.wales/discover/library-resources/ballads>; <https://journals.library.wales/>; <https://newspapers.library.wales/>.

<sup>20</sup> 'Maldwyn: The index to Welsh poetry in manuscript', *NLW*, <https://www.library.wales/discover/maldwyn>.

<sup>21</sup> D. Pearson, *Book Owners Online*, <https://bookowners.online>. The project is making conscious efforts to include entries from Wales.

<sup>22</sup> These can be accessed at: <https://pre.folger.edu/>; <https://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/>; <https://archaeologyofreading.org/>; <https://www.annotatedbooksonline.com/>; <https://recirc.nuigalway.ie/> and <https://earlymodernfemalebookownership.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>23</sup> See <https://dhil.lib.sfu.ca/mvm/>.

We open with a comprehensive survey of the state of the field of book and library history in Wales. Covering an extensive period, from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, and with insightful comments on twenty-first century developments, Shaun Evans outlines the strengths and the lacunae in existing research into the history of books, manuscripts, libraries and their users with a particular focus on the Welsh country house. Running throughout Evans' piece is an interest in the relationships which gentry men and women had with their books, and the ways that texts functioned in the construction of individual selves, of dynastic or familial outlooks and of the physical and material spaces of houses themselves. Evans places the history of Welsh libraries in the context of current debates about the identities exhibited by members of the Welsh gentry, their commitment to Welsh cultural life, their international and cosmopolitan outlooks and their perceived 'anglicisation'. He highlights a range of areas in which further research would be particularly valuable, particularly in addressing the fact that existing scholarship is largely based on a limited number of individual case studies. Evans also points out that systemised collation and analysis of the information which we have about the contents of Welsh libraries, particularly that found in manuscript catalogues, would allow greater understanding of the role of country houses as repositories of printed texts in Welsh and other languages. It would also permit scholars to place Welsh libraries into a 'four nations' context via meaningful comparisons with similar collections formed in England, Scotland and Ireland. The potential benefits of synthesising data in this way are considered in a number of the articles gathered here, notably those by Julie Mathias, Melanie Bigold and Lisa Tallis.

In *A Nation and Its Books*, Jones and Rees noted that, due to a lack of research then undertaken, the collection focused more on the printing and purchasing of texts than on writing and reading.<sup>24</sup> Helen Fulton's examination of the books and manuscripts owned and read by Brecon-born Sir John Prise (1501/2-1555), a member of the Welsh Marcher gentry, is an example of how these various strands can be fruitfully brought together. Prise was part of a circle of antiquarians who acquired books and manuscripts from monastic collections during the Reformation. Fulton's argument that Prise's acquisitions reflected his own particular interests is borne out by her examination of the relationships between these rescued texts and Prise's own *Historia Britannicae Defensio* (1575), his defence of the *Brut* version of British history. Fulton makes particularly clear the ways that case studies of particular individuals or collections can enhance our understanding of broader historical and cultural events and developments. In addition to her consideration of the significance of the print and manuscript texts which were owned by Prise, or which passed through his hands, Fulton's piece also demonstrates the importance of other sources, notably commonplace books and personal miscellanies as evidence of engagement with and use of early modern texts.

Sue Niebrzydowski's book-specific case study explores the acquisition and afterlife of the manuscript copy of John Lydgate's *The Lyf of Our Lady*, purchased by the seventeenth-century bibliophile Sir Thomas Mostyn of Gloddaith (1651-1692). Niebrzydowski places Mostyn's ownership of this text into a rich context which takes in acquisition principles, related texts in the Gloddaith library – notably other works by Lydgate and the collection of Catholic material in the Mostyn collection – the material and aesthetic qualities of particular texts and, crucially, signs of use, damage and repair. Mostyn's ostensibly male-dominated collection is opened up to demonstrate the presence of women as owners, readers, and users of books and manuscripts. The article foregrounds the significant female influence over the broader familial, communal and religious cultures within which libraries were developed. Below the surface of this study of the early modern afterlife of a Middle English text are currents of emotion and speculation. Niebrzydowski uses correspondence to give

---

<sup>24</sup> P. Jones and E. Rees (eds.), *A Nation and its Books: A History of the Book in Wales* (Aberystwyth, 1998), p. xiii.

weight to her suggestions regarding the emotional experiences and reactions of not only Mostyn but other collectors such as Samuel Pepys as they pursued, purchased and missed out on the acquisition of particular texts. She also practices the essential informed-but-speculative approach which enlivens and deepens analysis of the use of books and manuscripts, notably in relation to analysis of female book use. Alongside detailed commentary on the titles and copies which made up Mostyn's library, Niebrzydowski's piece emphasises the deep personal connections which early modern men and women had with the books and manuscripts they owned and used.

Ways of reading the history of book use, and considerations of the roles which texts played in the construction and maintenance of different communities, within and beyond Wales, are key themes of many of the articles in this edition. In a case study centred on the collection owned by John Jones (1650-1727), Dean of Bangor, Julie Mathias reconstructs some of the overlapping circles of readers evidenced in an unusual and valuable notebook in which Jones recorded the items he lent out. Supplemented with Jones' will and correspondence, the notebook provides evidence of some of the contents of Jones' collection. As a source, it challenges notions of a 'private' library. Further, as with so many early modern libraries, the evidence we have is immediately suggestive of the evidence we lack. Jones almost certainly owned texts which are not mentioned in his notebook, whether because his colleagues and friends had no desire to borrow them, or because he was unwilling to lend them. Mathias' reconstruction of Jones' book-lending networks takes in family and friends – male and female; clerical colleagues – senior and junior; and others including the leading antiquary Edward Lhuyd. Mathias's article highlights the immense importance of archival study to book history. She positions Jones' collection partly in relation to English examples considered by David Pearson, drawing promising and valuable comparisons between the libraries of readers from England and Wales.

If male readers and book owners in Wales are neglected in the fields of book and library history, women are only more so. Melanie Bigold's pioneering article, exploring three case studies centring on the collections owned by Sarah Ponsonby (1755-1831) and Lady Eleanor Butler (c. 1739-1829), the 'Ladies of Llangollen'; Hester Thrale Piozzi (1741-1821); and Elizabeth Greenly (1771-1839) of Titley Court in Herefordshire, makes a comprehensive start on redressing the gender imbalance. Bigold draws on a wide range of sources to reconstruct aspects of these women's methods of selecting, acquiring, storing, organising, reading and sharing their books. Like Fulton's consideration of the relationship between John Prise's library and his own writing, Bigold makes clear that the histories of reading and writing in Wales need to be examined in conjunction with each other. Bigold draws out the material qualities of books, as well as the surroundings in which they were stored, displayed and enjoyed, linking these aspects to their owners' sociable networks and processes of self-construction. That this piece arises from research undertaken as part of a Leverhulme-funded project, 'Women's Libraries and Book Ownership, 1660-1820', allows Bigold to position these collections acquired and maintained by women in Wales in relation to the personal libraries amassed by women in England, contributing to our broad understanding of Romantic-era female book owners, as well as the specific ways that collecting was inflected by personal and local connections.

These connections, a key theme of this special edition as a whole, come to the fore in Lisa Tallis' examination of just a relatively small sample of the books collected by Enoch Robert Gibbon Salisbury (1819-1890), businessman, barrister and MP. Now part of the Special Collections and Archives of Cardiff University, Salisbury's 'Cambrian Collection' of books about, or produced in, Wales provides unparalleled insights into specifically Welsh, nineteenth-century book history as well as a demonstration of the ways that books and reading can be intricately tied up with life experiences from childhood. Alongside marginalia and inscriptions in the books themselves, Tallis



mines Salisbury's print and manuscript catalogues in a wide-ranging consideration of the immense value of collections which have not been dispersed. The article also underlines the importance of Special Collections to the study of Welsh book history and the distinctive contributions that professional librarians can make to this field. This final article picks up many of the strands explored throughout the edition. These include the unpredictable but undeniable presence of female authors and readers in ostensibly male-dominated collections; the potential to uncover traces of the acquisition and reading practices of 'ordinary' or working-class people in the histories of the libraries of wealthier men and women; the significance of provenance and signs of use not only to today's researchers but to book collectors throughout the centuries; and, above all, the intense value of studying the intricately connected histories of books and the people who encountered them.

We hope that this collection will serve a number of purposes. Each article provides an insightful addition to the increasing body of work on Welsh book history, offering much to scholars exploring particular figures, texts, periods and themes. They also demonstrate the potential which might be realised by a suitably-funded shift from individual (albeit deeply collaborative) researchers producing case-study style pieces to large-scale projects, aimed at generating and analysing big data, involving professionals from a range of fields and institutions, exploring an array of sources from multiple centuries. The study of libraries – the people who constructed them, the texts within them, the materialities of those texts as well as of the spaces in which they were stored – offers much to the neglected/budding field of Welsh material culture.

The Brecon conference succeeded in showcasing vibrant programmes of academic and cultural heritage activity converging on the subject of books and manuscripts in Wales, whilst simultaneously pointing to gaps and associated opportunities for the development of collections-based research. Notwithstanding the strengths, achievements and diversity of scholarship about Welsh books, there are numerous questions and approaches which have been successfully pursued in other places which might be reapplied to augment scholarly understanding of Welsh contexts and collections. In particular, and especially with regards to printed books, the material dimensions of book history and library history have not yet emerged as concerted fields of enquiry in Wales in the same way they have done elsewhere. The *Library & Information History* journal, *Cambridge History of Libraries* and *Cambridge History of the Book* series have provided important frameworks for the development of a research agenda centred on historical books and libraries in England.<sup>25</sup> There are also growing bodies of scholarship focusing on books and libraries in Ireland and Scotland.<sup>26</sup> Such scholarship is increasingly focusing on reading practices; textual materialities; women's book ownership

---

<sup>25</sup> Key works include: D. Pearson, *Book ownership in Stuart England* (Cambridge, 2021); A. Bautz and J. Gregory (eds.), *Libraries, books and collectors of texts 1600-1900* (New York, 2018); D. McKitterick, *The invention of rare books* (Cambridge, 2018); M. Purcell, *The country house library* (New Haven, 2017); M. Dimmock, A. Hadfield and M. Healy (eds.), *The intellectual culture of the English country house, 1500-1700* (Manchester, 2015); E. Potten, 'Beyond bibliophilia: contextualizing private libraries in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', *Library & Information History [LIH]* 31, 2 (2015), 73-94; J. Raven, 'Debating bibliomania and the collection of books in the eighteenth century', *LIH* 29, 3 (2013), 196-209; S. West, 'An architectural typology for the early modern country house library', *The Library*, 14, 4 (2013), 441-64; D. Pearson, 'Patterns of book ownership in late seventeenth-century England', *The Library* 11, 2 (2010), 139-67; A. Hunt, 'Private libraries in the age of bibliomania', in G. Mandelbrote and K. A. Manley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 438-58.

<sup>26</sup> For example: P. Reid, 'Patriots and rogues: some Scottish lairds and their libraries', *LIH* 35, 1 (2019), 1-20; E. Boran (ed.), *Book collecting in Ireland and Britain, 1650-1850* (Dublin, 2018); K. Baston, *Charles Areskine's library: lawyers and their books at the dawn of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Leiden, 2016); M. Purcell, *The big house library in Ireland: books in Ulster country houses* (Cambridge, 2011); M. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: books and their readers in provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* (Leiden, 2010).

(#HerBook); the intricacies of book trade, scholarly networks and the circulation of books, as well as the material environments used for the storage and reading of books.<sup>27</sup> Case studies of individual libraries, collectors and regions have been central to the development of such research and this special edition points to some of the opportunities for integrating Welsh contexts and collections into this growing international field of enquiry.

---

<sup>27</sup> Important recent contributions include: A. Smyth, *Material texts in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2018); K. Acheson (ed.), *Early modern English marginalia* (London, 2018); L. Knight, M. White and E. Sauer (eds.), *Women's bookscapes in early modern Britain* (Michigan, 2018); A. Williams, *The social life of books* (New Haven, 2017); J. Raven, *What is the history of the book?* (Cambridge, 2017); E. Salter, *Popular reading in English c.1400-1600* (Manchester, 2017); S. Orgel, *The reader in the book: a study of spaces and traces* (Cambridge, 2015); M. Towsey, 'Private libraries, elite women and shared reading practices in Georgian Britain', *LIH* 29, 3 (2013), 201-22; D. Pearson, *Books as history: the importance of books beyond their text* (London, 2008); S. Colclough, *Consuming texts: readers and reading communities* (Basingstoke, 2007); J. Fergus, *Provincial readers in eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 2006); S. West, 'Rare books and rare women: gender and private libraries 1660-1830', in E. Kerslake and N. Moody (eds.), *Gendering library history* (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 179-95.