

BOOK REVIEWS

Ed. Sharon M Varey and Graeme J White (eds), *Landscape History Discoveries in the North West*, Chester, University of Chester Press, 2012. 279pp. UK £12.99 US \$32.

Reviewed by Glenn Foard, University of Huddersfield

This collection of papers derives from a 2011 conference marking the 25th anniversary of the Chester Society for Landscape History. It encompasses a range of sites and landscapes in the northern half of the Welsh Marches though, not surprisingly, concentrating on Cheshire. In many ways the volume is typical of the eclectic nature of landscape history and, indeed, landscape archaeology - a fuzzy distinction which is addressed in the introduction by Dai Morgan Evans. The time span is broadly medieval and early modern, as one might expect where most of the research is documentary led, though some papers also draw substantially upon the physical evidence to complement the written sources.

Anyone who comes to this book expecting large scale integrated perspectives on major historical themes will be disappointed. Instead, what the book offers is a wide range of topic and scale, extending from individual sites, such as Stanlow Abbey, through studies of timber framed buildings in a single township, to reviews on a countywide scale. While all the papers are modest in scope and impact, this is typical of most landscape history in England. The authors are manufacturing individual bricks out of which, much later, a few large scale overviews of a theme, a region or even the theme at a national scale are likely to be constructed. To a degree it is in this way, with the small scale local work of many individuals, that our understanding of the evolution of the English landscape has been transformed since Hoskins first published his 'Making of the English Landscape' in 1955.

It will be the specialist on a particular theme, or someone local to the individual site, that will generally seek out the individual site or township papers in this book - such the Walk Mill at Foulk Stapleford. Most of us will move quickly on to the wider overviews, though the depth and quality of the research which underpins the papers is very variable. Thus the analysis of the putative curvilinear enclosures of Willaston appears highly speculative, while the analysis of the morphology of settlement in north east Wales is based wholly on 19th century mapping, largely unsupported by earlier sources.

Other papers provide what appears to be valuable synthesis of evidence, as with analysis of the development of turnpikes in Cheshire from 1700 to 1850. Yet when one approaches the broader studies from a position of detailed knowledge then flaws are revealed, as with the paper on the enclosure of West Cheshire. At one end of the spectrum the examples are on a very small scale, failing to show the overall character of open field and enclosure at the township level, where it is best understood. At the regional scale the paper lacks adequate mapping and statistics to demonstrate the geographical patterns that are claimed. Most importantly perhaps, at the national scale there is an inadequate grasp of

the nature of the open field landscape of the 'champion' lands of central England and their enclosure. This leads to wildly inaccurate comparisons with Cheshire. It is not just the remarkable claim that 'parliamentary enclosure was an admission of failure'. It goes far deeper with, for example, the failure to realise that some aspects presented as typical of late medieval or early modern Cheshire can actually be found at the same date in champion townships of the Midlands.

But it is perhaps unfair to criticise local studies for their parochial nature. There is a great deal of valuable data here and local perspectives on themes that can and, undoubtedly, will be used by others to create overviews on a broader scale.

David Jenkins, *From Ship's Cook to Baronet: Sir William Reardon Smith's Life in Shipping, 1856-1935*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011. Xiii + 223 pp. 8 Colour Plates. Bibliography. UK £14.99 US \$25 pbk.

Reviewed by Daryl Leeworthy, University of Huddersfield

David Jenkins is one of Wales' leading authorities on the maritime world, particularly the ship-owners of Cardiff. Until recently, he was senior curator at the National Waterford Museum in Swansea and a consistent presence in the research room there. This wide experience and depth of knowledge comes to the fore in this book on the life of Sir William Reardon Smith, who grew up in poverty in mid-nineteenth century Devon and became one of the richest men in Britain and a leading philanthropist. Combining Reardon Smith's own unfinished autobiography and a lengthy academic essay that takes up the story to give the reader a fuller sense of his life, this is, despite the interesting narrative, a work that requires some concentration and depth of knowledge to make the best use of.

In recent years, Welsh maritime history has undergone something of a renaissance: new work on the 'intelligent town' of eighteenth-century Swansea by Louise Miskell, the emerging scholarship of nineteenth-century ship-owners by Richard Haines, and the tireless work on maritime heritage and archaeology by Deanna Groom of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales at Aberystwyth, has consolidated and extended the much earlier work undertaken by Martin Daunton on labour relations in the dockyards and ports of Glamorgan. This may be added to the scholarship which appears annually in the journal *Cymru a'r Môr / Maritime Wales*, published by Gwynedd Archive Service, which has a sizeable presence in the notes and bibliography of this book, where even the work of Daunton does not.

The highlight is undoubtedly Reardon Smith's own autobiography, which was written at the very end of his life - indeed mortality caught up with him before he finished it. Comprising seven relatively short chapters, it navigates the reader from Reardon Smith's first voyage in September 1870, aged fourteen, to his life as a cargo ship captain criss-crossing the Atlantic in the mid-1890s. It has a sparing style which combines a sense of

observation about life on board nineteenth-century merchant ships with the clear narrative drive of a rags-to-riches story. The endnotes (which appear between pages 46 and 54) are full of additional information and facts, although none provide any indication as to the archival evidence that might be followed up on.

Jenkins' own essay begins on page 57. Intended, at least in part, as the second half of the biographical work, there is nevertheless an immediate shift in style with the loss of Reardon Smith's social and cultural observations and their replacement by a clearer concentration on the facts and figures of maritime trade. For historians with an eye for tables, this is ideal, but for a different class of historian, however, this can leave the second half of the book rather less able to hold interest. There are, nevertheless, flashes of the remarkable. Towards the end of Jenkins' account he quotes observations made by Reardon Smith on Franklin Delano Roosevelt. 'I have travelled all over the world a great deal', declared Reardon Smith in 1934, 'here in America you have a wonderful president who is trying to ease your burden'. There was considerable potential here – was Reardon Smith alone amongst his Cardiff contemporaries in his thoughts about President Roosevelt, we might wonder – but such lines of enquiry are never pursued. Likewise, despite living through the tumultuous dock strikes of 1911 – not least the one that paralysed Cardiff – and running his own shipping company, we are never introduced these events.

Wider problems are also sadly evident which limit the effectiveness of the book beyond immediate interest in Reardon Smith's life. The bibliography is, in particular, poorly structured and deciphering it will make for a challenge when scholars come to follow up Jenkins' research. An entry under the Glamorgan Record Office (now the Glamorgan Archives) which reads simply "Annual Reports" is clearly insufficient, given the number of annual reports held by that institution – we are left to guess (based on supposition) which he means. In a similar vein, the notes to the text are consolidated as one single list rather than broken by chapter. This again presents problems of checking sources, not least when so many of the notes run to the effect of so-and-so told me this. Whilst historians often do rely on personal communications as means of gaining knowledge and understanding, if the form that such communications are being used in is intended as oral history (as some of these are), it would have been better to present them as such.

This is, then, not an academic work – though it is published by a university press – it is, instead, a work of local history which bears all the hallmarks (positive and negative) of that. There is undoubted interest here – in Reardon Smith's autobiography most certainly – but there is also the sense that this is a missed opportunity to place William Reardon Smith fully into the context of his times. The absence of so much of the political and social history of South Wales and the failure of the author to make those links, means that whilst we learn a good deal about the Reardon Smith Line, its share dividends and its expenditure on ships, we never learn how fitted in. There is undoubtedly a good local audience for this book, but academic readers expecting the level of scholarship normally associated with a university press may find themselves frustrated.

Richard Wyn Jones, *The Fascist Party in Wales? Plaid Cymru, Welsh Nationalism and the Accusation of Fascism*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2014, xvii + 112pp, \$25 pbk.

Reviewed by Peter C. Grosvenor, Ph.D, Sociology & Global Studies, Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA, USA

1968 saw the death of veteran Labour Member of Parliament Ness Edwards, precipitating a by-election in his South Wales constituency of Caerphilly. Two years earlier, in a by-election in Camarthen, Gwynfor Evans had won Plaid Cymru's first parliamentary seat. Caerphilly provided Plaid with a high profile opportunity to challenge Labour's hegemony in the Welsh valleys. In that historic standoff, Labour retained the seat, but with its majority slashed from 21,148 to 1,874.

Today, the MP for Caerphilly is Labour's Wayne David, an experienced politician who is also a serious student of Welsh political history, and the biographer of Ness Edwards. In a parliamentary debate in 2002, David claimed that there was a "strong strand of racism and xenophobia in Plaid Cymru's history." He then turned to the political outlook of the poet and playwright Saunders Lewis, who was a founding member of Plaid, its president from 1926 to 1939, and an enduring intellectual influence on the party: He believed that he could embrace the corporatist ideas of Mussolini, with whom he was enamoured. He certainly had plenty of time for the racist remarks of various fascist elements arising in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Let me make it clear that he was an anti-Semite (quoted p.22).

The accusation that Plaid Cymru identified itself with European fascism in the 1930s and 1940s stems from the period, and it has been tirelessly reiterated by the party's political opponents ever since.

The historical veracity of the accusation is the subject of this study by Richard Wyn Jones, Professor of Welsh Politics, and Director of the Wales Governance Centre, at Cardiff University. The book was first published in Welsh in 2013, and was originally conceived of as a section in the forthcoming second volume of Wyn Jones's survey of Plaid Cymru's political thought, volume one of which - *Rhoi Cymru'n Gyntaf: Syniadaeth Plaid Cymru* - was published in 2007.

Wyn Jones is right to emphasise from the beginning the gravity of his subject: if the accusation is factual, a substantial part of the Welsh intelligentsia has lent its support to an historically fascist party; if it is without foundation, leading figures in the Welsh political class have been involved for many decades in the sustained propagation of a conscious lie. Wyn Jones's conclusion could not be clearer: that the imputation of fascism to Plaid Cymru rests on a series of fabrications and willful misinterpretations that reveal deep pathologies in Welsh political culture. His objective is to demolish what he insists is the myth of Plaid Cymru's fascism.

Wyn Jones's first – and weakest – line of attack is to point out that professions of sympathy for the personalities and policies of various European far right movements in the inter-war period can be found across the political spectrum. This is demonstrably true, and it is entirely reasonable for Wyn Jones to ask why such incriminating endorsements have stuck to leading Plaid Cymru figures and not to other, often more explicit, offenders, whose ranks include Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George – neither of whom has an historical reputation tarnished with fascism. But the effect of this valuable exposure of the double-standard is to place others in the dock; it does not, in itself, get the Plaid leaders out of it.

Neither is Wyn Jones's case advanced by calling into question the definition of fascism. He is correct to point out that the left has often employed "fascist" inaccurately and indiscriminately as a term of abuse, but the substantive accusations against the Plaid leaders are not answered by refined distinctions between fascism, the radical right, the conservative right, and authoritarian conservatism.

In his examination of the case against specific Plaid leaders, Wyn Jones does not shy away from their self-incrimination. He does not, for example, question Ambrose Bebb's admiration for Charles Maurras and *L'Action française*, but seeks instead to loosen Bebb's connection to Plaid.

Saunders Lewis presents a more difficult problem. Since the publication of D. Tecwyn Lloyd's study *John Saunders Lewis: Y Gyfrol Gyntaf* (1988), there has been an increased focus on the anti-Semitic content of Lewis's writings. The starkest example of such content is found in Lewis's controversial poem "Y Dilyw 1939," which bluntly invokes the stereotype of the Jew-as-financier, a theme revisited in his political essays. Wyn Jones asks us to interpret such passages as rare and aberrant in the context of the Lewis oeuvre. He quotes Lewis's description of anti-Semitism as "one of history's diseases," then goes on to write that "[t]his is Lewis at his most perceptive: frankly admitting a temptation to which he was to surrender on more than one occasion" (p.46). Few readers will find much mitigation in that.

But, ultimately, efforts to associate Plaid with fascism have been fuelled less by the pronouncements of its leaders than by the party's positions on the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

Working-class support for the Second Republic against Franco's Phalangists occupies an iconic place in the history of Welsh socialism and communism, as exemplified in Hywel Francis's landmark *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War* (1984). Drawing on Robert Stradling's revisionist *Wales and the Spanish Civil War: The Dragon's Dearest Cause?* (2004), Wyn Jones shows that the anti-Catholicism that was already well-established in Nonconformist Wales readily conflated Catholicism with fascism, and that the strong presence of Catholics in the Plaid leadership enabled the party's left-wing critics to associate it with Franco.

Plaid's actual position on Spain was non-interventionist. This was also the stance of the National Government and, until October 1937, of the Labour Party. Plaid has never shrugged off the suspicion that the anti-modernists in its leadership valorised Franco as a bastion against the advance of what they saw as the culturally destructive force of industrial socialism. Acknowledging this, Wyn Jones speculates that Plaid's historical reputation may have fared better if the party had adopted instead the alternative position of support for Basque and Catalan autonomy.

For Wyn Jones, the basis of Plaid's non-interventionism was its powerful strain of pacifism, which also explains the party's massively controversial position of neutrality in the Second World War. This was widely perceived as borderline treasonous at the time, and subsequent apologists for Plaid - despite their strained efforts to compare the party's wartime stance to that of Gandhi or de Valera - have been on the defensive over this issue ever since.

Despite the context, nuance, and qualification he supplies, Wyn Jones cannot put as much distance between fascism and the interwar Plaid leadership as he would like, and he is himself uncomfortable with the party's policies towards Spain and the war against Hitler. He is on much stronger ground, however, when he claims that fascist policies and attitudes were always absent from the party's official programme, and this is surely a key point. Plaid's detractors could protest that, for example, Saunders Lewis's anti-collectivist concept of *perchentyaeth* (proliferated small-scale property ownership) drew inspiration from fascist land policies, and bore close resemblance to the distributist ideas of G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc - two Catholic thinkers who were themselves accused of fascist sympathies. But, as Wyn Jones points out, ideas pioneered by fascist regimes - such as public works schemes, and corporatist cooperation between the state, unions, and employers - were adopted as part of the New Deal. Would Plaid's critics then argue that the Roosevelt administration was fascist?

The evidence for fascist sympathy within Plaid may not be as weak as Wyn Jones claims, but it is not strong enough to reasonably sustain the longevity and vitriol of the accusation. The discrepancy is convincingly explained by Wyn Jones in terms of three pathologies in Welsh political culture. Firstly, there is Welsh anti-Catholicism which, though now dissipated, has received insufficient historical attention. Secondly, British nationalism in Wales was revived and intensified by the struggle against Nazism. In this situation, Welsh nationalism - especially given its neutrality stance - was pushed to the margins. Thirdly, the signal characteristic of Welsh politics in the democratic age has been one-party dominance - first by the Liberals, then by Labour - which came to an end only with the proportionally elected Welsh Assembly after 1999. In Wyn Jones's analysis, one-party dominance leads to other political parties being treated not as competitors to be beaten but as enemies to be crushed.

This indispensable study convincingly shows that it is an insupportable over-claim to present Plaid Cymru as the fascist party in Wales during the interwar years. But it is too

much to declare, as does Plaid theoretician Adam Price in his cover endorsement, that it “buries forever one of the most destructive lies in Welsh political discourse.” The verbal legacies of some Plaid leaders, and the party’s positions on Spain and on the Second World War, should continue to cause discomfort to a party that today stands for a creative form of red/green progressive and democratic politics.

Huw Pryce, *J.E. Lloyd and the Creation of Welsh History: Renewing a Nation’s Past*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011. Xvii + 277 pp. 6 Plates (B&W). UK £19.99, US \$35 pbk.

Reviewed by Daryl Leeworthy, University of Huddersfield

Until very recently Welsh historians rarely stopped to think about historiography – writing about how other historians go about writing history – because we were too busy recovering the past and trying to interpret to worry about such things. There are those who would argue (the present reviewer included) that it is still much too soon. Modern Welsh history writing is, after all, not much more than a century old, and only since the 1960s has it gained any considerable size. Large gaps remain. The leading historiographer in Wales is undoubtedly Neil Evans (who appears in the blurb on the back cover), and his thoughts on the subject can be found in a variety of journals and in his editorials in *Llafur*. His most recent publication in the field is the collection of essays – *Writing a Small Nation’s Past* (Aldershot, 2013) – which he edited alongside Professor Huw Pryce of Bangor University, the nation’s only Professor of Welsh History. Looming large in that collection, and the conference that preceded it, is the figure of Sir John Edward Lloyd (1861-1947), the first professional historian to turn their attention to the Welsh past, and the subject of Huw Pryce’s intellectual biography.

This is a book of two halves, each enriching the other. The first comprises a relatively straightforward narrative account of the life of J. E. Lloyd, from his birth in the Liberal Nonconformist community of Welsh exiles in Liverpool, through his academic training at Aberystwyth and Oxford, and on to his academic presence as professor of history at Bangor. Through this account we can observe Lloyd’s efforts to carve an academic niche, but also provide a stable platform for research into, teaching about, and publication on Welsh history. Above all, we sense Lloyd’s total immersion in the Liberal Nonconformist national project, which was stirred into life in the aftermath of the 1868 General Election. This biography is underpinned by a remarkable range of archival material, drawing on Lloyd’s own archive, but also collections in Aberystwyth and Oxford. It is, at once, both utterly convincing and sympathetic.

The second half is quite different, albeit still framed as biography. Here we are presented not with Lloyd’s life, but the life of Lloyd’s greatest creation *A History of Wales*

from *Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* which was published in 1911. For a historian of late-nineteenth-century training, Lloyd's habits were somewhat lacking in the probing rigour employed today but his *modus operandi*, that 'we cannot sacrifice Arthur and St David and the two Llywelyns and Owain Glyn Dwr to the Wales which was the product of the industrial revolution' (cited p. 92), echoes keenly a significant debate that still rages. Lloyd was, above all, a Whiggish historian and believed in the progress of the Welsh nation, its people, and its customs. He employed a degree of scientific rigour to give his work a firm foundation, but one with a purpose. As Pryce notes 'empirical rigour served to legitimize a 'whiggish' narrative of events' (p. 98).

To conclude, Pryce focuses on a single question: 'creating Welsh history?' The interrogative draws on Lloyd's obituary published in *The Times* after his death in 1947. At the time many would have said yes. Pryce, however, is more nuanced than that: he shows clearly that Lloyd was working within a wider historical tradition and that his methodologies weren't so different from contemporaries or predecessors. And yet, there remains a strong degree of admiration for a historian who 'brought steadfast dedication, breadth of vision and meticulous verification of detail' (p. 176). Whether or not historians of nineteenth and twentieth century Wales, fired as their writing is by quite different methods and approaches, see John Edward Lloyd as quite as important as those working in medieval history do is certainly open for debate. Other books, not least Glanmor Williams' edited collection *Merthyr Politics* (1966) and, in more recent years, Gwyn A. Williams' *When Was Wales?*, would seem to have had a far greater impact on those subsequent generations of Welsh historians who have sought to understand coalfields, docks, and ironworks, the sorts of places they grew up in.

At all times Pryce is meticulous: he willingly observes weaknesses in Lloyd's methodology and points to areas of contention where these have arisen in the scholarship over the century since *A History of Wales* was published. This is no more apparent than in the sixty pages of notes and nearly thirty pages of bibliography, which contain items in both English and Welsh. It is clear that Pryce has scoured the archives thoroughly in producing his account. Thus, the only major flaw lies in the black and white plates that are, almost, hidden in the pages of the book. This is a shame since the photographs and images that are reproduced are too small to really add anything considerable to the text. There was clearly scope for further illustration, and it would have been welcome, but the plates here are strikingly redundant.

This is an impressive study and a considerable contribution to our understanding of Welsh historiography. It will stand also as a valuable addition to wider considerations of medieval historiography and its development over the twentieth century. Indeed, we now possess, in Huw Pryce's book, the clearest insight yet into one of Wales' singular contributions to the field. Those who question the logic of pursuing historiography when there is other work to be done may read the book's underlying purpose with some puzzlement, but with never anything less than admiration for the erudition and scholarship

that underpins it. Whether or not this sort of pursuit succeeds in 'renewing a nation's past', however, remains very much to be seen.