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## Re-opening 'The Old Curiosity Shop': To what extent did the Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858 fulfil the Ioloic vision of Welsh culture?

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# Re-opening ‘The Old Curiosity Shop’: To what extent did the Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858 fulfil the Ioloic vision of Welsh culture?

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**Figure 1:** Davies, Walter (1858) '*Peithynen*' displaying the false bardic alphabet in a poem in memory of Iolo Morganwg, prepared for the Llangollen Eisteddfod, 1858 [Online]. Available at <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/24324> (Accessed 17 May 2019) © National Museum Wales, 2019.

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This dissertation is dedicated in memory to my parents.  
Thank you for always believing that I would get here one day.

## **Glossary of Welsh Terms**

*Coelbren y Beirdd* - ‘The Alphabet of the Bards’.

*Nod cyfrin* - ‘the mystic mark’.

*Peithynen* - a wooden frame containing literature composed using the *Coelbren y Beirdd*.

*Rheiengerdd* - a love poem.

*Y Gwir yn Erbyn y Byd* - ‘The Truth Against the World’.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

*'The glory of a nation does not consist in paying any honour to any man in the past,  
but in improving the present,  
and in seeking after truth and adopting it,  
even if it leads to the putting away every national prejudice,  
every institution and custom of the past...'*<sup>1</sup>

The above is an extract from an article published by *The Cardiff Times* on 23 October 1858, in response to the Eisteddfod which had taken place at Llangollen one month prior. It is worthy of reprint here as it encapsulates the discussion of Welsh nationhood that occurred in the aftermath of the Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858, which centred upon the reception and utilisation of invented traditions in the early Victorian period.<sup>2</sup>

The term 'invented tradition' is derived from Eric Hobsbawm's seminal work of 1983, and is defined as 'a set of practices [...] which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past'.<sup>3</sup> Hobsbawm makes the point that the phenomenon of invented traditions does not confine itself to one particular period, but that it is most prevalent when 'a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed'.<sup>4</sup> Prys Morgan has demonstrated that this was almost certainly the case during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Wales, as the ancient way of life decayed and 'Welsh picturesque customs were 'now wholly laid aside''.<sup>5</sup> During this period Edward Williams ('*Iolo Morganwg*'), a pre-eminent Welsh antiquarian, and other members of the Welsh literati, sought to both recreate and promulgate a patriotic Welsh past through the

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1 Richard French, 'The Merits and Demerits of Eisteddfodau', *The Cardiff Times* (23 October 1858), p. 4.

2 The Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858 will hereafter be referred to as 'Llangollen'.

3 Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions' in *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., 2nd edn (New York, 2013 [1983]), p. 1.

4 Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Traditions', p. 4.

5 Prys Morgan, 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period' in *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., 2nd edn (New York, 2013 [1983]), p. 43.

cultivation of invented traditions. This inextricably linked the Ioloic legacy to the endurance of such traditions, and it is these traditions that we see manifest in the controversial events and reception of Llangollen – in the form of the Gorsedd and the Madoc myth.

A comprehensive understanding of the popular perception of invented traditions during this period necessitates engagement with the contemporaneous cultural climate. For the purposes of this dissertation, the impact of the *'Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales'*, the so-called 'Treachery of the Blue Books', is particularly salient.<sup>6</sup> The repercussions of the Blue Books on both the continuation and castigation of invented traditions at Llangollen was first noted in Prys Morgan's work of 1983, *'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period'*. Morgan's work acknowledges the dual impact of the Blue Books on Welsh culture as perpetuated at Llangollen: whilst some sought to prove Welsh pre-eminence through the revivification of patriotic nationalism, others attempted to redress questionable Welsh historiography as a means to demonstrate the scholarly progression of Wales.<sup>7</sup> Within the latter category due consideration must be given to Thomas Stephens, a scholar whose essay refuting the long-established Madoc myth provoked a controversial response when it was entered into a competition at Llangollen. Morgan ultimately finds Stephens to be the victor of Llangollen, attributing the shift in the popular perception of invented traditions to the harsher criticism that poets and mythologists faced in the wake of the Blue Books.<sup>8</sup>

The significance of Llangollen in terms of the reception of the Ioloic legacy is noted by Marion Löffler in *'The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg: 1826-1926'* (2007). In this work, Löffler surmises that 'the decades between 1850 and 1890 [...] marked the high tide of

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6 R. R. W. Lingen, Jellyngyr C. Symons and H. R. Vaughan Johnson, *'Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales'* (London, 1847).

7 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', p. 93.

8 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', p. 97.

Iolo's legacy'.<sup>9</sup> Given Iolo's close relationship to invented traditions, this assertion appears to refute Morgan's conclusion that 'from 1848 onwards the invention of tradition, which had been so long dominant in Welsh culture, began to decay'.<sup>10</sup> This divergence is partially attributable to the fact that where Morgan focuses on the movement away from mythological history towards more practical pursuits in the aftermath of the Blue Books, Löffler instead focuses on the attempts at patriotic cultural regeneration that occurred alongside it.<sup>11</sup> To this end, much of Löffler's work comprises a discussion of the continuation of invented traditions in the century after Iolo's death by Ioloic legatees such as John Williams ('*Ab Ithel*'), one of the principal organisers of Llangollen.

The historiography of Llangollen has, thus far, tended to focus on the continuation or castigation of the Ioloic legacy at Llangollen through the reception of invented traditions. Yet, if we step away from this phenomenon briefly, there is an opportunity to consider other elements of the Eisteddfod which did not coalesce with Iolo's vision of Welsh culture. Such elements have received a brief mention in Geraint Bowen's work of 1992, '*Gorsedd y Beirdd – From Primrose Hill 1792 to Aberystwyth 1992*'. In this work, Bowen notes features of Llangollen that would have 'enraged' Iolo: the dissemination of new Druidic ideas, influenced by the mores of eastern cults, under the auspices of Evan Davies ('*Myfyr Morganwg*'), the recital of a Trinitarian doxology, and the adoption of the title 'Archdruid', again by Myfyr Morganwg.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, whilst this dissertation will primarily seek to reappraise the reception of invented traditions at Llangollen in light of the divergence between Morgan and Löffler, consideration will also be given to the theological proclivities of members of the Gorsedd, as a means to assess the broader continuation of the Ioloic legacy at Llangollen. Such analysis will be presented within the

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9 Marion Löffler, *The Literary and Historical Legacy of Iolo Morganwg: 1826-1926* (Cardiff, 2007), p. 5.

10 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', p. 97.

11 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', pp. 98-100; Löffler, 'Iolo Morganwg', p. 5.

12 Geraint Bowen, 'Gorsedd y Beirdd – From Primrose Hill 1792 to Aberystwyth 1992', in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1992), p. 132.



second chapter of this dissertation, which will focus primarily on the 1858 Gorsedd of the Bards. This chapter will consider Ab Ithel's account of the Gorsedd of 1858, published within *The Cambrian Journal*, alongside the Ioloic ideals conveyed within the *Iolo Manuscripts* (1848), as a means to evaluate to what extent the Ioloic paradigm was adhered to at Llangollen.<sup>13</sup>

The third chapter of this dissertation will consider the aforementioned essay of Thomas Stephens, which sought to refute the Madoc myth.<sup>14</sup> The myth regarding the presence of Welsh Indians in America in fact had much earlier origins than the Ioloic period, as demonstrated in Gwyn A. Williams' work of 1979 *Madoc: The Legend of the Welsh Discovery of America*.<sup>15</sup> However, Anthony Smith's thesis on 'ethno-symbolism' notes the way in which mythology is rediscovered and reinterpreted by nationalist intelligentsia in the process of nation-building; a concept that was realised in the revivification of the Madoc myth by Iolo and his contemporaries as a means to exemplify Welsh pre-eminence in the closing decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Analysis of Thomas Stephens' *Madoc* essay thus demonstrates the way in which the traditions that were reinvigorated by Iolo and his contemporaries were beginning to be repudiated by 1858. Chapter Three will also consider the broader literary output of Llangollen; thus allowing conclusions to be drawn regarding both the wider continuation of the Ioloic legacy at Llangollen and the cultural climate that Morgan has claimed necessitated the shift from the invented to the pragmatic.<sup>17</sup>

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13 John Williams, 'Gorsedd of the Bards of the Isle of Britain; the Royal Chair of Powys; and the Grand Eisteddfod held at Llangollen On Alban Elfed, 1858', *Cambrian Journal*, V (1858) pp.262-313; Edward Williams, *Iolo Manuscripts: A Selection of Ancient Welsh Manuscripts*, ed. and trans. by Taliesin Williams (Llandoverly, 1848).

14 Thomas Stephens, *Madoc: An Essay on the Discovery of America by Madoc ap Owen Gwynedd in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Llywarch Reynolds (London, 1898 [1858]).

15 Gwyn A. Williams, *Madoc: The Legend of the Welsh Discovery of America* (London, 1979), pp. 34-5.

16 Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London, 2002), pp. 28-9. For an example of how the Madoc myth was revived by Iolo and his contemporaries, see: William Owen Pughe and Edward Williams, 'Discovery of the Madawgwys', *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, 70 (1791), pp. 795-7.

17 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', pp. 92-100

Ab Ithel's account of Llangollen notes the primary aims of the Eisteddfod, amongst which reference is made to 'the perpetuation of the Cymraeg, and the cultivation of Welsh literature'.<sup>18</sup> The importance of language has been explored within Benedict Anderson's thesis on the 'imagined community', which delineates the way in which the proliferation of the vernacular and its corresponding literature is utilised as a means to construct a 'community' between members of a society that would otherwise have been disengaged from one another.<sup>19</sup> This concept has particular resonance if we are to consider Llangollen as an attempt at nation-building in the aftermath of the Blue Books; yet, by 1858 much of South Wales, in particular, had been heavily anglicised, leaving many cut off from contemporary understandings of Welsh culture which were predominantly focused on the preservation of the Welsh language.<sup>20</sup> The analysis of South-Walian, English-language newspaper commentary throughout this dissertation thus allows the exploration of the wider reception of Ioloic ideals, amongst those who were unable to access the 'community' that was nurtured at Llangollen.

In his contemporaneous biography of Iolo Morganwg, Elijah Waring referred to his subject's mind as resembling 'an old curiosity shop'.<sup>21</sup> This dissertation predominantly seeks to examine the extent to which the events Llangollen conformed to the Ioloic prototype and thus constituted a 're-opening' of this metaphorical shop. Although Llangollen has warranted mention in the preceding historiographical discussion of invented traditions and the Ioloic legacy, no thorough

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18 Williams, 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', p. 262.

19 Spencer and Wollman, 'Nationalism', pp. 38-39.

20 Janet Davies, *The Welsh Language: A History* (Cardiff, 2014) - see p. 57 for Davies' estimation that only 67% of the Welsh population were Welsh-speakers by 1851, with industrialised areas of north-east Wales remaining 'stubbornly Welsh'.

21 Geraint H. Jenkins, 'On the Trail of a 'Rattleskull Genius': Introduction' in *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, Geraint H. Jenkins ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cardiff, 2009 [2005]) - see p. 9 for Elijah Waring's reference to Iolo's mind as resembling an 'old curiosity shop'.

analysis of its events and reception has as yet been undertaken.<sup>22</sup> Such a study will not only ascertain the extent to which the Ioloic vision of Welsh culture was fulfilled in 1858, but will also allow broader conclusions to be drawn about the cultural climate of the period and the wider reception of invented traditions in early Victorian Wales.

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22 There is an article titled 'Eisteddfod Fawr Llangollen 1858' by J. Iorwerth Roberts which features in the *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society* (1959). However, as this article is written in the Welsh language, it is inaccessible for analysis for the purposes of this dissertation.

## Chapter Two

### ‘Our own Pageantry and Peacockry’<sup>23</sup>: The 1858 Gorsedd of the Bards

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**Figure 2:** Monk, Charles (1858) *Eisteddfod Llangollen*, NLW 99133602102419 © National Library of Wales, 2019.

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23 Trevor Fishlock, *Talking of Wales* (London, 1976), p. 76.

The above image is an example of the way in which the Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858 was advertised. It is worthy of reprint here as it indicates the way several elements of the Ioloic legacy were given prominence at Llangollen: the *nod cyfrin*, the Ioloic motto of ‘*Y Gwir yn Erbyn y Byd*’, and, of particular importance for the purposes of this discussion, the Gorsedd of the Bards.<sup>24</sup> The way in which Ioloic ideals were promoted at Llangollen has been noted in Löffler’s work of 2007, which emphasises the elements of the 1858 Gorsedd of the Bards which may be deemed to have fulfilled the Ioloic vision of Welsh culture, predominantly focusing on the reverence given to Ioloic symbolism and the close adherence to the Ioloic model in the form of the Gorsedd ceremony itself.<sup>25</sup> Löffler’s work also addresses the controversy surrounding the doctrine promulgated at Llangollen, with particular reference to that espoused by Myfyr Morganwg, a common topic in the historiography of Llangollen.<sup>26</sup>

However, the impact that Myfyr’s adaptation of Iolo’s Druidic theology, and its subsequent reception, had on the Ioloic legacy has received little academic attention, save a scant mention Bowen’s work of 1992, which observes several elements of Llangollen that Bowen claims would have ‘enraged’ Iolo.<sup>27</sup> Thus, whilst it is possible to view Llangollen as a quasi-Romantic remembrance of Ioloic ideas, it is clear that there is much to consider in terms of the symbolism, ceremony and ideology of the Gorsedd.

Ab Ithel’s report of Llangollen remains the most comprehensive account detailing the Gorsedd of 1858, yet its contents must be treated with necessary caution. Donald Moore’s work of 1998 has explored the biased editorial policy of *The Cambrian Journal*, of which Ab Ithel was

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24 See the preceding ‘Glossary of Welsh Terms’ for a definition of the ‘*nod cyfrin*’ and ‘*Y Gwir yn Erbyn y Byd*’.

25 Löffler, ‘Iolo Morganwg’, pp. 56-7.

26 Löffler, ‘Iolo Morganwg’, p. 58, see also: Dean Powell, *Dr William Price* (Gloucestershire, 2012), pp. 267-8, Huw Walters, ‘Myfyr Morganwg and the Rocking Stone Gorsedd’ in *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, Geraint H. Jenkins ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cardiff, 2009 [2005]), pp. 492-3.

27 Bowen, ‘Gorsedd y Beirdd’, p. 132.

editor and within which his account of Llangollen was published, which Moore states gave uncritical support to Ioloic ‘fantasies’.<sup>28</sup> Brynley F. Roberts has critiqued Ab Ithel further still in an article of 1999, in which he states that *The Cambrian Journal* contains ‘almost nothing of scholarly value’.<sup>29</sup> This is perhaps too harsh a criticism, as whilst Ab Ithel’s report must be examined with due consideration to its propensity to promulgate Ioloic ideas and omit anything that does not fit within this paradigm, it nevertheless provides a valuable insight into the perspective of Ab Ithel and his cohorts.

Ab Ithel’s account depicts Llangollen as ‘The National Gorsedd of the British Bards [...] accompanied by a Grand National Eisteddfod’, thereby conveying the Gorsedd as the primary focus of Llangollen and asserting its ascendancy over the Eisteddfod, a sentiment echoed in contemporary programmes produced for Llangollen (See Figure 2).<sup>30</sup> Such phraseology reflects Ab Ithel’s intention to ‘stage a national eisteddfod held under the supreme authority of the Gorsedd of the Bards’, and appears to exceed Iolo’s aims in his affiliation of the Gorsedd with the Eisteddfod at Carmarthen in 1819.<sup>31</sup> Iolo had sought to authenticate the Gorsedd by making it an integral part of the established tradition of the Eisteddfod, in line with the theoretical framework of Hobsbawm’s invented traditions, an ambition that was realised at Llangollen.<sup>32</sup> However, Ab Ithel’s sentiment regarding the Ioloic invention of the Gorsedd was not ubiquitous; an advertisement for Llangollen

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28 Donald Moore, ‘Cambrian Meetings 1847 – 1997: A Society’s Contribution in a Changing Archaeological Scene’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 147 (1998), p. 11.

29 Brynley F. Roberts, ‘Robert Jones, Rotherhithe: 6 January 1809 – 28 March 1879’, *National Library of Wales Journal*, 31, 2 (1999), p. 139.

30 Williams, ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod’, p. 262.

31 Walters, ‘Myfyr Morganwg’, p. 491.

32 For an account of the 1819 Gorsedd at Carmarthen, see: A. B., ‘To the Editor’, *The Cambrian* (24 July 1819), p. 3; Geraint H. Jenkins, ‘The Unitarian Firebrand, the Cambrian Society and the Eisteddfod’ in *A Rattleskull Genius: The Many Faces of Iolo Morganwg*, Geraint. H. Jenkins ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cardiff, 2009 [2005]), p. 290; Hobsbawm, ‘Inventing Traditions’, p. 1.

within the *Monmouthshire Merlin* omits any mention of the Gorsedd, although it does pay homage to the Ioloic motto of ‘The Truth Against the World’ within the title.<sup>33</sup>

Ab Ithel’s report notes at the outset that Llangollen was arranged to take place on Alban Elfed, the autumnal equinox, in accordance with the instructions outlined in the *Iolo Manuscripts*.<sup>34</sup> However, an article that featured in *The Times*, which was subsequently republished in several South-Walian newspapers shortly thereafter, asserts that ‘Welsh scholarship so far accommodated itself to modern wants as to explain that Alban Elfed meant the 1st of October’; thereby indicating that a general awareness of the significance of Llangollen being held on Alban Elfed may have been limited.<sup>35</sup>

The opening of Ab Ithel’s account also acknowledges the principal aim of the architects of Llangollen: to ‘adhere as closely as possible to the orthodox rules and customs of bardism which, with respect to the Gorsedd [...] are defined and established’.<sup>36</sup> By 1858, Ab Ithel had been overcome by Ioloic fanaticism, and held the axiomatic belief that the rules and customs delineated here originated from the annals of ancient Welsh history, with scant awareness that their genesis actually lay within Ioloic manuscripts.<sup>37</sup> However, whilst Ab Ithel’s account of Llangollen evidences his belief in the perennial nature of Iolo’s invented traditions, contemporary South-Walian newspaper reports demonstrate that such belief was not universal, with an article published within *The Cardiff Times* referring to such customs as ‘a remnant of superstition’.<sup>38</sup>

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33 Anon., ‘Y Gwir yn Erbyn y Byd’, *The Monmouthshire Merlin, and Glamorgan and Brecon Silurian* (18 September 1858), p. 1.

34 Williams, ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod’, p. 262; Williams, ‘Iolo Manuscripts’, pp. 433-4.

35 Anon., ‘A correspondent who signs himself ‘TUDOR’’, *The Times* (23 October 1858), p. 8. For examples of South-Walian republication, see: Anon., ‘Justice to Wales’, *The Welshman* (29 October 1858), p. 5, Anon., ‘The Llangollen Eisteddfod’, *The Monmouthshire Merlin, and Glamorgan and Brecon Silurian* (30 October 1858), p. 6, Anon., ‘The ‘Times’ and the Llangollen Eisteddfod’, *The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* (13 November 1858), p. 7.

36 Williams, ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod’, p. 262.

37 See, for example: Williams, ‘Iolo Manuscripts’, pp. 430-48.

38 French, ‘The Merits and Demerits of Eisteddfodau’, p. 4.

Further examples of the Ioloic symbolism on display at Llangollen are evident in Ab Ithel's account, where we are told that one of the Ovates bore a *peithynen* frame containing a poem entitled 'Biography of Iolo Morganwg', composed using the *Coelbren y Beirdd*.<sup>39</sup> Both the *peithynen* and the *Coelbren y Beirdd* are Ioloic inventions; as such, their presence at Llangollen demonstrates the enduring impact of some of the fundamental elements of Welsh culture created by Iolo.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, these invented traditions were utilised at Llangollen to display a poem remembering Iolo, thereby further indicating the continuation of the Ioloic legacy. The permanence of Ioloic inventions is also evident in the arrangement of stones at the 1858 Gorsedd to create three 'lines or pencils of light', this being the structure of the *nod cyfrin*, the mystic symbol that Iolo claimed was present at the creation of the world.<sup>41</sup> However, whilst Ab Ithel's account outlines the prominence of Iolo's creations at Llangollen, no mention of them is found within the South-Walian newspaper coverage, save a brief reference to the *peithynen* within the *Monmouthshire Merlin*.<sup>42</sup> This suggests that, whilst examples of Ioloic symbolism were present at Llangollen, the wider Welsh populous lacked awareness of their significance.

The ceremonial aspect of the Gorsedd of 1858 aligned itself closely with the structure delineated within the *Iolo Manuscripts*.<sup>43</sup> Although Iolo states within his manuscripts that the 'institutional ceremonials' of the Gorsedd are not 'indispensably requisite parts of the system', he nevertheless claims that it is commendable if such ceremonies are performed, 'as they comprise the ancient forms transmitted, in continuity, by the retentive memory of the Gorsedd'.<sup>44</sup> It is the

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39 Williams, 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', p. 267. See the preceding 'Glossary of Welsh Terms' for definitions of the *peithynen* and the *Coelbren y Beirdd*.

40 For the origin of the *peithynen* and the *Coelbren y Beirdd*, see: Williams, 'Iolo Manuscripts', pp. 620-3.

41 Williams, 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', p. 268; Edward Williams, 'Iolana: Fragments from the Iolo MSS', *The Cambrian Journal*, [second series] 3, (1860), p. 130.

42 Anon., 'Llangollen Gorsedd and Eisteddfod', *The Monmouthshire Merlin, and Glamorgan and Brecon Silurian* (2 October 1858), p. 6.

43 For an outline of Iolo's prototypical Gorsedd, see: Williams, 'Iolo Manuscripts', pp. 445-8.

44 Williams, 'Iolo Manuscripts', p. 445.



ceremonial aspect of the Gorsedd which is most in keeping with Hobsbawm’s theory of ‘invented traditions’, in that it comprises ‘a set of practices [...] of a ritual or symbolic nature’ which seek to imply continuity with the past through repetition.<sup>45</sup> The ritualistic elements of Iolo’s Gorsedd were authenticated within his manuscripts through their apparently perennial nature, and further still when they were undertaken at the Carmarthen Eisteddfod of 1819, and were thus affiliated ‘with a suitable historic past’: the Eisteddfod.<sup>46</sup> Yet, despite Iolo’s attempt to align the Gorsedd with eisteddfodic culture in 1819, the decades following Carmarthen did not see the Eisteddfod and the Gorsedd develop as one, cohesive entity, a fact that Ab Ithel and his colleagues sought to remedy, as evident in their promotion of Llangollen (see Figure 2).<sup>47</sup>

Löffler’s work of 2007 provides a concise overview of how the Gorsedd ceremony of 1858 adhered to the Ioloic model, through the inclusion of ‘a stone circle, the ritual of sheathing and unsheathing a sword, and the declaiming of the Gorsedd prayer’.<sup>48</sup> Although these ceremonials were portrayed favourably within Ab Ithel’s account, and, indeed, some South-Walian newspaper coverage, other commentary was less complimentary; an account of Llangollen reprinted in *The Cardiff Times* refers to the affair as being ‘altogether unworthy of [...] a christian and scientific era such as ours’.<sup>49</sup> However, despite this initial critique, the long-term impact of Llangollen on the Gorsedd was more beneficial: Llangollen was to act as a prototype for future eisteddfodau, thus amalgamating the Gorsedd with eisteddfodic tradition.<sup>50</sup> Iolo’s dream at the Carmarthen Eisteddfod of 1819 had finally been realised.

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45 Hobsbawm, ‘Inventing Traditions’, p.1.

46 For an account of the Gorsedd at Carmarthen Eisteddfod, see Williams, Edward, *Llanover Manuscripts: Welsh Bardism, etc.*, (1767-1826), NLW 13097B; Hobsbawm, ‘Inventing Traditions’, p. 1.

47 Löffler, ‘Iolo Morganwg’, p. 41.

48 Löffler, ‘Iolo Morganwg’, p. 57.

49 Williams, ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod’, pp. 270-2. For a favourable representation of the Gorsedd within South-Walian newspaper commentary, see: Anon., ‘The Llangollen Eisteddfod’, *The Monmouthshire Merlin, and Glamorgan and Brecon Silurian* (25 September 1858), p. 8; French, ‘The Merits and Demerits of Eisteddfodau’, p. 4.

50 Löffler, ‘Iolo Morganwg’, p. 57.

Although Ab Ithel's account conveys a strict adherence to Ioloic ideals, Bowen's work of 1992 notes the elements of Llangollen that would have 'enraged' Iolo, including the performance of a Trinitarian doxology at the close of the ceremony of the Gorsedd.<sup>51</sup> The principal organisers of Llangollen were High Churchmen under the influence of the Oxford Movement, a fact which led to Llangollen being referenced as 'The Priestly Eisteddfod'.<sup>52</sup> Geraint Jenkins' work of 2005 notes the way in which Iolo had abandoned the 'stifling discipline' of Trinitarianism by 1791 and instead embraced principles of Rational Dissent and Unitarianism.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Iolo had launched vociferous attacks on the episcopacy as his disdain towards orthodox religion grew, referring to established religion as 'a system of Idiotism, of madness or of villainy'.<sup>54</sup> Whilst Iolo did maintain a close relationship with the Church in terms of the foundation of The Cambrian Society and the revivification of Welsh letters, Jenkins has effectively demonstrated how Iolo utilised this position as a means to emphatically undermine the episcopacy at the Carmarthen Eisteddfod of 1819.<sup>55</sup> As the Oxford Movement actively opposed principles of Dissent, it is possible to view the theology espoused at Llangollen as antithetical to Iolo's reputation as the 'Bard of Liberty'.<sup>56</sup>

However, Peter Freeman has noted a counter-response to the wider Oxford Movement in the early Victorian period which served to strengthen the Dissenting cause championed by Iolo: the politicisation, unification and radicalisation of different strands of Dissent – an alliance which was strengthened further by the growing popular disdain directed towards Anglicanism in general in the

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51 Bowen, 'Gorsedd y Beirdd', p. 132, see also: James Kenward, *Ab Ithel: An Account of the Life and Writings of the Rev. John Williams Ab Ithel* (Tenby, 1871), p. 135, Williams, 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', p. 272.

52 For information on Ab Ithel's role as editor of the Tractarian journal *Baner y Groes*, see: Peter Freeman, 'Baner y Groes, a Welsh-language Tractarian Periodical of the 1850s', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 32, 3, (2002), p. 305; Peter Freeman, 'The Revd Richard Williams Morgan of Tregynon and his writings', *The Montgomeryshire Collections*, 88, (2000), p. 91.

53 Jenkins, 'The Unitarian Firebrand', p. 274.

54 Jenkins, 'The Unitarian Firebrand', p. 277; Williams, Edward, *Iolo Morganwg manuscripts: Broad-sides and miscellanea*, (1780-1824), NLW 21404F.

55 Jenkins, 'The Unitarian Firebrand', p. 290.

56 Jenkins, 'The Unitarian Firebrand', p. 274.

aftermath of the Blue Books.<sup>57</sup> The Nonconformist ascendancy of the mid-nineteenth century was, however, a double-edged sword for the Ioloic legacy; Morgan has effectively demonstrated that the ‘sheer effort of creating a new nonconformist nation made the Welsh ignore much of the distant past and concentrate on a more relevant historical tradition’.<sup>58</sup>

The divergence from Ioloic ideals at Llangollen is further evident in Bowen’s reference to the way in which the actions of Myfyr Morganwg would have angered Iolo.<sup>59</sup> Myfyr had declared himself Archdruid in 1852, following the death of Iolo’s son Taliesin ab Iolo; yet this was a title that Iolo himself had rejected.<sup>60</sup> It was at this time, too, that Myfyr invested himself with the ‘druidical egg’, which was seen draped around his neck at Llangollen and was subsequently ridiculed in the press.<sup>61</sup> By 1858, Myfyr had also ‘rehashed druidism’ in line with his fascination with eastern culture, claiming to be the bearer of particular new-found ‘mysteries’ regarding Druidic secrets.<sup>62</sup> Such a vision of Druidism did not coalesce with the religious sympathies of many attendant at Llangollen; even Ab Ithel, who was as much under the spell of Myfyr as he was Iolo, addresses in his account of Llangollen the meeting that was called which asked Myfyr to explain the doctrines espoused by him which were ‘not considered to be entirely in harmony with the Christian religion’.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Myfyr’s ideology was critiqued in the South-Walian press,

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57 The term ‘unification’ is used loosely here; although this unity did join Unitarianism with other strands of Dissent that also held Trinitarian beliefs, this union served to oppose the established Church, rather than to theologically unite the differing strands of Dissent. Peter Freeman, ‘The Response of Welsh Nonconformity to the Oxford Movement’, *The Welsh History Review*, 20, 1-4, (2000-1), p. 435. For more on the hostility towards Anglicanism in the aftermath of the Blue Books, see: Morgan, ‘From a Death to a View’, pp. 92-4, see also: Prys Morgan, ‘From Long Knives to Blue Books’ in *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays Presented to Glanmor Williams*, R. R. Davies, Ralph A. Griffiths, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and Kenneth O. Morgan eds. (Cardiff, 1984), p. 210.

58 Morgan, ‘From Long Knives to Blue Books’, p. 214.

59 Bowen, ‘Gorsedd y Beirdd’, p. 132.

60 Walters, ‘Myfyr Morganwg’, p. 489.

61 Walters, ‘Myfyr Morganwg’, p. 492.

62 Bowen, ‘Gorsedd y Beirdd’, p. 132; Titan [*pseud.*], ‘To the Editor of the Cambrian Journal’, *The Cambrian Journal*, 2, (1855), pp. 319-320.

63 Williams, ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod’, p. 292.

where his ‘heathen vanities’ were associated with ‘popish’ activity.<sup>64</sup> Myfyr had been gripped by Druidic fever, and, to an extent, sought to advance Iolo’s work; however, it remains difficult to align Myfyr’s radical reassemblage of Druidic theology with Iolo’s vision of Welsh culture.

It is evident, therefore, that the preservation of the Ioloic legacy at Llangollen is a problematic concept. James Kenward, who was attendant at Llangollen, outlines, in his biography of Ab Ithel, what he perceived to be the predominant aims of the 1858 Gorsedd: to rekindle the patriotism of the Welsh settled in England, and to allow attendees to correct their prejudices, embrace the novelty of the Gorsedd, and realise the truth promulgated.<sup>65</sup> Yet, despite Ab Ithel’s attestations that the reports he consulted in the compilation of his account found Llangollen to be a ‘resounding success’, analysis of contemporary South-Walian media commentary indicates that the motivations delineated by Kenward here remained unfulfilled.<sup>66</sup> Some South-Walian commentators were more sympathetic towards the Gorsedd than others, conveying it as emblematic of quintessential antiquarianism; yet, the overwhelming consensus within the South-Walian press was negative, denouncing the Gorsedd as anti-Christian, or representative of a pagan ceremony derived from a bygone age.<sup>67</sup> Much of this disillusionment towards antiquarians ideals was propagated by the increased awareness of politics and the embryonic ‘Age of Progress’ that arose in the aftermath of the Blue Books.<sup>68</sup> The critique of the Gorsedd within South-Walian media commentary denotes a growing divergence between the sentiments expressed by Ab Ithel and his cohorts, and those of the wider, Welsh populous. It is in this socio-political climate that Morgan has found allegiances towards the Ioloic vision of Welsh culture were most sorely tested, a phenomenon that can be

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64 French, ‘The Merits and Demerits of Eisteddfodau’, p. 4.

65 Kenward, ‘Ab Ithel’, p. 130.

66 Williams, ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod’, p. 313.

67 For representations of the Gorsedd as emblematic of quintessential antiquarianism, see: Anon., ‘The Llangollen Eisteddfod’, *The Cardiff Times* (30 October 1858), p. 3. For the Gorsedd as anti-Christian, see: French, ‘The Merits and Demerits of Eisteddfodau’, p. 4. For the Gorsedd as outdated, see: Anon., ‘The ‘Times’ and the Llangollen Eisteddfod’, p. 7.

68 Morgan, ‘From a Death to a View’, pp. 97-8.

considered further within the context of both the propagation and repudiation of the Madoc myth at Llangollen.<sup>69</sup>

## Chapter Three

### Patriotism vs. Progress: Literature of the 1858 Eisteddfod

*'Let us show that we are not incapable either of self-analysis or of historical criticism; and let us show that we have, in our ancient history, literature, and language, honours enough that are really our own, without filching the glories or tarnishing the renown of Christopher Columbus...'*<sup>70</sup>

The above extract is taken from the closing statements of an entry into a competition at the Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858 'For the best Essay on the Discovery of America in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, by Prince Madoc ab Owen Gwynedd'.<sup>71</sup> This entry was made by Thomas Stephens of Merthyr, who was, by 1858, already an established critic and social reformer, having publicly rebuked the Eisteddfod as an overtly Romantic undertaking as early as 1842, and begun his exposition of Ioloic forgeries from the 1850s onwards.<sup>72</sup> What was unique about Stephens' entry into the competition at

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69 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', p. 97.

70 Stephens, 'Madoc', p. 225.

71 Anon., 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', *The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* (2 October 1858), p. 6.

72 For an example of Stephens' early denunciation of the Eisteddfod, see: B.C.D. [*pseud.*], 'Abergavenny Cymreigyddion: To the Editor of The Cambrian, Letter 2', *The Cambrian* (12 November 1842), p. 3. For confirmation that 'B.C.D.' was the pseudonym used by Stephens, see: Thomas Stephens, 'To the Editor of The

Llangollen was that, where other entrants sought to prove the historicity of the Madoc myth, Stephens sought to discredit it entirely through the systematic rebuttal of its supporting historical narrative, much of which originated from the work of Iolo Morganwg and his cohorts within the Gwyneddigion Society.<sup>73</sup>

Whilst it may, therefore, be determined that Stephens' essay emphatically undermined the Ioloic legacy, his work was not received well by the secretaries of Llangollen. The controversy that arose both in the immediate aftermath of Stephens' submission, and in the subsequent newspaper coverage, delineates the complex dialogue surrounding the propagation and refutation of invented traditions in early Victorian Wales. The cultivation of the Madoc myth by Iolo and the Gwyneddigion Society does not necessarily fit within the scope of invented traditions as defined by Hobsbawm, given that first mention of the myth can be found in print as far back as 1583, when it was utilised as a means to justify the British colonisation of America.<sup>74</sup> However, Morgan's discussion of invented traditions focuses not only traditions that were invented during the Romantic period in Wales, but also those that were rediscovered and reinvigorated; thereby allowing the Madoc myth to be considered within the theoretical framework of invented traditions.<sup>75</sup>

The means by which the Madoc myth reached its apogee under the auspices of Iolo and his contemporaries has been explored in Williams' work of 1979. Williams notes the effort that was made in the closing decade of the eighteenth century to 'establish Madoc and his Welsh Indians in Welsh history, and to relate them to that ancient and libertarian tradition of the Druids and the Bards which a new breed of intellectuals was reviving'.<sup>76</sup> This revivification of the Madoc myth by Iolo

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Cambrian', *The Cambrian* (11 February 1843), p. 3. For a discussion of Stephens' exposition of Ioloic forgeries, see: Löffler, 'Iolo Morganwg', p. 135.

73 For examples of Stephens' critique of Ioloic sources, see: Stephens, 'Madoc', pp. 31, 55, 177-8, 225.

74 Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Traditions', p. 1; Williams, 'Madoc', p. 35.

75 Morgan 'From a Death to a View', pp. 83-5.

76 Williams, 'Madoc', p. 87.

and his contemporaries supports Anthony Smith's theory of 'ethno-symbolism', which rejects ideas surrounding the modernity of nations and instead notes the central importance of 'pre-modern ethnic ties and sentiments in providing a firm base for the nation-to-be'.<sup>77</sup> Yet, the Madoc myth became important to members of the late-eighteenth century Welsh literati not just because of the statement that his discovery of America made regarding Welsh pre-eminence, but also because the existence of Welsh Indians allowed the Welsh to surmise that there existed a section of Welsh culture that had retained its independence from England.<sup>78</sup> This is a particularly salient point given that Iolo and his cohorts acted under the heady influence of the libertarian philosophy and Jacobin ideals disseminated by the American and French Revolutions.<sup>79</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising then, that the Llangollen committee rejected Stephens' essay debunking the Madoc myth. Caroline Franklin's work of 2003 has demonstrated the central importance of the Madoc myth, asserting that it is because of the significance of the myth in terms of Welsh pre-eminence and independence that the Llangollen Eisteddfod 'could not countenance [its] scholarly demolition'.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the sentiments espoused by the myth had particular resonance in the aftermath of the Blue Books, as the Welsh sought to rehabilitate themselves from the scathing attack made on their morality, language and culture by the English commissioners. However, whilst the Llangollen committee sought to exonerate the Welsh through the promulgation of what they perceived to be authentic, Welsh antiquity, scholars such as Stephens implored the Welsh to stop 'thrusting in the faces of English and Continental scholars assertions which we cannot prove and they will not believe'.<sup>81</sup>

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77 Spencer and Wollman, 'Nationalism', p. 28.

78 Williams, 'Madoc', p. 88.

79 Williams, 'Madoc', p. 88.

80 Caroline Franklin, 'The Welsh American Dream: Iolo Morganwg, Robert Southey and the Madoc legend' in *English Romanticism in the Celtic World*, Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes eds. (New York, 2003), p. 79.

81 Stephens, 'Madoc', p. 225.

The sentiment evoked by Stephens was not confined to scholarly circles; although Ab Ithel's account of Llangollen omits any mention of the controversy that arose following Stephens' submission, contemporary, South-Walian newspaper reports provide a comprehensive narrative of events. The adjudicators of Llangollen found Stephens' submission to be most worthy of the prize, yet one of Llangollen's principal organisers, Richard Morgan (*'Mor Merion'*), interrupted proceedings to disqualify Stephens' essay, on the basis that it 'was not on the subject' as it sought to disprove, rather than prove, the thesis.<sup>82</sup> When Stephens' objected to the disqualification of his essay, the committee sought to drown out his protestations by ordering the brass band to play up, a reaction that was vehemently objected to by members of the audience, who asserted that 'it would be a burning shame to refuse a hearing to a man of Mr. Stephens's literary reputation'.<sup>83</sup> Stephens was thus allowed to speak, and presented an impassioned case for the inclusion of his essay within the competition, which made a favourable impression on his audience and forced the secretaries of Llangollen to concede that they would reconsider their decision.<sup>84</sup> It is clear then, that whilst the Llangollen committee may have sought to preserve Ioloic ideals, the tide was turning and members of the public, as well as scholars, were beginning to seek a more academic appraisal of Welsh historiography.

However, the reluctance of the committee to acknowledge the worth of Stephens' essay may also be attributed to the fact that Ab Ithel, too, had entered into the essay competition.<sup>85</sup> The list of prizes given at Llangollen indicates the propensity of the organisers to make awards to one another, or their friends and families, where possible; therefore, it is possible that Stephens' essay was

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82 Anon., 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', *The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* (2 October 1858), p. 6.

83 Anon., 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', p. 6.

84 Anon., 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', p. 6.

85 Anon., 'Llangollen Eisteddfod: The Madoc Essays on the Discovery of America', *The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* (1 January 1859), p. 7.



denounced as a means to obtain glory for Ab Ithel, rather than to protect the legacy of the Madoc myth itself.<sup>86</sup> Another aggrieved contender for the prize was Richard French, who had condemned the Gorsedd as ‘unworthy of the intelligence of a [...] scientific era such as ours’, and yet claimed to have shown ‘on scientific principles’ that it was not at all improbable that Madoc had discovered America.<sup>87</sup> French’s perspective is indicative of the complex nature of the reception of invented traditions within early Victorian Wales; whilst he sought to condemn one Ioloic invention - the Gorsedd, he sought to preserve another - the Madoc myth.

French upheld the view of the Llangollen committee that Stephens’ essay was ‘quite foreign to the subject intended’, yet his perspective was ridiculed by the press.<sup>88</sup> The overwhelming South-Walian response to Stephens’ essay was favourable, and the Welsh papers were rife ‘with denunciations of the conduct of the Llangollen committee in this affair’.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the adjudicators of the competition which Stephens had entered were infuriated by the intervention of the committee; even submitting letters to the press expressing their exasperation that their judgement in favour of Stephens’ essay was not actioned.<sup>90</sup> Even the Ioloic legatee Myfyr Morganwg had voted that the prize should be shared between Stephens and the best affirmative essayist.<sup>91</sup> Whilst such judgement supports Morgan’s view that the Ioloic legacy was beginning to decay by the early Victorian period, this conclusion disregards a significant development that

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86 Williams, ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod’, pp. 276, 299.

87 French, ‘The Merits and Demerits of Eisteddfodau’, p. 4; Anon., ‘Prize Oration’, *The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* (30 October 1858), p. 8.

88 Anon., ‘Prize Oration’, p. 8.

89 Anon., ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod: The Madoc Essays on the Discovery of America’, p. 7. For further examples of positive representations of Stephens’ essay within newspaper reports, see: Fiat Justitia [*pseud.*], ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod’, *The Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales* (27 November 1858), p. 4, Anon., ‘The Madoc Essays’, *The Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales* (25 December 1858), p. 3.

90 D. Silvan Evans, ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod: The Madoc Essays on the Discovery of America’, *The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* (1 January 1859), p. 7.

91 Anon., ‘Llangollen Eisteddfod’, *The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* (2 October 1858), p. 6.

Hywel Teifi Edwards, in his work of 1990, has claimed was a direct consequence of the controversy surrounding Stephens' submission: a meeting of the Welsh literati at Llangollen, at where it was decided upon the necessity of the establishment of a National Eisteddfod, with a centralised committee to ensure fair adjudication in future eisteddfodau.<sup>92</sup> Whilst the submission and reception of Stephens' essay may have cast aspersions on the Ioloic legacy, the overall effect was the foundation of the National Eisteddfod, and, given that Iolo's Gorsedd was inextricably fused with eisteddfodic tradition in 1858, this effectively raised Ioloic ideology to the national plane.<sup>93</sup> Thus, whilst Stephens' essay may have sought to indict one Ioloic invention, it inadvertently augmented another.

Although Stephens' essay was undeniably the most controversial work presented, the majority of the works submitted into competitions at Llangollen did conform to Ioloic ideals; however, the tempestuous political climate of the early-Victorian period was evident even in some of the literature which may be said to conform to such ideals.<sup>94</sup> A noteworthy example of the way in which the cultural climate of the mid-nineteenth century penetrated the literature of Llangollen is *Myfanwy Fychan*, a *rheingerdd* composed by John Ceiriog Hughes.<sup>95</sup> According to Dean Powell, Ceiriog's poem served to 'created a wholesome, moral, well-mannered and pure image of the Welsh woman who had been pilloried in the Blue Books'.<sup>96</sup> The seditious assertions of the Blue Books had reflected particularly badly on the morality of Welsh women, with the Revd. John Price inextricably

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92 It is understood that the formation of the National Eisteddfod as a direct consequence of Stephens' submission was covered in the Welsh-language press, as such, it is inaccessible for the purposes of this dissertation. For Edwards' findings, see: Hywel Teifi Edwards, *The Eisteddfod*, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 2016 [1990]), p. 24. For the establishment of the National Eisteddfod at Llangollen, see: Williams, 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', p. 297.

93 For further information on the cohesion of the Gorsedd and the Eisteddfod in 1858, see Chapter Two of this dissertation.

94 For examples of the topics covered in the literature of the 1858 Eisteddfod, see: Williams, 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', p. 288, 299. For examples of the literary topics of eisteddfodau under the auspices of Iolo and the Gwyneddigion Society, see: Anon., 'Caermarthen Eisteddfod', *The Cambro-Briton*, 1, 1 (1819) pp. 35-6.

95 See the preceding 'Glossary of Welsh Terms' for a definition of the term '*rheingerdd*'.

96 Powell, 'William Price' p. 267.

linking such immorality to Nonconformist chapel culture in his insinuation regarding the ‘bad habit of holding meetings at dissenting chapels or farmhouses after night, where the youth of both sexes attend from a distance for the purpose of walking home together’.<sup>97</sup> Edwards has noted how *Myfanwy Fychan* acted as a riposte to such indictments, stating that Ceiriog’s work presented a vision of ‘Welsh sweethearts whose conduct was as impeccable as their sentiments were pure’, an opinion that was echoed by both the adjudicators of Llangollen and the wider Welsh public.<sup>98</sup>

*Myfanwy Fychan* thus highlights the tumultuous public feeling evoked by the Blue Books, which has been noted by Morgan as a contributory factor to the demise of invented traditions in Wales.<sup>99</sup> Yet, Ceiriog’s response to the Blue Books appears to counter Morgan’s assertion regarding the shift from the patriotic to the practical in the aftermath of 1847. Not only does *Myfanwy Fychan* utilise a traditional form of poetry, it also evidences the continued relevance of the literature espoused by Iolo Morganwg and his contemporaries; the original poem, ‘*Adwl I Fyfanwy Fechan O Gastell Dinas Bran*’ by Hywel ab Einion, from which Ceiriog’s work was derived, was printed in *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, a compilation of ancient Welsh manuscripts collated by Iolo, William Owen Pughe (‘*Idrison*’) and Owen Jones (‘*Owain Myfyr*’) in the early nineteenth century.<sup>100</sup>

However, whilst the majority of the literature advanced at Llangollen did align itself with Ioloic ideals, its reception within South-Walian newspaper coverage was ambivalent at best. Although some accounts viewed the literary output of Llangollen favourably, the majority viewed such literature as an antiquated novelty with the propensity to advance ‘vague, dreamy idea[s], of

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97 Jellyngyr C. Symons, *Reports of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales, Part II: Brecknock, Cardigan, Radnor, and Monmouth* (London, 1847), p. 61.

98 Edwards, ‘The Eisteddfod’, p. 35.

99 Morgan, ‘From a Death to a View’, pp. 92-100.

100 Owen Jones, William Owen Pughe and Edward Willams, *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (Denbigh, 1870 [1801-1807]), pp. 339-40. For an English translation of Hywel ab Einion’s poem see: Thomas Pennant, *Tours in Wales*, Vol. I (Caernarvon, 1883), pp. 363-5.

great things that were done of old'.<sup>101</sup> Others altogether condemned the more traditional literature of Llangollen, asserting that it was a waste of time to 'write senseless verses of praise to Mr. So and So'.<sup>102</sup> This is a marked contrast to the South-Walian reception of Stephens' essay, which, as has been demonstrated, was overwhelmingly favourable.

The responses of the South-Walian press towards the literature of Llangollen indicate a change in the way in which invented traditions and wider, Ioloic material were received, particularly amongst those who were predominantly English-speaking and were thus disengaged from many of the ideas regarding Welsh culture that were perpetuated at Llangollen.<sup>103</sup> Thus, whilst a concentrated analysis of the literature of Llangollen highlights the way in which the Ioloic legacy was fostered, and that which did not conform repudiated, a wider exploration of South-Walian newspaper commentary presents an alternate perspective. Such a perspective tends to support Morgan's assertion regarding the decay of invented traditions from 1848 onwards, in that it suggests that any allegiance to the Ioloic vision of Welsh culture at Llangollen was largely confined to the sub-section of the Welsh literati occupied by Ab Ithel and his cohorts.<sup>104</sup>

Nonetheless, one of the most significant outcomes of the furore surrounding Stephens' essay was the formation of the National Eisteddfod. Edwards has found that the National Eisteddfod was formed with the intention of negating any similar controversies in future eisteddfodau, however, a notable repercussion of its establishment was the furtherance of what may be perceived as the Ioloic vision of Welsh culture.<sup>105</sup> Llangollen was to be viewed as a prototype for the National Eisteddfod,

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101 For a favourable account of the literature of Llangollen see: Anon., 'Llangollen Eisteddfod and Gorsedd', p. 6; Anon., 'The Llangollen Eisteddfod', *The Monmouthshire Merlin and Glamorgan and Brecon Silurian* (30 October 1858), p. 6.

102 Giraldu [pseud.], 'The Times and the Eisteddfod', *The Monmouthshire Merlin and Glamorgan and Brecon Silurian* (6 November 1858), p. 3.

103 For an estimation that only 67% of the Welsh population were Welsh-speakers by 1851, with industrialised areas of north-east Wales remaining 'stubbornly Welsh', see: Davies, 'The Welsh Language', p. 57.

104 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', p. 97.

105 Williams, 'Llangollen Eisteddfod', p. 297, see also: Edwards, 'The Eisteddfod', p. 24.

and, as has been demonstrated, prevalence was given at Llangollen to Ioloic symbolism and ritual; thus, when the Eisteddfod was elevated to the national plane, so, too, were Ioloic mottoes – the most dominant of which was the Gorsedd.

## Chapter Four

### Conclusion

*'No matter how many Thomas Stephens stand triumphantly  
rational on its ruins, the story of Madoc cannot die...'<sup>106</sup>*

Gwyn A. Williams' above sentiment regarding the permanence of the Madoc myth can, to an extent, be applied to all Ioloic constructs. This dissertation has explored how the traditions both created and nurtured by Iolo Morganwg around the turn of the eighteenth century were expressed and received at the Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858. In doing so, it has demonstrated the means by which Thomas Stephens sought to undermine Ioloic evidence pertaining to the Madoc myth, and examined the denunciation of Iolo's Gorsedd in the contemporaneous South-Walian press.

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<sup>106</sup> Williams, 'Madoc', p. 202.

Although such findings lend themselves to Morgan's conclusion regarding the decay of invented traditions in the aftermath of the Blue Books, Williams has attested to the perennial nature of the Madoc myth, and the same conclusion must be drawn regarding the Gorsedd, given that it remains an integral part of eisteddfodic culture to this day.<sup>107</sup>

The alignment of the Gorsedd with the Eisteddfod owes much to the Llangollen Eisteddfod of 1858. As explored in Chapter Two of this work, the secretaries of Llangollen ensured a strict adherence to the Ioloic model in terms of both the ceremony and symbolism of the 1858 Gorsedd. Although these Ioloic mottoes were derided in the South-Walian press in the immediate aftermath of Llangollen, the form that was advanced acted as a prototype for future eisteddfodau; thus amalgamating the Gorsedd within eisteddfodic tradition.<sup>108</sup> Hobsbawm has demonstrated the central importance of authenticating invented traditions by placing them in the framework of established custom; this theory is first evident in Iolo's actions at the Carmarthen Eisteddfod of 1819, but was not fully realised until the cohesion of the Gorsedd and Eisteddfod at Llangollen.<sup>109</sup>

Morgan has referenced Stephens' *Madoc* essay as emblematic of the movement of the Welsh to seek a more vociferous historiography in the mid-nineteenth century; attributing such a phenomenon, at least in part, to the tumult of the Blue Books.<sup>110</sup> As demonstrated in Chapter Three of this dissertation, the profound impact that the Blue Books had on Welsh culture was evident at Llangollen not just in Stephens' work, but also in Ceiriog's poem *Myfanwy Fychan*. Yet, Ceiriog's response to the Blue Books actually derives from material published in Ioloic works, and thus demonstrates that the continued relevance of the literature championed by Iolo. Morgan's work has also considered the detrimental impact that the Nonconformist ascendancy of the mid-nineteenth

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107 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', p. 97; Williams, 'Madoc', p. 202.

108 Löffler, 'Iolo Morganwg', p. 57.

109 Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Traditions', p. 1; Jenkins, 'The Unitarian Firebrand', p. 290.

110 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', pp. 92-4.

century had on invented traditions, yet Chapter Two of this work has demonstrated that this was a double-edged sword for the Ioloic legacy: whilst it did lead the Welsh away from the mythical, towards a more relevant historiography, it also effectively unified, politicised and radicalised Dissent, a cause championed by Iolo.<sup>111</sup>

Although Williams does point to Stephens as the scalpel under which the Madoc myth was shredded, he also notes continued attempts to prove the historicity of the Madoc myth throughout the twentieth century.<sup>112</sup> Whilst such attempts were primarily undertaken by American scholars, and were based more on faith than academia, this does at least indicate that Stephens was not entirely successful in quashing Iolo's Madoc.<sup>113</sup>

Moreover, whilst Stephens' submission sought to undermine one of the principal traditions cultivated by Iolo, it actually served to elevate the status of Iolo's Gorsedd, from provincial to national.<sup>114</sup> The formation of the National Eisteddfod, which Edwards has found was a direct consequence of the controversies of Llangollen, was surely the realisation of what Iolo's contemporaries within the Gwyneddigion Society had sought to achieve when they attempted to revive eisteddfodic tradition in the closing decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, as Llangollen was to act as a prototype for the National Eisteddfod, the position of the Gorsedd within the eisteddfodic tradition was effectively reinforced, due to the prevalence bestowed upon it at Llangollen.<sup>116</sup> The pre-eminence of the Gorsedd within the emergent National Eisteddfod is evident at the first of these national eisteddfodau, which took place at Aberdare in 1861. Indeed, the South-

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111 Morgan, 'From Long Knives to Blue Books', p. 214; Freeman, 'The Response of Welsh Nonconformity to the Oxford Movement', p. 435.

112 Williams, 'Madoc', p. 200-1.

113 Williams, 'Madoc', p. 200-1.

114 Löffler, 'Iolo Morganwg', p. 41.

115 Edwards, 'The Eisteddfod', p. 24. For information on the revivification of eisteddfodic tradition by the Gwyneddigion Society, see: Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', pp. 59-60, Anon., 'Caermarthen Eisteddfod', pp. 35-6.

116 Löffler, 'Iolo Morganwg', p. 57.

Walian press, who had been so quick to denounce the Gorsedd of 1858, appear altogether more accepting of its successor at Aberdare; thus suggesting that although the Gorsedd was ridiculed in the immediate aftermath of Llangollen, the long-term impact to Ioloic constructs was more beneficial.<sup>117</sup>

It is clear that by the early-Victorian period allegiances to the mythological past were beginning to be tested, and the socio-political climate of the time did lead to the critique and reappraisal of invented traditions. Yet, the close adherence to the Ioloic model in terms of the 1858 Gorsedd of the Bards, which was to become an integral part of the National Eisteddfod that perceived Llangollen as prototypical, substantiates Löffler's claim regarding the strength of the Ioloic legacy in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and thus effectively demonstrates the fulfilment of the Ioloic vision of Welsh culture.<sup>118</sup>

In his discussion on the reception and refutation of invented traditions, Morgan concluded that, despite the best efforts of Ab Ithel and his colleagues, Thomas Stephens was the real victor of the Llangollen.<sup>119</sup> Yet, this research has indicated the means by which, even as late as 1858, some thirty-two years after his death, the rich and complex legacy of Iolo Morganwg continued to outwit even the most accomplished of contenders.

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117 For examples of South-Walian representations of the Gorsedd at Aberdare, see: Anon., 'Aberdare Grand National Eisteddfod', *The Monmouthshire Merlin and South Wales Advertiser* (24 August 1861), p. 8, Anon., 'Grand National Eisteddfod at Aberdare', *The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* (24 August 1861), p. 8.

118 Löffler, 'Iolo Morganwg', p. 5.

119 Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', p. 97.



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