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“To what extent was Catholicism in Wales still prevalent during the Reformation period, from its inception in 1536 to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605? A discussion relating to families and martyrs.”

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Introduction

With the founding of the Church of England by Henry VIII, the Reformation period was one of great change and upheaval for both church and country. As the Reformation in Wales became a pivotal point in history both in terms of religion, and also in language, law and unity with England, it seems that the continuance of the Catholic faith had been diminished, and willingly overthrown by the Anglican Protestant Church (Bradshaw 1998, p74), and it is noted that in the Protestant faith, 'crucially-public worship was Welsh' (Suggett and White 2002 p53). However, in a comparable obstinacy to English Catholics, Welsh people of '*yr hen ffydd*' (the old faith) clung just as fiercely to their rituals and practices, even to point of martyrdom. In terms of law, the Acts of Union (1536 and 1543) instigated a distinct shift in the laws governing the country, where the Welsh tongue became outlawed, and that English became the language of the courts (Suggett and White 2002 p62). The English capitalised on the knowledge that many monoglot Welsh were illiterate, and that the language of the Church, Latin, meant little to them, so with the production of a Bible (the Welsh Bible 1588) in their native tongue, and the fact that scriptures were to be made readily available in every church, enticed a willing congregation to hear the word of God in a Reformed Church, to the point of ensuring that Church of England clergy installed in Welsh parishes were both educated, and could speak Welsh. As a result of these measures, it could be said that the peaceful conversion of the Welsh was a foregone conclusion.

However, strongholds of Welsh Catholicism held true, in spite of the imposition of fines for non attendance at Protestant Church, losses of property or status, and fear of denouncement to the authorities. This dissertation aims to discuss the extent to which Catholics were able to continue the practice of their faith, and what evidence is still available to suggest that it did indeed continue, both openly and in secret. Whilst the Reformation, and ultimately, the Counter Reformation covered a

large period in history, the main focus for this essay will be the period from the initial introduction of the Reformation into Wales, up until the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. By means of several small case studies, and by no means a definitive work, it will be seen that by dipping into different time periods, it can be shown how attitudes to Catholic Wales developed and changed, in terms of acceptance and sympathies.

Much has been written on the Reformation, many opinions which agree, and certain areas in which there is scope for discussion of differing viewpoints. Using the information provided by Jones and Silke (1959), Bradshaw (1998 p73) states that towards the end of the Reformation period, 'Welsh historians are agreed that by the end of the reign of Elizabeth-the English Reformation had secured widespread acceptance from the Welsh community,' suggesting that ultimately, Wales had become a willing part of the united realm that Henry VIII sought to create, not by following the process of religious Protestant reform seen on the continent, but by reforming laws, language, politics, religion, and ultimately, ensuring the financial dominance of the Crown over the estates and wealth of the Catholic Church. In opposition to this, historian Dr. Katharine Olsen writes over a decade later that 'true, there were no armed uprisings in Wales in response to this tumult. But this didn't mean that the Welsh were unmoved. It may not have been in their best interest to resist the changes through rebelling, but other means of showing dissent existed' (2010). Perhaps this alternative explanation for the relative ease with which the Reformation took hold in Wales is more realistic, if viewed from our own current view of the world.

Eminent Welsh Reformation historian, Glanmor Williams notes that during the early Reformation period, the Welsh became 'increasingly associated [with] two kinds of loyalty; the one Tudor, the other Welsh,' with the latter indicative of 'the concept of the reformed religion as a return to the great fountain-head of Welsh religious life, the Celtic Church' (1987), which would intimate that the Reformation in Wales was merely a return to an older established practice, rather than a distinct

break from the Catholic faith. In the same vein, Gwyn A. Williams agrees that Protestantism was not, in fact, an alien import, but came about as the result of a quarrel between the Celtic Church and the Christian Emperor Augustine. He notes that Richard Davies, Bishop of St. Davids led a 'stunning propaganda victory,' when he stated that 'the Pope came late into Wales and that by the sword the king of England' (1985 p47), suggesting that the proposition that the Reformation was problem free was somewhat unsubstantiated, and that this use of the past to justify the present by Davies could be viewed as little more than an attempt to publicly validate and enforce the legitimacy of the Reformed Church. This public validation seemed to gain factual credence, following a 1603 survey of Welsh dioceses, which advised that there were 808 known and avowed recusants. Whilst allowing for discrepancies, Glanmor Williams (1997) calculated that this would equate to no more than 3,500 known Catholics from a church going population of 212,450 (in Bradshaw 1998, p47). On the surface, these figures seem to corroborate the idea that Catholicism was all but eliminated within Wales, yet must be taken within the knowledge that by law, it was a requirement to attend Anglican church. Like Olsen, Williams further asserts that in spite of these figures, 'there was no rebellion against the religious changes there, no Pilgrimage of Grace, but neither was there any real sign of enthusiasm for the new faith, and contemporaries were acutely aware of the discontented grumblings and Catholic sympathies which remained strong throughout the sixteenth century' (1997).

It is these sympathies which will be discussed through this dissertation, and how they enabled the Catholic faith to continue in Wales. Initially, there will be a study of material culture to support the assertion that worship of the old faith continued both publicly and privately. Varying primary sources will be utilised to present differing views from both Catholic and Protestant perspectives, which will serve to enable us to conclude how, and to what extent Catholicism could, and did continue, supported by the writings of various historians ranging from Glanmor Williams, expert in Welsh Reformation History, to more contemporary historian, Dr. Katharine Olsen. In Chapter one, a

letter dated 1570 from Bishop of Llandaff, John Hughes, will serve to put forward the Protestant viewpoint, whilst noting the continued existence of Catholic sympathies in the area, and known instances of the practice of the faith. In addition to this, there will be evidence presented in the form of a discussion on the artwork and inscriptions left at the Gunter house in Abergavenny, paired with Catholic symbolism from Cross slabs, which are still available to view today. Chapter two begins the case studies, focussing on the clergy and Welsh martyrs, to support the assertion that Catholicism was continuing to be practised, with reference Welsh martyrs, David Lewis and Richard Gwyn, using both primary and secondary sources from historians such as Madge O' Keefe, and evidence from the Dissolution Statute of 1536, along with State Papers from the National Archive. Sources for Chapter three include an anonymous account of the sentencing of Titus Oates, illustrating the manner in which Welsh Catholicism developed from being persecuted and oppressed, to fighting back by means of plots and rebellions, and the reasoning, in this case, being one of personal gain, instead of true compassion or adherence to the faith. In comparison to Oates, who was in the main, viewed with scorn, in particular for changing his faith to suit himself, Hugh Owen of Plas Du, became a Catholic exile in the Spanish Court, working as an intelligencer. Primary sources from the Catholic Records Society again provide an illustration of how Owen worked and was viewed, and was ultimately accused of taking part in the Gunpowder Plot of 1604.

Chapter One

To begin with, it can be said that it is the overt or secret sympathies which the Welsh people had for Catholicism, which lead us to a need to explore more fully how the traditional view of the Reformation in Wales can be challenged, and what evidence supports the idea that Catholicism continued to a greater degree than was perhaps perceived at the time. Did Wales, with the translation of the Bible into Welsh become more accepting of the Church of England, as Reformist writings would have us believe, or did it, as Gwyn Williams claims actually mean that 'for many

Welsh Catholics the language itself, now under attack at home, became a sanctified vehicle of the faith' (1985 p126)? Davies (1990 p238) notes that Pope Gregory VII had argued that 'Scriptures...if available to everyone...will be misinterpreted by those of little learning...who will then be led to perdition,' by which it becomes clear that opinions of the general populous in terms of education and ability to learn was poor. Davies further advises that there was a belief that the Bible had been translated into Welsh centuries before the Protestant Reformation, in the form of twenty-two manuscripts forming a synopsis of the Bible, called *Y Bibl Ynghymraec* (1990 p239), making a case that language had always been at the very heart of the Reformation and Catholicism in Wales.

Taking this into account, perhaps the seeds of a religious culture of 'acceptance' had already been sown within the consciousness of the Welsh people? As already noted, unlike other Celtic countries, such as Scotland and Ireland, Wales was the only one for whom the Bible itself was translated into the native tongue, with the specific reason being that of furthering the Reformation in the country. Religion, and in particular, the language of religion, in effect, became an effective bartering tool with which the Protestant faith gained advances into the predominantly Catholic Wales, unlike the standard imposition of 'top-down' religious and administrative ideals which were the norm in England in this period. Attributed to Robert Gwyn of Llyn, the production of the first known book to be printed in Wales, *Y Drych Cristnogawl* (The Christian's Mirror), by means of a printing press secreted in a cave in Llandudno, showed how devotional literature served to inspire and empower the continuance of the Catholic faith, (Gwyn Williams 1985 p125). Bowen (2014 p36) advises that this book was framed in easy terms 'in order to enable simple folk to understand the book and benefit from it,' which echoes the implication that in terms of understanding of religion, the Welsh, at this point, were to a greater degree, indifferent to the Catholic, or indeed, the Protestant faith, owing to the lack of knowledge of Latin, or of the Scriptures themselves- a deficit the Church of England sought to rectify in their favour. Haigh (1993 p3) notes that in England, 'for many, no doubt,

the Reformation brought changes of which were mainly external, from passive observance of Catholic rituals to passive hearing of sermons and psalm singing,' and taking this as a measure of attitudes in England, it would be a fair assumption to say that there is no reason to believe the same was significantly different in Wales. Both Protestant and Catholic faiths drew on assertions that they were each established in the ancient history of Wales, and that each has a claim to be the original religion of its' people.

In a letter to the Privy Council in 1570, Bishop of Llandaff, Hugh Jones, gives an account suggesting that the Reformation in Wales was successful, and that he had 'diligently and carefully according to my bounden duty from time to time travelled both myself, my officers and preachers throughout my said diocese making diligent inquisition of the estate and conformity of the people of my said diocese by all good means possible,' (NA, SP12/66/22) a statement which could be viewed as him making attempt to consolidate his position by self publicising his own worth. He provides a very positive picture, stating that 'concerning the resorting of the people to the Church to the common prayers I find none disobedient,' (NA, SP12/66/22) a picture which he then appears to somewhat contradict, when he adds that in 'the receiving of Communion I find every man obedient, saving those whose names are underwritten and their pretended causes' (NA, SP12/66/22). However, Gray (2004) advises that 'few refused communion-which is quite credible in the period before *Regnans in excelsis* (the papal bull deposing Elizabeth I), even in an area where recusancy was to be a problem,' leading us to believe that although there were instances of known recusancy, Jones, who Gray (2004) notes was 'reputedly the first Welsh-speaking bishop in his diocese for three hundred years,' was actually a well established member of the clergy, and made an honest account of the Catholic faith still being practiced in his diocese

If we compare this idea of general sufferance of the Catholic faith to the evidence found in the house owned by the Gunter family of Abergavenny, and cross slabs in the Brecon Cathedral, the photographs we see will provide us with further evidence of recusancy in Wales. Madeleine Gray, FSA from the University of South Wales writes that the cross slabs we can see today 'have the IHS trigram, in the square capitals format popularised by Ignatius Loyola as the emblem of the Jesuits. Some of these memorials commemorate known recusants, but most seem to exemplify the characteristic Welsh combination of traditionalism and loyalism,' (2016 p1) illustrating how the Catholic faith did appear to sit side by side with Protestantism in a setting of quite comfortable social acceptance in Wales. Gray (2016 p207) suggests that geographically, the work on these slabs had to be carried out by several workshops, as the areas in which they were found are widespread, indicating a knowledge of an active work towards the preservation of the old faith. Olsen, in agreement, also explains that in terms of funerary practices, Catholicism was both witnessed by officials, and reportedly, dismissed and stemmed. Using an example of the funeral of Lewis Roberts of Beaumaris, it was reported that Catholic practices of the singing of psalms, and lighting of candles was carried out in direct defiance to the English Book of Common Prayer, and to the Welsh language version of the same, *Llyfr Gweddi Gyffredin*. Local mayor, Roger Buckley dismissed this as a 'mere ignorance and a folishe custome there used,' (NA, SP12/69/44) and promised swift action would be taken (Olsen 2014 p92), perhaps intimating that this was a 'permitted' practice in the area. As we can see, these funeral practices were not able to be stemmed, as Gray notes that at least 150 grave slabs bearing Catholic symbolism, most prominently, the cross of the crucifixion, have so far been found (2016 p210) and that although some have obviously been re-cut, 'reuse of medieval cross slabs is significant in itself, as Sarah Tarlow has pointed out in the context of reused cross slabs in Orkney. Some of her examples of reuse, she suggests, could be intended to preserve important memorials and offer evidence of 'an adherence to Catholic values and practices' Tarlow (1999) in Gray (2016 p211). By continuance of these funerary and burial practices, it can be seen that

Catholics in Wales managed successfully to openly, and with the knowledge of their Protestant contemporaries, fulfil and maintain their faith.

More material evidence of Catholic symbolism can still be seen in the photographic evidence from the house of the Gunter family in Abergavenny, who were known recusants, and gave shelter and a place to say mass, to the Catholic priest, and later martyr, St. David Lewis. Gwyn Williams states that 'gentry houses sheltered the faith but reeled from the execution of their sons' (1985 p126), and in giving shelter to St. David Lewis, the Gunters laid themselves open to the possibility of persecution by Anglican authorities. From the evidence found at the Gunter Mansion, we can still view the 'graffiti' dated 1640 (available at <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/archive/6486120/details/504>) located in the attic chapel of the house. This clearly shows the usage of the property, and although not strictly speaking 'gentry,' the Gunters were a well to do family in the town, who allowed the use of their home for Catholic purposes, which in turn echoes Williams assertion, that 'many of the gentry were slack in executing their duty to enforce the religious settlement and some had warm Catholic sympathies' (1988 p5). If this were not enough evidence in the use of the property, now housed at Abergavenny museum is a frescoed painting of the '*Adoration of the Magi*' (Welsh Georgian Trust photo available at <http://www.welshgeorgiantrust.org.uk/wpgcontent/uploads/2015/05/Fresco-of-magi-e1430719240130.jpg>). Recovered from the house, this artwork, depicts the adoration of the newborn Christ and his Holy Mother, and, if standing alone flies in the face of the Protestant rule to do away with inappropriate Catholic iconography, religious artworks and relics, and is a valuable primary source which has obviously been venerated and protected from a time when such artworks and objects of faith would have been routinely destroyed. This material evidence, coupled the secondary evidence serves to demonstrate the strengthening of an already existing faith both in people and the clergy.

Wales appeared to be able to co-exist in a state of religious disunity; a social situation which seemed to perpetuate through the initial Reformation period and beyond. Writing in 1605 to the Earl of Salisbury, and denouncing the Catholic faith, Robert Bennet, Bishop of Hereford wrote that his men while searching door to door for Catholics 'neere ye confines of Monmouth-shiere, where they found houses full of alters, images, books of superstition, Reliques of idolatry, but left desolate of men and weomen, all were fledd into Wales' (1605 p289). Here we can see that the Protestant regime had officers employed specifically to locate and round up recusants, with the intent to imprison them, and also that Wales was considered a sanctuary for Catholics. Conversely, evidence would also seem to suggest that Catholics in Wales, from all walks of life, were persecuted, the early seventeenth-century State Papers relating to Brecon noting that among Catholics, 'few are of great abilities and possessions,' but in the main they are 'of a verie poore estate....now verie poore....a poore labouring man' (NA, SP14/162) in Gray (2016 p232). It is reported by Robert Bennet that in the diocese of St. Davids, there were, upon investigation, 52 male and 62 female recusants. They ranged in age and status from the young to elderly widows, and in trade from 'poor persons' through to 'working tradesmen' to 'farmers' to one 'apocathary,' who, it is noted 'at 15 was sent from Westminster School to Flanders, and returned a Papist,' and in the same derogatory tone, that two Catholics of Devynnock 'were perverted by marrying Papists' (1605 p303-4). The implication here is obvious. Catholics were seen by the Protestant authorities as a 'perversion,' and yet, Welsh families lived alongside them in seemingly, relative harmony, allowing their families to inter-marry, and even to convert to the Catholic faith-a statement of how Catholicism was regarded by the general populous, rather than the opinion of the authorities who reported upon them. Indeed, as Olsen (2010) states, 'by 1581, merely being a recusant could cost you up to £20 a month (a small fortune today) and by 1593, recusants could not go more than five miles from home,' so being a Catholic was not only costly in terms of financial fines, but also in the restriction of freedom of movement.

Chapter Two

If the people of Wales were persecuted for their adherence to the Catholic faith, the clergy in turn suffered the same fate. Marotti states that 'after Elizabeth's accession, especially after the acceleration of the persecution of the Catholics following the 1570 papal bull excommunicating the queen and, from 1574 onward, the steady flow of Catholic missionary priests from abroad, the situation for English Catholics was perilous' (2013 p.34). In agreement with this, Olsen (2014) notes that unlike Catholics, 'few Welshmen would appear to have gone into Marian exile,' and that 'despite the number of English Protestants executed for their faith, Marian martyrs were rare in Wales.' Prior to this, before the Reformation even came into being, and following inspections of the monasteries, Henry VIII in the Dissolution Statute of 1536 speaks of the 'vicious, carnal and abominable' (in Woodward 1963 p74) living of the nuns and monks. This opinion was said to be based on 'royally inspired sources, and we are quite at liberty to regard it all as so much anti monastic propaganda' (Woodward 1963 p75), even so, it proved to be the basis for the legitimising of the dissolution of the monasteries, and with such, the beginning of the persecution of the Catholic clergy. This led to a need for the Catholic Church to take extreme measures in providing suitable priests to conduct masses for the faithful. In order to accomplish this, they carried out a plan to smuggle Welsh Catholics out of the country, train them as priests, and then, with the help of Catholic families, smuggle them back into Welsh communities, ensuring a comparable adversary to the Protestant clergy installed by the authorities (Gwyn Williams 1985 p145). This very physical presence enabled Welsh society to continue in its acceptance of the Catholic faith among it, to embrace and to hide the old faith, whilst outwardly enduring the new.

During this period, many Catholic exiles fled the country for Europe, from where they plotted and schemed to bring about a return to the Catholic faith back at home in Wales. Exile, Dr. Owen Lewis, who became Bishop of Cassano in Naples, and also envoy to Mary Stuart, appealed to Wales' Celtic compatriots, and said that Catholics in Wales and Scotland needed to 'stick together, for we are the old and true inhabitants and owners of the isle of Brittany; these others be but usurpers and mere possessors' (in Bowen 2014 p145), illustrating that although it had to be recognised that Protestantism was indeed the 'possessor' of the land, that their belief in the right of 'ownership' by Catholicism was of an ages old institution. This fierce determination to regain religious dominance led to plans for invasions in the name of Catholicism. Wynne asserts that the writings of staunch Marian Catholic, Dr. Morys Clynnog, if representative of all Welsh exiles, suggests a less than physically peaceable attitude towards the overthrowing of what they call the heresy in England (1956 p195-6). In reflecting on both the strength and constancy of the Catholic faith in Wales, and its legitimate claim on the land, Clynnog wrote, 'constant and constancy in the true faith and religion of this Welsh nation is of very great antiquity, and is not to be despised for it may be proved from the writings of ancient and more recent authors' (in Bowen 2014 p144).

However, as we will see, not all Welsh exiles remained out of the country, and many paid for their faith with their lives, becoming martyrs to the cause. Edward Jones, a priest who was martyred in 1590 wrote 'I submit myself to any death whatsoever before I will forsake the Catholic faith' (in Ellis, 1933 p48), a sentiment echoed time and time again by martyrs such as Richard Gwyn (1537-1584) and David Lewis (1617-1679), who were later canonised and became Saints, as two of the Forty Catholic Martyrs of England and Wales. The public feeling for both of these men was that of great affection and respect. In the case of Richard Gwyn, the Holywell MS says that he was 'of the people generally loved for his diligence in teaching and other good partes know to be in him, and it is further noted that Simon Thelwall of Ruthin, the judge who pronounced his sentence 'neither

enjoyed office after this dayes work nor good houre,’ and that the jury ‘dropped away miserable and never lived to see ye nexte assize following.’ These statements of Thelwall were reportedly theatrical, yet have been well used by Welsh historians (Edwards 1971 in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 1973). In reporting on the authorities’ trial and conviction for the supposed treason committed by Gwyn, Price argues that ‘the judge who tried them admitted their innocence of any share of the alleged conspiracy. They suffered....only for fulfilling their priestly duties’ (1930 p96), and Huw (2004) further advises that Gwyn was so well thought of whilst imprisoned that he was ‘allowed extraordinary liberties by an indulgent gaoler who was later obliged to be his executioner.’

In the same vein, in the case of David Lewis, sympathies both for the man, and for the faith ran high in the local officials and people. It is reported that although the Protestant authorities were willing to pay handsomely for the denouncement and capture of Catholic recusants and priests, particularly those who they thought had a part in the Popish Plot, it seemed, at least initially, that none were ‘willing to turn traitor to him, or give evidence against him, or in any way conspire for his death’ (Canning, 1923). Indeed, local officials were said to attempt to obtain a reprieve for Lewis, and that opposition to his death sentence was such that procuring men to both build the scaffold for his hanging, and to carry out the execution itself was met with difficulty and opposition (O’Keefe). Catholicism was peculiarly strong in the Monmouthshire area, which could possibly explain the lengths to which locals went to save Lewis, who lived and worked among them for decades, and was given the title *Tad y Tlodion* (father of the poor). This concealment of Catholic priests in the past can still be seen today, in that there is evidence of a ‘hiding place’ in *Ty Mawy*, which was known to be used in the Jacobite rebellions, but was likely a priest hole prior to this, knowing that Jesuits were active in the area of Monmouthshire (Squiers 1934 p175), yet as this is a sole example, it indicates that perhaps there was not such a need to conceal priests as in England, where a proliferation of

such places can be found, owing to the lack of acceptance of Catholicism in English society during the period.

Chapter Three

As has already been seen, Catholics became increasingly persecuted, which in turn led to frustrations and to the more radical elements becoming parts of plots both at home and abroad to enable the Catholic faith to once more become the religion of their homeland. The Welsh, and in particular their language had from the earliest of times been considered a means of distrust and concealment from the English during missives from abroad to home (Allmand 2014). It can be said that it was this distrust of the Welsh, and in particular religious divisions within the people which instigated frictions, conflicts and disunity.

The Popish Plot of 1685 brought to the fore this state of rebellion, hugely exacerbated by the Welsh informer, Titus Oates. Born in Rutland into a Baptist family, Oates throughout his life was seen to be a liar who would turn sides for his own gain. Several times, he was charged with perjury, yet managed to escape, eventually converting, at least superficially and as a means to both escape and to a livelihood, to Catholicism, although, by his own admission he felt he was 'lulled asleep, by the allurements of the Popish Syrenes' (Marshall 2004). His supposed faith was not enough to save him, and he eventually, stood trial for his part in the Plot, being charged with perjury. Sir Henry Coventry, who saw Oates give his evidence observed that 'if he [Oates] be a liar, he is the greatest and adroitest I ever saw, and yet it is a stupendous thing to that what vast concerns are like to depend upon the evidence of one young man who hath twice changed his religion' (*Ormonde MSS*, new, ser, 4.207 in Marshall 2004), an understandable attitude to have by Welsh people of either faith, and while being tolerant of those who lived and worshipped the Catholic faith, were not ignorant to the claims made by Oates, in the name of either the Catholic or Protestant faith. It was reported that he

behaved contemptuously on transport to prison, and 'began again his old way of Railery againft the King and Government' (Anon, 1865). Ultimately, Oates was found guilty of perjury, and was sentenced, according to a report written at the time, albeit anonymously, that he 'fhould for ever be Degraded, and forthwith ftript of all his Prieftly Habits,' (Anon, 1865), a sentence whose punishments included being whipped, pelted with rubbish and a lifetime imprisonment. Yet, those whose faith turned from Catholicism were not necessarily shunned and cast out. Father Augustine Baker of Monmouthshire said of his own parents on turning to Protestantism, they 'before had been Catholics [and] did not well discern any great fault, novelty, or difference from the former religion....save only in the change in language,' and that they 'so easily digested the new religion and accommodated themselves thereto' (in Olsen 2014 p99), indicating an attitude of acceptance from both Catholic and Protestant peoples of each others' religious choices.

Yet this acknowledgement both of religious tolerance, as indicated by Father Baker, and the need for change induced by Protestantism, or indeed, a return to the past as fought for by the Catholics, could induce a fully dedicated and decisive conclusion. Williams (1988 p4) notes that 'neither, however, could ignore political considerations, which continued to exert a decisive influence,' a statement which is backed up by historical evidence of plots and schemes from 'clerics like Owen Lewis or lay conspirators such as Hugh Owen'(Williams 1988 p4). Olsen notes that there was a diverse social mix of recusants in Wales, and in spite of persecution and financial punishment, 'prominent recusant families remained scattered throughout Wales,' and that these included 'the Owens of Plas Du' (2010), a home which 'was known to have harboured six priests during this period for it was considered to be a 'Mass center' for the area' (Williams 1957).

It was implied that Hugh Owen of this family was involved in the Gunpowder Plot, an assertion which may have been suggested to the government following a visit by Guy Fawkes to the continent at Easter of that year (Fraser 1996). Indeed, this time of year was considered to be of great

importance to the Protestant cause, as Olsen advises that 'Easter drew the largest number of people; unsurprisingly, perhaps, as not receiving communion at Easter was an important basis for suspicion of recusancy' (2014), which raises the question why Fawkes would want to meet at this highly conspicuous time of year, unless to specifically discuss resistance to the English Crown? Owen had already been denounced for his part in the Ridolfi plot, although an acquaintance of his, Lord Lumley stated that he believed in his innocence 'in any wise privy to any matter concerning the Queen of Scots' (in Loomie 1963). However, it was reported that Owen did indeed know of 'matters concerning' Mary, and, on fleeing to the continent, he attempted to gain support for a rescue plan for the Scottish Queen, and became a willing intelligencer to the same, of whom Robert Persons told Mary 'the sayd Mr Owen [is] a very active, diligent, faythfull and secret Sollicitor' (Catholic Records Society).

Owen, whilst maintaining his Catholic faith, eventually became a prominent figure in the Brussels Court, having established an unrivalled network of correspondents in London and on the continent, who would supply him with ongoing intelligence on military matters, politics and more (Loomie 1963). Owen continued to work in this vein, passing on information, yet weeding out those who came from England and Scotland, masquerading as Catholic exiles. Writing to his brother, Robert, Owen wrote of James I, 'I perceive there is no hope at all of amendment in this stinking king of ours. An ill quarter to look for righteousness: at the hands of a miserable Scot' (in Loomie 1963 p86), a sentiment quite clearly well founded, as James was said to have stated that 'never, he assured his Privy Council on 19 February 1604, had he considered toleration for the Catholics, whose 'superstitious religion' he abhorred' (Childs 2014 p278). From this time onwards, Owen, on the information contained in the confession of Fawkes and the other surviving conspirators, and with there being no supplying of further evidence than this, became the target for James' violent distrust and condemnation of the Catholic faith, who attempted, without success, to have him brought back

to England for trial. Despite having the full animosity of the English Court stacked against him, Owen said of the charges 'not a word will be found which touches the said conspiracy, for I take my oath that no human being ever wrote to me about it, nor did I write to anyone about it' (in Loomie 1963 p86). Owen maintained this position, and never returned to Wales. His story, however, serves to highlight the religious persecution with which Catholics both in England, Wales, or exile continued to suffer at the hands of the Protestant authorities, presenting an ongoing strength of faith and determination to cling to past traditions and beliefs.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated how the success of the Reformation in Wales, and in particular, the extent to which Catholicism was still tolerated and encouraged within Wales, can, in part, be attributed to links between Welsh patriotism to the initial 'Welsh' Tudor regime, and royalty in general, and to that of the existing gentry. Following the introduction of the Protestant Church of England, Catholics had become the new dissenters, the minority in England, yet in Wales, their faith appeared to be strong, if for some only by tradition, but certainly safer than to practice than those who practiced in Protestant England. Indeed, Lewis (1948) notes that 'nonconformity became the very nationhood of Wales. It was a new nation, formed and unified by its religious conversion.' Yet the necessity to convert was thrust upon them, willingly or otherwise. It has been shown through evidence supplied both of physical remains such as artworks from the Gunter house, and documents from the Catholic Records Society, that Catholicism in Wales not only continued, but thrived. Yes, as Olsen notes 'many in Wales came to accept the new church over a long time; but equally others never did, or wished to reform it' (2010), and those who never did accept the new faith have been seen to be persecuted to the point of revolution, both at home in Wales and abroad in exile. It has been seen how both Catholic and Protestant faiths draw on the assertions that they are each established in the

ancient histories of the land, and that each lays claim to being the originator of the faith within the Welsh people. However, the evidence clearly supports the conviction to which Welsh families clung to the Catholic faith, and how Welsh martyrs were firmly seated in this period of Welsh history, and how each endured a loss of privilege, status, and life itself in order to remain true to the faith of their fathers both in life and in death.

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