

**The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales c. 1892-1914:  
a conflict with key values of Wales' staunchly Liberal society  
and its views of acceptable womanly conduct?**

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## **Dedication**

To my wonderful husband Sam - Thank you for your endless love, support and encouragement throughout my Open University journey. You kept me going through the tough times, allayed my doubts and fears, and your proofreading is legendary! I couldn't have done it without you.

Also, to the many men and women who supported the women's suffrage movement. It was a long road to travel but your commitment, perseverance and belief in the justice of the cause made this dissertation possible.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

EFF	Election Fighting Fund
ILP	Independent Labour Party
NLOWS	National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
NWLF	North Wales Liberal Federation
SWLF	South Wales Liberal Federation
UDMD	Undeb Dirwestol Merched y De (South Wales Women's Temperance Union)
UDMGC	Undeb Dirwestol Merched Gogledd Cymru (North Wales Women's Temperance Union)
WFL	Women's Freedom League
WLA	Women's Liberal Association
WLF	Women's Liberal Federation
WNF	Welsh National Federation
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
WUWLA	Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Associations

## **Introduction**

A concerted campaign to achieve women's suffrage in the United Kingdom took place from the mid-1860s until equal voting rights were established in 1928. Yet, prior to 1991, despite extensive research focusing on the suffrage campaign in England, only a small body of work had been published on the women's suffrage movement in Wales. Subsequent scholarship relating to the Welsh suffrage campaign has however become 'sufficient in body to constitute a historiography'.<sup>1</sup> Key works, as discussed below, provide context for the purpose of this dissertation which aims to assess the extent to which women's suffrage activity in Wales conflicted with key values of Wales' staunchly Liberal society and its views of acceptable womanly conduct.

In 1991, Kay Cook and Neil Evans published *The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band?*<sup>2</sup> which, though describing itself as a 'preliminary exploration' of the topic, provided a succinct overview of women's suffrage activity in Wales, 1890-1918. The authors maintained that the stimulus for the women's suffrage campaign in Wales came largely from outside the home nation and, as a result, framed their analysis as a consideration of Welsh *responses* to suffrage activity. The analysis was also heavily focused on violent Welsh responses to the militant activity of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and provided little consideration of wider responses to suffrage activity in Wales. Cook and Evans suggested that the violence was, at least in part, fired by men's reaction to women who challenged the conventional ideas of a woman's 'appropriate role' in society. Alternately, however, they

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<sup>1</sup> Ryland Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928* (Cardiff, 2009), pp. 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Kay Cook and Neil Evans, "'The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band'? The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1890-1918', in *Our Mother's Land* ed. by Angela John (Cardiff, 2011 [1991]), pp. 157-85. Available at <https://www-jstor-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt9qhfrn.17>, Accessed 6 February 2023.

suggested that the violence was driven by militant activity coming into conflict with support for the Liberal party in Wales and particularly the Liberal MP, David Lloyd George, who was regarded as ‘a national institution’.<sup>3</sup>

Cook and Evans’ article was shortly followed by Angela John’s 1994 work *Run like Blazes*,<sup>4</sup> which focused on how suffragettes were perceived in Wales. John concurred with Cook and Evans’ view that the suffragettes lacked ‘a rooted indigenous base’ in Wales and her work maintained a similar focus on the militant aspects of suffragette activity. She reinforced Cook and Evans’ views of conflict between militant suffragette activity and key values of contemporary Welsh society and asserted that militants were often considered to be troublemakers from outside the country, who might be perceived as ‘Other’ in terms of gender, class and nationality – the stereotypical upper or middle-class English woman.<sup>5</sup>

Cook and Evans, and John, all therefore presented suffrage activity in Wales as driven by outsiders and focused their analysis on violent Welsh responses to militant activity. Cook and Evans recognised their lack of emphasis on non-militant activity such as the ‘patient work’ of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS),<sup>6</sup> while John considered how Welsh suffragettes in London used their ‘Welshness’ to further their cause,<sup>7</sup> but potential grassroots activity in Wales and Welsh responses to wider suffrage activity were largely overlooked.

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<sup>3</sup> Cook and Evans, “‘The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band’?”, pp. 176-7.

<sup>4</sup> Angela John, “‘Run like Blazes’”: The Suffragettes and Welshness’, *Llafur*, 6.3 (1994), p. 30. Available at <https://journals.library.wales/view/1326508/1328679/30/#?xywh=-1548%2C-222%2C5828%2C4378>, Accessed 6 February 2023.

<sup>5</sup> John, “‘Run like Blazes’”, pp. 29-35.

<sup>6</sup> Cook and Evans, “‘The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band’?”, p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> John, “‘Run like Blazes’”, pp. 35-40.

Violent responses to suffragette activity in Wales were used by contemporary observers to portray Wales as a nation of anti-suffragists but Kirsti Bohata, in her 2002 article *For Wales, See England?*,<sup>8</sup> aimed to reassess this reputation. This was potentially an opportunity to explore Welsh responses beyond the hostility displayed to militant activity. However, Bohata maintained focus on the violent responses and her analysis largely reiterated previous scholarship, although suggesting that the violence represented a prioritisation of other long-standing concerns rather than an anti-suffrage position.<sup>9</sup> Her consideration of the relationship between Welsh suffragists and the nationalist Cymru Fydd movement in the 1890s<sup>10</sup> provided a welcome indication of indigenous suffrage activity but broader questions relating to Welsh grassroots activity and responses to the suffrage movement remained outstanding.

In their 1991 article, Cook and Evans highlighted the need for a thorough study of the women's suffrage movement in Wales,<sup>11</sup> but it was not until 2009 that Ryland Wallace published his pivotal text *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales 1866-1928*.<sup>12</sup> This expansive review provides a comprehensive account of women's suffrage activity in Wales and places it within its broader British context, but it is descriptive rather than analytical. It remains a key work on the topic but does not engage with existing historiographical debates.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kirsti Bohata, "For Wales, see England?" Suffrage and the new woman in Wales', *Women's History Review*, 11.4 (2002), pp. 643-56. Available at <https://www-tandfonline-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/abs/10.1080/09612020200200342>, Accessed 8 February 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Bohata, "For Wales, See England?", pp. 644-7.

<sup>10</sup> Bohata, "For Wales, See England?", pp. 648-52.

<sup>11</sup> Cook and Evans, "The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band?", p. 157.

<sup>12</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*.

<sup>13</sup> Harold L. Smith, 'Review of "The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928" by Ryland Wallace', *The English Historical Review*, 127.526 (2012), pp. 758-60. Available at <https://www-jstor-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/41474138?sid=primo>, Accessed 26 March 2023.

Despite Wallace's expansive review, subsequent scholarship relating to women's suffrage in Wales remains sparse. Beth Jenkins' 2021 work, *Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales*,<sup>14</sup> which explores Welsh activity within the women's suffrage campaign, is a rare exception and directly addresses the question of an indigenous Welsh suffrage movement. She acknowledges the view that Wales was not initially a suffrage stronghold, and that campaign activity was driven by outside forces, but successfully demonstrates the importance of grassroots support for suffrage activity in Wales, and thereby negates the long-held view that Wales had little or no indigenous suffrage movement.

Following Jenkins' work, it is inappropriate simply to consider Welsh *responses* to suffrage activity. The campaign for women's suffrage in Wales included an indigenous element which can no longer be overlooked. Further, while violent responses, driven by Welsh attachments to Liberalism and acceptable womanly conduct, are well documented, the relationship between the wider women's suffrage campaign in Wales and the values of contemporary Welsh society remain largely unexplored. This dissertation will therefore broaden previous analysis by considering the extent to which women's suffrage activity in Wales (both militant and non-militant) conflicted with the values of a staunchly Liberal society and its views of acceptable womanly conduct. In addition to identifying areas of conflict, the dissertation will consider any mitigating actions taken by suffrage campaigners and assess whether the conflict represented fundamental opposition to women's suffrage or was a consequence of other values and beliefs. Analysis will be limited to the period c.1892-1914, starting with the establishment of the Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Associations (WUWLA) and

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<sup>14</sup> Beth Jenkins, 'Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales' in *The Politics of Women's Suffrage: Local, National and International Dimensions* ed. by A. Hughes-Johnson & L. Jenkins (London, 2021), pp. 87-108. Available at <https://www-jstor-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/j.ctv2321krx.10>, Accessed 6 February 2023.



finishing with the advent of the Great War, although, in places, some earlier analysis is necessary for context.

The nature of the key research question lends itself to discussion in two distinct chapters. The first will focus on the political environment and the conflict between the women's suffrage campaign and wider Welsh political aspirations, including home rule and disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales. In addition, the discussion will consider the complex relationship between the suffragettes and Lloyd George. The second chapter will focus on the socio-cultural environment and the conflict between women's suffrage and the Welsh concept of a woman's place in society. This will consider the ideology of separate spheres and the ambition to avoid any suggestion of immorality amongst Welsh women following the publication of *The Blue Books of 1847*.<sup>15</sup>

The study will consider primary material including contemporary newspapers, journals, suffrage accounts and other archive material: Welsh periodicals such as *The Welsh Review*<sup>16</sup> include numerous articles relevant to the suffrage campaign in Wales while suffrage journals such as *Votes for Women*,<sup>17</sup> although not specific to Wales, include numerous articles focused exclusively on Welsh suffrage events and issues. However, it must be recognised that these sources largely represent middle-class opinion and inevitably incorporate personal or organisational bias.

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<sup>15</sup> R. R. W. Lingen, J. C. Symons and H. R. Vaughan Johnson, *The Blue Books of 1847* (London, 1847), Part 3, pp. 64-6. Available at <https://www.library.wales/discover-learn/digital-exhibitions/printed-material/the-blue-books-of-1847>, Accessed 19 February 2023.

<sup>16</sup> For example: Nora Wynford Philipps 'The Problem of the Nineteenth Century', *The Welsh Review*, 1.4 (1892), pp. 348-58. Available at <https://journals.library.wales/view/2010283/2010610/37#?xywh=-1494%2C-238%2C5239%2C3936>, Accessed 17 January 2023.

<sup>17</sup> For example: Gladice G. Keevil, 'Pembroke By-Election', *Votes for Women*, 16 July 1908, pp. 314-5. Available at <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:maq296xur>, Accessed 21 April 2023.

The dissertation will draw on existing scholarship relating to suffrage activity, but also consider work relating to key values of Welsh society such as Ursula Masson's *Hand in Hand with the Women*<sup>18</sup> which explores the history of women's liberalism in Wales and Brian Harrison's *Separate Spheres*<sup>19</sup> which is not specific to Wales but considers opposition to women's suffrage in Britain.

In conclusion, the study will assert that a significant degree of conflict existed between the women's suffrage campaign in Wales and contemporary values relating to Wales' staunchly Liberal outlook and views of women's role in society. However, the relationship was complex with conflict often arising because of other values and beliefs, rather than a fundamental opposition to women's enfranchisement. Equally, embedded cultural values often hindered the participation of local women in suffrage activity, thus potentially diminishing the effect of the women's suffrage campaign in Wales.

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<sup>18</sup> Ursula Masson, "Hand in hand with the women, forward we will go": Welsh nationalism and feminism in the 1890s', *Women's History Review*, 12.3 (2003), pp. 357-86. Available at <https://www-tandfonline-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/abs/10.1080/09612020300200364>, Accessed 6 February 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London, 2013[1978]). Available at <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/open/detail.action?docID=1163772&pq-origsite=primo>, Accessed 16 February 2023.

## Chapter 1

### Women's Suffrage and Wales' staunchly Liberal society

In 1867, the author of a handbook on Welsh electoral affairs asserted that ‘the real nation [Wales] takes very little interest in politics’.<sup>20</sup> This was a view endorsed by Welsh Liberation Society member Henry Richard, who, during 1866, wrote a series of articles in the *Morning Star* espousing his view of the nature of Welsh society.<sup>21</sup> Richard attributed this political apathy to ‘a wide separation in conviction and sympathy between the great bulk of the people and those who assume to be their leaders’.<sup>22</sup> In his view, the Welsh were nonconformist, Welsh-speaking and Liberal,<sup>23</sup> yet they were represented in Parliament by wealthy landowners who monopolized political life.<sup>24</sup> Few of these political representatives were prepared to address longstanding Welsh grievances associated with land reform, disestablishment of the Church of England and language.<sup>25</sup> However, the 1867 Reform Act doubled the number of eligible Welsh voters, who responded to Richard’s campaign for Welsh men ‘manfully to assert their political rights’<sup>26</sup> and enabled Liberal politicians, including Richard, to score memorable victories in the 1868 election<sup>27</sup>. Subsequent electoral reforms, in 1884 and 1885, extended the franchise further and in the 1885 election, the Liberals captured all but five of the thirty-five available seats in Wales,<sup>28</sup> finally breaking the

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<sup>20</sup> Cited in Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, ‘Parliament and people in mid-nineteenth-century Wales’, in *People and Protest: Wales 1815–1880* ed. by Herbert, T. and Jones, G. E. (Cardiff, 1988), p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Cragoe, ‘Richard, Henry’, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2014), p.4. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23527>, Accessed 21 February 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Richard, *Letters and Essays on Wales* (London, 1884), p. 105. Available at <https://archive.org/details/lettersessaysonw00richiala>, Accessed 19 February 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Cragoe, ‘Richard, Henry’, *ODNB*, p.4.

<sup>24</sup> Ieuan G. Jones, ‘Parliament and people in mid-nineteenth-century Wales’, pp. 43-6.

<sup>25</sup> Masson, “‘Hand in hand with the women’”, p. 363.

<sup>26</sup> Richard, *Letters and Essays on Wales*, p. 124.

<sup>27</sup> Geraint H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 222.

<sup>28</sup> G. H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, pp. 222-3.

hold of the Tory landowning dynasties<sup>29</sup> and aligning the Welsh political landscape with the staunchly Liberal views of the Welsh people.

Early women's suffrage campaigners were hopeful that the 1884 Representation of the People Act would incorporate a successful women's suffrage motion, but their hopes were dashed when the prime minister, William Gladstone, voiced strong opposition to the proposed amendment.<sup>30</sup> However, with a Liberal government in power, radical suffragists were behind the formation of the first Women's Liberal Associations (WLAs), many of which affiliated to a UK-wide Women's Liberal Federation (WLF). Two prominent suffrage campaigners, Nora Philipps (wife of Liberal MP, J. Wynford Philipps) and Eva McLaren, championed the organisation of WLAs within Wales, and in March 1892 the Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Associations (WUWLA) was inaugurated, with twenty-nine Welsh affiliate associations.<sup>31</sup> Nora Philipps was elected president of the new Welsh Union which was committed to the key Liberal principles of disestablishment, temperance, land reform, and home rule,<sup>32</sup> but also included 'just legislation for women including their Parliamentary enfranchisement' amongst its key objectives.<sup>33</sup> Mrs Philipps reported that the majority of Welsh male Liberals were 'in sympathy' with the women's movement<sup>34</sup> and hence it appeared that Welsh Liberalism and the campaign for women's suffrage were successfully aligned.

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<sup>29</sup> Masson, "Hand in hand with the women", p. 363.

<sup>30</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p.22.

<sup>31</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 31-3.

<sup>32</sup> Anon., 'Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Federations', *Cambrian News*, 1 April 1892, p. 8. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3312910/3312918>, Accessed 14 April 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Anon., 'Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Federations', *Woman's Herald*, 9 April 1892, p. 5. Available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/DX1900366325/NCUK?u=tou&sid=bookmark-NCUK&xid=d37d321f>, Accessed 14 April 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Anon., 'Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Federations', *Cambrian News*, 1 April 1892, p. 8.

However, not all men, or indeed women, within Welsh society were in favour of a Liberal organisation formally adopting a women's suffrage policy. In October 1891, the *South Wales Daily News*, one of the main organs of Welsh Liberal politics, published an article which praised the UK-wide WLF for resisting attempts to incorporate women's suffrage as a formal objective because, in doing so, it enabled women to focus 'more thoroughly in the work of Liberalism generally'.<sup>35</sup> The article did not reject the idea of women's suffrage outright but argued that women's efforts were more urgently required in promoting wider Liberal policies and ensuring Liberal success in the forthcoming election. A similar argument was put forward by Miss Eliza Orme in response to a rallying cry for women's suffrage published by Nora Philipps in 1892.<sup>36</sup> Miss Orme rebutted Mrs Philipps' assertion that 'Woman's suffrage is the burning question' in the WLF, declaring that 'the burning question ... is how to win the General Election',<sup>37</sup> and arguing that women's suffrage should defer to other 'more important' policies of the Liberal party.<sup>38</sup> Such challenges did not however prevent the growth of the WUWLA which, by 1895, represented around nine thousand women across Wales.<sup>39</sup>

In terms of male Liberalism, the North Wales and South Wales Liberal Federations (NWLF and SWLF respectively) came into being in the late 1880s<sup>40</sup>, and in 1886 the first Cymru Fydd society was formed in London. Initially a cultural organisation, Cymru Fydd quickly

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<sup>35</sup> Anon., 'Women in Politics', *South Wales Daily News*, 6 October 1891, p. 6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3721359/3721365>, Accessed 14 April 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Philipps, 'The Problem of the Nineteenth Century'.

<sup>37</sup> Eliza Orme, 'A Commonplace Correction', *The Welsh Review*, 1.5 (1892), p. 467. Available at <https://journals.library.wales/view/2010283/2010723/36#?xywh=-1574%2C-198%2C5398%2C3935>, Accessed 17 January 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Bohata, "'For Wales, see England?'"', pp. 650-1.

<sup>39</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> J. Davies, N. Jenkins, M. Baines et al., 'Liberal (Liberal Democrat) Party, The', *The Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales* (2008). Available at [https://search-credoreference-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/content/title/waencywales?tab=entry\\_view&heading=liberal\\_liberal\\_democrat\\_party\\_the&sequence=0](https://search-credoreference-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/content/title/waencywales?tab=entry_view&heading=liberal_liberal_democrat_party_the&sequence=0), Accessed 18 April 2023.

spread throughout Wales and developed into a Welsh Liberal nationalist movement of which the Caernarfon MP, David Lloyd George, was a prominent member.<sup>41</sup> When, in 1895, a proposal aimed to unite the NWLF, SWLF and Cymru Fydd under a single Liberal banner, namely the Welsh National Federation (WNF), Nora Philipps and the WUWLA took the opportunity to take their political involvement and suffrage campaign to the next level.<sup>42</sup>

Mrs Philipps proposed a union between Cymru Fydd and the WUWLA, and requested Cymru Fydd to pledge itself 'to secure for women equal rights of citizenship with men', in return for the WUWLA helping the men 'in all the noble objects upon which they had set their hearts'.

Dissenting voices argued that women's suffrage should not be highlighted any more than other ideals which 'have no particular relation to Wales' but Mrs Philipps' motion, warmly supported by Lloyd George, was carried by an overwhelming majority.<sup>43</sup> The *South West Daily News* reported that Cymru Fydd had been 'captured by the ladies' and Nora Philipps capitalised on her success by securing a formal presence for the WUWLA within the WNF and a pledge that the organisation would aim for women's suffrage. However, the *South West Daily News* also commented on dissenting voices and noted the 'humorous banter' occasioned by the opposition of some of the women themselves.<sup>44</sup> Once again, Liberal support for the women's suffrage campaign was not absolute.

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<sup>41</sup> J. Davies, N. Jenkins, M. Baines et al., 'Cymru Fydd', *The Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales* (2008). Available at [https://search-credoreference-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/content/title/waencywales?tab=entry\\_view&heading=cymru\\_fydd&sequence=0](https://search-credoreference-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/content/title/waencywales?tab=entry_view&heading=cymru_fydd&sequence=0), Accessed 18 April 2023.

<sup>42</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 36.

<sup>43</sup> Anon., 'National Convention: Wales in Conference', *South Wales Daily News*, 18 April 1895, pp. 5-6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3734217/3734222>, Accessed 17 February 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Anon., 'Liberalism in Wales', *South Wales Daily News*, 19 April 1895, pp. 5-6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3734226/3734231>, Accessed 17 February 2023.

The majority of dissenters gave precedence to party loyalty and the promotion of longstanding Liberal causes, rather than declaring an explicit anti-suffrage position. However, Lady Osborne Morgan, a recognised anti-suffragist, took a harder line, asserting that many Liberal workers were ‘indifferent, doubtful or opposed’ to women’s suffrage.<sup>45</sup> She strongly rejected the WUWLA proposal that support for women’s suffrage should be used as a test question for prospective Liberal parliamentary candidates and, in Masson’s words, epitomised the view that ‘the nation must come first and women must wait’.<sup>46</sup> The conflict between party and the fight for women’s suffrage was never far below the surface.

The success of Nora Philipps and the WUWLA was however short lived. Dissent and distrust between the North and South Wales Liberal Federations (NWLF, SWLF) thwarted the implementation of the WNF and an acrimonious meeting between Cymru Fydd and the SWLF in Newport in 1896 heralded the end of Cymru Fydd and the decline of the WUWLA.<sup>47</sup>

The turn of the century saw the campaign for women’s suffrage lose momentum across Britain. The National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), led by Millicent Fawcett, was founded in 1897 but activity was limited in its early years. However, the founding of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903, by women members of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), reignited the fight for women’s enfranchisement. The

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<sup>45</sup> Lady Osborne Morgan, ‘Lady Osborne Morgan on the Liberal Party and Female Suffrage’, *Cambrian News*, 20 March 1896, p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3315001/3315004/24>, Accessed 14 April 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Masson, “‘Hand in hand with the women’”, p. 377.

<sup>47</sup> Cook and Evans, “‘The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band’?”, pp. 162-3.

NUWSS was committed to strictly law-abiding tactics, but the WSPU, led by Emmeline Pankhurst, adopted a more militant approach.<sup>48</sup>

In terms of political activity, WSPU focused its campaign on disrupting the activities of prospective and standing Liberal MPs, irrespective of their views on suffrage, to put maximum pressure on the ruling Liberal government. Meanwhile, the NUWSS' stated policy was to support 'the best friend of women's suffrage', whatever his party.<sup>49</sup> However, these policies led both organisations into conflict with Liberal party supporters in Wales: In the Mid-Glamorgan by-election of 1906, the sitting Liberal member, Samuel Evans, a prominent anti-suffragist, was severely heckled by a WSPU activist during his campaign meetings, with the local press reporting under headlines of 'Uproarious Scenes' and 'Pandemonium'.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, the NUWSS disassociated themselves from WSPU activity, but threw their support behind the prospective Labour candidate.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, at the 1908 Pembroke by-election, the WSPU campaigned against the Liberal candidate, Mr Roch, despite him formally declaring his support for women's suffrage.<sup>52</sup> According to Gladice Keevil, writing in the WSPU journal, *Votes for Women*, WSPU campaigners were able to argue their points with 'a large Liberal audience', who cheered as they went away.<sup>53</sup> There is strong potential for bias in her statement, although it does suggest that the response from Liberal Wales was not entirely negative. However, the 'foolish nagging policy of the WSPU' generated hostile

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<sup>48</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 52-3, 131-3.

<sup>49</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 55, 135-6.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 55.

<sup>51</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 55, 135-6.

<sup>52</sup> Walter Francis Roch, 'Bye-Election 1908, To the Electors of the County of Pembroke', *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph*, 15 July 1908, p. 2. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4117472/4117474>, Accessed 21 April 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Keevil, 'Pembroke By-Election'.



reactions in many Welsh towns and villages where police intervention was required to rescue campaigners from missiles including rotten eggs, bags of flour and fireworks.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the NUWSS' commitment to law-abiding tactics, NUWSS activists regularly met with hostility when campaigning in Wales and even innocent visitors to Wales could be presumed as militants and attacked by angry mobs.<sup>55</sup> Such hostile Welsh responses strengthened after militant WSPU supporters disrupted the Welsh National Eisteddfod in London in 1909. Their disruption was aimed at the Liberal prime minister Herbert Asquith, a renowned anti-suffragist, and David Lloyd George, now Liberal chancellor, whose initial support for women's suffrage had not translated into political action.<sup>56</sup> However, this disruption at a key Welsh cultural event was regarded as a slight to Welsh identity. NUWSS activist, Helga Gill, campaigning in Wales, reported that she was regularly asked 'Why did you break up our Eisteddfod?' and the *Western Mail* asserted that 'Nothing could do their cause [women's suffrage] more injury in Wales'. Such ongoing militant protests and adverse public reaction persuaded the NUWSS to re-emphasise its condemnation of violent protest, but its council also recognised that 'Wales .... did not distinguish between this Union [NUWSS] and the one which had disturbed its Eisteddfod'.<sup>57</sup> However it is evident that hostile Welsh reactions were triggered by perceived insults to Welsh patriotism and Liberalism, rather than a fundamental rejection of demands for women's suffrage.

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<sup>54</sup> Cook and Evans, "'The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band'?", pp. 171-2. The Viscountess Rhondda, *This was my World* (London, 1933), pp. 139-44. Available at <https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.07116/page/149/mode/2up>, Accessed 12 April 2023.

<sup>55</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 90, 153, 163-4.

<sup>56</sup> Anon., 'Welsh Eisteddfod', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 1909, p. 15. Available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/IO0706250884/TGRH?u=tou&sid=bookmark-TGRH&xid=87994978>, Accessed 22 April 2023.

Anon., 'Welsh Eisteddfod', *Daily Telegraph*, 18 June 1909, p. 9. Available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/IO0706250972/TGRH?u=tou&sid=bookmark-TGRH&xid=3ed6cee9>, Accessed 22 April 2023.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 141-2.

Although women's suffrage campaigners frequently encountered hostility in Wales, the most notable event occurred in 1912 after government attempts to introduce limited women's suffrage through Conciliation Bills in 1910, 1911 and 1912 had all failed. Many Liberal MPs, including Lloyd George, had voted against the proposals, concerned that simply enfranchising women on the same basis as men would hand an electoral advantage to the Tories.<sup>58</sup> However, Lloyd George was considered a traitor by suffrage activists for his perceived insincerity on the suffrage question.<sup>59</sup> When Lloyd George returned to his native Llanystumdwy in September 1912, to open the village hall, militant suffragettes disrupted the occasion and received exceptionally rough treatment from the hostile crowd who seemed 'to forget that the interrupters were women or even human beings'.<sup>60</sup> The event made headline news in the national press, with page one reports such as 'Suffragettes Mobbed and Beaten in Wales',<sup>61</sup> and WSPU campaigners accused Lloyd George of inciting his supporters to violence against the women.<sup>62</sup> Modern scholarship has highlighted this event as evidence of the violent Welsh response to women's suffrage claims<sup>63</sup> but, as Bohata asserted, the event was primarily the culmination of increasing frustration on both sides: suffragettes angered by the Liberal government's lack of action on women's suffrage in conflict with a Welsh crowd

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<sup>58</sup> Anon., 'Extracts from a Liberal Party report presented to the Liberal government in November 1911 on the likely effects of a Conciliation Bill', *The National Archives*. Available at <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20100222223628/http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/britain1906to1918/g3/cs2/g3cs2s5a.htm>, Accessed 21 April 2023.

<sup>59</sup> J. Graham Jones, 'Lloyd George and the Suffragettes at Llanystumdwy', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*, 35 (2002), pp. 4-5. Available at <https://liberalhistory.org.uk/journal-issues/journal-of-liberal-democrat-history-3435/>, Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Anon., 'Mr Lloyd George's "Chivalry", Press and Other Views', *Votes for Women*, 27 September 1912, p. 835. Available at <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:rax433zix>, Accessed 14 April 2023.

<sup>61</sup> Anon., 'Suffragettes Mobbed and Beaten in Wales', *Daily Mirror*, 23 September 1912, p. 1. Available at [https://www-ukpressonline-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ukpressonline/database/search/preview.jsp?fileName=DMir\\_1912\\_09\\_23\\_012&sr=1](https://www-ukpressonline-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ukpressonline/database/search/preview.jsp?fileName=DMir_1912_09_23_012&sr=1), Accessed 21 April 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Anon., 'Mr Lloyd George's "Chivalry", Press and Other Views', p. 834.

<sup>63</sup> Cook and Evans, "'The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band'?", pp. 171-2.

determined to protect their local hero who represented a Liberal party which had Welsh issues at its heart.<sup>64</sup>

Although the general portrayal of Wales as a ‘haven of anti-suffragists’ may be misleading,<sup>65</sup> there is little doubt that the women’s suffrage societies had difficulty in making headway in the country. The majority of NUWSS and WSPU organisers in Wales were ‘temporary English importations’<sup>66</sup> who faced an uphill struggle to engage Welsh society, but there is plentiful evidence of their efforts to ameliorate the situation. Both societies strove to employ Welsh-speaking activists as speakers and translated suffrage material into Welsh to engage with rural communities in their own language.<sup>67</sup> By 1913, there were twenty-eight NUWSS branches in Wales and Cardiff was the largest NUWSS branch outside London with some 1200 members.<sup>68</sup> The WSPU, largely rebuffed due to its militant anti-Liberal stance, had only five branches in Wales, but a third women’s suffrage society, the Women’s Freedom League (WFL), formed following a schism in the WSPU in 1907, also had five branches. Leneman asserts that the WFL was the most active suffrage organisation in South Wales, supported by Welsh women attracted to a militant society that did not pursue anti-Liberal tactics,<sup>69</sup> although Wallace contends that membership numbers were small.<sup>70</sup> However, despite difficulty in assessing overall suffrage society membership numbers, it is evident that Welsh based suffrage activity was not insignificant. The *Western Mail* reported 365 suffragists and sympathisers leaving Wales to attend the WSPU’s 1908 ‘Women’s Sunday’ demonstration in

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<sup>64</sup> Bohata, “‘For Wales, see England?’”, p. 645.

<sup>65</sup> Bohata, “‘For Wales, see England?’”, p. 643.

<sup>66</sup> John, “‘Run like Blazes’”, p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> B. Jenkins, ‘Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales’, pp. 98-101.

<sup>68</sup> Deidre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 42. Cook and Evans, “‘The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band?’”, p. 169.

<sup>69</sup> Leah Leneman, ‘A truly national movement: The view from outside London’ in *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* ed. by Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (Manchester, 1998), p. 43.

<sup>70</sup> Wallace, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 111.

London<sup>71</sup> and *The Daily Telegraph* reported on ‘maidens of Wales’ marching beneath their emblem of the Red Dragon at the 1911 suffrage ‘Coronation’ procession.<sup>72</sup>

Beth Jenkins asserts that ‘Liberal supporters .... comprised a majority of the NUWSS membership’,<sup>73</sup> but more work is needed to understand the composition of local groups<sup>74</sup> and it is impossible to assess if significant numbers of Liberal party supporters were actively engaged in the women’s suffrage campaign. Nevertheless, the autobiography of Margaret, Viscountess Rhondda, provides evidence for Liberal politics co-existing with militant WSPU activity.<sup>75</sup> Margaret’s mother, Sybil Haig, was involved with women’s suffrage from the 1880s and, later, became an active member of the WSPU while Margaret herself joined the society in 1908.<sup>76</sup> For Margaret, ‘militant suffrage was the very salt of life’, yet she and her mother lived in harmony with her father, the Liberal MP, Mr D. A. Thomas. Margaret’s mother worked ‘loyally for him during election time’ and Margaret asserted that her father ‘could not help rather enjoying some of our exploits’.<sup>77</sup> Close family ties to both Liberalism and suffrage may not have been common, but Viscountess Rhondda’s experience shows that the two were not totally incompatible.

All the main suffrage societies published their own journals and pamphlets, but campaigners also sought to manage the dissemination of suffrage news through the local press. Cook and Evans report that the Liberal-leaning newspaper, the *Glamorgan Free Press*, requested

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<sup>71</sup> Cited in Wallace, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 60.

<sup>72</sup> Anon., ‘Votes for Women: Immense International Procession’, *The Telegraph*, 19 June 1911, p. 5. Available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/IO0707888165/TGRH?u=tou&sid=bookmark-TGRH&xid=172835f9>, Accessed 21 Apr 2023.

<sup>73</sup> B. Jenkins, ‘Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales’, p. 98.

<sup>74</sup> Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 45.

<sup>75</sup> The Viscountess Rhondda, *This was my World*.

<sup>76</sup> Wallace, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 71-2.

<sup>77</sup> The Viscountess Rhondda, *This was my World*, pp. 120, 148-9.

weekly accounts of the activities of the NUWSS' Cardiff branch,<sup>78</sup> providing another example of co-operation between Welsh Liberal society and the women's suffrage campaign. However, press responses to the WSPU's militant activity were less sympathetic. After a militant attack on Lloyd George at the Wrexham Eisteddfod in 1912, avid Liberal supporter Sir John Gibson, owner of the *Cambrian News* and recognised supporter of women's suffrage, declared that the militant policy of the WSPU was demonstrating that women were 'unfit for political enfranchisement' with their attacks 'near akin to insanity'.<sup>79</sup> It is not therefore surprising that WSPU branches found it necessary to establish groups of people who would write 'indignantly' to the local paper whenever suffrage was attacked, or suffrage news distorted.<sup>80</sup> Yet, once again, the conflict is not between Welsh Liberalism and suffrage per se, but a response to militant WSPU targeting of Welsh Liberal personalities and, by extension, Liberal party ideals.

In 1912, frustrated by the Government's lack of progress on women's suffrage, the NUWSS abandoned its stance of supporting 'the best friend of women's suffrage', whatever his party. Rejecting the Liberal and Conservative parties, the NUWSS set up the Electoral Fighting Fund (EFF) to provide electoral support to the Labour party who had a commitment to introduce votes for women.<sup>81</sup> There was 'unanimous' opposition to this policy from the South Wales Federation of the NUWSS,<sup>82</sup> which Jenkins interprets as evidence of strong Liberal support within the Welsh NUWSS membership.<sup>83</sup> Masson proposes a more complex

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<sup>78</sup> Cook and Evans, "The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band"?, p. 169.

<sup>79</sup> John, "Run like Blazes", pp. 32-3.

<sup>80</sup> The Viscountess Rhondda, *This was my World*, p. 130.

<sup>81</sup> Leneman, 'A truly national movement: The view from outside London', pp. 45-6

<sup>82</sup> Ursula Masson, "Political conditions in Wales are quite different ..." party politics and votes for women in Wales, 1912-15', *Women's History Review*, 9.2 (2000), p. 374. Available at <https://www-tandfonline-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/abs/10.1080/09612020000200248>, Accessed 12 April 2023.

<sup>83</sup> B. Jenkins, 'Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales', p. 98.

relationship highlighting Conservative support amongst the NUWSS membership and providing evidence that the primarily middle-class NUWSS members had no trust in the Labour party, or specifically the Labour MPs who represented the working-class mining communities. However, Masson does not deny the potential impact of Liberal support and concludes that the NUWSS in South Wales was only ‘slightly less homogeneously Liberal than often assumed’.<sup>84</sup> Opposition to the revised NUWSS policy in Wales was therefore undoubtedly strengthened by the alignment between membership of the society and support for Welsh Liberalism.

The above discussion has demonstrated that there was a complex relationship between Wales’ staunchly Liberal society and the women’s suffrage campaign in Wales. There is little evidence of conflict between Liberalism and the fundamental idea of women’s suffrage. Indeed, in the late nineteenth century, suffrage activity was fully aligned with the Welsh Women’s Liberal Associations. However, there is plentiful evidence of conflict between women’s suffrage and other Liberal priorities, including land reform, disestablishment and, most importantly, the maintenance of governmental power. The NUWSS, non-partisan (until 1912) and campaigning by constitutional means, attracted substantial support in Wales, but the WSPU’s defiant anti-Liberal stance and militant activity led to violent Welsh reactions against suffrage activists. Further, contemporary media coverage of these violent events led to images of Wales as an anti-suffrage society, and created a biased focus in modern scholarship which has only recently been addressed.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Masson, “Political conditions in Wales are quite different ...”, pp. 375-7.

<sup>85</sup> Bohata, “For Wales, see England?”, pp. 643-5

Women's suffrage demands did not conflict directly with the values of a staunchly Liberal Welsh society and many Welsh Liberal MPs, including Lloyd George, nominally supported the suffrage agenda. However, lack of government progress on women's suffrage demands in the early twentieth century led to a gradual disconnect between support for party and for suffrage. By 1912, when the NUWSS transferred its electoral support to the Labour Party, the conflict between women's suffrage and support for the Liberal party in Wales had deepened, and conflict in the political priorities of the Liberal government frustrated all attempts to achieve enfranchisement for women until after the Great War.

## Chapter 2

### Women's Suffrage and Wales' views of acceptable womanly conduct

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, powerful social conventions in Britain promoted the ideology of separate spheres between the sexes, a belief that the two sexes were fundamentally different and intended to fulfil distinct roles in society.<sup>86</sup> Men were suited to public roles in politics, finance or economics, while women were expected to fill domestic roles, focused on the home, family and children.<sup>87</sup> This over-arching principle became of paramount importance to Wales following the publication of the *Reports of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales (The Blue Books of 1847)*. The reports were commissioned to address concerns about deficiencies in education in Wales, but the commissioners related these deficiencies to particular characteristics of the Welsh people, including the indecency and immorality of Welsh women.<sup>88</sup> The Welsh passionately refuted the allegations<sup>89</sup> but, nevertheless, demanded that their women should subsequently be above criticism in every way.<sup>90</sup> Welsh women's journals such as *Y Gymraes* were established to promote moral and domestic standards in women and thereby created 'an ideal to which women of Wales could aspire', albeit reflecting standards associated with a middle-class 'Angel of the House' that had little relevance to the majority of women in Wales.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 188.

<sup>87</sup> Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>88</sup> Lingen, Symons and Vaughan Johnson, *The Blue Books of 1847*, II, pp.56-60; III, pp.64-66.

<sup>89</sup> Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The language of the Blue Books: the perfect instrument of empire* (Cardiff, 1998), pp. 209-10. Available at <https://libezproxy.open.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=27371&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, Accessed 15 February 2023.

<sup>90</sup> Jane Aaron, 'A Review of the Contribution of Women to Welsh Life and Prospects for the Future', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 8 (2002), p. 197. Available at <https://journals.library.wales/view/1386666/1426058/187#?xywh=111%2C95%2C2028%2C1811>, Accessed 12 April 2023.

<sup>91</sup> Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'The True "Cymraes": Images of Women in Women's Nineteenth-Century Welsh Periodicals', in *Our Mother's Land* ed. by Angela John (Cardiff, 2011[1991]), pp. 74-80. Available at <https://www-jstor-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt9qhfrn.13>, Accessed 20 March 2023.



Equally however, Wales developed the quasi-mythical figure of the Welsh Mam, a stereotypical miner's wife, who was no less virtuous than her middle-class counterpart, and no less devoted to her home and family, but who demonstrated a toughness and inner strength, not seen in the more delicate 'Angel'.<sup>92</sup> Two idealistic Welsh women, with very different lives, but both sharing the key characteristics of virtue and devotion to their home and family.

Welsh outrage at the general sense of English superiority running through the *Blue Books*<sup>93</sup> and Wales' idealised view of the perfect Welshwoman remained embedded in society throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>94</sup> Hence, these cultural values were current when, as discussed in chapter one, the first organised suffrage activity in Wales developed within the Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Associations (WUWLA), formed in 1892. Nora Philipps, president of the new body, was English by birth and Eva McLaren, secretary, was Anglo-German.<sup>95</sup> Further, both hailed from wealthy families with no direct links to Wales.<sup>96</sup> Their efforts to advance women's involvement in public politics in Wales could therefore have generated strong negative reactions from an indignant Welsh society. However, despite some opposition,<sup>97</sup> suffrage campaign activity driven by these two wealthy

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<sup>92</sup> Aaron, 'A Review of the Contribution of Women to Welsh Life', p. 195.

G. A. Williams, 'Women Workers in Wales, 1968-1982', *Welsh History Review*, 11.4 (1983), pp. 530-1. Available at <https://journals.library.wales/view/1073091/1078288/553#?xywh=-798%2C-225%2C4077%2C4266>, Accessed 14 April 2023.

<sup>93</sup> Martin Johnes, *Wales - England's colony?* (Cardigan, 2019). Available at <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=24a9994b-4534-4bbb-9776-fad31ae995e4%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZZY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=2234621&db=nlebk>, Accessed 15 February 2023.

<sup>94</sup> Roberts, *The language of the Blue Books: the perfect instrument of empire*, p. 222.

<sup>95</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>96</sup> Linda Walker, 'McLaren [*née* Müller], Eva Maria', *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2009). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/56261>, Accessed 7 May 2023.

Linda Walker, 'Philipps [*née* Gerstenberg], Leonora', *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2015). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/57852>, Accessed 7 May 2023

<sup>97</sup> For example, Orme, 'A Commonplace Correction'.

middle-class English women appears to have been successful.<sup>98</sup> Their apparent acceptance within conservative Welsh society can potentially be explained by the fact that both women were wives of Liberal MPs, and their campaign work did not directly challenge Liberal party candidates, MPs or prospective governmental policies.

However, the nature of Welsh responses changed in the early twentieth century with the establishment of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the Women's Freedom League (WFL) - all discussed in chapter one. These organisations, at least initially, lacked an indigenous base in Wales<sup>99</sup> and relied on visiting English activists to promote their cause. Jenkins notes the resentment caused by the importation of English 'stars' to Wales, campaigners who often regarded Welsh women as passive and disinterested, and who failed to understand the 'alien' environment.<sup>100</sup> Further, as membership of the NUWSS widened, English-born, educated women, particularly school and head teachers, took prominent roles within the movement.<sup>101</sup> Combined with militant WSPU members from England, it is little wonder that suffrage activists might be perceived as 'Other' in terms of gender, class and nationality, and viewed as 'mysterious, even unpleasant'<sup>102</sup> or 'noisy, and unfeminine' by working-class Welsh society.<sup>103</sup> Following a stormy visit to Wales in 1908, Charlotte Despard, president of the WFL, reported on 'Ungallant Little Wales' – a title reflecting her dismay at the rough

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<sup>98</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 33.

<sup>99</sup> John, "Run like Blazes", p. 30.

<sup>100</sup> B. Jenkins, 'Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales', pp. 93-5.

<sup>101</sup> Deidre Beddoe, 'Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Wales', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 33.3 (2004), p. 336. Available at <https://journals.library.wales/view/1277425/1292074/114#?cv=114&xywh=-1066%2C-229%2C5112%2C4563>, Accessed 12 April 2023.

<sup>102</sup> John, "Run like Blazes", p. 29.

<sup>103</sup> Bohata, "For Wales, see England?", p. 644.

treatment meted out to women campaigners but, equally perhaps, reflecting a lack of Welsh chivalry towards the women's 'unfeminine' behaviour.<sup>104</sup>

Beddoe strongly rejects the idea that the women's suffrage movement in Wales was an alien one, citing the amount of suffrage literature translated into Welsh and the prominent involvement of Welsh women in the suffrage organisations.<sup>105</sup> However, this 'Welshness' reflected a committed effort by suffrage societies to engage Welsh language speakers and produce literature in Welsh, as a means of bridging the linguistic and cultural gap.<sup>106</sup> For the majority of Welsh women, including Welsh Mams eking out a living for their families in mining areas, life was ruled by the expectation that a woman's 'proper position was on the hearth' where she could ensure the proper upbringing of children 'which nature intended her to do'.<sup>107</sup> The Anglocentric narrative of the suffrage movement (as described by Bohata)<sup>108</sup> and its apparent rejection of feminine values did not sit comfortably with the ideals or, in many cases, the realities of Welsh society.

Wales' response to the *Blue Books* was not however entirely detrimental to women's social development. Women benefitted from access to improved education with a resulting increase in literacy skills, and it was recognised that women had an important part to play in social reform.<sup>109</sup> Women became key players in the temperance movement which expanded rapidly in Wales from the 1890s and hence provides a contrasting study to the suffrage campaign.

Leading members of the North and South Wales Women's Temperance Unions (UDMGC

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<sup>104</sup> Charlotte Despard, 'Ungallant little Wales', *Women's Franchise*, 28 May 1908, p. 569. Available at <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:sac292caj/read/single#page/5/mode/1up>, Accessed 17 February 2023.

<sup>105</sup> Beddoe, 'Women and Politics in Twentieth Century Wales', pp. 336-7.

<sup>106</sup> B. Jenkins, 'Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales', pp. 98-101.

<sup>107</sup> *Pontypool Free Press*, 22 February 1907, cited in Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 188.

<sup>108</sup> Bohata, "'For Wales, see England?'" p. 644.

<sup>109</sup> S. R. Williams, 'The True "Cymraes"', p. 90.

and UDMD respectively) were predominantly middle-class but, unlike the main suffrage organisations, these women were Welsh, often Welsh speaking and proud of their efforts to avoid social distinctions within their movement.<sup>110</sup> Further, their aims aligned closely with efforts to enhance Wales' 'social purity'. Nevertheless, their activities were still seen as contraventions of Welsh societal norms for women and subject to censure. Ceridwen Peris, one of the leading members of the UDMGC, recalled that speaking from a stage in public conflicted with contemporary ideas of a woman's place in society: 'The hearth and home was a woman's place and silence her virtue',<sup>111</sup> while chapel elders sometimes forbade the women to meet in chapels, for fear they were neglecting their homes. Indeed, Reverend D. G. Jones reported that when men saw Cranogwen (Sarah Jane Rees, founder of the UDMD) addressing a crowd of men from the pulpit 'they thought that the end of the world had come'.<sup>112</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the longstanding societal belief in women's domesticity created an associated reluctance for women to speak in public. Sarah Matthews of the UDMGC noted that Welsh women members were overcome by nervousness and reserve,<sup>113</sup> and this issue was undoubtedly an element in the apparently passive response of Welsh women observed by English suffrage campaigners.<sup>114</sup> However, the suffrage societies worked to overcome these obstacles by offering training and instruction in public speaking, such as that at the NUWSS summer school in the Conwy Valley in 1913.<sup>115</sup> Prior to joining the WSPU, Viscountess Rhondda recalled that she had never spoken in her life, but subsequently based her speeches on a format taught by Annie Kenney, a prominent WSPU leader: 'Tell them, firstly what you

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<sup>110</sup> Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'From Temperance to Suffrage?', in *Our Mother's Land* ed. by Angela John (Cardiff, 2011[1991]), pp. 134-9. Available at <https://www-jstor-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt9qhfrn.16>, Accessed 20 March 2023.

<sup>111</sup> Cited in Lloyd-Morgan, 'From Temperance to Suffrage?', pp. 146-7.

<sup>112</sup> Cited in Lloyd-Morgan, 'From Temperance to Suffrage?', pp. 147-8.

<sup>113</sup> Cited in Lloyd-Morgan, 'From Temperance to Suffrage?', p. 138.

<sup>114</sup> B. Jenkins, 'Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales', pp. 93-5.

<sup>115</sup> Cook and Evans, "'The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band'", p. 174.

want, secondly why you want it and thirdly how you mean to get it'.<sup>116</sup> Meanwhile, WSPU member Elsie McKenzie found she appeared to be 'changed into somebody else' as a result of her new-found ability to write articles and argue politics on a public platform.<sup>117</sup> The suffrage campaigners therefore recognised the reluctance of women to speak in public, whether through their own reticence, their fear of censure or a combination of both, and actively supported their members to move confidently beyond their restrictive domestic environments.

It is evident from responses to the women's temperance campaign in Wales, that public activities relating to the more contentious issue of women's suffrage were also likely to be considered inappropriate and unfeminine. In a parliamentary debate, Sir J. D. Rees, former Liberal MP for Montgomery Boroughs and a determined foe of women's suffrage, argued that the suffragists were 'not representative women' and 'there is little peace, light and refreshment about them'.<sup>118</sup> Rees was voicing a common anti-suffragist argument, that suffragists were effectively blurring the clear distinction between the sexes<sup>119</sup> and it is readily apparent that the suffragists did not conform to Rees' view of acceptable womanly conduct.

The concept that suffrage activists, particularly the militant WSPU campaigners, were blurring the distinction between the sexes was potentially an underlying element in the physical assaults experienced by women during campaign activities. Viscountess Rhondda vividly recalled her experience in a Welsh mining village when she was relieved of her purse

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<sup>116</sup> The Viscountess Rhondda, *This was my World*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>117</sup> Cited in Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 69.

<sup>118</sup> J. D. Rees, 'Representation of the People (Women) Bill', *Hansard: House of Commons Sessional Papers*, 5 May 1913, Fifth series, vol. 52, c. 1762. Available at <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.cds5cv0052p0-0011?accountid=14697>, Accessed 4 May 2023.

<sup>119</sup> Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, p. 56.

and hat before the scheduled campaign meeting, subjected to rotten eggs during the meeting and afterwards had to run through gardens and hedges to dodge pursuers intent on ‘real mischief’,<sup>120</sup> while a WFL meeting at Newtown in July 1912 was broken up by ‘gangs of Liberal roughs’ and several women activists were injured by ‘a yelling, savage mob, more like wild beasts than human beings’.<sup>121</sup> However, the most publicised violence against suffragists related to attacks on WSPU suffragettes who disrupted Lloyd George’s address at Llanystumdwy in September 1912. As discussed in chapter one, the violence can be partly attributed to local anger at an attack on Lloyd George, the hero of Welsh Liberal supporters. However, local and national newspapers related how ‘metropolitan, middle-class’ activists had their hair torn out and their heads beaten, men threatened to drown them in the river<sup>122</sup> and Sylvia Pankhurst, a prominent WSPU organiser, claimed that activists ‘were beaten, kicked and stripped almost naked’.<sup>123</sup>

Such violence against women suffrage campaigners appears excessive in an age of supposed male chivalry and the *Daily Mail* report on proceedings, under the headline ‘Welsh Way with Suffragettes’,<sup>124</sup> suggests a belief that such violence was specifically Welsh in nature. Yet the sensationalist nature of the Llanystumdwy reports were questioned by several attendees at the event. In particular, a prominent local journalist, E. W. Evans, wrote a letter to Lloyd George asserting that the newspaper reports were greatly exaggerated and claiming that the suffrage activists had stage-managed the event by, inter alia, inserting false hair inside their hats which

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<sup>120</sup> The Viscountess Rhondda, *This was my World*, pp. 141-2.

<sup>121</sup> Anon., ‘With the Campaigners: Rowdyism in Montgomery Boroughs’, *The Vote*, 27 July 1912, pp. 245-6. Available at <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:gox998zah>, Accessed 7 May 2023.

<sup>122</sup> John, “‘Run like Blazes’”, p. 33.

J. G. Jones, ‘Lloyd George and the Suffragettes at Llanystumdwy’, p. 8.

<sup>123</sup> Cited in J. G. Jones, ‘Lloyd George and the Suffragettes at Llanystumdwy’, p. 8.

<sup>124</sup> Anon., ‘Welsh Way with Suffragettes’, *Daily Mail*, 23 September 1912, p. 7. Available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/EE1862728851/DMHA?u=tou&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=4153e5fd>, Accessed 17 January 2023.

could then be pulled out in handfuls.<sup>125</sup> It is entirely possible that WSPU activists came to Llanystumdwy aiming to fabricate an excessive level of violence from the Welsh crowd, and hence benefit from the resulting publicity. Alternately, they may have had genuine fears for their safety and taken appropriate precautions. Irrespective of their motives however, they evidently anticipated the potential for gratuitous violence.

Cook and Evans suggest that the violent reactions from Welsh men represented ‘the exercise of domination’ over women who dared to challenge societal conventions of womanly conduct, potentially amounting to a ‘collective symbolic rape’.<sup>126</sup> However, the suffragettes also suffered at the hands of Welsh women. The *Western Mail* reported that one activist at Llanystumdwy feared Welsh women more than men because they ‘took their hatpins out of their hats and made every attempt to use them’ and refused to provide refuge to assaulted activists in their homes.<sup>127</sup> It is possible that there was a sexual element underpinning the male violence, but fundamentally the suffragettes had lost the societal protection normally afforded to women in the early twentieth century, due to the conflict between their activities and views of acceptable womanly conduct. Suffragettes had effectively renounced their femininity, and hence might be subjected to a level of violence which would generally be considered inappropriate against women.

Opposition to the ideas and activities of the women’s suffrage movement did not always however involve physical violence. Many men, and women, across Britain opposed the suffragist demands from a variety of viewpoints and, as suffragist agitation increased, formal opposition organisations were established. The separate male and female societies,

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<sup>125</sup> Cited in J. G. Jones, ‘Lloyd George and the Suffragettes at Llanystumdwy’, p. 3.

<sup>126</sup> Cook and Evans, “‘The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band’?”, p. 177.

<sup>127</sup> Cited in J. G. Jones, ‘Lloyd George and the Suffragettes at Llanystumdwy’, p. 9.

established in 1908, amalgamated in 1910 to form the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage (NLOWS) and Mrs Gwladys Gladstone Solomon, organising secretary of the National League, is credited with developing the organisation in Wales. Only three branches were established in Wales by 1912, but this increased to nineteen following Mrs Gladstone Solomon's campaign tour of Wales in that year.<sup>128</sup> Her views are clearly articulated in two letters that she wrote to Lloyd George. In one, she outlines the political argument (discussed in chapter one) that women's suffrage could undermine the strength and priorities of the Liberal government.<sup>129</sup> However, in the other, she argues that women do not actually want the vote. She asserts that she is 'thankful' to pay taxes in return for men shouldering the burden of government and wants no responsibilities beyond those necessary to maintain her home and child.<sup>130</sup> The 'preposterous' idea of women's suffrage<sup>131</sup> was also challenged by Margaret Williams from Anglesey, who contended that men were physically superior to women. Men were therefore able to enforce the laws they made with physical force whereas women's weaker constitution exempted them from such activity. For Margaret, the payment of taxes allowed women to benefit from the resultant civilised society and did not, as suffragists claimed, suggest a right to enfranchisement.<sup>132</sup> Such views clearly reflect the ideology of separate spheres for men and women, and were regularly used to support the arguments of anti-suffragist MPs, including J. D. Rees who contended that the 'smallest

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<sup>128</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 199-201.

<sup>129</sup> Gwladys Gladstone Solomon, 'Letter to David Lloyd George MP, 8 October 1912', *The National Archives*. Available at <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20220201192307/https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/britain1906to1918/g3/cs2/g3cs2s7a.htm>, Accessed 10 May 2023.

<sup>130</sup> Gwladys Gladstone Solomon, 'Letter to David Lloyd George MP, 15 June 1912', *The National Archives*. Available at <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20220201210355/https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/britain1906to1918/g3/cs2/g3cs2s6a.htm>, Accessed 10 May 2023.

<sup>131</sup> Gladstone Solomon, 'Letter to David Lloyd George MP, 8 October 1912'.

<sup>132</sup> Cited in Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 193, 195.



possible proportion' of women actually wanted, or believed themselves eligible for, the vote.<sup>133</sup>

Mrs Gladstone Solomon described her campaign meetings in Wales as 'very well attended',<sup>134</sup> although Wallace notes that there were few reports from Wales in the *Anti-Suffrage Review* (the regular NLOWS journal), which suggests that membership and activity may have been limited. Indeed, like the suffrage societies, the anti-suffrage movement in Wales suffered from a shortage of speakers, due to the reluctance of women to engage in public roles.<sup>135</sup> However, the Newport branch of the NLOWS, the strongest in Wales, canvassed its local area and claimed that the responses provided 'conclusive proof' of strong anti-suffragist activity.<sup>136</sup> There is obviously a strong likelihood of bias in its methods and reporting, so it is difficult to judge the true sense of feeling in the area. Nevertheless, Lady Llangatock of the Newport branch, writing in her local newspaper, asked 'What lady would not defend the dignity of her sex and show her disapproval of the suffragette party who thus brought discredit on womanhood',<sup>137</sup> which again demonstrates the conflict between suffrage activity and ideals of womanhood.

Discussion has demonstrated that the ideology of separate spheres created significant conflict between the women's suffrage campaign and views of acceptable womanly conduct. This conflict was not unique to Wales as similar ideology existed throughout Britain, but *The Blue Books of 1847* cast a long shadow in Wales,<sup>138</sup> creating distrust of English intervention in the

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<sup>133</sup> Rees, 'Representation of the People (Women) Bill'.

<sup>134</sup> Gladstone Solomon, 'Letter to David Lloyd George MP, 8 October 1912'.

<sup>135</sup> Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, pp. 204-5.

<sup>136</sup> Cited in Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 207.

<sup>137</sup> Monmouthshire Weekly Post, 1 May 1909 cited in Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales*, p. 204.

<sup>138</sup> Roberts, *The language of the Blue Books: the perfect instrument of empire*, p. 222.

country and a determination that Welsh women's conduct should be beyond reproach.

Suffrage campaigners from England often lacked appreciation of Welsh values,<sup>139</sup> and hence, suffrage organisations had to engage Welsh activists, provide Welsh translations and provide women with training in public speaking in order to bridge the cultural divisions. Further, the ideology of separate spheres required women to live virtuous and dutiful lives dedicated to their home and family. However, suffrage activists, particularly militant WSPU campaigners, were perceived to blur the distinctions between men and women. They rejected the feminine values inherent in Wales' idealised images of the 'Angel of the House' and Welsh Mam, and therefore lost the societal protection normally afforded to women. Paradoxically, the doctrine of separate spheres also underpinned the peaceable arguments of Mrs Gladstone Solomon and other anti-suffragists who simply contended that women did not want the vote or else considered themselves ineligible for the privilege.

In summary therefore, there was a complex set of relationships between women's suffrage activity and views of acceptable womanly conduct in Wales, with suffrage societies having to negotiate a considerable degree of conflict. The NLOWS anti-suffrage stance was generated by a fundamental rejection of women's enfranchisement. Much of the remaining opposition resulted from suffrage activity challenging the ideology of separate spheres, but rejection of the women's suffrage agenda was inherent within the concept.

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<sup>139</sup> B. Jenkins, 'Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales', pp. 93-5.

## Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to assess the extent to which women's suffrage activity in Wales conflicted with key values of Wales' staunchly Liberal society and its views of acceptable womanly conduct. Examination of the evidence has demonstrated a significant degree of conflict in both the political and socio-cultural spheres, but the nature of the relationship was complex with a myriad of underlying causes, diverse effects and differing modes of expression. There was undoubtedly outright opposition to the concept of women's suffrage in some quarters but, in a number of cases, opposition to the women's suffrage campaign was not commensurate with a fundamental hostility to women's enfranchisement - opposition could be motivated by other factors. There is also plentiful evidence of support for the women's campaign, although this could be tempered by concern at some of the women's more militant activities.

In the political arena, Liberal MPs and Welsh Liberal supporters were not necessarily opposed to the idea of women's franchise but there is evidence of significant conflict between suffrage activity and other Liberal priorities. Women's suffrage was an issue which could potentially frustrate the continuation of Liberal governmental power and derail efforts to implement land reform and disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales.<sup>140</sup> Hence, many Welsh men, and women, including Lloyd George, adhered to the maxim that 'the nation must come first and women must wait'.<sup>141</sup> Women's suffrage may have been a just cause but, in the context of late nineteenth, early twentieth-century Welsh politics, it had to take a back seat to other issues.

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<sup>140</sup> Bohata, "For Wales, see England?", pp. 650-1.

<sup>141</sup> Masson, "Hand in hand with the women", p. 377.

In the socio-cultural arena however, evidence suggests a more fundamental opposition to women's suffrage based upon Wales' longstanding adherence to the ideology of separate spheres. Societal expectations created idealised Welsh women – the middle-class 'Angel of the House' and the Welsh Mam - both expected to operate solely in the domestic sphere, looking after home and family, and not embroiled in turmoil of public life.<sup>142</sup> For many anti-suffragists, this established doctrine fundamentally negated any claims for women's suffrage. Further however, women's suffrage activity, including meetings, campaigns and public speaking, created a direct challenge to these ideals. Suffrage campaigners, particularly militant WSPU activists, were therefore deemed to have renounced their femininity and as such, could be subjected to violent attacks.

The ideology of separate spheres also created a more subtle conflict as Welsh women of all classes, long conditioned to their domestic role in society, lacked the confidence to act in the public arena, restricting their potential involvement on either side of the suffrage argument. Suffrage societies attempted to address this issue through training, and supported Welsh speaking women with pamphlets etc. in the Welsh language. Nevertheless, although Jenkins has proven that Wales did not lack an indigenous suffrage movement,<sup>143</sup> suffrage society members were largely middle-class. Primary evidence relating to working-class women, denied involvement by their reticence or simply lack of time, is therefore lacking and hence their views on suffrage remain largely unknown.

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<sup>142</sup> S. R. Williams, 'The True "Cymraes"', pp. 74-80.

G. A. Williams, 'Women Workers in Wales', pp. 530-1.

Aaron, 'A Review of the Contribution of Women to Welsh Life', p. 195.

<sup>143</sup> B. Jenkins, 'Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales', pp. 87-108.

Political and socio-cultural conflicts conspicuously combined during Lloyd George's visit to Llanystumdwy in 1912, when militant WSPU suffragettes, who disrupted proceedings, were subject to violent assaults by the outraged crowd. Lloyd George, a nominal supporter of women's suffrage, was targeted for his party's lack of progress on the suffrage question, and his personal betrayal in voting against a recent Conciliation Bill. Meanwhile, the suffragettes were targeted both for their attack on Wales' Liberal hero and for their rejection of feminine values which placed them outside women's domestic sphere. This event provides a stark reminder that the political and socio-cultural conflicts, though examined separately in this dissertation, in practice overlapped. Individuals on both sides of the suffrage debate were not motivated by a single factor, but by a multitude of differing factors, many of which are outside the scope of this debate. Some, such as Wales' nonconformist bias, represent a worthwhile avenue for further research.

Cook and Evans interpreted the violent Welsh responses to suffrage activity as a reaction to women challenging their 'appropriate role' in society and to support for the Liberal party in Wales.<sup>144</sup> However, this dissertation has broadened the scope of the investigation to consider the extent of such conflict in relation to wider aspects of the suffrage campaign, militant and non-militant. Wales was not an anti-suffrage society, but analysis has identified a significant degree of conflict between the women's suffrage campaign in Wales and contemporary values relating to the country's staunchly Liberal society and views of acceptable womanly conduct. However, the relationship was complex. Conflict between suffrage campaigners and Welsh society often arose because of other societal values and beliefs, rather than a fundamental opposition to women's enfranchisement, particularly in the political sphere. Conversely, embedded cultural values undeniably hindered the participation of local women

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<sup>144</sup> Cook and Evans, "'The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band'?", pp. 176-7.

in suffrage activity, potentially diminishing the effect of the women's suffrage campaign in Wales. Beth Jenkins' recent analysis, challenging the longstanding view that Wales did not have an indigenous suffrage movement,<sup>145</sup> expanded current understanding of the women's suffrage movement in Wales. It is hoped that this article, considering the broader conflicts within Welsh society, does the same.

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<sup>145</sup> B. Jenkins, 'Suffrage organizers, grassroots activism and the campaign in Wales', pp. 87-108.

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