

'A very thriving place': the peopling of Swansea in the eighteenth century

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ABSTRACT: In this article, the town of Swansea is suggested as an exemplar of pre-nineteenth-century Welsh industrial and urban development. Small in comparison with English towns, Swansea in 1801 had nevertheless risen up the Welsh urban rank-order to stand second only, in terms of population, to the industrial boomtown Merthyr Tydfil. Contemporary descriptions of Swansea as 'Copperopolis', 'the Metropolis of Wales', 'the Mecca of Nonconformity' and 'the Brighton [or Naples] of Wales' reflect the range of its functions at this time, and the high regard in which the town was held, both by its inhabitants and by visitors. Such a town inevitably attracted settlers and this article also examines eighteenth-century population change, the scale of immigration and the provenance of the settlers, and attempts to link the influx with the physical development of the town.

Introduction

The foundation and expansion of industrial enterprises in eighteenth-century Wales provided the catalyst for the demographic explosion of the nineteenth century, the shaping of Wales' principal modern towns and the consequent emergence of a true Welsh urban system less dependent economically on English towns such as Bristol and Shrewsbury. England's urbanization had occurred earlier than that of Wales and, indeed, earlier than elsewhere in Europe: according to E.A. Wrigley, about 70 per cent of European urban growth during the eighteenth century took place in England and, in the period from 1600 to 1800, the proportion of people living in towns with populations over 10,000 in Europe hardly increased compared to a fourfold jump in England.¹ But, before the first national census of 1801, how is it possible to measure the process of population growth and in-migration quantitatively? This article considers, primarily through a critical examination of parish registers and other contemporary material, and the use of techniques such as aggregative analysis, these

¹ E.A. Wrigley, 'Urban growth and agricultural change', in E.A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth: The Transformation of Traditional Society* (Cambridge, 1987), 174–80, and Jan de Vries, 'Patterns of urbanization in pre-industrial Europe', in H. Schmal (ed.), *Patterns of European Urbanization since 1500* (London, 1981), 77–109.

phenomena as they affected one important Welsh town – Swansea – during the eighteenth century, and attempts to place the town's economic development in the context of Wales' nineteenth-century urban transformation.

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Welsh towns were 'small' in terms of population by English standards. But they were also 'deceptively numerous', albeit the number of market centres appeared disproportionate to the economy they purported to serve.² According to Philip Jenkins, only about 11 per cent of the Welsh lived in towns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³ Peter Clark estimates that, in 1700, there were perhaps 50 Welsh towns with a population of under 2,500 (the equivalent figure in England was 730) with probably only Wrexham and Carmarthen exceeding this figure reflecting Wales' sparse population and 'the sluggish and undeveloped nature of the economy'.⁴ In Jenkins' view, to speak of 'urban' history in Wales before the nineteenth century is perhaps to misuse the term.⁵ Yet Spencer Dimmock, in his contribution to this volume, revises the proportion of urban population in sixteenth-century Wales to nearer 20 per cent on the basis of the low population density in the countryside; and he questions whether the effects of the Black Death and Glyndŵr's revolt on the population of some Welsh towns were as great as has been supposed. Historians have, perhaps, been too ready to underestimate the development of the Welsh urban economy.

Wales' modest population and perceived underdeveloped urban economy in this pre-industrial period have been explained in terms of its difficult terrain and resulting poor communications. Size of population is not, however, the only determinant of the economic health and influence of a settlement, nor whether it can be defined as a 'town', and a consideration of inter-urban links, social and economic function and structure is also vital.⁶ As Jenkins and Clark assert, Wales' industrial and economic advance in the eighteenth century owed a great deal to historic trading relations developed by the Welsh ports, especially those of south Wales where a commercial connection had existed with Bristol and Ireland for centuries; and also to an improvement in internal communications (roads and canals) towards the end of the century.⁷ Swansea was one of those Welsh ports that had enjoyed historic trading links with Bristol and the southern Irish

² P. Jenkins, 'Wales', in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. II: 1540–1840 (Cambridge, 2000), 133–4.

³ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴ P. Clark, 'Small towns 1780–1840', in Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. II, 733–7; L. Owen, 'The population of Wales in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1959), 99–113.

⁵ Jenkins, 'Wales', 133–4.

⁶ R. Sweet, *The English Town 1680–1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow, 1999), 7–10; Jenkins, 'Wales', 139–42.

⁷ Jenkins, 'Wales', 136–8; Clark, 'Small towns', 739, 756; W.R.B. Robinson, 'Swansea', in R.A. Griffiths (ed.), *The Boroughs of Medieval Wales* (Cardiff, 1978), 266–7.

ports, particularly Cork, Lismore and Munster.⁸ Originally a Norman planted town imposed as part of a system of control of the native Welsh, Swansea's favourable position on the coast, and at the mouth of the river Tawe, meant that it was likely to survive, if not flourish, as an urban centre and port. And, as a castle town and borough, and a market centre with a reasonably fertile hinterland, the town had attracted settlers from an early date. The establishment, in 1717, of John Lane's copper-smelting works at Landore, about one and a half miles to the north of the town, marked a new stage in Swansea's economic development; the subsequent growth of the non-ferrous metal industry, and the export of coal extracted from the estates of neighbouring gentry quick to exploit new opportunities, provided the basis for much of its eighteenth-century expansion. By 1726, Defoe considered Swansea to be a 'very thriving place', and commented on the 'very great trade for coals and culm' exported widely resulting in 'sometimes a hundred sail of ships at a time loading coals here'.⁹ Even allowing for hyperbole, Defoe was impressed by Swansea's appearance and commercial bustle.

The town's further development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is significant and intriguing: significant because industry began in Swansea at an early date, and grew steadily throughout the eighteenth century; intriguing because this activity was engrafted on to Swansea's earlier functions of borough, port and market town, and later subsisted in parallel with the town's apparently antithetical role of fashionable resort and watering-place. According to Glanmor Williams, of all the (cities and) towns in Wales, 'Swansea has a history unsurpassed in length, importance, variety and interest.'¹⁰ Whilst this was a comment on the city at the end of the twentieth century, it is arguably of no less application to the town of 1800 when Swansea was emerging from dominance by the lords of the manor, the dukes of Beaufort, into a centre for the extraction of coal and manufacture of copper. The existence alone of these activities may not have qualified the Swansea of 1800 as a Welsh urban centre of importance and variety but, at a time when the whiff of copper-smoke was becoming pervasive, the town was engaged in transforming itself into fashionable resort and acquiring a reputation amongst the gentry and middle classes

⁸ Jenkins, 'Wales', 137.

⁹ P. Rogers (ed.), *Daniel Defoe: A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain, 1724-6* (Harmondsworth, 1971), 378.

¹⁰ G. Williams, 'Preface', in G. Williams (ed.), *Swansea: An Illustrated History* (Swansea, 1990), xvii. The primary source material is unusually rich (for a Welsh town): for a summary, see R.A. Griffiths, 'Sources and further reading', in R.A. Griffiths (ed.), *The City of Swansea: Challenges and Change* (Stroud, 1990), 318-29; and C.R. Anthony, 'Seaport, society and smoke: Swansea as a place of resort and industry c. 1700 to c. 1840' (unpublished University of Leicester Ph.D. thesis, 2002). The main repositories are: in Aberystwyth, the National Library of Wales (NLW) and, in Swansea, the University Library and Archives, West Glamorgan Archive Service, Royal Institution of South Wales, City Archives (Guildhall) and the Central Library.

as a place 'remarkable for the convenience it affords to bathers, being almost equal to Weymouth in its white sand and beautiful shore'.¹¹ And with this growing social activity there developed, from about 1780, all the essentials of urban and civic status: shops displaying fashionable merchandise, houses in the latest classical style, circulating libraries, a theatre, walks and gardens and other facilities and diversions for resident and visitor alike; and, of course, trades, crafts and professional services, all contributing to Swansea's reputation and economy.¹² By the end of the century, English traveller Henry Skrine was moved to observe that 'all the resources of polished society are here at times to be found amidst the noise of manufactures and buz of incessant commerce'.¹³ Later still, at a time when the consequences of industrial activity were becoming ubiquitous, the town opened its Assembly Rooms (1822); and, in 1835, the prestigious and influential Swansea Philosophical and Literary Institution (renamed the Royal Institution of South Wales in 1838) was founded for the dissemination of knowledge and the study of science and literature.¹⁴

Early nineteenth-century Swansea had thus come to occupy a position unique in Wales as the leading urban centre integrated fully into both Welsh and British urban networks. Contemporary references to 'Copperopolis', 'the Metropolis of Wales', 'the Mecca of Nonconformity' and 'the Brighton [or Naples] of Wales', whilst no doubt over-egging the pudding, were not intended as ironic and reflected the high regard in which the town was held.¹⁵

Sources and methodology

The methodology in this article is based on that of W.S.K. Thomas, W.T.R. Pryce and, particularly, Brinley W. Jones.¹⁶ It has not been previously

¹¹ E.D. Clarke, *A Tour through the South of England, Wales and Part of Ireland, Made during the Summer of 1791* (London, 1793), 195; R. Sweet, 'Stability and continuity: Swansea politics and reform, 1780–1820', *Welsh History Review* 18, 1 (1996), 16–19; D. Boorman, *The Brighton of Wales. Swansea as a Fashionable Resort, c. 1780 – c. 1830* (Swansea, 1986), 3–12.

¹² Details may be found in successive tide tables, directories and guides for Swansea from 1795; and see also Anthony, 'Swansea c. 1700 to c. 1840', 235–48.

¹³ H. Skrine, *Two Successive Tours throughout the Whole of Wales* (London, 1798), 68. For accounts of the physical development of Swansea see, for example, B. Morris, 'Buildings and topography', in Griffiths (ed.), *The City of Swansea*, 145–64 (and the many other published works on the subject by this author); Anthony, 'Swansea c. 1700 to c. 1840', 206–13, 246–8. The copper-works also attracted travellers: Elizabeth Spence in the early 1800s described them as a 'spectacle . . . truly sublime': E.I. Spence, *Summer Excursions through Parts of Oxfordshire . . . and South Wales* (London, 1809), 84.

¹⁴ Boorman, *The Brighton of Wales*, 90–6; L. Miskell, 'The making of the new "Welsh metropolis": science, leisure and industry in early nineteenth century Swansea', *History*, 88 (2003), 35–52; G. Gabb, 'What manner of men? The founders of the Royal Institution', *Minerva*, 3 (1995), 18–26.

¹⁵ Swansea emerged as 'the chief centre of Dissent in Wales' following the establishment of radical Puritanism from the 1630s: Glanmor Williams, 'Religion and belief', in Griffiths (ed.), *The City of Swansea*, 17–33.

¹⁶ W.S.K. Thomas, *The History of Swansea from Rover Settlement to the Restoration* (Llandysul, 1990), especially 80–5; W.T.R. Pryce, 'Parish registers and visitation returns as primary

applied specifically to eighteenth-century Swansea. Demographic historians, following the lead of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, have undertaken much valuable work on the demography of English towns, using sources similar to those mentioned in this article.¹⁷ For Wales, the short articles by David Williams and Leonard Owen are the most frequently cited secondary sources.¹⁸ Williams examines the work of the statistician John Rickman, who was responsible for the first four censuses. Rickman used parish register data collected at the time of each census to estimate population in periods before 1801 based on the assumption that the ratio of recorded baptisms, burials and marriages to total enumerated populations bore the same relationship in those earlier periods as in 1801.¹⁹ Owen's estimates of population of Welsh towns and parishes for 1545/63 and 1670 draw on data derived, respectively, from the Bishops' Census and the Hearth Tax; he proposes multipliers for converting households into heads of population and then calculates the rate of increase in population to 1801. Pryce reviews Rickman's techniques and applies them to parish register data of some 60 parishes in north-east Wales to estimate the regional distribution of population before 1801.²⁰ Jones, in a valuable article, examines 35 eighteenth-century parish registers in west Glamorgan, including those of Swansea town and hundred, and compares rates of increase of population and the effect of Dissent on the data.²¹ Elizabeth Parkinson, in her

sources for the population geography of the eighteenth century', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1971), 271–93; B.W. Jones, 'The population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan: the evidence of the parish registers', *Glamorgan Historian*, 12 (1977), 177–98. See also, for the nineteenth century, M.I. Williams, 'Observations on the population changes in Glamorgan, 1800–1900', *Glamorgan Historian*, 1 (1963), 109–20, and W.T.R. Pryce, 'Language zones, demographic changes and the Welsh culture area 1800–1911', in G.H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains 1801–1811* (Cardiff, 2000), 37–79. For good general works on migration, see I.D. Whyte, *Migration and Society in Britain, 1550–1830* (Basingstoke, 2000), and P. Clark and D. Souden, *Migration and Society in Early Modern England* (London, 1987); and for Irish immigration, P. O'Leary, *Immigration and Integration: The Irish in Wales, 1798–1922* (Cardiff, 2000). For an interesting overview, see D. and M. Walker, 'An Anglo-Welsh town', in Griffiths (ed.), *City of Swansea*, 1–16.

¹⁷ See, in particular, E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1989). For examples of articles on individual topics, see D. Ashurst, 'St Mary's Church, Worsborough, south Yorkshire: a review of the accuracy of a parish register', *Local Population Studies*, 55 (Autumn 1995), 46–57; S.C. Wallwork, 'Allowing for migration in estimating early population levels', *Local Population Studies*, 56 (Spring 1996), 30–42; C.G. Pooley and J. Turnbull, 'Migration and mobility in Britain from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries', *Local Population Studies*, 57 (Autumn 1996), 50–71.

¹⁸ D. Williams, 'A note on the population of Wales, 1536–1801', *British Bulletin of Celtic Studies*, 8 (1937), 359–63; Owen, 'Population of Wales', 99–113.

¹⁹ Census, 1801: *Observations on the Result of the Population Act, 41 Geo. II* (London, 1802); Census, 1841: *Preface* (London, 1843), 34–7.

²⁰ Pryce, 'Parish registers', 271–93. Pryce also considers the value of successive church visitation records as a method of deriving population data.

²¹ Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 177–98.

study of the Hearth Tax records for Glamorgan, concurs with Owen's population estimates, although she considers his figures for the population of Swansea hundred in 1670 to be understated.²² In her discussion of appropriate multipliers for conversion of households into population, Parkinson adopts a range of 4.5 to 5.0 (Owen's for Glamorgan is 5.33) 'partly to emphasise that the figures can only be an approximation'.²³ For the purposes of comparison, the Compton Census of 1676 is a useful almost contemporary record and Parkinson considers the figure for Swansea (1,792) to agree quite well with her estimated population of 1,600 based on the 1670 Hearth Tax records.²⁴ Anne Whiteman and Tom Arkell examine data from the Compton Census and suggest approaches to interpretation, and Arkell proposes a multiplier for households of 4.3 (representing the median of a range from about 3.8 to 5.0).²⁵ Whiteman agrees with Owen's figure for the number of households for Swansea taken from the 1670 Hearth Tax records (325) but her multiplier to establish estimated population is 4.25.²⁶ Whatever the methodology and multipliers, it must be appreciated that the accuracy of the data is obviously dependent on the reliability of the returns and, for conversion of the number of households into heads of population, a degree of speculation is unavoidable. The conclusions to be drawn are, therefore, at best tentative.²⁷

The growth of the town

How did Swansea's development and rate of population growth in the eighteenth century measure up to other Welsh towns? Table 1 (which, for the sake of consistency, adopts Owen's data and his multiplier of 5.33) compares the growth of Swansea 1670–1801 with other major towns in Wales. At the later date, Swansea, with an enumerated population of 6,099, was second to Merthyr Tydfil in size representing a transformation in its fortunes from 1670, when it was seventh in the rank-order of Welsh towns with a population, according to Owen (based on the Hearth Tax

²² E. Parkinson (ed.), *The Glamorgan Hearth Tax Assessment of 1670* (Cardiff, 1994), xlv–xlviii; The National Archives (TNA) E179/221/294.

²³ Parkinson (ed.), *Glamorgan Hearth Tax*, xlv.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁵ A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676. A Critical Edition* (London, 1986); A. Whiteman, 'The Compton Census of 1676', in K. Schurer and T. Arkell (eds.), *Surveying the People* (Oxford, 1992), 78–96; T. Arkell, 'A method for estimating population totals from the Compton Census returns', in Schurer and Arkell (eds.), *Surveying the People*, 97–116.

²⁶ Whiteman, *Compton Census*, 461–2.

²⁷ Useful works dealing with the background to population increase in Wales include: H. Carter, 'The growth and decline of Welsh towns', in D. Moore (ed.), *Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Swansea, 1976), 47–62; H. Carter, 'Urban and industrial settlement in the modern period, 1750–1914', in D. Huw Owen (ed.), *Settlement and Society in Wales* (Cardiff, 1989), 269–96; R.O. Roberts, 'Industrial expansion in south Wales', in Moore (ed.), *Wales in the Eighteenth Century*, 109–26; M. Griffiths, 'The emergence of the modern settlement pattern, 1450–1700', in Owen (ed.), *Settlement and Society*, 225–32.

Table 1: *Population change in Welsh towns, 1670–1801*

Town	Est. pop. c. 1670	Enum. pop. 1801	% change
Merthyr Tydfil	–	7,705	
Swansea	1,733	6,099	252
Carmarthen	2,195	5,548	153
Neath	1,130	2,502	121
Caernarfon	1,755	3,626	107
Haverfordwest	2,137	3,964	86
Wrexham	3,225	4,039	25
Brecon	2,210	2,705	22
Cardiff	1,771	1,870	5

Sources: Owen, 'Population of Wales' (except Neath, when Parkinson's estimated population from the same source is utilized, but with Owen's multiplier of 5.33); 1801 Census.

return of that year) of 1,733. Wrexham, with a population of 3,225, was the largest Welsh town at the earlier date. Merthyr Tydfil was obviously a special case: in 1670 the town existed only as an upland parish with a few scattered hamlets and owed its foundation and rapid growth to the presence of workable deposits of iron and coal in close proximity. Merthyr, arguably, was not a town – in the sense of possessing identifiable urban characteristics – even in 1801, and provides a useful contrast to Swansea: at this date, Merthyr lacked the 'middling' social groups and professions (and the amenities, fashionable shops and polite architecture such groups demanded) present in many pre-industrial urban centres, including Swansea, where industry had developed much more gradually, and so was able to subsist in parallel with a thriving social sector.²⁸ Merthyr's ironmasters had made little attempt to infuse the town with a sense of urban self-esteem, and the town was not to acquire a semblance of civic dignity until later in the nineteenth century when the extraction of coal had replaced the production of iron as the main plank of the economy.²⁹

Of the other Welsh towns, Carmarthen, Haverfordwest and Caernarfon in 1801 were historic regional centres with relatively good communications; Haverfordwest and Carmarthen also possessed rich agricultural hinterlands and were able to attract visitors in season to boost the local economy. Caernarfon's growth was given impetus from the late

²⁸ A. Croll, *Civilizing the Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr, c. 1870–1914* (Cardiff, 2000), 16–17; Miskell, 'Making of the new "Welsh metropolis"', 38; S. Hughes, *Copperopolis. Landscapes of the Early Industrial Period in Swansea* (Aberystwyth, 2000), 19–20.

²⁹ Croll, *Civilizing the Urban*, 17–22; C. Evans, 'Merthyr Tydfil in the eighteenth century: urban by default?', in P. Clark and P. Corfield (eds.), *Industry and Urbanisation in Eighteenth Century England* (Leicester, 1994), 11–19.

eighteenth century with the development of the slate industry, but this was not sustained. Wrexham had long since supplanted Denbigh as regional capital of north-east Wales because of its superior nodality. Brecon was also an ancient regional centre but its development was inhibited by the dramatic growth of the towns to the south. Neath's initial development as a port and industrial town was similarly later affected by the success of its near neighbour Swansea. Cardiff, in 1801, following 130 years of stagnation, languished at the foot of the Welsh urban rank-order, and its ultimate dominance could hardly be imagined prior to the construction by Bute in the late 1830s of port facilities for the export of coal from the Valleys.

As discussed above, Hearth Tax records and Compton Census returns are important sources for pre-1801 population data. The Hearth Tax has been used since the seventeenth century as a method of estimating population although successive commentators have questioned the reliability of the data.³⁰ The 1670 assessment is probably the most accurate and complete, and the application of a multiplier of 4.5/5 to the recorded number of households (325) indicates a population of Swansea town in the range 1,612 to 1,775, a mean of 1,694.³¹ The Compton Census (1676) provides a good contemporary comparative source for checking the accuracy of Hearth Tax returns.³² Whiteman's estimate of the population of Swansea town in 1676 is 1,500, or 1,792 if the estimated number of nonconformists (292) is added.³³ In fact, at the time of the Compton Census, an accurate count of nonconformists was impossible, although their numbers were undoubtedly significant given that, by the mid-seventeenth century, Swansea was regarded as the centre of Dissent in Wales, and a town tolerant of nonconformism. Population estimates from early contemporary sources, including the Hearth Tax and Compton Census, are summarized in Table 2 (adjusted for evasion and Dissent).

Swansea's estimated growth in population between 1550 and 1650 suggests a revival in its economy but, in relative terms, the rally was hardly dramatic.³⁴ The lack, for the eighteenth century, of statistical data for determining population comparable with the Hearth Tax returns and other national and regional surveys available for the earlier period

³⁰ For example, C. Husbands, 'Hearths, wealth and occupations: an exploration of the Hearth Tax in the later seventeenth century', in Schurer and Arkell (eds.), *Surveying the People*, 65–77; Arkell, 'A method for estimating population totals'.

³¹ Inclusive of 17 households not chargeable because 'under the value and poore', and with the addition of 150 individuals to allow for evasion.

³² Parkinson suggests a method of comparison in 'Interpreting the Compton Census returns of 1676 for the diocese of Llandaff', *Local Population Studies*, 60 (1998), 52–7; Parkinson (ed.), *Glamorgan Hearth Tax*, xlix–l.

³³ Whiteman, *Compton Census*, 461–2, and Whiteman, 'Compton Census of 1676', 78–96.

³⁴ Owen, 'Population of Wales', 107–13; Griffiths, 'Emergence of the modern settlement pattern', 230–1; I. Soulsby, *The Towns of Medieval Wales* (Chichester, 1983), 24–7; Jenkins, 'Wales', 133–4; Robinson, 'Swansea', 270–1. The generally accepted view that Welsh towns declined after 1400 may have been overstated.

Table 2: *Swansea population estimates: early sources*

Date	Source	No.	Multiplier	Correction	Est. pop.
1545/46	Chantry cert.	600	× 1.5		900
1563	Bishops' Census	180 (h'holds)	× 4.68		842
1650	Cromwell survey	162 (tenements)	× 4.5–5 × 2		1,458–620
1670	Hearth Tax	325 (h'holds)	× 4.5–5	evasion + 150	1,612–775
1676	Compton Census	353 (adult c'f'msts)	× 4.25	Dissent + 292	1,792

Sources: Owen, 'Population of Wales', 105, 110; Thomas, *History of Swansea*, 78–83; Parkinson (ed.), *Glamorgan Hearth Tax*, xlvi–xlvii; Whiteman, *Compton Census*, 461–2.

has already been noted, and is an obvious problem. Window Tax returns are unreliable because of increasing evasion and exemptions from charge, and similar difficulties attend the interpretation of Land Tax returns.³⁵ But evidence of the demographic consequences of industrial growth in Wales in the eighteenth century may be extracted, with care, from the Anglican and nonconformist registers of baptisms, burials and marriages. The main difficulties with the data include non-registration of births of those infants who died before baptism; the increase in the birth/baptism interval in west Glamorgan from 11 to 14 days from c. 1760 to 1780; unregistered 'clandestine' marriages prior to Lord Hardwicke's Act of 1753 and negligence in keeping the parish registers up-to-date.³⁶ Dissent was probably an even more significant factor affecting accuracy of the registers, both in Swansea and in many other towns where nonconformity had found fertile soil to root and grow.³⁷ By the late seventeenth century, townspeople were being cited for refusing to allow their children to be baptized in church and, given that Dissenters were also often denied burial in parish graveyards, the accuracy of Anglican registers would obviously have been affected. By the second decade of the eighteenth century Dissenters are estimated to have formed 7 per cent to 8 per cent of the population of Glamorgan: the proportion of Dissenters in 'the Mecca of Nonconformity' would have been higher than in many towns and, as the century progressed, the number of Baptists and Independents increased, supplemented by a small number of Quakers and, later, Methodists. The number of

³⁵ Pryce reviews critically these sources: Pryce, 'Parish registers', 271–93.

³⁶ Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 180–3; D.V. Glass, *Numbering the People* (Farnborough, 1973), 222.

³⁷ G. Williams, 'Religion and Dissent', in Griffiths (ed.), *The City of Swansea*, 22–8; Jenkins, *History of Wales*, 141–2, 147; Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 184–6; Pryce, 'Parish registers', 286–7.

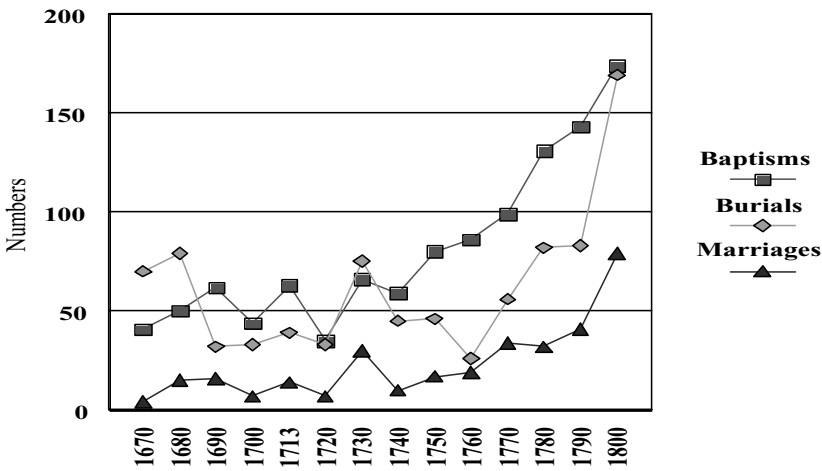


Figure 1: St Mary's, Swansea: baptisms, burials and marriages, 1670–1800

Source: St Mary's, Swansea, parish registers.

Roman Catholics was never significant.³⁸ By the 1790s, the exodus from the established church, and consequent omissions from the Anglican registers had, as we shall see, rendered these records unreliable as a basis for demographic study.³⁹

The data in Figure 1, derived from the parish registers, suggest that Swansea's demographic history falls into three phases.⁴⁰ First, the rise in the number of baptisms for the period from 1670 to about 1730 may be evidence of modest in-migration, although obviously natural increase cannot be discounted. The excess of burials over baptisms from the beginning of the period until halfway through the 1680s indicates a major mortality crisis caused by disease (probably smallpox).⁴¹ Allowing for

³⁸ Williams, 'Religion and education in Glamorgan, 1660–1675', in E.T. Davies, G. Williams and G. Roberts (eds.), *Glamorgan County History*, vol. IV (Cardiff, 1974), 487; Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 184–5.

³⁹ Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 185–6; Pryce, 'Parish registers', 278–9.

⁴⁰ The registers are reasonably complete from an early date although there is a gap for the years 1692 to 1716. Other breaches in the data can mostly be closed by reference to the Bishops' Transcripts. Remaining omissions within a particular year are infrequent and, where occurring, may be, in almost all cases, supplied by taking the average of five months prior and five months after the missing figure.

⁴¹ A 'major' mortality crisis is deemed to be one where there are at least twice as many deaths as births and a 'minor' crisis where there are at least one and one half as many deaths: R. Schofield, 'Crisis mortality', in M. Drake (ed.), *Population Studies from Parish Registers* (Matlock, 1982), 97–108; D. Turner, '"Crisis" mortality in nine Sussex parishes', in Drake (ed.), *Population Studies*, 109–12.

this crisis, and also for gaps in the data for the period 1692–1713, the net increase of baptisms over burials points to a steady, if very small, increase in population. A clue may be found in the commercial development by Sir Humphrey Mackworth, from the end of the seventeenth century, of copper-smelting in the Neath area, about seven miles to the north-east of Swansea, which may have been instrumental in attracting migrants to the region.⁴² An important reason for the location of industry here was the easy availability, close to the coast, of coal: it was much cheaper to ship copper ore from its Cornish source to south Wales to smelt, than to take coal in the opposite direction. The move, in 1717, of the industry from Neath to Swansea was almost certainly connected with the superior harbourage and navigable qualities of the river Tawe, and the presence, close to the banks of this river, of easily exploitable coal highly suitable for the smelting process.⁴³

The second phase falls between the years 1730 and 1760. Burials exceeded baptisms from the mid-1720s to the early 1730s indicating a minor mortality crisis: according to the registers, there were 56 more burials than baptisms for the period from 1727 to 1731. But this was the last demographic reverse experienced in south Wales and, from the 1730s on, the increase of baptisms over burials began steadily to grow.⁴⁴ The difference was not spectacular: between 1713 and 1753 the excess of baptisms over burials was only 260, albeit this includes deaths during the minor mortality crisis of 1727–31, and another minor crisis centred on 1753. The overall trend, nevertheless, suggests a steady increase in population, especially from about 1750, when the baptism and marriage aggregates on the graph take an upward turn at the same time as the recorded number of burials levels out.⁴⁵ The relatively high number of deaths in 1800, indicating another minor mortality crisis, distorts the data at the end of this third period. The trend corresponds with Swansea's increasing demand for workers in the coal and copper industries, a demand that was to be sustained throughout the third period from 1760 to 1800. Yet copper-smelting did not require a large workforce: during the eighteenth century there was no significant technological advance in the industry requiring a substantial increase in labour or the learning of new skills, and numbers

⁴² Ulrich Frosse's copper-smelting venture a century earlier for the Mines Royal Company at Aberdulais, near Neath, was significant 'in what it portended, not in what it achieved': R. Rees, *King Copper. South Wales and the Copper Trade 1584–1895* (Cardiff, 2000), 6–8. Frosse employed skilled German workmen. See also, for a summary of the early history of the industry in Swansea, Hughes, *Copperopolis*, 18–20.

⁴³ Hughes, *Copperopolis*, 16–18; Rees, *King Copper*, 14–15.

⁴⁴ Other parishes in west Glamorgan experiencing crisis included Neath and Margam: Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 189–90.

⁴⁵ Most west Glamorgan parishes were undergoing some population increase in this period: Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 189–90.

increased slowly from about 200 (1730s) to 500 (1770s) and to 1,000 (1800).⁴⁶ To these numbers must, of course, be added dependants.

Although numbers may not have been substantial (and many would have been housed in the new industrial settlements outside the town in any event), most of the new workers would have been young and of child-producing age and, in relative terms, they constituted an important element in Swansea's growing population, particularly over the period from 1750 to 1800 when the number of copperworks increased from one (the Landore works having closed in 1745, and the Cambrian in 1748) to eight.⁴⁷ In addition to those drawn to the Swansea area by opportunities to work in industry, others were attracted by prospects of employment in trade and services generated by the demand for leisure and cultural facilities arising out of Swansea's efforts to market itself as a smart resort from about 1780.⁴⁸

Jones suggests another reason for population growth from the mid-eighteenth century: the enclosure by Act of Parliament in 1762 of 700 acres at Townhill (lying immediately to the north-west of the town) and 50 acres at the Burrows (adjoining the mouth of the river Tawe) and, by implication, the development for residential purposes by the chief grantees of this land – the town burgesses and the duke of Beaufort.⁴⁹ Whilst the Burrows area was, from the 1770s, developed as Swansea's fashionable quarter, which fact no doubt would have attracted some of the better-off to settle, Townhill remained as grazing land (and as a source of building stone) and continued to be enjoyed as such by the duke and the burgesses. Townhill was not built on to any extent until the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

Swansea's capacity to attract migrants should not, however, be considered simply in terms of the town's economy and its industrial and commercial growth: many were drawn because of the town's reputation as a centre of nonconformity. In 1790, the church authorities complained of the 'vast numbers' attracted to the town 'far too many of them irreligious, debauched and profane'.⁵¹ In 1804, the Rev. Matthew Bassett, Vicar of St Mary's, was also disconcerted: 'There are many Dissenters from the

⁴⁶ Hughes, *Copperopolis*, 19–21; T. Boyns and C. Baber, 'The supply of labour', in A.H. John and Glamor Williams (eds.), *Glamorgan County History: Industrial Glamorgan*, vol. V (Cardiff, 1980), 311–62.

⁴⁷ Hughes, *Copperopolis*, 20–46; T. Boyns, 'Industrialisation', in Griffiths (ed.), *The City of Swansea*, 37–40. Henry Sockett, barrister and Visitor of Swansea's House of Industry, was of the opinion that, by 1821, 'at least a thousand' families of workmen lived in the town (the total population at this date was 11,236): Henry Sockett, *The Substance of Three Reports to the Inhabitants of... Swansea 1818–1819–1820* (London, 1821), 6.

⁴⁸ Boorman, *Brighton of Wales*, 1–11; Anthony, 'Swansea c. 1700 to c. 1840', 163; Miskell, 'Making of the new "Welsh metropolis"', 33–8.

⁴⁹ Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 190; N.A. Robins, *The Enclosure of Townhill: An Illustrated Guide* (Swansea 1990).

⁵⁰ Robins, *Enclosure of Townhill*, 14; Morris, 'Buildings and topography', 157–61; Anthony, 'Swansea c. 1660 to c. 1840', 171–2.

⁵¹ NLW, SD Churchwardens' Presentments, 1790.

Table 3: *St Mary's: comparison of estimated population from parish registers and enumerated population, 1801–31*

Year	Est. pop.- parish registers	Enum. pop.	Difference/under registration?
1801	6,195	6,099	–
1811	6,095	8,963	2,808
1821	5,760	11,236	5,476
1831	6,538	13,256	6,718

Sources: St Mary's, Swansea, parish registers; Census.

Establish'd Church in my Parish... Anabaptists, several that espouse Whitfields Tenets and others those of Westley's [*sic*]... The Dissenters have increased of late years which I attribute to the very great increase in ye population of this parish.⁵²

The growing presence of Dissent in Swansea affected increasingly the accuracy of the parish registers; it is, however, difficult to quantify the process. Very few nonconformist burial records exist, and none before 1781, and then only those of the Quakers for 1781 and Unitarians for 1783 – both minor sects.⁵³ And there is no reference to the burial of a Dissenter in the Anglican registers. Evidence of nonconformist baptism is, however, a little less obscure; in 1705, it is reported that dissenting preachers were baptizing children at the houses of Swansea members.⁵⁴ Some nonconformist baptism registers exist for Swansea for the second half of the eighteenth century and although the available data are incomplete it is clear that the number of nonconformist baptisms that might otherwise have appeared in the Anglican registers was increasing over this period in terms both of numbers, and expressed as a proportion of the baptisms at St Mary's.⁵⁵ The resultant widening gap between the enumerated population from 1801 and population estimates extracted from the parish registers is illustrated in Table 3. The increasing unreliability of the latter owing to the growth of Dissent is obvious.⁵⁶

By 1801, the population of the town (by which is meant St Mary's parish, i.e. excluding the developing townships to the north) had grown to over 6,000. Figure 2 illustrates the estimated population growth to 1791 based on

⁵² NLW, SD/QA/63, 1804.

⁵³ 53 Quaker burial records from 1781 are found in the Glamorgan Record Office, Cardiff (under general reference DSF), and those of the Unitarians in TNA, RG4 2295; see also M.F. Williams, 'Glamorgan Quakers 1654–1900', *Morgannwg*, 5 (1961), 49–75.

⁵⁴ NLW, *Bishops' Visitation Returns*, SD/CPD/21, 1705. 1705.

⁵⁵ NLW, RG4 3890, 4097 and 3665. For example, the proportion of baptisms in the High Street Presbyterian Chapel register compared to St Mary's increased from under 2% to 8% for the period from 1750 to 1784. See also Anthony, 'Swansea c. 1700 to c. 1840', 75–9.

⁵⁶ In Table 3, coincidence is the probable explanation for the similar figures for 1801.

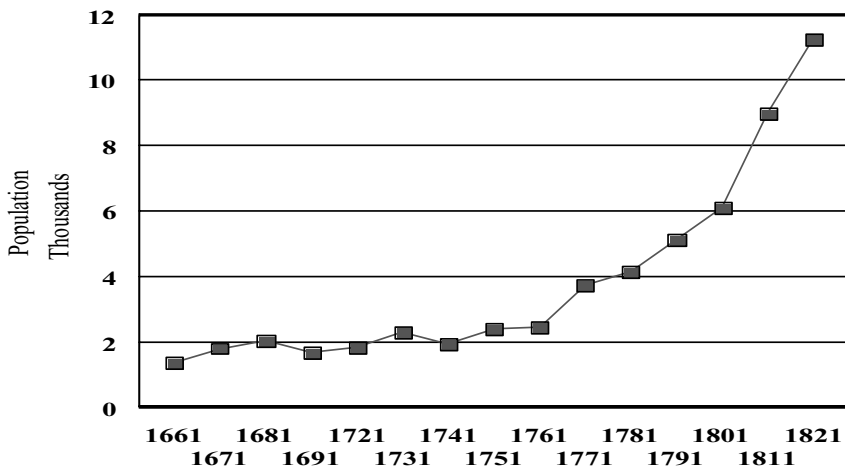


Figure 2: Population of Swansea, 1661–1821
 Sources: St Mary's, Swansea, parish registers; Census.

the parish registers.⁵⁷ Allowing for the increasing effect of nonconformity on the accuracy of, in particular, the baptism records, the data demonstrate that, over the period from 1670 to 1800, the population of Swansea had increased by about 4,366 or 252 per cent in 130 years.⁵⁸ In the same period, the population of west Glamorgan as a whole grew by between 88 per cent and 110 per cent.⁵⁹ The process was obvious to local inhabitants: in 1804 the Rev. Miles Bassett estimated, with impressive accuracy, that the population of his parish had doubled since the beginning of his incumbency in 1757.⁶⁰ The evidence of St Mary's parish registers from 1670 to 1800 suggests, therefore, a rising population, slow at first and then quickening, caused both by natural increase and, particularly from about 1750, by immigration. Even allowing for error, the data represent clear evidence that Swansea's growth cannot be explained simply as an excess of births over deaths.

⁵⁷ Following Thomas, *History of Swansea*, 82–3, T.H. Marshall's figures for crude birth (37.7 per 1,000), death (28.6 per 1,000) and marriage (17.2 per 1,000) are adopted. A three-year average centred on the aggregated number for the year was taken and Marshall's multipliers for under-registration (baptisms $\times 2.43$, burials $\times 1.2$, marriages $\times 2$) applied. The resulting figures, representing the population based on the number of births, marriages and deaths were averaged.

⁵⁸ Jones and Pryce also note the progressive deterioration in the reliability of registers of the parishes examined in north Wales and west Glamorgan: Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 184–6; Pryce, 'Parish registers', 290. The position in some parts of England was similar: see, for example, J. Boulton, 'The Marriage Duty Act and parochial registration in England' (citing Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*) in Schurer and Arkell (eds.), *Surveying the People*, 222–6.

⁵⁹ Jones, 'Population of eighteenth-century west Glamorgan', 187.

⁶⁰ NLW, SD/QA/63, 1804.

Immigration and natural increase

Is it possible to determine the proportion of in-migration to natural increase in population in eighteenth-century Swansea? Documentary sources for the former, especially during the eighteenth century, are lacking. Before 1700, apprenticeship regulations, church court depositions and documentation relating to poor law and settlement legislation are useful for information on origin and destination of certain groups of migrants but, after this date, the incidence and utility of these records decline and, for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reliance must be placed on those sources from which it is possible to infer in-migration from its effects on the receiving population such as marriage records (especially after 1753) and, particularly after 1841, the census enumerators' books.⁶¹ By about 1750, when some roads were improving through the efforts of the turnpike trusts, and the volume of immigration had grown, the receiving communities had become used to, and better equipped economically to absorb, the incomers, so that the process excited less attention by commentators. The ubiquity of movement had made it a little-remarked-upon phenomenon and, indeed, the growing industrial towns, where deaths exceeded births (particularly in the earlier period), demanded a regular infusion of new workers.⁶²

Table 4 (below) gives an impression of immigration to natural increase. The point has already been made that the population data for the last quarter of the seventeenth century extracted from the parish registers are not particularly helpful in calculating immigration because of the distortion caused by the high death rate at this time. The first decade or so of the eighteenth century suffer from a complete or partial absence of both parish register and Bishops' Transcripts data so that estimating immigration for this period is difficult. From the available evidence, however, Swansea's population growth before about 1720 appears to have been slow. After this date, corresponding with the foundation of the first copper-works in Landore (1717), the town was attracting growing numbers from elsewhere, and those immigrants constituted an increasing proportion of the town's population, a trend which accelerated throughout the nineteenth century.

In Table 4, the apparently large increase in the proportion of immigrants to the indigenous after 1780 is, of course, distorted by under-registration for the reasons already discussed. Whilst many earlier immigrants to Swansea were of Anglo-Norman stock, as evidenced by the pattern of personal names, it is not easy to determine the provenance and precise motivation of incomers from the late seventeenth century, although it seems likely

⁶¹ Whyte, *Migration and Society*, 16–18; P. Clark, 'Migration in England during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', in Clark and Souden, *Migration and Society*, 216–19.

⁶² Clark and Souden, 'Introduction', in Clark and Souden, *Migration and Society*, 21–2.

Table 4: *St Mary's: contribution of migration/natural increase to population growth, 1671–1800^a*

Years	Population		Net migr.	% migr.	% nat. incr.
	t1	t2			
1671–90	1,733	1,648	–	–	–
1721–40	1,813	1,924	+24	21.62	78.38
1741–60	1,924	2,434	+176	34.51	65.49
1761–80	2,434	4,139	+933	54.72	45.28
1781–1800	4,139	6,099	+1,245	63.52	36.48
1801–20	6,099	11,236	+3,928	76.46	23.54

^aImmigration may be expressed by the well-known formula: net immigration = $Pt2 - [Pt1 + (B - D)]$ where $Pt1$ is the population at the first date, $Pt2$ is the population at the second (later) date, B is the number of baptisms (births) and D the number of burials (deaths) over the period. The formula thus reflects the fact that changes in population result both from the relationship of births to deaths and migration inwards and outwards.

Sources: St Mary's, Swansea, parish registers; Census.

that most will have travelled short distances and have been influenced by both push and (particularly) pull factors.⁶³ Evidence for earlier immigration may be found in the many examples of English names in seventeenth-century Swansea: for example, Isaac After who was Portreeve in 1673, John Symonds shoemaker, John Collman, gent., Nicholas Long, dyer, Cradock Rogers, tanner, John Southerwood, mariner, and so on.⁶⁴ Prominent families such as the Herberts, the Seys, the Francklens and the Ayres were English (or Anglo-Norman) in origin.⁶⁵ A rough and ready indication of the proportion of Swansea's inhabitants with Welsh and English surnames is shown in Table 5, which suggests that a relatively high proportion of individuals of non-Welsh origin were present in the town from an early date.⁶⁶ But the proportion of Welsh to non-Welsh appears

⁶³ Whyte, *Migration and Society*, 68, 141–7; Pooley and Turnbull, 'Migration and mobility', 57; P. Clark, 'Migration in England 1650–1750', in Clark and Souden, *Migration and Society*, 243–4. Skilled workers were more likely to travel longer distances: Ulrich Frosse's German workers brought to Aberdulais have already been mentioned and, in 1695, Humphrey Mackworth found an absence of skilled copper workers and colliers in the Neath area and had to import them from Shropshire and Derbyshire: Rees, *King Copper*, 10–11.

⁶⁴ NLW, register of wills and probate inventories for St David's 1669–1700; R. James, 'Swansea wills index, 1564–1858', NLW.

⁶⁵ Walker and Walker, 'Anglo-Welsh town', 7–8.

⁶⁶ Any attempt at classifying surnames into 'English' and 'Welsh' will obviously be impressionistic. Some comfort may, however, be drawn from the fact that the Welsh did not begin to adopt the English system of fixed surnames until about the sixteenth century and then favoured patronyms with or without the (English) genitive 's'. Another common form (the Welsh equivalent of the genitive 's') resulted from the compounding of *ab* or *ap* ('son of') with the father's first name particularly if that name began with a

Table 5: *Welsh and English surnames found in Swansea, 1660–1835*

no.	Welsh names		English names		English names (long settled) ^a		Total
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
1660–1700	100	72	31	22	8	6	139
1701–50	123	67	41	22	19	10	183
1751–1800	156	70	49	22	18	8	223
1801–35	113	64	59	34	4	2	176

^aThese names are reasonably identifiable in the Swansea records through time and include the Anglo-Norman names already referred to. For the purpose of identifying later immigrants, they are placed in a separate category.

Sources: NLW, register of wills 1669–1700; James, 'Swansea wills index'.

remarkably consistent until 1800 when English names increase. It should, however, be borne in mind that most Welsh immigrants after 1750 settled outside St Mary's parish, and would thus be excluded from the data, and most of the labouring classes did not make wills.⁶⁷ This may help explain the contemporary perception of Swansea as an 'English' town: although the Welsh held a numerical advantage, they were likely to have been dominated in local affairs by English industrialists and manufacturers, gentry and professionals.⁶⁸

Employing Hearth Tax data for 1670 and Land and Window Tax data for 1788 for the same purpose produces the following results:

1670: Welsh names 66% English 27% English long settled 7%

1788: Welsh names 57% English 35% English long settled 8%

An Irish minority was also present. Although trading links with Ireland had existed from an early date, Irish migration to Swansea did not compare with the large-scale movement to some other British towns and cities from about the late 1780s.⁶⁹ Although there had been a small resident Irish community from the end of the eighteenth century responsible for the foundation, in 1810, of Swansea's first Catholic church, the Irish presence in

vowel. Examples of each name form from the Swansea wills index include David/Davies, Evan(s), Griffith(s), John/Jones, Lloyd, Owen, Bevan(s), Bowen, Powell, Price, Pritchard. Occupational, descriptive and place-name forms were not much found in Wales except, of course, colloquially, although the place-name of origin sometimes became the surname of a migrant; also, place-names were adopted by the upper classes (e.g. Thomas Pennant, b. 1726). This meant that the Welsh had a smaller range of surnames than the English but uncertainty arises because some of these surnames were not exclusive to Wales (for example, Jones, Roberts, Ellis, Thomas, Williams): T.J. and Prys Morgan, *Welsh Surnames* (Cardiff, 1985), esp. 10–24; D. Hey, *Family Names and Family History* (London, 2000), 91–4, 117–22.

⁶⁷ For the English/Welsh mix in Swansea in the medieval period, see Robinson, 'Swansea', 285–6.

⁶⁸ Walker and Walker, 'Anglo-Welsh town', 11–14; Sweet, 'Stability and continuity', 27.

⁶⁹ Whyte, *Migration and Society*, 166.

the town in 1838 amounted to not much more than 400 out of a population of about 16,000, or 2.5 per cent of the town's population. By 1851, however, numbers had grown substantially to 1,333, representing 4.3 per cent of the town's population, and continued to grow throughout the remainder of the century.⁷⁰ Many of Swansea's Irish settled in the area to the north of the town centre known as Greenhill.

These findings confirm the importance of the immigrant to the development of Swansea, and the significance of cross-border connections for the expanding economy of Welsh towns. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, a new breed of immigrant – the English industrialist and entrepreneur – made an indelible mark on the Swansea area. Coppermasters such as John Lane from Bristol, successive members of the Morris family originally from Shropshire and, later, representatives of the Vivian and Grenfell clans from Cornwall, provided the focus for significant internal in-migration by the most numerous of the migrant order, the labouring classes who, as suggested above, came initially from Wales and then, increasingly, from elsewhere. Swansea offered attractive opportunities both for the English entrepreneur and for the English labourer.

The Town Corporation was successful in attracting a different type of Englishman: the visitor and the tourist. The Corporation's efforts, from about 1780, to market the town as a seaside resort attracted visitors in search of leisure and entertainment, some of whom will have settled in the town, or in the elegant new housing constructed in classical style on the Burrows from the 1770s. For about 50 years, Swansea enjoyed modest success as a fashionable resort with the spending power of visitors and the leisured classes contributing to the local economy, and the publications of (mostly English) travellers raising the town's profile in England and further afield. A concerted effort was made to improve the fabric and infrastructure of the town, to the general approbation of English commentators.⁷¹ All this activity attracted merchants, professionals, shopkeepers and craftspeople: men like William Padley from Yorkshire, Quaker merchant and town burgess; Robert Nelson from Scotland, wealthy mercer and property developer; and John Francis from Somerset, coach and harness manufacturer and retailer. These individuals, and many like them, came to Swansea to exploit the trading advantages offered by the new concentrations of population. In addition, there was a small, but economically important, number of Jewish immigrants to Swansea from the early eighteenth century, including the parents of Lazarus David (born in Swansea in 1734) who came probably from Spain or Portugal. In 1749,

⁷⁰ J.R. Alban, 'The wider world', in Griffiths (ed.), *The City of Swansea*, 126; O'Leary, *Immigration and Integration*, 18–19, 46, 108 and 111.

⁷¹ Sweet, 'Stability and continuity'; Boorman, *Brighton of Wales*; Miskell, 'The making of the new "Welsh metropolis"'; Anthony, 'Swansea c. 1700 to c. 1840', 225–35.

David Michael and his brother Moses arrived from Germany: these two were the first representatives of the Michael family who became prominent in trade and the professions in the town. By 1768, the Jewish community had its own burial ground at Mayhill (on Townhill) and, by 1818, its first purpose-built synagogue.⁷²

But the older town had not yet been subsumed: John Nixon's painting of the cobbled Market Square in 1799, crammed with buyers and sellers, depicts a scene of Hogarthian vitality – but with hints of the modern commercial Swansea: 'Voss from Bristol' and 'Swansea Bank' adjoin the old open-sided Market Hall. Visitors were, however, generally impressed with Swansea's appearance: Richard Warner in 1798 considered the town's trade to be almost on par with that of Bristol, and its houses 'large and well built . . . chiefly modern, handsome and commodious'.⁷³ Henry Skrine, in the same year, remarked that 'Swansea both in extent, the width of the streets and the aspects of its buildings, far exceeds all the towns in South Wales; it has of late been greatly improved'.⁷⁴ Even the habitually critical John Evans conceded, in 1803, that the town was 'well built . . . and from the spaciousness of its streets, the appearance of its buildings, and the beauty of its situation, may be considered as the first town in Wales'.⁷⁵ But there were also visitors from other parts of Wales. In 1796 Iolo Morganwg noted with obvious enthusiasm that: '[Swansea has] improved amazingly within the last 25 years that it is now the largest [town] in Wales, it has a great deal of coal trade, a large copper works, a Pottery equal, as some say to Mr. Wedgewood's, a fine Bay for sea-bathing, and on that account has been much frequented'.⁷⁶ And Swansea was spreading out physically: Iolo also recorded, apparently with approval, that 'Morrison increases daily and goes towards Swansea that walks out rapidly to meet it, and that a few years of peace will enable the two towns to embrace each other'.⁷⁷

Conclusion

This article has examined critically the sources for population change in Swansea for the century prior to the date of the first census, and has attempted to link the increase revealed by such examination to the physical

⁷² Alban, 'The wider world', 125–6; Robins, *Enclosure of Townhill*, 22.

⁷³ R. Warner, *A Second Walk through Wales . . . in August and September 1798* (Bath, 1799), 362.

⁷⁴ Skrine, *Two Successive Tours*, 67–8. Not all English visitors were quite so enthusiastic, however, the complaints relating chiefly to the presence of copper-smoke and the lack of cleanliness of the streets.

⁷⁵ J. Evans, *Letters Written during a Tour through South Wales, in the Year 1803 . . .* (London 1804), 161, 169, 171–2.

⁷⁶ E. Williams, 'Agricultural observations made in a journey thro' some parts of Glamorgan . . .', NLW, MS13115B. Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams) was well known in his day as a polymath and founder of the modern National Eisteddfod.

⁷⁷ Morrison, a planned settlement built from 1773 by copper-master John Morris I for his workers, originally lay about three miles to the north of Swansea town; for an account of the development of Morrison, see Hughes, *Copperopolis*, 199–201.

and economic development of the town. The data suggest (Figure 2) that, for the first 20 years after the introduction of copper-smelting in 1717, the population was static, reflecting the effects of disease and the small scale of the local industry. From about 1741, Swansea's population began, if not to lift off, then at least to swell steadily in response to the demand for coal and copper products; and, from about 1780, migrants were attracted also by the prospect of work servicing visitors to the new and fashionable resort. By 1801, the town had leapt from seventh to second in the Welsh urban rank-order (Table 1): this was a rate of growth far exceeding that of any other historic Welsh town in the eighteenth century and, as the century progressed, the growth may increasingly be ascribed to in-migration (Table 4). But the wider picture reveals that, even in 1801, and well after the onset of industrialization, Wales possessed only twelve towns with a population of more than 2,000, and none of over 8,000. Although the explosive urban growth associated with the industrialization of south Wales – reflecting improvements in technology and communications – did not come until later in the nineteenth century, visitors in the decade before and after 1800 were often impressed with, and commented favourably on, the appearance and commercial bustle of Wales' larger towns; and it is clear that these centres operated effectively in economic and social terms and as part of a wider urban network (which included English towns) with close links also to their rural hinterlands.

Tracing Swansea's eighteenth-century demographic history from the available source material helps to provide a context for consideration of the nineteenth-century demographic convulsion of south Wales and its effects. By 1800, Swansea was a thriving, heterogeneous town on the threshold of remarkable commercial and industrial development but, as the nineteenth century progressed, its industrial works would increasingly 'cram-jam . . . the narrow banks of the Tawe River with their furnaces and spoil-tips' ultimately to the detriment of its other functions.⁷⁸ The town's eighteenth-century experiences heralded its destiny as Wales' first modern industrial town; but also presaged the almost intractable problems of post-industrial dereliction.

⁷⁸ A.J. Maddox, *The South Wales Evening Post*, 27 Aug. 1958, quoted by R.O. Roberts, 'The smelting of non-ferrous metals since 1750', in John and Williams (eds.), *Glamorgan County History*, vol. V, 51.