Rethinking urban Wales

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ABSTRACT: Five separate strands which have gone into the making of urban studies
in Wales are identified and reviewed. The need for a broad, interdisciplinary
approach, derived from H.J. Dyos, is suggested. The most comprehensive existing
work is that of the geographer, Harold Carter, whose massive contribution is
briefly outlined and evaluated. A more historical approach, centring on the idea of
urbanization, is advocated, with the aim of drawing together the disparate fields
of study.

My title may seem premature. Thinking about urban Wales does not
seem to be prolific and it might be objected that we need first thoughts
rather than second ones. Yet, if we regard urban history as retaining its
fundamentally Dyoscesan orientation as a field where humanities and
social sciences meet rather than as a precisely delineated discipline with
an agreed methodology and problems, it follows that we have to cast the
net widely in order to encompass its dimensions.[1] This means that there is
more work about Wales than is at first apparent. We have to consider five
rather separate sources of the subject, all of which have important bearings
on its development. These are: work by historians, on pre-industrial towns
which starts at the turn of the twentieth century and persists in more
sophisticated forms; the contributions of geographers; work arising from
a conjunction of sociology and anthropology; post-1945 social history of the
modern period and finally the proliferation of works on urban sociology
and planning since the 1970s.

   This is to leave aside non-academic contributions to the subject. There
were two histories of Welsh towns written in the late seventeenth century,
apparently none in the eighteenth, while there emerged a plethora of
eisteddfodic essays on towns and settlements in the nineteenth century.
Most of these were forgettable, though at least one classic was produced
in the Powells' *History of Tredegar*, a book which deserves reprinting and
the wider exposure which this would produce.[2] But for present purposes

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1 H.J. Dyos, 'Agenda for urban historians', in H.J. Dyos (ed.), *The Study of Urban History*
   (London, 1968), 1–46.
2 D., E. and D. Powell, *History of Tredegar* (Tredegar, 1884; 2nd edn 1902).

I will confine myself to work by professional academics, which means concentrating on the writings of the twentieth century.

Urban fields in Wales

The first strand of interest in urban Wales comes from the earliest days of professional Welsh historiography. The dominant trend in this was work on nationhood, towered over by Sir John Lloyd, and finding it difficult to move beyond the collapse of the semi-independent state of Gwynedd in 1282. Yet we have paid too little attention to a less ambitious but powerful tendency, the effort to write the post-conquest history of Wales which drew its inspiration from economic and social history and was centred on institutions like manors, lordships and, crucially, boroughs.[3] One of the first professional monographs in Welsh history was *The Medieval Boroughs of Snowdonia* (London, 1912) by E.A. Lewis (1880–1942) published on the eve of the First World War. Lewis' subsequent work was on trade and towns – mainly editions of documents – located within an approach which did not revolve around the state and which saw conquest as an economic opportunity rather than a political disaster. William Rees (1887–1978), by contrast, focused mainly on manors and lordships but could encompass burghal history within this and he particularly worked on the history of Cardiff.[4] Work on boroughs fitted comfortably into a historiographical framework provided by native state-building and conquest.[5] Thus medieval and early modern urban history in Wales has deep roots and subsequent work flowers by taking advantage of these.[6]

The second strand of Welsh urban thinking came from geography and anthropology as practised by the 'Aberystwyth school' founded by H.J. Fleure (1887–1969) and continued by E.G. Bowen (1900–82) and Harold Carter (b. 1925).[7] The main thrust of this was an examination of rural communities in Wales, often stressing the way in which rural society preserved almost timeless patterns.[8] It fed into the strong tradition of

[3] N. Evans, '"When men and mountains meet": historians' explanations of the history of Wales, 1890–1970', *Welsh History Review*, 22 (2004), 222–51.

[4] W. Rees, *A History of Cardiff* (Cardiff, 1962; 2nd edn 1969).

[5] T. Jones Pierce, *Medieval Welsh Society*, ed. J.B. Smith (Cardiff, 1972); Glyn Roberts, *Aspects of Welsh History* (Cardiff, 1969), chs. I, II, IV.

[6] See A.H. Dodd (ed.), *The History of Wrexham* (Wrexham, 1957); R.A. Griffiths (ed.), *Boroughs of Mediaeval Wales* (Cardiff, 1978).

[7] The best contextualization of the Aberystwyth school is in the work of Pyrs Gruffydd: 'Back to the land: historiography, rurality and the nation in interwar Wales', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.s. 19 (1994), 61–77; *idem*, 'Remaking Wales: nation building and the geographical imagination, 1925–50', *Political Geography*, 14 (1995), 219–40; *idem*, 'The countryside as educator: schools, rurality and citizenship in inter-war Wales', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22 (1996), 412–23. See also E.G. Bowen, H. Carter and J.A. Taylor (eds.), *Geography at Aberystwyth: Essays Written on the Occasion of the Departmental Jubilee, 1917–8–1967–68* (Cardiff, 1968).

[8] See especially Alwyn D. Rees, *Life in a Welsh Countryside* (Cardiff, 1950); David Jenkins *et al.*, *Welsh Rural Communities* (Cardiff, 1962); David Jenkins, *The Agricultural Community in South-West Wales at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 1971).

folk studies in Wales but always contained a subsidiary urban dimension. The approach relied upon a sharp urban–rural contrast, something which marked much early work in urban geography.[9] Bowen initiated urban geography in a Welsh context but it was Harold Carter who brought it to fruition in an imposing body of work on the urban geography of Wales.[10] Carter is such a central figure that I will need to return to him and make him the focus of rethinking our ideas about urban Wales. His work is both historical and contemporary and he became the Welsh exemplar of the 1960s' expansion of urban history, the only Welsh contributor to Dyos' seminal symposium, *The Study of Urban History* (London, 1968). He is also a major figure in urban geography in general and author of the leading textbook in the field as well as co-author of a synthesis of nineteenth-century urban geography.[11] His other field of endeavour was in language geography but he managed to straddle the fields by locating the recent decline of the Welsh language in rural Wales as an aspect of 'counter-urbanization', an expression of the pressures exerted by the Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester conurbations on rural Wales. His work is remarkably coherent and deservedly dominates the field.[12]

It is convenient to group with the Aberystwyth school a number of other geographers and anthropologists working at the same time or with related approaches. In the 1940s Kenneth Little produced a fine study of Butetown, Cardiff's multi-racial dockland community, which belongs in this context. Little was a physical anthropologist who happened upon Cardiff's docklands as a fine source of skulls for measurement. He stayed to write a major analysis of segregation and social areas, but one which has never been included in the various surveys of Welsh community studies. Some of this neglect in Wales was Little's own fault. He called his book *Negroes in Britain* and his subtitle was even worse: *A Study of Race Relations in English Society* (London, 1948; 2nd edn 1972). But his methods were cognate with those of the Aberystwyth school and given their emphasis on linguistic definitions of Welshness they might not have been too dismayed by his identification of Cardiff as a part of England. But we have taken a too severe revenge for his failures of ethnic identification: it is time to recognize this book as the classic work on Welsh urban society that it is.

Philip Jones' studies of settlement patterns and migration in the south Wales valleys were path breaking and emerged from the University of Birmingham. His work arose out of his own experience of industrial south

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[9] H. Carter, 'Whose city? A view from the periphery', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.s. 14 (1988), 4.

[10] H. Carter, *The Growth of the Welsh City System* (Cardiff, 1969).

[11] H. Carter, *The Study of Urban Geography* (London, 1972; 4th edn 1995); H. Carter, *An Introduction to Urban Historical Geography* (London, 1983); H. Carter and C.R. Lewis, *An Urban Geography of England and Wales in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1990).

[12] There is a brief appreciation by C.R. Lewis, in 'Urban essays for Harold Carter', *Cambria*, 16 (1991), 1–3.

Wales and was concerned to challenge simplistic views of settlement in the area.[13] He may stand for other geographers who produced a multitude of studies of urban structure and population from the 1960s. These were less ambivalent about urban Wales than the Aberystwyth school, though they shared certain methods and approaches with them.

The third dimension is work more centrally concerned with urban life which has issued from the University of Wales, Swansea, for over fifty years. While this shares with the Aberystwyth school a foundation in anthropology it is distinct from it in having sociology rather than geography as its other support and by its application of both surveys and participant observation to urban communities.[14] This perhaps took its origins from a series of studies of the immediate region which were conducted by staff of the university in the 1930s but was developed in the post-war period on the basis of research on contemporary urban structures which had a clear concern to root this in the immediate past.[15] The first professor appointed to head this school in 1964, W.M. Williams, was a product of the Aberystwyth approach and of rural community studies but the school's focus has always been urban.[16] In the 1960s there were distinguished studies of family life in Swansea, while the 1980s saw the launching of important work on de-industrialization and its impact in the wider region.[17] At present the concerns of the family studies are being revisited in a major research project.[18] Cleary this is a body of work that urban historians of twentieth-century Wales would ignore at their peril.

The fourth strand to be considered is the social and economic history of the modern era which took off after 1945 and especially in the 1960s. Inevitably this had to deal with urbanization, though this was never its primary focus. Perhaps the central thrust was in labour history and it acquired something of a revolutionary tinge, in contrast with

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[13] P.N. Jones, *Colliery Settlement in the South Wales Coalfield, 1850–1926* (Hull, 1969); *idem*, *Mines, Migrants and the Steam Coal Valleys* (Hull, 1987). I am grateful to Philip Jones for discussing his background with me.

[14] While geographers based in Swansea, like David Herbert and Graham Humphreys, produced distinguished work it is not associated with the work of the School of Sociology and Anthropology. Urban research in Aberystwyth has been geographical rather than anthropological in approach.

[15] T. Brennan, E.W. Cooney and H. Pollins, *Social Change in South-West Wales* (London, 1954).

[16] C.C. Harris (ed.), *Family, Economy and Community* (Cardiff, 1990), is a history and sampling of the work of the school to that time.

[17] C. Rosser and C.C. Harris, *The Family and Social Change: A Study of Family and Kinship in a South Wales Town* (London, 1965); C. Bell, *Middle Class Families: Social and Geographical Mobility* (London, 1968); D. Leonard, *Sex and Generation: A Study of Courtship and Weddings* (London, 1980); Ralph Fevre, *Wales is Closed: The Quiet Privatisation of British Steel* (Nottingham, 1989); C.C. Harris and Swansea Redundancy Group, *Redundancy and Recession in South Wales* (Oxford, 1987).

[18] BBC Radio 4 'Thinking allowed' 24 Dec. 2004; Nickie Charles, 'Social change, family formation and kin relationships' http://www.regard.ac.uk/research_findings/ R000238454/report.pdf, consulted 12 Jan. 2005.

the social democratic reformism which animated both Dyos and Asa Briggs in England.[19] In Wales the central idea was very much class and the kind of urban society which predominated in Wales did not encourage viewing urban areas as arenas for the playing out of class conflicts. Indeed, class became associated with place and linked with community.[20] Valleys ironmaking and coalmining communities were seen as one-class communities and often posed against the more complex urban communities of the south Wales coastal plain.

The pioneer exponent of modern urban history in Wales is Ieuan Gwynedd Jones (b. 1920) who was an active member of the Urban History Group and his studies of Merthyr were landmark works in urban analysis in Wales.[21] Dyos recognized the talent in this work by commissioning Jones to write a book on Merthyr for the prestigious 'Studies in Urban History' series. While Wales was not the jewel in the crown of Dyos' liberal empire it did have its place in the firmament. There is something fitting, from a Welsh perspective, that the last meeting of the Urban History Group that Dyos was able to attend was in Swansea and featured papers by Harold Carter, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and Gwyn Williams on Merthyr.[22] Gwyn Williams' was in some respects the archetypal Welsh approach of the era. He was always attracted to radical urban communities and many in Wales have forgotten his path-breaking book on *Medieval London: From Commune to Capital* (London, 1963) – also a study of a revolutionary community. Urban insurrection was never a prime interest of Dyos and the Urban History Group.[23] The approach continued in Hywel Francis and Dai Smith's studies of radical and revolutionary communities in the south Wales coalfield in *The Fed: The South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1980) and in Merfyn Jones' powerful analysis of *The North Wales Quarrymen, 1874–1922* (Cardiff, 1981) which was driven by work relations not by the urban variable.

[19] For the politics of urban history see Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones' obituary of Dyos in *History Workshop Journal*, 7 (1978), 246–7, and David Cannadine's review essay on Briggs reprinted in his *The Pleasures of the Past* (London, 1989; paperback edn 1990), 172–83. Briggs' approach was less comprehensive and more impressionistic. In conversation in the summer of 1969, Dyos called *Victorian Cities* a 'city centre book', an epithet which needs to be contrasted with his own more totalizing vision of the Victorian city.

[20] N. Evans, 'Writing the social history of modern Wales: approaches, achievements and problems', *Social History*, 17 (1992), 479–92. Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society, 1885–1951* (Cardiff, 1996), is a later work which shares some of this approach, but places the political emphasis firmly on reformist politics.

[21] Ieuan Gwynedd Jones' scattered essays are partly collected in his three volumes, *Explanations and Explorations* (Llandysul, 1981); *Communities* (Llandysul, 1987) and *Mid-Victorian Wales: The Observers and the Observed* (Cardiff, 1992).

[22] Dyos was indirectly responsible for the introduction of an urban history special subject in Swansea in the 1960s, after Glanmor Williams had been an external examiner at Leicester. Conversation with Terry Lloyd (who taught it), Swansea, 17 Mar. 2004.

[23] E.P. Thompson's review of the Dyos and Wolff blockbuster (*New Society*, 4 Oct. 1973, 33) complained (amongst other things) of its lack of labour history and centrally of its focus on stasis rather than change.

Wales was absent from both Briggs' *Victorian Cities* and Dyos and Michael Wolff's *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, 2 vols. (London, 1973) though Scotland and Northern Ireland and their distinctive urban structures and landscapes found a place in the latter, and Briggs' own approach suggested that national variants of the Victorian city could be elaborated.[24] Fully fledged urban history in Wales came in the form of John Davies' *Cardiff and the Marquesses of Bute* (Cardiff, 1981) and especially of Martin Daunton's, *Coal Metropolis: Cardiff, 1870–1914* (Leicester, 1977). These were both exemplary studies, with a central focus on the city-building process, and Daunton has become one of the leading urban historians in Britain. Yet many of his influences were as much from American urban history as from British and perhaps a little apart from Dyos and Leicester.

The fifth and final strand in urban studies in Wales was more-or-less contemporaneous with the last one: the development of urban political economy from the 1960s, especially manifesting itself as what we may call 'the Cardiff school' of urban and regional planning. Like the Aberystwyth and Swansea schools this group has attained some prominence in the discipline internationally but it has to be considered apart from both. When sociology emerged in Wales in the 1960s and 70s it was largely as a critique of the Aberystwyth school, or at least its most rural and essentialist products.[25] Nor was there any of the concern manifested in Swansea for family and anthropological field methods; there was evidence of geographical approaches but mainly in the newer work which tends to eschew maps rather than being driven by them. There was some interest in history, though the time-span of urban planning in Wales rarely reached back beyond 1945. Yet it often nestled comfortably with the new historical work, drawing on its conclusions, taking broadly similar approaches and drawing on related intellectual traditions.[26] The planning work took up a number of themes – largely the plight of the de-industrializing south Wales valleys and city centre redevelopment, especially in Cardiff. There was also a concern with regionalism, largely absent from historical work. Practitioners of this approach – Phil Cooke, Gareth Rees, Kevin Morgan, Huw Thomas and John Lovering became well known in the field well

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[24] My own essay 'The Welsh Victorian city: the middle class and national and civic consciousness in Cardiff, 1850–1914', *Welsh History Review*, 12 (1985), 350–87, was a conscious effort to produce a Briggsian approach, with a title derived from Geoffrey Best. His chapter, 'Another part of the island', in Dyos and Wolff, *The Victorian City*, was originally published as 'The Scottish Victorian city' in *Victorian Studies* in 1968.

[25] See crucially Graham Day, 'The sociology of Wales: issues and prospects', *Sociological Review*, n.s. 27 (1980), 447–74.

[26] G. Rees and T.L. Rees (eds.), *Poverty and Social Inequality in Wales* (London, 1980); G. Williams (ed.), *Crisis of Economy and Ideology: Essays on Welsh Society, 1840–1980* (Bangor, 1983); R. Macdonald and H. Thomas (eds.), *Nationality Planning in Scotland and Wales* (Cardiff, 1997); Ralph Fevre and Andrew Thompson (eds.), *Nation, Identity and Social Theory: Perspectives from Wales* (Cardiff, 1999).

beyond Wales and made sure that Wales attained a place at the conference table, wherever it was located across the globe.

Ploughing across the boundaries

Enough has been said to demonstrate that there is a substantial body of research on urban Wales, that it comes from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and that it contains many distinguished contributions. The problem is that we have rarely thought of it as a single field in this way. It remains fragmented into approaches in different disciplines and different periods of history, which all too often do not speak meaningfully – if at all – to each other. It needs ploughing again as a single field rather than a set of adjacent ones. As a starting point we need to return to Harold Carter's work, the most comprehensive approach to urbanism in Wales. It is now forty years since his classic book – and centre piece of all his research – *The Towns of Wales*, appeared. A review of its strengths and weaknesses, drawing where relevant on other aspects of his work, provides a launching pad for the re-evaluation of the urban studies in Wales which is needed.

A major strength of Carter's work is its comprehensiveness. It seeks the historical roots of towns in Wales, discusses relationships between towns, the way in which urban systems emerge and are transformed, and is interested in the topography of towns, particularly in the way in which older developments shape contemporary plans. There is much concern with urban hierarchies, statistical sophistication and some interest in theory. He took the formal model of urban networks derived from Christaller and turned it into an operational model of how urban systems were created in Wales. Later, in his work on Merthyr, there was close analysis of urban patterns and migration.[27] It is doubtful if anyone will ever rival the range of his work, in an age of increasing academic specialization. The focus on towns as such took it beyond what most economic or social historians would have written about individual towns or types of towns. Carter was, for instance, writing about resort development long before the history of leisure became a growth topic and his concern for urban systems led him to acknowledge the role of communities which were left out in the emphasis on class conflict in the modern social and economic history of Wales. He finds a place for Bridgend, Llandudno Junction, Pontypridd and Caerphilly, none of which were foci of the class struggle, and which would normally be the preserve of local historians.[28] Thinking about urban systems and inter-relationships between places has many gains.

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[27] H. Carter and S. Wheatley, *Merthyr Tydfil in 1851: A Study of the Spatial Structure of a Welsh Industrial Town* (Cardiff, 1982).
[28] Julie Light's contribution to this volume is a welcome effort to examine such neglected communities.

Centrally, Carter's work is a paradigm case of post-war positivist geography. It exhibits the strengths – and to some extent the weaknesses – of that approach. One reason to rethink this approach to urban Wales is simply the extent to which this has been done in the discipline of geography generally in recent years.[29] Positivism is seen as being theoretically naive and the technical wizardry and jargon as something of a disguise for this. But what concerns us here is the adequacy of the overall historical view which is developed.

Carter argues that there are two phases of town foundation in Wales – the Norman Conquest and the Industrial Revolution. There were no significant native origins of towns in the middle ages and the *bastides* which came with the castles were planted by conquerors and they expunged any native growth. This meant that there was a tendency for them to decline once pacification was achieved in the later middle ages and those that survived did so only if they acquired a different rationale, more closely related to economic and social, rather than military, needs. By the eighteenth century a fairly stable hierarchy of towns had been created, organized around the four quadrants of Wales, the circuits of the Courts of Great Session.[30] Towns of alien origin had finally found a secure niche. Yet they had no time to rest on their laurels as industrialization disrupted this formation almost as soon as it had been created. This was another external force and not something which came from the internal dynamics of Wales. Another process of settling created a new hierarchy and even a capital. There was much in common between these two phases, especially the external origin of urbanity in Wales:

in many ways what is distinctive is the wide variety of urban features developed in a small country to which town life was completely alien . . . In both cases [i.e. in each phase] the stimulus to genesis is in a sense derived from outside the country, certainly it is external to the cultural core, and the result has been a tension between things Welsh and things urban and English.[31]

This emphasis is confirmed and even exaggerated when it is given a theoretical slant in his inaugural lecture.[32] Here the ideas of orthogenetic and heterogenetic cities, developed by Redfield and Singer in the 1950s, is applied to Wales.[33] Orthogenetic cities are those in which a localized folk tradition is elaborated into a great tradition. This is the basis of the moral order; the folk culture becomes systematic and reflective. Heterogenetic

[29] See R. Peet, *Modern Geographical Thought* (Oxford, 1998).
[30] H. Carter, 'The growth and development of Welsh towns', in Donald Moore (ed.), *Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Swansea, 1976), 47–62.
[31] H. Carter, 'Phases of town growth in Wales', in Dyos (ed.), *The Study of Urban History*, 231, 251.
[32] Carter, *Growth of the Welsh City System*.
[33] R. Redfield and M. Singer, 'The cultural role of cities', in Richard Sennett (ed.), *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (New York, 1969), 206–33.

cities are those in which new states of mind are created by the meeting of cultures: new states of mind are forged and change is a consequence. This provides Carter with a theoretical underpinning for the views he had already elaborated in other places. It is useful here as it makes his viewpoint stand out in high relief. He offers here not so much an urban history of Wales but a historical sociology of the Welsh town: that is identifying a type of urbanity rather than specific instances of urban development.[34]

The analysis is clearly part of a long tradition of stark rural/urban contrasts which has now been under attack for at least forty years. It can also be related to the idea which dominated the analysis of Carter's predecessor in the Gregynog Chair of Human Geography at Aberystwyth, E.G. Bowen. Emrys Bowen was an imaginative historical geographer who explained the history of Wales as a conflict between inner Wales (the mountainous core, which conserved the folk culture) and outer Wales (the borderlands and coastal plains open to influences from outside). Agents of change spread through outer Wales: Romans, Normans and industrialists spread their new words in a constant geographical pattern. Carter's work is much less impressionistic but his analysis is similar. Carter is not the only scholar to use Redfield and Singer as a prop; Hohenberg and Lees employ them in a related manner to make a distinction between different types of European cities.[35] In Carter's case this links with ideas of Wales as a colony, or internal colony, which were popular in the 1970s.[36] Many of Redfield and Singer's examples of heterogenetic cites are colonial cities and, indeed, Carter identified his work with the idea of internal colonialism in the 1980s, seeing urbanism in Wales displaying an ethnic hierarchy and sometimes employing the language of *apartheid* to describe it.[37]

Of course it is not sufficient to identify the intellectual underpinnings of Carter's work. Whatever its sources it may still be a valid approach to urban Wales. But his work on the medieval period is often considerably at variance with the more recent thoughts of historians. Here there is no simple picture of alien origins and there is an emerging conception that medieval Welsh towns may have been small compared with England but they still performed important urban functions within Welsh society. On the origins of Welsh towns, Ralph Griffiths observes: 'the mainspring of

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[34] Engin F. Isin, 'Historical sociology of the city', in Gerard Delanty and Engin F. Isin (eds.), *Handbook of Historical Sociology* (London, 2003), 312–25.

[35] P. Hohenberg and L.H. Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000–1950* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), 6.

[36] M. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966* (London, 1975). For a critique see N. Evans, 'Internal colonialism? Colonisation, economic development and political mobilisation in Wales, Scotland and Ireland', in G. Day and G. Rees (eds.), *Regions, Nations and European Integration: Remaking the Celtic Periphery* (Cardiff, 1991), 235–64.

[37] H. Carter, 'Internal colonialism and the interpretation of aspects of the urban geography of Wales', in D. Dukakis-Smith and S.W. Williams (eds.), *Internal Colonialism: Essays around a Theme* (Edinburgh, 1983) 53–66; Carter, 'Whose city?'.

borough growth in Wales was unusually complex – military and defensive, administrative, commercial and agricultural, religious – and the current fashion of regarding almost all Welsh boroughs as alien plantations does more to confuse than to illuminate by its simplicity'. And he sees later developments as being integral to the story rather than as an 'Other' against which Welshness is defined: 'The story of burghal development in Wales illuminates important facets of the country's history. The momentum and impact of conquest, the infusion and mingling of peoples, the experience of new habits and the remodelling of old customs are at the heart of burghal development, as of much else in mediaeval Wales.'[38] In a later pass at the issue Griffiths stresses the elements of continuity in Welsh towns rather than the massive break at the Norman Conquest.[39] Historians have also seen evidence of ethnic ordering in medieval Wales but have balanced this with evidence of accommodation. Nor do they see evidence for a transhistorical internal colonialism. Medievalists regard the situation in their period as straightforward colonialism which was eradicated by the 'union' of 1536. There is a superficial similarity between this and the idea of internal colonialism but really the approaches are distinct. For Carter any medieval and early modern accommodation was bought at the expense of Anglicization, and generally he perceives a much greater degree of continuity in ethnic stratification, and even in the processes underlying urban form.[40]

Nor is Welsh culture simply a folk tradition. It was systematized and turned into a literate tradition. Clearly princely courts and aristocratic houses were parts of this process but in the longer run it would be wrong to ignore the role of English towns as locations for developing this in the early modern period: like London, Oxford, Cambridge and Shrewsbury in the development of a religiously inclined print culture in Wales or the later position of London, and particularly the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, in the elaboration of a Welsh literary tradition.[41] In the nineteenth century towns like Caernarfon, Aberdare, Swansea and Wrexham were powerhouses of Welsh-language printing.

This raises the issue of the way in which Wales and its towns fit into the urban structure of the United Kingdom. Carter's work on Wales tends to stop at the border. Most historians, by contrast, have stressed the influence

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[38] R.A. Griffiths, 'The study of the mediaeval Welsh borough', in Griffiths (ed.), *Boroughs of Mediaeval Wales*, 14–15, 16.

[39] R.A. Griffiths, 'Wales and the Marches', in D.M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. I: *600–1540* (Cambridge, 2000), 681–714.

[40] R.R. Davies, 'Colonial Wales', *Past and Present*, 65 (1974), 3–22; R.R. Davies, 'Race relations in post-conquest Wales: confrontation and compromise', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1974), 32–56; Evans, 'Internal colonialism?'; Carter, 'Whose city?'; Carter, 'Internal colonialism'; H. Carter, 'Parallelism and disjunction: a study of the internal structure of Welsh towns', in T.R. Slater (ed.), *The Built Form of Western Cities: Essays on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday* (Leicester, 1990), 189–209.

[41] E. Jones (ed.), *The Welsh in London, 1500–2000* (Cardiff, 2001).

of cross-border links to English towns. Ralph Griffiths has taken the Severn Estuary as a unit of analysis for the medieval period and many historians stress the way in which Welsh society was dominated by border towns in the early modern period.[42] A recent survey of Welsh towns in the early modern period takes the external links as the starting point.[43] Connections are therefore vital but so are comparisons with other regions and nations of the British Isles and in continental Europe. There certainly seems to be a basis for comparisons on both a British and a European level.[44] This would be more revealing than an analysis of Wales which relies on a very general contrast between concepts which are at best ideal types rather than operational guides. A cursory glance at one near neighbour suggests some possible approaches. Irish towns share some features with Welsh ones – certainly there was much plantation and this went on over a protracted period. Yet they are no longer seen as an alien excrescence by Irish historians; Irish history is defined as what happened in Ireland, and as an interaction of cultures rather than privileging one and seeing others as alien.[45] It is this position which Ralph Griffiths has recently approached in seeing the people of late medieval Wales as 'adjusting to the fact that they were a cosmopolitan people of diverse origins. Their communities – rural as well as urban, even in the north-west heartland of recently conquered Gwynedd – were interleaved in varying measure with migrants . . . contacts between English and Welsh multiplied and relationships between them deepened.'[46] This brings us to a central issue: the relationship of Welsh towns with identity.

Since the late 1970s a dominant trend in Welsh historiography had been the discussion of identity. Glanmor Williams, Prys Morgan and centrally Gwyn A. Williams have made major contributions to this development.[47] What has been challenged – as in wider discussions of nationality and

[42] R.A. Griffiths, 'Medieval Severnside: the Welsh connection', in R.R. Davies, Ralph A. Griffiths, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and Kenneth O. Morgan (eds.), *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays Presented to Glanmor Williams* (Cardiff, 1984), 70–89.

[43] P. Jenkins, 'Wales', in Peter Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* vol. II: *1540–1840* (2000), 133–49.

[44] For Britain see the regional essays in the *Cambridge Urban History*, vols. I and II; for Europe see M. Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages: Town Plantation in England, Wales and Gascony*, 2nd edn (Gloucester, 1988); H.B. Clarke and A. Simms, 'Towards a comparative history of urban origins', in *idem* and *idem* (eds.), *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe: Ireland, Wales, Denmark, Germany, Poland and Russia from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1985), 669–714.

[45] R.A. Butlin (ed.), *The Development of the Irish Town* (London, 1977); Mary Daly, 'Irish urban history: a survey', *Urban History Yearbook* (1986), 61–72; T. Barry (ed.), *A History of Settlement in Ireland* (London, 2000); F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890–1939* (Oxford, 1979).

[46] R.A. Griffiths, 'After Glyndwr: an age of reconciliation?', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 117 (2002), 139.

[47] G. Williams, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979); P. Morgan, *The Eighteenth-Century Renaissance* (Swansea, 1981); G.A. Williams, *When Was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (London, 1985).

identity – is the older primordial and essentialist view. By fixing attention on moments of creation when discussing identity Carter supports these older conceptions. Welsh identity – and urban culture – is seen as being petrified at birth rather than fluid and changing. Once we see the idea of Wales in this way it is inevitable that we will need to rethink our ideas of towns and their place in the history of Wales. Implicitly, this is what Ralph Griffiths' work does. Of course, Carter writes perceptively about the way in which towns adapted to the circumstances of Welsh society after the conquest, and his more recent work takes some account of later research by historians: but essentially the same framework is preserved.[48]

The same thing is true when we come to the industrial phase of town formation. There is rather less emphasis on alien origins here – and Redfield and Singer from whom he borrows much seem to see all towns after the Industrial Revolution as being heterogenetic. Certainly much of the capital and some of the labour for Welsh industrialization came from outside Wales but it is more than doubtful whether this makes Welsh industrial towns some kind of alien growth. Indeed, a recent important study of the north Wales quarrying towns stresses the importance of workers and their aspirations in the making of nucleated settlements in Bethesda and Llanberis. This was done in the teeth of some opposition from the quarry owners. These towns could therefore be seen as expressions of a folk culture rather than the negation of it.[49] South Wales towns also saw struggles for control and a sense of collective ownership of them became one of the clear expressions of working-class identity.[50] Perhaps the issue of identity in urban Wales is all the more pressing because of the issue of ethnicity and the way in which this has become a significant stratum of research in modern Wales.[51]

Central to any discussion of urbanization in Wales and its relation to Welsh identity must be the nature of industrial settlements in Wales. What is characteristic of these through a long period is what we might call their 'quasi-urban' nature. This is not exactly to add another category to Dyos' urbanity and suburbanity.[52] For Dyos urbanity certainly suggested the urbane. The nineteenth century added a category of what he called sub-urbanity – urban horrors which lacked the qualities of civilization.

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[48] Carter, 'Whose city?'.

[49] D. Gwyn, 'The industrial town in Gwynedd', *Landscape History*, 23 (2001), 71–89.

[50] See centrally, D. Smith, 'Tonypandy 1910: definitions of community', *Past and Present*, 87 (1980), 158–84. Interesting developments of this come in D. Gilbert, 'Community and municipalism: collective identity in late Victorian mining towns', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17 (1991), 259–70; *idem*, 'Imagined communities and mining communities', *Labour History Review*, 60 (1995), 47–55; Carter also touches on this in 'Whose city?'.

[51] C. Hughes, *Lime, Lemon and Sarsaprilla: The Italian Community in South Wales, 1881–1945* (Bridgend, 1991); U. Henriques (ed.), *The Jews of South Wales: Historical Studies* (Cardiff, 1992); P. O'Leary, *Immigration and Integration: The Irish in Wales, 1840–1922* (Cardiff, 2000); C. Williams, N. Evans and P. O'Leary (eds.), *A Tolerant Nation? Exploring Ethnic Diversity in Wales* (Cardiff, 2003); P. O'Leary (ed.), *Irish Migrants in Modern Wales* (Liverpool, 2004).

[52] H.J. Dyos, *Urbanity and Suburbanity* (Inaugural Lecture, Leicester, 1973).

As far as Wales is concerned Ieuan Gwynedd Jones has confronted this issue by distinguishing 'civic' communities from merely 'urban' ones. Whatever terminology we use, Welsh urbanization in the industrial era centred on urban or quasi-urban places rather than 'civic' or 'urbane' ones.[53] What was characteristic of Wales was primary urbanization: that is urbanization which ushered from effectively green field sites rather than from the influence of industrialization on established urban cores. A recent survey of urban history in Britain offers us the thought that 'entirely new settlements thrown up by the industrial revolution' were a 'small group'.[54] This was certainly not true of Wales where it was perhaps the dominant form of urbanization, and the same would probably be true of at least some other coalfields. This feature was recognized in discussions of urban Wales from the mid-nineteenth century where the American comparison is frequent and it persists in the contemporary historiography which identifies early industrial communities in Wales as frontier settlements.[55] Perhaps this goes some way to explain the weakness of the tradition of urban biographies in Wales.[56] Richard Rodger has argued eloquently that urban biographies provide us with an eloquent conspectus of urbanity and its relationship with identity but it would need serious modification in order to apply to Wales.[57] Only now are we beginning to write the equivalent of urban biographies for valley towns which offer a way forward in this.[58] Again the distinctiveness of the Welsh urban experience shows the need for comparative studies and perhaps even more urgently than in the earlier periods.[59] These may need to utilize a

[53] Jones, *Explorations and Explanations*; and *idem*, *Communities* (Llandysul, 1987).

[54] J. Beckett, 'Chronicling the British industrial city', *Journal of Urban History*, 26 (1999), 88.

[55] C. Evans, *'The Labyrinth of Flames': Work and Social Conflict in Early Industrial Merthyr Tydfil* (Cardiff, 1993), has much to say of relevance to this; N. Evans, 'Region, nation, globe: roles, representations and urban space in Cardiff, 1839–1928', in Andreas Fahrmeir and Elfie Rembold (eds.), *Representation of British Cities: Transformation of Urban Space, 1700–2000* (Berlin and Vienna, 2003), 108–29; Evans, 'Welsh Victorian city'.

[56] While *Urban History* and the *Journal of Urban History* have both carried several review articles in recent years on English and Scottish urban biographies it would be impossible to produce a similar crop for Wales. For some exceptions to this, but spread over four decades, see K.S. Hopkins (ed.), *Rhondda – Past and Future* (Ferndale, n.d. *c.* 1975); I.G. Jones (ed.), *Aberystwyth, 1277–1977* (Llandysul, 1977); D. Moore (ed.), *Barry: The Centenary Book* (Barry, 1984); G. Williams (ed.), *Swansea: An Illustrated History* (Swansea, 1990); R.A. Griffiths (ed.), *The City of Swansea: Challenges and Change* (Gloucester, 1990); J. Davies, *Cardiff: A Pocket Guide* (Cardiff, 2002).

[57] R. Rodger, '*Urban History*: prospect and retrospect', *Urban History*, 19 (1992), 8.

[58] M. Lieven, *Senghennydd: The Universal Colliery Village* (Llandysul, 1994), is the pioneer study. Andy Croll considers the emergence of urbanity in Merthyr in his ground-breaking book: *Civilising the Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr, 1870–1914* (Cardiff, 2001).

[59] See D. Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850–1926* (Oxford, 1992), for a useful start. The coalfields considered are south Wales and Nottingham. See also R. Fagge, *Power, Culture and Conflict in the Coalfields: West Virginia and South Wales, 1900–22* (Manchester, 1996); S. Berger, 'Working class culture and the labour movement in the South Wales and the Ruhr Coalfields, 1850–2000', *Llafur*, 8 (2001), 5–40.

series of measures of urbanization – not simply the percentage urban, but average town size, urban density and population density – in order to bring out the distinctiveness of regional patterns of urbanization.[60]

One aspect of this distinctiveness was expressed in urban structure. Welsh towns often seemed to outside observers not to be towns, to the extent that they lacked recognizable cores. With the travellers to early nineteenth-century Merthyr their impatience is almost palpable.[61] Later discussion would condemn the ribbon development of the Rhondda Valleys – 'the longest street in the world' – in similar ways. North Wales slate-quarry towns were essentially the same. For many later generations these places have become central to their inhabitants' sense of Welshness: they were defined by a relatively egalitarian culture with minimal (and obscured) class divisions and an idea that Wales is a kind of federation of such places, 'a community of communities'. But peculiar forms of urban settlement may have a wider resonance in the history of Wales. More recently the sprawling suburbia of the valley mouth towns seems to defy easy categorization as towns too. Unfortunately the new urban planning work shows no urgency about studying such areas which would need the development of what has been called a Los Angeles model of development to replace the famous concentric rings of the Chicago school of urban sociology.[62] While the validity of this approach has been questioned for contemporary English cities, it may be one of the means of bringing out the distinctiveness of Welsh urban patterns.[63] In the remoter past perhaps the smallness of Welsh towns raises similar issues.

Carter's work raises centrally the importance of anti-urban ideology in Wales. For him it has become an analysis rather than an object of study. Indeed there is a general gap in writing about this important feature of the cultural landscape.[64] The essential approach was elaborated by Raymond Williams over thirty years ago but it has been little developed in Wales.[65] His work stressed the profound interconnection of the country and the city in the real world but revealed a complex structure of thought that was developed, masking the reality of capitalist social relations. But work in Wales tends to conflate these things. We have seen how this is the

[60] See H. Matzerath, 'The influence of industrialization on urban growth in Prussia (1815–1914)', in H. Schaal (ed.), *Patterns of European Urbanisation since 1500* (London, 1981), 145–79.

[61] N. Evans, 'The urbanisation of Welsh society', in G.E. Jones and T. Herbert (eds.), *People and Protest: Wales, 1815–1880* (Cardiff, 1988).

[62] M. Dear, 'Los Angeles and the Chicago school: invitation to a debate', *City and Community*, 1 (2002), 5–32.

[63] M. Savage, G. Bagnall and B. Longhurst, *Globalization and Belonging* (London, 2005), x and ch. 5.

[64] There are important studies by Dai Smith in his *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), and Jones in his *Mid-Victorian Wales*, but there is a need for further work. There is no sustained analysis of the scope of M. Daly, 'An alien institution? Attitudes towards the city in nineteenth and twentieth-century Irish society', *Etudes Irlandaises*, n.s. 10 (1985), 181–94.

[65] R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973).

case with Carter but perhaps the same could be said from the other end of the interpretative spectrum in the work of Dai Smith, who operates with a polarized view of rural and urban divisions and ideologies. This comes out forcefully in his *Wales! Wales?* (London, 1984). The exclamatory Wales is Victorian liberalism which is associated with rural life and values. The questionable Wales is the new society on the coalfield, a society which many ideologues of rural nostalgia felt was not really Wales but an alien presence. Dai Smith provides a valuable analysis of this hostile reaction but this is an opening effort rather than a definitive account. Hywel Teifi Edwards takes this further by charting the sentimental image of the Welsh miner which was propagated in Welsh-language culture, showing that some forms of urbanity could be assimilated into Welsh culture and identity.[66] My own preliminary work on this suggests that whatever friction there could be between the Welsh intelligentsia and industrial communities was tempered by the nonconformity of those communities and severe criticism of new societies was usually reserved for non-Welsh forms of them. Established Welsh industrial workers were usually accepted into the *gwerin* (folk or even *volk*); Irish, English and rumbustious newcomers in general were not.

We need to move on to another of Carter's themes, the nature of the Welsh urban system. The idea of an urban system pervades Carter's work and puts the relations of town and country on the agenda even if it is not fully discussed. His inaugural lecture was called *The Growth of the Welsh City System* but the issue is not pinned down definitively. The implication of the title is that there is a single Welsh urban system but the lecture uses south-west Wales as an example and elsewhere Carter discusses regional urban systems within Wales rather than offering a view of a single Welsh urban system. He stresses the conflict between rural and urban values which undermines any cultural integration of Wales but sees some integration at the economic level.

Perhaps we need to turn both these arguments on their heads. Industrialization produced communities which have become central parts of the idea of Welsh identity. The 'folk culture' also produced in the nineteenth century its own response to the national urban hierarchy in the structure of eisteddfodau and denominations. Most Welsh urban communities were shaped by an urban popular culture and dominated by a populist values rather than by distant elites. The *gwerin* was urbanized; – lightly and distinctively – but definitely urbanized.

The other side of Carter's argument is that there is economic integration. This relates to Brinley Thomas' conception of a distinct Welsh economy, something he argued that existed in the late nineteenth century when Wales formed a single labour market and people expressed cultural preferences

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[66] H.T. Edwards, 'The Welsh collier as hero, 1850–1950', *Welsh Writing in English*, 2 (1996), 22–48.

in their pattern of migration.[67] Dudley Baines' work in many respects gives the *coup de grâce* to the idea of a Welsh economy in that period and shows more substantial outflows from rural Wales to the midlands and Merseyside than to south Wales.[68] Contemporary north and mid-Wales continue to be subject to counter-urbanization from Merseyside and the midlands. The extent to which Cardiff is the functional capital of the whole of Wales is questionable. So a strong degree of economic integration is problematic at best.

Contrary to Carter's position, then, culture is in many respects a binding force, especially in the nineteenth century and if we move away from a strict linguistic definition of culture. His own most recent work recognizes the emerging Welsh-speaking elites of Cardiff and Bangor as a break from past patterns of urban structure.[69] For the present period we can add another dimension of a Welsh city system which was only embryonic when Professor Carter gave his inaugural lecture – the impact of devolved government. It made Wales into a single political unit and the creation of the Welsh Office in 1964 seems to have stopped the municipal imperialism of the bordering English conurbations towards rural Wales in its tracks.[70] Devolution also has economic implications through the Welsh Development Agency (created in 1975) and other quangos, though it has not perhaps created a separate Welsh economy.

Conclusion

For the future we need to develop from urban history towards regional history. Merfyn Jones' book on the north Wales quarrymen pointed in this direction but it has only been developed fitfully.[71] This would seem to be one of the directions in which Carter's city-systems ought to take us. Very little Welsh analysis has taken this route. This would also be a way of questioning the implicit single Welsh urban system approach. Welsh towns and regions have always been influenced by their cross-border links and a

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[67] B. Thomas, 'Wales and the Atlantic economy', in B. Thomas (ed.), *The Welsh Economy: Studies in Expansion* (Cardiff, 1962).

[68] D. Baines, *Migration in a Mature Economy: Emigration and Internal Migration in England and Wales, 1861–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), ch. 10.

[69] Carter, 'Whose city?'; J.W. Aitchison and H. Carter, 'The Welsh language in Cardiff: a quiet revolution', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.s. 12 (1987), 482–92; in many respects Aberystwyth is now the capital of Welsh-speaking Wales.

[70] W.T.R. Pryce, 'Region or national territory? Regionalism and the country of Wales, 1927–1998', paper presented at Univeristät Karl Ossiwesky, Oldenburg, 29 May 1999.

[71] R.M. Jones, 'The historical consequences of early industrialisation in a Welsh district: the case of north Wales', in R. Schultze (ed.), *Industrial Regions in Transformation* (Klaartext, Essen, 1993); N. Evans, 'Two paths to economic development: Wales and the north-east of England', in P. Hudson (ed.), *Regions and Industries: An Approach to the Industrial Revolution in Britain* (Cambridge, 1989); *idem*, 'Patterns of protest and labour implantation in south Wales and the north-east of England, 1780–1950', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Gescheidnis*, 18 (1992), 212–30; *idem*, 'Regional dynamics: north Wales, 1750–1914', in E. Royle (ed.), *Issues of Regional Identity: Essays in Honour of John Marshall* (Manchester, 1998).

regional analysis is one means of coming to terms with these connections. The superimposition of an administrative and governmental structure on an all Wales basis is a very recent development and it still has to contend with the reality of powerful cross-border forces – perhaps especially in north-east Wales where there are complex patterns of migration in both directions.

Urbanization needs to be recognized as one of the major themes in Welsh history and not as some kind of negation of Welshness. In a country which became so highly urbanized in the nineteenth century this should not be a contentious point but it needs to be linked with the growing awareness which historians are developing of the integral and vital nature of urban communities in Wales in the more remote past. We need to think of urbanization as a process which influences all aspects of society. Forty years ago Charles Tilly offered a comprehensive definition of the process which is a useful starting point: 'a collective term for a set of changes which generally occur with the appearance and expansion of large-scale co-ordinated activities in a society . . . in the long run, urbanization in any sector of a society will affect all other sectors . . . Urbanization may also transform rural areas without eradicating agriculture.'[72]

Such a view is too broad and Tilly himself has subsequently modified it by removing from it what is more usually referred to as state-building. Hohenberg and Lees offer a related perspective: 'urbanisation is an ongoing process that affects the country as well as the city . . . As urban places grow they interact with their rural surroundings, with one another, and with larger socio-political units.'[73] This might be a useful starting point for developing some of the new views of urban Wales which have been advocated here and of integrating them into our general views of Welsh history. Of course it poses questions for urban history as an approach to stress the rural connections, but the thrust of what has been argued here is to see the field as a fulcrum on which a total history turns rather than as a case for quarantine. Dyos, after all, has been seen as providing a kind of *Annales* totality for the cities of Victorian Britain.[74] Putting the idea of urbanization at the centre of our approach will be one means of making urban studies more historical (rather than geographical) in form. It is important to develop such a framework; we have in prospect a number of major studies of Welsh towns and aspects of urban life in Wales. To allow these to have the maximum impact they will need an overall perspective.[75] The idea of urbanization is not central to Carter's work; it is historians who have probed more the size of towns, their relative

[72] C. Tilly, *The Vendee* (London, 1964), 16–19.
[73] Hohenberg and Lees, *Making of Urban Europe*, 4.
[74] Rodger, '*Urban History*', 9–10.
[75] I am thinking of Louise Miskell's forthcoming book on early nineteenth-century Swansea, Chris Williams' on mid-nineteenth-century Newport and Steve Thompson's book on health in interwar industrial south Wales.

weight in society and their wider impact. This is especially true for the medieval and early modern periods. For the modern period little attention has been given to overall levels of urbanization and its wider resonance. We need to recognize that urbanization is: 'a process involving not only the concentrations of populations at certain densities and shifts in their occupational and social structures but a number of cultural adaptations too'.[76] If we accept this we can see that the towns of Wales provide an elevated standpoint from which to view its entire post-Roman history. Comparisons with towns outside Wales will help to show what was distinctive about them but we will also need to keep them firmly in their regional context in order to understand the nature of their urbanity.

[76] Dyos, *Urbanity and Suburbanity*, 20.