Indexing the archaeology of Wales

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Wales today has numerous periodicals dealing with archaeology and history at local, county and national level, but the doyen of them all is the journal of the Cambrian Archaeological Association, Archaeologia Cambrensis, established over a century and a half ago. In the 1950s, while on the staff at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, the present author became involved (in his spare time) in directing a project for a new and continuing comprehensive index of Archaeologia Cambrensis, to run from its first edition in 1846 to the present day. As the project developed he found himself embroiled in the technicalities of indexing and press work recounted in this article.

By a curious fact of history the periodical Archaeologia Cambrensis came into existence before the foundation of the society that was to become its sponsor. It was launched as an independent venture by two clergymen of the Church of England – at their own expense – because they were passionately interested in the past of Wales and perceived the remains of antiquity to be in peril from ignorance, neglect and ill-considered development. The first quarterly part of the publication appeared in January 1846. Its quarterly frequency enabled interested readers to write to the editors to express their opinions and have their letters published in the next issue. The two editors were delighted to receive a chorus of support, and in issue No. 3 for July 1846 a letter was printed proposing that an antiquarian association be formed, called ‘the Cambrian Archaeological Association for the study and preservation of the National Antiquities of Wales’ (Jones, 1846). Action ensued, and supporters were invited to a meeting at Aberystwyth in September 1847, where the new society was constituted. It then adopted Archaeologia Cambrensis as its journal.

The Latin title indicated the learned status of the publication, a convention used by more than one such society. The venerable Society of Antiquaries of London had its own Archaeologia, which probably influenced the Cambrian choice, because many Welsh antiquaries already belonged to the London society. Articles were in the English language, though lengthy passages from original documents in Latin and Welsh were often reproduced. Indeed, one of the Association’s early supplementary volumes contained no fewer than 235 pages of Latin text from a 13th-century metrical history of the Britons (it was not thought necessary to provide a translation – or an index!). Entitled Gesta Regum Britanniae, it was edited by Francisque Michel and printed for the Association in Bordeaux in 1862 – an instance of the sort of cross-channel collaboration not unusual among antiquaries of the time. Unfortunately, demand for such a specialized publication was greatly overestimated, and to this day scores of copies remain unsold in the Association’s bookstock at the bargain price of £1 each.

In the mid-19th century the archaeological scene in Wales – not to mention the political and academic – was vastly different from the present. Archaeology was the preserve of the amateur, particularly members of the gentry, the clergy and the rising middle classes; there were no professionals.

Figure 1. Cromlech at Llansantffraid, near Conway (Caern.), North view. Drawn and engraved by J. T. Blight. Archaeologia Cambrensis, Vol. XI, Third Series, 1865.
Wales had no recognized capital city nor any ‘national’ museum or library. Welsh cultural leadership was exercised from London by Welsh émigrés, more especially by the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion. There was only one institution of university status in the Principality, St David’s College, Lampeter, founded in 1822 to train priests for the Church of England in Wales (the Welsh Church was not disestablished until 1920, following the Act of 1914). The history of Greece and Rome was already familiar to those who had passed through the grammar schools and the universities, but now there was a keen interest in British antiquities, both field monuments and small finds. In addition, the Middle Ages were for many clerics and laymen a beacon of inspiration for ecclesiastical liturgy and architecture.

Archaeology had a wider connotation than today. The published aims of the newly formed Cambrian Archaeological Association were: ‘to Examine, Preserve and Illustrate the Ancient Monuments and Remains of the History, Language, Manners, Customs and Arts of Wales and the Marches’ (i.e. the Welsh Border counties). This sweeping brief was to prove beyond the resources of any one body and, not surprisingly, with the passage of time certain specialisms went their own way in separate societies, many archaeological responsibilities passing to governmental agencies – with the blessing of the Cambrians.

Indexing the journal – a history

Indexing was far from the minds of the journal’s first promoters; they were more concerned with finding money to pay printers’ bills. Finances were precarious, for no ‘pecuniary subscription’ had been required from members, though a voluntary contribution of £1 per annum would ensure receipt of any publications. Grants were made from the Association’s funds to subsidize publication, which was undertaken ‘at the risk of the Secretaries’. The position was regularized in 1857, when the subscription was raised to one guinea (£1 1s.) for all but honorary members.

It was impossible to predict an assured future for the journal, and volumes were confusingly numbered in successive ‘series’, each taking the numbering back again to I. This practice lasted until 1921, when volume numbers were added (in Roman lettering), based on dead reckoning from the first issue. The series system was finally abandoned in 1929 and a new, crown quarto format, judged more suitable for archaeological publication, was introduced. To confuse the situation further, from 1942 to 1943 inclusive, each volume was issued in two annual parts over two successive years. In 1954, common sense prevailed and one volume of the journal was henceforth published to represent each calendar year. By the end of the 20th century, practical problems of the kind that were affecting many voluntary societies resulted in ‘issue slippage’, so that the ‘volume year’ no longer corresponded to the publication date. Successive editors had the daunting task of trying to ‘catch up’, a process that continues to this day.

Naturally each volume had its own index, but criteria and quality would vary over a period. The need for a fuller, consolidated index covering a run of volumes was eventually appreciated, and in 1892 Archdeacon D. R. Thomas, a luminary of the Church, a scholarly historian and keen supporter of the Association, published An Alphabetical Index to the First Four Series, 1846–1884, with an introduction and lists of articles and illustrations. The alphabetical section covered places, persons, archaeological monuments, objects and publications. Fifteen years later another scholar, Francis Green (1902), published An Alphabetical Index to the Fifth Series 1884–1900, with a list of papers and articles. He explained in his preface that he had originally compiled the work for his private use, and that it did not profess to give a reference to every single name. There were thus two indexes of sorts covering the 19th-century issues of the journal.

Many years went by before any further action was taken towards a general index. In the early 20th century it was becoming clear that the two existing indexes were inadequate and needed replacing, while further index volumes would be needed for the current century. The General Committee set up an Index Sub-Committee in 1931, which was reconstituted in 1949 and again in 1960 (indexes did not evoke a sense of urgency in the way that meetings did). It was agreed that a new index covering all the 19th-century issues (1846–1900) should be compiled de novo.

For this task the General Committee commissioned one of its members, a distinguished prehistorian from Shropshire, Miss Lily F. Chitty. Compilation was done by the time-honoured method of handwritten slips of paper filed in old shoeboxes; these would finally be converted into text on an old-style typewriter, making as many carbon copies as one typing could achieve (no electronic word-processors nor photocopiars then). Everyone knew the compiler to be reliable, scholarly and thorough.

Years went by, and when the magnum opus was at last delivered, the committee was dismayed, not by its quality or thoroughness, but by its size – two massive black binders packed with typed quarto sheets. It was more like a concordance than an index, and would be too bulky to print in one volume. Apart from bibliographical considerations, there was the horrendous problem of financing the printing. It was not easy to explain to the learned compiler that the dissemination of her work in its existing form would have to be limited to the top fair copy and its three carbon copies (the latter were eventually deposited at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, and the University College of North Wales, Bangor). It was clear that the index could only be published in printed form if drastically shortened. The Librarian of the National Museum of Wales at Cardiff, Miss Elizabeth H. Edwards, was persuaded to undertake the task. For economy, recurring words, such as counties, were savagely abbreviated (see Fig. 2). The ‘abridged’ index for 1846–1900, filling 402 pages, finally appeared in the autumn of 1964 (Chitty, 1964).

Meanwhile, lessons had been learnt, and work on the next index volume, to cover the period 1901–60, was already well under way. The compiler was Mr T. Rowland Powel (who was later awarded the Wheatley Medal for his work). This index followed closely the precedent of the first, though the brevity of the abbreviations could now be relaxed and fuller particulars of meetings and additional publications included. It so happened, however, that Mr Powel had decided, at an advanced age, to emigrate to Australia, and...
Once he had produced the typescript copy, he left the task of seeing the index through the press with the present writer. Various changes subsequently proved necessary to maintain consistency with the earlier volume, and the resulting invoice, in the days of hot-metal type, was not welcomed by the Treasurer. This second volume, of 313 pages (Powel, 1976), appeared in 1976, 12 years after the first (Fig. 3).

Nothing daunted, the Committee turned to a third volume – should it wait for another half-century, or would a shorter period be preferable? Comments from users and an assessment of the archaeological scene prompted a decision in favour of a period of only 20 years – 1961–80. The number of professional users was rising steeply and they were impatient. Compilation was undertaken by Mrs Helen Davies of Aberystwyth, again by the traditional ‘slips and shoebox’ method, while additional work was undertaken by the present writer to ensure more cross-references and ancillary information on persons and places, as well as lists of meetings, presidents and so on. The slips have now been pasted up into pages, and modern technology at last breaks through – the pages have been photocopied and electronically typeset to produce definitive text. The typesetting is still going on and publication is expected early in 2004.

Financing the index

The Association wisely set aside funds from time to time to build up an Index Fund. While much of the work on the indexes was done voluntarily by the officers, considerable sums had to be expended on the time-consuming work of producing the slips and the subsequent typing. To meet an expected shortfall of funds, applications were made to charitable trusts and other bodies; subventions of £1,750 were raised towards the cost of the 1964 volume, but the Association had to bear the whole burden for the next.

It was confidently expected that some revenue would accrue from sales of indexes, especially since membership was then increasing (it touched 1000 in 1971 before falling back later). Sadly, only a small proportion responded, even at the subsidized price offered, thus leaving more unsold stock on the shelves. Like other societies the Association lacked experience in selling publications, as opposed to distributing them free. It was not until the Council for British Archaeology undertook market research in the late 20th century that the truth dawned: a specialized research monograph would normally attract only 200–250 purchasers ‘out there’ – if they could be found. An index clearly falls in this category. By no means every reader, whether paid-up member or fortuitous user, appreciated the value and potential of an index. The Cambrian indexes had been designed to give enough detail for a user to decide quickly whether a reference was worth looking up at all. But those who did buy found two treasure chests of information beyond their expectations.

The content of the indexes

In both indexes references were given to persons, places, objects and publications mentioned in the text of the annual volumes of Archaeologia Cambrensis. Any supplementary volumes were not included, except for the Centenary volume, A hundred years of archaeology (Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1949). Entries were arranged according to the English alphabet, word by word. Places and dates of annual meetings had been given in volume I, but in volume II there was also room for the names of presidents, as well as a map to show the local government boundary changes of 1974. Geographical locations were naturally given under the pre-1974 (Henrican) counties in both indexes, but no attempt was made to equate them with subsequent changes.

The fact that the first version of the 1964 index could be reduced to nearly half its bulk amply demonstrated that indexing involves choice and judgement. Obviously, an index for archaeologists implies archaeological content, and archaeology is much the same in Wales as anywhere else. But what is ‘archaeological’? A recent president of the Association, who happened also to be a railway enthusiast, chose Welsh railway history for his presidential address, but was dismayed to find only a handful of references in the published Cambrian indexes. Making a fresh search on his own account, he discovered 300 railway references over the past 150 years. Clearly, in the eyes of past indexers railways

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were not of archaeological interest; they were ‘modern’ irrelevancies. We have seen more than one shift of interest in archaeology in recent decades: there have been vogues for industrial remains, historic gardens and landscape studies, all of which alter the indexer’s perception of relevance. However, in published reports of meetings one matter scrupulously recorded is the generosity of prominent members in entertaining Cambrians to tea (or even lunch). Single-minded prehistorians may be disgusted to see this in an index, but social historians will be fascinated, while would-be donors of teas may be encouraged to even greater generosity.

The framework of time past

The ‘vocabulary of time’ is crucial in classifying and indexing objects, sites and periods of the past, particularly the most ancient past. One does not now come across the expression Anno Mundi – ‘In the Year of the World’, reckoned as from 4004 BC, when, according to Archbishop Ussher and others, the world began. This chronology has been superseded by the concept of Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, extending over an immensely long period of time. But in 1846 the Three Ages had hardly been heard of in Wales (or in England for that matter), much less incorporated into archaeological thinking. They had only been enunciated in published form ten years previously, and that in Denmark. The chronology defined in the early pages of Archaeologia Cambrensis covered five periods: (1) Celtic, Cymric, Gaelic, Erse, etc.; (2) Roman; (3) Saxon, Danish, Scandinavian, etc.; (4) Medieval; (5) Modern: AD 1600–1800. In fact, the index for 1846–1900 contained few mentions of the new-fangled terms ‘Neolithic’ and ‘Palaeolithic’. In the second volume, however, citations of both were numerous and duly indexed.

Problems of terminology and classification

If an antiquity has alternative names, the indexer will have to choose one of them as the main guide-word. For example, what we recognize today as a prehistoric chamber tomb has variously been called ‘Druidal altar’, ‘burial chamber’, ‘passage grave’, ‘entrance grave’, ‘Neolithic burial place’ and ‘dolmen’ or ‘cromlech’ (when denuded of the covering mound). But note that ‘cromlech’ in France means a ‘stone circle’. Similarly, ‘earthworks’ will require either many subheadings or a multitude of cross-references under: ‘barrows’, ‘camps’, ‘forts’, ‘hill-forts’, ‘promontory forts’, ‘fortresses’, ‘motte-and-bailey castles’ and ‘tumps’, and under Welsh equivalents found in place-names: caer, castell, tomen, twmpath.

Attempts to give names to peoples of prehistoric times is fraught with difficulty. ‘Celts’ and ‘Celtic’ offer a case history. As archaeological investigation progressed, a consensus seemed to emerge that the Early Iron Age in Europe represented a distinctive ‘Celtic’ culture. Recently this has been thrown into question by Simon James (1999), who asserts that the only safe usage of the word is for peoples known to speak a Celtic language. If so, the prehistoric ‘Celts’ vanish in a haze of unsupported assumptions.

Problems with places

Many place-names in Wales have English and Welsh alternatives that do not resemble one another, so the main entry will be the form most frequently found in the text, with cross-references as appropriate, e.g. ‘Abertiffi, see Cardigan’. Place-names of Welsh origin are often perplexing, not only to strangers but to the Welsh themselves; there are usually several variants for the same place, partly because the names were committed to writing at different dates, often by persons with little knowledge of the Welsh language, and partly because Welsh orthography was not standardized until the 20th century.

Welsh place-names were finally regularized in 1957 by a gazetteer prepared by the Board of Celtic Studies of the University of Wales. The Board’s aim was to produce consistent forms based on the way the name was spoken in Welsh and on the category of place denoted. These forms are nowadays used on official bilingual road signs; such signage would have been difficult to devise were it not for the gazetteer. In Welsh, the accent should fall on the penultimate syllable of the name, e.g. Bancyfelin (Carmarthenshire). Hyphens were inserted or omitted to prevent false accentuation, e.g. Héol-y-cyw (Glamorgan). In a written text there is an indexing problem because a word-by-word sequence treats separated and hyphenated forms as two (or more) words. Thus there can be two sequences of superficially similar place-names. Nant means ‘brook’ and it is sometimes separated from its defining element, and sometimes joined to it. Thus Nant Ddu (‘Black Brook’) and Nant-y-glo (‘Coalbrook’) will belong to one sequence, and Nanteos (‘Nightingale Brook’) and Nantperis (‘Brook of Peris’) to the next sequence. Welsh also has its own alphabet, which differs slightly from the English, but in terms of alphabetical order this only matters when indexing a Welsh text. The whole subject is discussed in detail in Moore (1986).

Problems with people

Persons are normally indexed according to their surname or regal name, but surnames were adopted in Wales later than in England. Ancient Welsh naming practice was patronymic. Individuals were identified by their baptismal name followed by that of their father (or, rarely, of their mother), e.g. Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, where ap (or ab) means ‘the son of’; verch is used for ‘the daughter of’. To identify the above-mentioned Llywelyn the index attaches a defining phrase: last native prince of Wales. The guide-word for a patronymic is thus the first name.

From the 16th century onwards, Welshmen began to adopt surnames in the English fashion, usually making their fathers’ first name into their surname, and omitting the ap. That name then remained unchanged in later generations. Occasionally there may be uncertainty as to whether a name represents a surname or patronymic, e.g. Owain Glyndŵr (or Glendower in its English form) may sometimes be indexed under O, sometimes under G. In modern times, ap forms have sometimes been consolidated as a surname from patriotic motives in defiance of onomastic logic, as the first page of any Welsh telephone directory will show.
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The work, however, did – and does – entail unremitting toil. I had to set aside a room in the house where proof sheets would not be disturbed. Sunday night was the regular time allotted for proof-reading and our large ginger cat knew this well. As soon as the meal was over he would make for the index room, leap on to the desk, sit on the proofs and wait for me to arrive. He would even rouse me if I dropped off over the work. I could not help thinking of that 9th-century monastic cat, called Pangur Bán, immortalized in a poem by an Irish monk in the monastery of St Paul in Carinthia (see MacCana, 1960: 20). The cat would work in tandem with his master: Pangur’s craft was hunting mice, the monk’s craft was hunting words.

References


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Authors’ quirks

Authors do not always help the indexer. An article indexed for vol. III bore the title ‘O Domus Antiqua’? Surely any citation of these words would be meaningless to a searcher – even if translated into English. In fact, the title alluded to a now-vanished gentry house in the Vale of Tywi called ‘Danyrallt’, so the entry will appear under D for Danyrallt (not D for Domus).

Recently an article was offered for publication with the title ‘Elegy for The Ham’. Since it was prose, not verse, to index the word ‘elegy’ at all would mislead the searcher. The subject was a mansion known as ‘The Ham’ in the Vale of Glamorgan, also now demolished and forgotten. Welsh-speaking readers, on the other hand, might have assumed that it concerned a well-known popular ballad entitled ‘Y Mochyn Du’, describing the death of a favourite pig, certainly ‘an elegy for the ham’! Both authors and editors should remember that every word they write is liable to be indexed.

A personal note

I have to confess that when a delegation of two senior ‘Cambrians’ came to see me in the National Museum of Wales nearly 50 years ago and asked me to organize the publication of the first volume of the General Index, I was taken aback because I had never evinced the slightest interest in indexes. I was also dismayed, because I would have the delicate task of explaining the situation to the disappointed compiler. I did not remotely imagine that this index project would still be on my desk at the beginning of the next century.

However, I found myself more and more drawn into the work, however, did – and does – entail unremitting toil. I had to set aside a room in the house where proof sheets would not be disturbed. Sunday night was the regular

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