A Concise History of Wales

Based on the most recent historical research and current debates about Wales and Welshness, this volume offers the most up-to-date, authoritative and accessible account of the period from Neanderthal times to the opening of the Senedd, the new home of the National Assembly for Wales, in 2006. Within a remarkably brief and stimulating compass, Geraint H. Jenkins explores the emergence of Wales as a nation, its changing identities and values, and the transformations its people experienced and survived throughout the centuries. In the face of seemingly overwhelming odds, the Welsh never reconciled themselves to political, social and cultural subordination, and developed robust and ingenious ways of maintaining a distinctive sense of their otherness. The book ends with the coming of political devolution and the emergence of a greater measure of cultural pluralism, changes which not only mark a new beginning in the nation’s history but also present an exciting challenge for its resourceful people. Packed with critical analysis and striking cameos, Professor Jenkins’s lavishly illustrated volume provides enthralling material for scholars, students, general readers and travellers to Wales.

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This is a series of illustrated ‘concise histories’ of selected individual countries, intended both as university and college textbooks and as general historical introductions for general readers, travellers, and members of the business community.

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A Concise History of Wales

GERAINT H. JENKINS
For my wife
Ann Ffrancon
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Formidable though the task promised to be, for a variety of reasons I was very pleased to accept this commission. I had always believed, and still do, that no self-respecting historian should forego the opportunity of writing the entire history of his or her native land. I also relished the intellectual challenge of preparing a concise and digestible account that would not fall into the trap of squeezing the life out of the past. Moreover, the prospect of completing a work which would meet the needs of an international audience as well as the people of Wales was too tempting to resist. Wales and its history deserves to be much more widely known and appreciated.

I have tried to give due weight to events, movements and ideas in each period, and if the chapters on the modern period are somewhat longer than the others this simply reflects the fact that the material available since the coming of the printed word is much more voluminous and diverse. A book of this kind inevitably owes an irredeemable debt to a great many scholars, both past and present, whose work has stimulated me profoundly. The further reading list at the end of the volume indicates my principal debts, though I have also ventured (gingerly in some periods) into the thickets of original sources, as well as into a mass of articles and Welsh-language publications. I do hope that the reader will sense that the critical synthesis presented here is flavoured with my own ideas, interpretations and the very occasional and pardonable bout of partiality. Most of all, I hope that the book conveys the richness and vitality of the history of Wales.
It’s a particular pleasure to thank several colleagues for their assistance. Miranda and Stephen Aldhouse-Green, Robert Johnston, John T. Koch, Huw Pryce, Paul O’Leary, Russell Davies, Neil Evans, Steven Thompson and Chris Williams read drafts of chapters, commented critically upon them and saved me from many errors and infelicities. I gratefully acknowledge their kindness. My greatest debt, however, is to the late Glanmor Williams, whose generosity in improving the work of colleagues and friends was proverbial. He read the best part of the typescript and kept my spirits buoyant by offering constant advice and encouragement. I like to think that he would have enjoyed reading the whole printed version. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the errors and inadequacies which remain.

My personal assistant, Nia Davies, cheerfully transformed my long-hand scrawl into an immaculate typescript and helped me in all manner of ways to ensure that the work reached the publishers in a fit and proper condition. I thank her most warmly. The staff of the National Library of Wales proved to be unfailingly helpful and courteous. I’m also grateful to John Jenkins, Paul Joyner, Penny Icke and Patricia Moore for their assistance in selecting appropriate illustrations, and to Antony Smith for preparing most of the maps. William Howells kindly prepared the index. Isabelle Dambricourt of Cambridge University Press was a model of patience and efficiency. As always, I owe an enormous debt to my family. My wife Ann knows better than anyone how much this book means to me and how it has robbed us of precious leisure hours and vacations. Since she has lived with this undertaking since its inception, the very least I can do by way of inadequate recompense is to dedicate it to her with my love and admiration.

Geraint H. Jenkins
April 2006