1 Introduction

I believe that nothing will invigorate the Welshman’s character as much as the knowledge of his own country’s history. —Owen M. Edwards

Over the past 1,500 years, Welsh writers have produced some of the greatest works of literature and poetry. Their contributions have, as Welsh poet Dylan Thomas wrote, “change[d] the shape of the universe” (Thomas, 1991: 61). But all of those contributions have been made possible by the physical labor of publishing – the tedious repetition of handwriting manuscripts by medieval monks, the backbreaking work of printing on a Gutenberg-style press, the lightning-fast printing of the industrial age, and the new challenges of paperless electronic publishing.

The creation of texts – whether handwritten, printed, or electronic – preserves culture, literature, myths, and society, and provides invaluable insights into history. Yet, with all of the billions of texts that have been produced, we still have much to learn about the history of how those texts were produced and preserved by the publishing process, and how the production of texts has influenced modern societies. In a letter to his wife in 1936, Thomas wrote, “Our discreditable secret is that we don’t know anything at all, and our horrid inner secret is that we don’t care that we don’t” (Ferris, 1985: 242). In studies of the history of publishing, the number of things we don’t know is sometimes the dark secret. Courses and published histories cover the major developments – a broad outline of publishing, printing, and papers from ancient Egypt, Han dynasty China, and medieval Arabia and Europe through Johannes Gutenberg, William Caxton, and Lord Stanhope – without necessarily delving into the smaller implementations of publishing that have shaped the histories of nations, peoples, cultures, and languages. Understanding these smaller publishing efforts provides greater impact and depth to the history of publishing: studying a small-town printer in nineteenth-century Wales who created local newsletters and religious pamphlets provides powerful evidence of the long-term reach of Gutenberg’s innovations.

For many small nations around the world, publishing is tied together in the history of the people—revolutions, renaissance, resistance, and resurgence. Culture, history, and texts are inextricably connected, making the printed word a good window into the world of those nations. Like other small nations, Wales has a long history with texts, going back to at least Roman Britain. Wales differs from other small nations, however, in two significant ways. First, the Welsh people maintained a primarily oral culture into the 1700s, centuries after the arrival of books in Britain. Second, Wales coexists on the same small island as two powerful publishing centers—Edinburgh and London—and its own history of publishing in the post-Gutenberg era has been constrained by location, restrictive publishing laws, and the English suppression of Welsh language and culture. As a result, publishing history in Wales has been overshadowed by the histories of its larger neighbors. These differences contribute to (1) a total volume of Welsh books that is much smaller than other nations, particularly before 1700 and (2) an underexplored history of publishing in Wales. As we dig into the history, we find that the few texts that do exist are deeply intertwined with the history, culture, myths, and language of Wales.

The story of publishing in Wales, then, is closely connected to the story of Wales itself—a long history of a remarkably resilient culture with roots in the ancient history of the British Isles. Wales, the Welsh people, and the Welsh language have survived invasion, migration, oppression, revolt, resistance, religious and social upheavals, and economic depression. The books of Wales chronicle this story and the Welsh people’s endurance over centuries of challenges. Ancient law books, medieval manuscripts, legends and myths, secretly printed religious works, poetry, song, social commentary, and modern novels tell a story of a tiny nation, its hardy people, and an enduring literary legacy that has an outsized influence on culture and literature far beyond the Welsh borders.

At this point, some readers may echo Sir Thomas More’s sentiment in Robert Bolt’s *A Man for All Seasons*, “For Wales? Why Richard, it profit a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world . . . but for Wales!” (Bolt, 2013: 120). The answer to this question has two parts: First, in spite of its small size, Wales has been a major contributor to world culture, particularly in the English-speaking world. Welsh histories and myths
provide the foundation of Arthurian legend and other British mythologies; Welsh-born monarchs transformed England into a world power; and Welsh literature, poetry, and song have spread throughout the world. Second, a serious exploration of publishing in Wales is valuable to the Welsh people as a record of their turbulent history and a testament to their endurance as a culturally distinct group.

Some studies of publishing history, such as John Feather’s *A History of British Publishing* or Colin Clair’s *A History of European Printing*, contain only passing references to publishing in Wales, usually as a very minor subset of the British market. Many histories of publishing make no mention of Wales at all, except perhaps in footnotes. In the past few decades, however, there has been a growing body of scholarship on the unique aspects of publishing in Wales. The valuable collection *A Nation and Its Books*, edited by Jones and Rees, provides a detailed examination of the history and issues associated with Welsh publishing, while *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, edited by Evans and Fulton, examines the vital role of literature and texts in Wales since Roman times. Larger collections, including the impressive multivolume set *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, treat Wales as an important contributor to British publishing while recognizing the unique – and separate – publishing history of Wales. In this Element, the goal is to provide a brief, accessible overview of Welsh publishing in the context of the history of Wales.

The Element provides an outline of the history of publishing in Wales, from its earliest beginnings in the Roman era through the digital publishing efforts of the twenty-first century. It will begin with a brief review of the history of Wales, focusing on the major events that shaped the unique identity of Welsh culture. It will then examine Welsh publishing history in five eras: from early literacy through medieval manuscript production (ancient history through 1450), early Welsh printing (1450–1718), Industrial Age publishing (1718–1847), Welsh Renaissance (1847–1992), and the electronic age (1992–present). Each of these eras is bounded by an important event that shaped publishing history in Wales: the invention of the Gutenberg press in 1450 (although printing didn’t come to the British Isles until several decades later); the establishment of the first legal printing press in Wales in 1718; the release of *Reports of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, ...
more commonly known as the Parliamentary Blue Books, in 1847; and the recognition of the Welsh language as an official language in 1993.

Of course, in attempting to create an overview of a history as long and complex as that of Welsh publishing, there are bound to be complications. One of these complications is the definition of Welsh publishing itself. Although the title of this Element is Publishing in Wales, the complicated history of Wales and its interactions with its neighbors in Britain means there are really four different aspects of publishing that need to be explored:

1. **Books in Wales.** Like most European countries, Wales has a tradition of books that predates printing by several centuries. The ancient handwritten books of Wales preserve the law, culture, language, stories, poems, and traditions of the Welsh people from before the advent of printing. These books provide important evidence of the history and culture of the British Isles from pre-Roman times through the Norman Conquest.

2. **Publishing in Welsh.** Although we know that the Welsh language likely predates the Roman presence in Britain, the earliest manuscript in Welsh is preserved in the marginalia of Latin manuscripts in the 900s. Welsh has always been sidelined or suppressed as a secondary language for publishing in the British Isles from the time of the Roman invasion. The language has persevered, however, and Welsh authors began publishing in their native tongue from the earliest days of printing, in spite of official opposition and logistical difficulties.

3. **Publishing by Welsh authors.** Some of the most significant contributions in Welsh publishing history were made by Welsh authors who wrote and published in other languages: Latin, Old English, French, and English. Welsh scribes copied the Gospels; Welsh historians documented the early history of Britain; Welsh poets recorded the epics and myths of the British Isles; Welsh lyricists contributed songs to the Protestant hymnal; and Welsh authors have continued to shape the poems, songs, and literature of the post-Gutenberg world.

4. **Publishing in Wales.** The origins of printing in Wales are much later than most of the rest of Europe. English laws forbade printing outside of the approved presses in London until the 1700s. While some printing was done in secret in Wales, the advent of a publishing industry was delayed...
until laws were relaxed in the 1700s. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, civil, political, social, and religious unrest was connected to a small but important printing industry in Wales.

These four aspects of publishing in Wales come together with intertwining stories that grow together to create a bigger picture of a publishing industry vital to culture, language, and identity in Wales. This Element attempts to capture that bigger picture and to show its connection with and importance to the worldwide history of publishing.

The other complication with creating a history of Welsh publishing is that Wales is a small nation with a small number of publications. For all of the Welsh contributions to the world, we simply have a much smaller library of texts – manuscripts, books, and other publications – on which we rely to tell the story. For example, in the sixteenth century, the total number of books printed in Europe and Great Britain was over 200 million, and that number increased to more than half a billion in the seventeenth century, representing hundreds of thousands of individual titles (Roser, 2013). By contrast, “the number of Welsh books of all kinds printed during the sixteenth century was only thirty, with a further 150 in the seventeenth century” (Williams, 1998: 49).

While working with a much smaller data set is difficult, it also allows for more individual stories to be told. Each book, after all, is the culmination of the work of the author and all the people associated with printing the book. Throughout this Element, I include some of these individual stories and focus on some of the important publications in Wales and the people who produced them. These individual stories, as distant descendants of the rich Welsh storytelling tradition, help create a broad overview of Welsh publishing history.
2 Welsh History and Identity

If, therefore, they would be inseparable, they would become insuperable.
—Gerald of Wales

Modern Wales is a small nation of idyllic landscapes, resort towns, and agriculture that also bears the scars of industrialization and the postindustrial economic slump. Wales is bounded on the west by the Irish Sea and on the east by Offa’s Dyke, and its hills are dotted with crumbling Norman castles, great manor houses, quarries, and mines. The Welsh landscape tells part of the story of this nation and its resilient people, who are often forgotten or subsumed into their membership in the United Kingdom.

But the rest of the story is told in the books of Wales. As “one of the oldest continuous literary traditions in Europe” (Evans and Fulton, 2019: i), the books of Wales establish and maintain the unique Welsh identity. Welsh people are distinct, culturally and linguistically – the proud descendants of ancient Celts who have survived waves of migration and invasion by Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, and Normans, and have preserved their identity through history, poetry, song, and story. There could be many approaches to a brief historical overview of Wales, but in this Element, I focus on three aspects of Welsh identity: (1) the existence of Wales as a separate nation, (2) the independence of the Welsh religion, and (3) the endurance of the Welsh language. Each of these aspects came under attack during each invasion of Wales, particularly in the Tudor era, and the Welsh responses have shaped the history of Welsh publishing.

2.1 Wales as a Separate Nation

The Welsh are not like any other people in Britain, and they know how separate they are. They are the Celts, the tough little wine-dark race who were the original possessors of the island, who never mixed with the invaders coming later from the east, but were slowly driven into the western mountains.
—Laurie Lee

2 Cambrensis, 2018: 39.  
3 Lee, 2015.
Wales has existed as an identifiable geographical area since the mid-700s when Offa, the king of Mercia, ordered the construction of a miles-long earthwork to mark the boundary between his Anglo-Saxon kingdom and the Welsh kingdom of Powys to the West. But the eighth-century Welsh princes connected their traditions, language, and culture to the Britons, who had ruled the island for centuries before the Romans invaded. Nineteenth-century Welsh writers connected the settlement of Wales even further back to the time of the biblical flood. The idea of Wales as a separate nation, rooted in biblical mythology, “became part of the warp and woof of the cultural experience of the Welsh people” (Jenkins, 2007: 5).

The archeological records tell a different, but no less fascinating, story. Although there were inhabitants of the British Isles dating back to Ice Age hunters, the story of Wales begins when the earliest Celts arrived around 600 BCE, bringing with them a powerful Iron Age civilization with extensive ties to the European continent and an “extraordinary material culture” (Jenkins, 2007: 18). Archeological records show that these early Celts traded goods with their Celtic cousins in Europe and, later, with the Greeks, Etruscans, and Romans.

The Celtic migration to the British Isles was significant for at least two reasons. First, the Celtic immigrants created the culture, languages, and legacy of ancient Britain and became the foundation of the people in the areas that became Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Second, the Celtic emphasis on travel and trade brought the British Isles to the attention of the growing European civilizations and began a series of invasions, migrations, and cultural and social upheavals.

The first major challenge to the Celtic civilizations came in 55 BCE when Julius Caesar began the Roman invasion of Britain. Caesar’s invasion brought the island under nominal Roman control, but there wasn’t a military presence and the Celtic tribes remained autonomous – as long as they paid tributes of goods and slaves to Rome. Later invasions “undertaken by the most stupid, maintained by the most dissolute, and terminated by the most timid of all the emperors” (Smith, 1874: 2) finally brought Britain under Roman control by the end of the first century CE. The Romans held the south and east, while the Celts were pushed to the west.
into Wales and to the north into Scotland, establishing centers of resistance that the Romans never fully conquered.

The Romans brought trade, prosperity, and Roman culture to the island. They built villas, amphitheaters, roads, aqueducts, and fortified walls. Roman citizens intermarried with the Celtic inhabitants, and Celtic rulers sent their children to Rome to be educated in Latin, undergo training in Roman warfare, and form critical political alliances. Rather than being absorbed into Roman culture, however, the Britons in Wales developed a linguistic and cultural identity with ties to both the independent Celts and the classical Romans. This Romano-British culture set them apart from both the Romans and their Celtic cousins to the north.

In subsequent centuries, the Romano-British legacy became romanticized in legend and song as the ideal of the British character, which is a study in contrasts between the cultures – the rugged hardiness of the Celts and the classical civilization of the Romans, the magical traditions of the British Isles and the miracle-based faith of Christianity, the terrifying blue-painted Celtic armies and the ordered ranks of Roman legions. This ideal and the conflicts surrounding it were preserved in bardic ballads and became the foundation of Welsh mythologies, including *The Mabinogion* and the legends of King Arthur.

The decline of the Roman Empire opened the door for the Germanic tribes who were spreading all over Europe. In roughly 450 CE, several Germanic tribes, including Angles, Jutes, Saxons, Frisii, and Franks, began to arrive in the British Isles. Unlike the Roman Conquest, the Germanic settlement was more of a centuries-long migration to the island where Anglo-Saxons gradually replaced the language and culture with their own – at least in England. In Wales and Scotland, the well-established Celtic kingdoms were joined by the Romano-British people who were pushed out of the south and east by the Germanic invaders.

Once again, Wales and Scotland were the centers of resistance to the newest inhabitants of Britain. Wales was ruled by princes (from the Latin *principus*, a title the Welsh rulers preferred to the title *king*, from the Proto-Germanic *kuningaz* [Davies, 2007a: 69–70]) who rivaled the Anglo-Saxon kings in power and influence. By the mid- to late 500s, Wales was divided into several small kingdoms with flexible borders that usually...
(but certainly not always) stood together against the growing Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex. Over the next two centuries, the Welsh kingdoms repelled repeated invasions from the east and took advantage of conflicts between the Anglo-Saxon rulers to maintain Welsh autonomy.

By the late 700s, all of the kingdoms of medieval Britain – the Welsh, the Anglo-Saxon, and the Scottish – faced a new threat. Viking raiders began attacking the coasts, sacking monasteries and towns, and establishing settlements. These new incursions set off a fresh round of violence within Britain. Internal struggles among rival Welsh princes and conflicts among the Anglo-Saxon rulers, combined with the ongoing threat of Danish invasion, led to civil wars and general strife throughout the island.

In 886, Alfred, the king of the West Saxons, declared himself king of the Anglo-Saxons after a series of decisive victories over rival Anglo-Saxon kings and the Danes. Alfred’s power over the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and ability to resist the Vikings made him an attractive ally for the Welsh princes. When Alfred proclaimed himself king of the Anglo-Saxons, several of the Welsh princes swore fealty to him, which brought most of Wales under Anglo-Saxon rule for the first time.

Alfred’s death in 899 did not signal the end of the unified kingdom of England. It did, however, end the alliance with the Welsh princes. By 900, Wales was once again independent, dominated by the powerful Anarawd ap Rhodri of Gwynedd, who had used his friendship with Alfred to cement his own authority over his brothers’ kingdoms of Ceredigion and Powys. This arrangement of a unified England sharing an uneasy border with the powerful Welsh kingdoms continued until William of Normandy landed in England in 1066 and defeated Harold Godwinson – the last Anglo-Saxon king.

The Norman Conquest was more complete than any of the invasions before it. As William wrote in his deathbed confession:

I persecuted the native inhabitants of England beyond all reason. Whether nobles or commons, I cruelly oppressed them; many I unjustly disinherit; innumerable
multitudes...perished through me by famine and sword...

I am stained with the rivers of blood that I have shed.

(quoted in Wood, n.d.)

Through massive waves of violence, the Normans went beyond gaining land and achieving control. They replaced large parts of the society. Anglo-Saxon lords were stripped of their titles and went into hiding, while William rewarded his followers with lands and titles. Norman castles were built throughout Britain, designed as visible shows of dominance as much as for defense. Norman French replaced Old English as the language of the elite, and Norman laws and customs were patched over the existing Anglo-Saxon laws.

Although England fell to William fairly quickly, the Celtic fringe proved much more difficult. The Welsh princes were powerful, and they had centuries of experience in defending their borders from encroaching armies. Although the Normans enjoyed initial success in their invasions, the Welsh princes resisted, and by 1100, most of Wales was back under Welsh control. But, similar to their struggles against the Anglo-Saxons, the Welsh kingdoms were unable to completely unite against the Normans. Succession crises and in-fighting led some of the Welsh princes to make alliances with the Normans; some, like Owain ap Cadwgan, were even knighted for their service to the English king.

As part of his initial attempt to conquer Wales, William installed a number of lords along the border to guard it and to take as much of Wales as they could. These Marcher Lords (march in this case means “border” or “boundary”) were given far more power than the other Norman nobility. They could build their own castles, rule according to their own laws (which were often a combination of Norman laws and the ancient Welsh law Cyfraith Hywel), and mount military campaigns – all without the approval of the king. The Marcher Lords intermarried with the Welsh princely families, creating a Norman-Welsh nobility that was beholden to the king of England and allied with the great families of Wales. The hope on the part of the king was that the Marcher Lords could control the Welsh and eventually conquer Wales, through force, by marriage, or by inheritance.